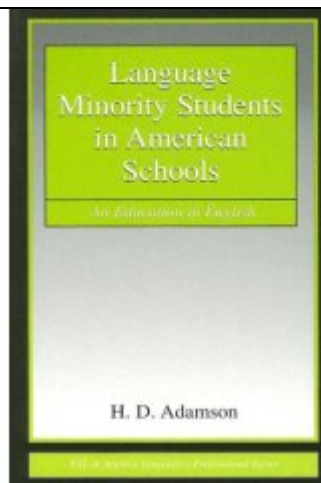




The Reading Matrix
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Language Minority Students in American Schools: An Education in English
 by H.D. Adamson (2005)
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Language Minority Students in American Schools by H. D. Adamson could not have appeared on the market at a better time given the urgency of ongoing debates about immigration, bilingual education, and national security in the United States. Intended for pre-service ESL and mainstream teachers who will work with culturally and linguistically diverse learners (read: most teachers in the U.S. and other countries; Matsuda, 2006), the book provides readers with an informed survey of second language acquisition theory wrapped in an engaging narrative chronicling the author's experiences working with diverse learners in multilingual settings in the U.S. and abroad. While educators may be the primary intended audience for this book, I would not hesitate to recommend it to a neighbor or friend interested in learning what the field of applied linguistics has to say about some of the more pressing controversies in education and society today such as the use of Ebonics in school curricula, English-only versus bilingual education initiatives, and the on-going reading wars between phonics and whole language advocates. *Language Minority Students in American Schools* fills a gap in the professional literature by offering a user-friendly introduction to second language theory without compromising scholarly rigor.

Since other reviews of *Language Minority Students in American Schools* summarize the contents of the individual chapters in the book well ([Cromarty-Lawtie, 2005](#); [Willoughby, 2005](#)), I will instead focus on the relative merits for using the book as a required textbook in an introductory linguistics course. I first became aware of the book as I scanned catalogues in search of a textbook I could use for an undergraduate course in second language acquisition (SLA). The first time I offered the course, I used Diaz-Rico's *Teaching English Language Learners: Strategies and Methods* (Pearson, 2004). I wanted a textbook that offered students an informed introduction to teaching methods and strategies they could use while working as ESL tutors in the local community, which Diaz-Rico's book did. I was especially pleased with her discussion of how critical theory informs modern-day ESL praxis. But my students were less enthralled with the book's K-12 focus, since most were teaching adults and wanted to work with similar populations overseas. Further, they wanted more SLA theory. They wanted to understand the internal cognitive and psycholinguistic processes that account for how one learns a second or additional

language. Since students in my course often have little or no previous training in linguistics, Adamson's book seemed to fit the bill better than other, more technical books on the market (e.g., Gass & Selinker, 2001; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2007).

One strength of *Language Minority Students in American Schools* is the way the author contextualizes SLA theory, making concepts simultaneously more meaningful and relevant to students. For example, in reviewing the major theories accounting for first language acquisition, Adamson includes a discussion of X-bar theory to explain the concepts of generative and universal grammar. This is a risky move, since X-bar theory has about as much relevance to the average undergraduate as string theory in physics does. (String theory explores the possibility of alternate and hitherto unknown dimensions in time and space). But rather than leading the reader down the rabbit hole, Adamson carefully weaves together theories and findings governing the acquisition of standard and non-standard varieties of English as a first language (e.g., Heath, 1983; Kovac & Adamson, 1981) with second language studies exploring creolization and interlanguage processes (e.g., Andersen, 1981 & 1983; Bickerton, 1984; Kovac & Adamson, 1981). The narrative is light-hearted – filled with jokes and conversational asides to the reader – and helps readers see the cognitive and sociocultural factors at play in language acquisition in individuals and society. Granted my students in North Carolina may be able to connect more immediately to Heath's and Adamson's research since it was undertaken close to home in the Southeastern U.S. But the linguistic concepts highlighted are universal, and so readers in other parts of the world should find the examples equally relevant.

Indeed, *Reading Matrix* readers living outside the United States will be pleased to note the discussion of bilingual education in Chapter Seven of the book includes a review of programs and policies outside the United States as well (e.g., in Sweden, Quebec, and The Netherlands). While this nod to international contexts is limited to just two pages, international readers can also benefit from the book's discussion of content-based instruction since many teaching/learning contexts are neither purely ESL nor EFL. Some overseas readers may also be relieved to learn that Adamson does not address the socio-political dimensions of TESOL to the extent that others in the field have recently done (e.g., Diaz-Rico, 2004; Pennycook, 2001; Smoke, 1998). But most readers will appreciate that the debate over Ebonics in America is closely related to debates over World Englishes since both ask essentially the same question: When is a variety of English (or any other language) legitimate? According to whom? Given the increasingly diverse and interconnected world in which we live, we can all benefit from an informed view of language learning and teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse settings in order to understand better that such variation is a natural and healthy expression of sociolinguistic vitality in a language, culture, and society.

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