

Book Reviewed:

Ruqaiya Hasan. 2011. *Language and Education: Learning and teaching in society*. Ed. J.J.Webster. London: Equinox. ISBN 978 190476 837 1 (hardback), 978 190476 838 8 (paperback)

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Ruqaiya Hasan's research is based in an understanding of society as "the condition for language" (p. 232). The subtitle of this third volume of her collected works draws attention to its main theme, the social nature of meaning-making and the role of education as a socialization process. Her arguments here help us understand how "the power of language is simply a potential," and that its meanings come when it gets "semiotic energy" from a "socially positioned speaker" (p. 230) who in every case is also ideologically positioned to understand and respond in particular ways. Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and Bernstein's sociology provide the theoretical foundations for her inquiries.

SFL is itself a description of how social uses of language relate to the internal systems of language, putting *langue* and *parole* in a dialectic relationship. The SFL grammar is distinctive in linking language and context by identifying those features of the context that the language inevitably activates, construing the field, tenor, and mode of discourse as speakers make particular linguistic choices that evoke socially consequential meanings. The fact that language systems and language use have evolved together and continue to co-evolve means that language has the potential to meet all speakers' needs for all facets of social life, continually evolving as the meanings to be made change over time and context. As Hasan points out, this perspective argues that the 'social' cannot be just tacked onto a linguistic theory, but needs to be intrinsic to the theory of language. Several of the chapters in this volume illustrate how SFL analyses enable us to recognize social meanings in language use.

The volume begins with a previously unpublished paper that in many aspects exemplifies the book as a whole. Her argument in chapter one, *On the process of teaching: a perspective from functional grammar*, deftly presents Hasan's conception of the social basis of language, her view of teaching and learning, and the kind of reasoning with grammar that characterizes an SFL approach. She poses the question *what kind of process is teaching?*, and then explores the transitivity of *teaching* through various considerations of its grammatical potential, showing it to be a *verbal* process, not a *material* one, in terms of how it works in the language systems. At the same time, she illustrates how her grammatical reasoning is also reasoning about the role and meaning of teaching in society.

Through the grammatical analysis, she shows that this verbal process is inextricably dependent on the *mental* processes of the person to whom the message is directed. The *saying* in itself is not enough; the mental engagement of the learner is needed for the teaching to be successful. This opening chapter, oddly framed as a presentation to language teachers, is imbued with a profound message about teaching more generally and the role of education in society, while at the same time

Hasan demonstrates how reasoning about grammar can surface important issues about education, the individual, society, and the teacher's place in the education enterprise. While the notion that teaching requires dialogic engagement is not new, what Hasan contributes to our understanding of this process is a focus on the social positioning of the learners and the need for teachers to develop a solid "sense of the addressee's social identity" (p. 41).

The notion of social identity draws attention to Hasan's major intellectual contribution over the past three decades: her empirical studies of language in mother-child dyads in which she identified semantic variation in families that are differently positioned in the social structure (this research is presented in the previous volume of her collected works; for a review, see Lemke, 2011). From those studies she developed perspectives on language, culture, and education, in dialogue with Halliday and Bernstein, that are highlighted in the four chapters in the first section of this volume, *On learning and teaching*. As a semanticist and sociological linguist, Hasan's conception of semantic variation draws in particular on Bernstein's work on coding orientation. She points out that the social environments in which children grow up are not equal, and that differences in primary socialization influence the ways students respond to learning in the classroom. Hasan develops a distinction between the primary socialization and language development that takes place in the home and community and the socialization that schools are engaged with through the notion of "semantic distance." Children's understanding of the world is shaped through their engagement in numerous acts of meaning-making in familiar home and community contexts that themselves vary in their social constructions of reality. When members of one community interact with those from communities that see things differently, they can experience semantic distance in their ways of construing experience.

Ways of thinking and being are naturalized for each individual as he/she engages with and takes up the semiotic potential of the community in learning the mother tongue, where language plays a major role in the construal of a reality. In this context there is no semantic distance. In education, however, semantic distance can emerge for many students as the naturalized frameworks operating in the classroom may conflict, making the discourse of the classroom a source of semiotic discord. This discord is related to more than a notion of "academic language" or register differences; it comes out of the fact that classroom language may not typify experience in ways that relate to the students' reality. For example, what a teacher expects students to take from a reading of a text or how a teacher anticipates students' responses to that text may not comport with the actual readings or responses of the particular students in her classroom (Hasan, 2004).

Students can experience alienation when the classroom meanings conflict with the naturalized meanings of the primary socialization context; Hasan points out that resolving this conflict is a complex task that places great demands on teachers and students. It is not a simple challenge to overcome, and Hasan's message to educators is that they need to be aware of the connections between language, culture and the processes of education, know their students, and understand why and in what ways language plays an active part in all the processes

of learning and teaching. Hasan suggests that a key goal of teacher education should be to prepare teachers to understand the nature of the society to which both teacher and taught belong, with a focus on how language functions in the life of the community. The teacher needs deep understanding of the social experiences and ways of meaning that students bring to the classroom, and needs to connect what is to be learned to the sense of self the learners bring with them.

Hasan sees the goal of education not just as nurturing individual creativity, but in engaging students in recognizing how they are positioned in society so they can participate in meaningful ways in responding to that positioning. She foregrounds the social aspects of education, as for her, the goal of education is "*to produce such habits of mind in human beings which enable them to appreciate the nature of a problem, to examine the merits and demerits of proposed solutions, so as to act with discrimination not simply from the point of view of what's in it for me but from a consideration of the quality of life in the community*" (p. 22). To accomplish this, Hasan develops the notion of *reflection literacy*— the idea that students need to learn to talk about language and its meaning potential as a means of interrogating the texts they read. She contrasts this with views of literacy as *recognition* of meaning or ability to engage in literate *action*, urging that educators develop more ambitious goals for literacy education that enable students to recognize and respond to texts that are contributing to shaping society in ways that are not equitable.

The second major section of this volume, *Language and Literacy*, presents three chapters that develop this view of literacy. It is exemplified in chapter 6, where Hasan creatively analyzes the ways various linguistic processes are exploited in discourses of globalization and promotion of democracy in the media today. She shows how the inherent semantic elasticity of words and expressions means that the meanings of words like *globalize* and *democracy* can be subverted in the interests of those in power. "Free" trade is restrictive, for example, when seen from the point of view of the farmer whose products can now be undercut by imports from the wealthier countries, and Hasan provides numerous examples of the ways connotative meanings of words can be evoked, meanings can be restricted, and evaluation subverted through language that naturalizes the principles promulgated by global international finance. She argues that a *reflection literacy* pedagogy is needed to enable students to explore and recognize such misuses of language.

Hasan insists on a focus on *text* and not just social practice in discussions of literacy, as "texts are...potent instruments of social formation" (p. 242) and language plays a very active role in the enactment of social practices. For SFL linguists, "texts" can be spoken or written; she is focused here on the role of language itself in "shaping reality and internalizing experience" (p. 241). Reflection literacy requires discussion of the social motivation for and consequences of texts in their social contexts, so that learners develop sensitivity to and understanding of the social practices of the larger communities in which they participate.

In the third major section of this volume, *Mother tongue and other tongue*, four chapters present Hasan's positions on language and education through analysis of the learning situations for students who are encountering new ways of thinking

and being because they are learning through a language different from their mother tongues. The chapters focus on the individual, societal, and classroom levels.

Herself a native of Pakistan, Hasan has throughout her career focused on the positioning of learners from what she refers to as the "so-called emerging/developing countries" (p. 38). In a 1976 paper, here chapter 8, Hasan discusses the problems of international students for whom success requires not just mastery of language but also mastery of the "social meanings" needed for participation in new cultural contexts of education. At a societal level, her chapter 9 focuses on sociological issues in teaching English in Pakistan, arguing that the role of a "foreign" language in society and how it positions learners from different contexts needs to be well understood by those who design English language teaching programs. In this context, students will inevitably bring attitudes about English to the classroom that need to be recognized, having experienced the power of English not just to mediate reality, but also "to create, destroy, upgrade and credit" (p. 282).

Hasan has a long-standing interest in English as a global language and its teaching and learning. Her chapter *Learning to function with the other tongue: A systemic functional perspective on second language teaching*, co-written with Gillian Perrett in 1994 and published here as chapter 10, brings together a discussion of SFL and the social-theoretical basis of language with an exposition on *modality* and its teaching in the second language classroom. Modal meanings are famously challenging to learn and teach, and as Hasan points out, one reason is that the teacher has no way of knowing the force and focus of the meaning intended by the speaker; nor can this always easily be discerned in classroom exercises. In this and her chapter 11 on tense/aspect in English and Urdu, she highlights the challenges of teaching systems of language such as modality or tense/aspect, where intended meanings may be difficult to recognize. She points out that teachers are seldom well prepared themselves to assist students in making effective choices from these systems.

Throughout this wide-ranging set of essays on education, literacy, and second language learning, Ruqaiya Hasan's deep understandings of language, society and the socially-positioned individual offer profound insights into the challenges facing teachers and other educators. But the ultimate message is optimistic. Hasan points out that "to live is to experience and most of the time for human beings, to experience is to learn" (p. 9). If we can connect the goals of education to the social experiences of learners, we can improve not only education but also the quality of life in our communities. Such a goal is crucially important in these current times of great social change.

Students and researchers in language and education can learn much from these essays. They offer provocative new points of argumentation with strong theoretical grounding for those engaged in dialogue about home/school discontinuities, the role of the teacher, and the meaning of critical literacy. For those interested in systemic functional linguistics, several chapters demonstrate the kind of reasoning about the social through analysis of the grammar that SFL so strongly supports. As a whole, the volume offers insights and directions for future research that will stimulate the thinking of the reader.

References

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