

**A Critical Analysis of Theoretical Concepts**, Jim Cummins, Bristol, UK; Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Multilingual Matters, 2021, i-464 pp., ISBN-13: 978-1-80041-357-3 (pbk).

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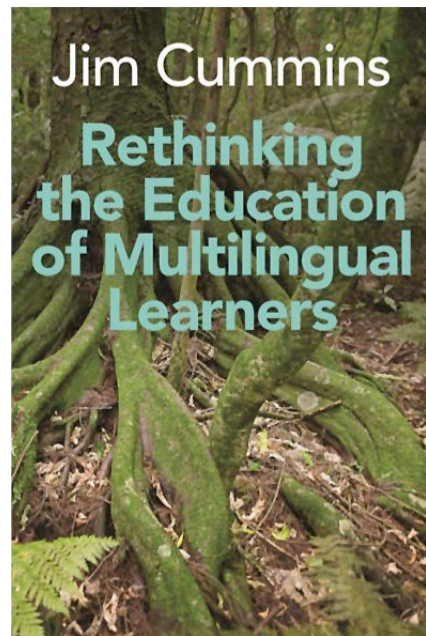
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Multilingualism has always been a pervasive phenomenon in the academic arena and societies, where people belonging to dissimilar linguistic and cultural backgrounds live and/or study beside the mainstream group (Gorter & Arocena, 2020). The issue gained more momentum with the globalization of English and the internationalization of education that led to an exponential rate of immigration and juxtaposition of native and non-native students at schools (Walker, 2018). Given the significance of multilingual education, a growing body of research has been conducted to unpack its multiple dimensions (Sun & Zhang, 2020). Although such studies have offered promising insights, this strand of research still demands more scholarly attention devoted to the understanding of theories, policies, and practices of multilingualism to help students learn English and succeed in academia. To make this happen and bridge the gaps, Jim Cummins' monograph, entitled "*Rethinking the Education of Multilingual Learners: A Critical Analysis of Theoretical Concepts*", presents the readers with a personal journey that covers more than 40 years of research and practice in bilingualism and multilingualism. He also provides an exceptional synthesis of theory, research, policy, and instructional practice regarding multilingual education. Moreover, Cummins takes a retrospective glance at his initial hypotheses and works on bilingualism that is complemented by a critical reflection on some pioneering cross-linguistic and multilingual pedagogies like translanguaging. Having several academic merits, this nuanced volume, can be interesting to bilingual and multilingual teachers, second/foreign language teachers, administrators, content developers, policymakers, and scholars, who can bridge the gap between theory and practice in this domain by developing and injecting new approaches into multilingual education.



Structurally, the book includes 11 chapters that are subsumed under three separate parts. Part 1, entitled “*Evolution of a Theoretical Framework: A Personal Account*” as the bulkiest section, includes 6 chapters that present a personal review on the developmental paths of Cummins’ theoretical ideas such as the threshold hypothesis, the linguistic interdependence hypothesis, basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP) since the 1970s. As these constructs developed, he proposed a sociological framework that calls for the integration of different disciplinary perspectives, academic interactions, and social relations, which are of equal importance in multilingualism. More specifically, in Chapter 1, the author inspects the fundamental claims of the proposed framework for bilingualism. It also represents the existing association between psycholinguistic and sociopolitical dimensions of bilingualism. Chapter 2 deals with Cummins’ attempts to solve contradictions in doing research on the cognitive consequences of bilingualism during the 1970s. Referring to Vygotsky’s concept of linguistic mediation, Cummins contends that the consequences of bilingualism hinge on students’ threshold level of proficiency in their two languages as they proceeded with education. In Chapter 3, Cummins explains the developmental interdependence hypothesis and some inconsistencies in the scientific results of examining bilingual and L2 immersion programs. In Chapter 4, Cummins collegially makes a distinction between cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) using empirical and theoretical data. The link between minoritized students’ academic achievement and social power relations is eloquently presented in Chapter 5 where “patterns of teacher-student identity negotiation” and “identity texts” are regarded as core elements of literacy instruction to tackle the imposed power relations at the macro-level of society. Chapter 6, as the last chapter of this part, presents some samples of experiencing unequal treatment in academia that posed challenges for students and offered some remedial pedagogical strategies to reverse such challenges.

In Part 2, entitled “*Critical Analysis of Competing Theoretical Claims*” Cummins shifts from presenting information from a personal stance to a critical stance and explicates the essential issues related to minority groups’ education and the validity of framing the phenomenon in specific ways. It delineates some critiques of theoretical constructs presented in previous chapters and proposes explicit criteria for assessing their credibility. Chapter 7 introduces and describes three criteria for determining the legitimacy of any theoretical construct, claim, or framework. They include 1) empirical adequacy, 2) logical coherence, and 3) consequential validity which are later used in the analyses of subsequent chapters and the theoretical claims common in bilingualism. Chapter 8 presents the critiques of “academic language” as a theoretical construct in bilingual education and the degree to which BICS and CALPS meet the proposed legitimacy criteria. Moreover, in this chapter, Cummins takes advantage of different perspectives endorsed by researchers who empirically and logically confirmed/rejected the legitimacy of such constructs under three main themes. In a similar manner, the legitimacy of “the linguistic interdependence hypothesis” and “the common underlying proficiency” as critical constructs of bilingualism is explored in Chapter 9 drawing on research findings to solve the inconsistencies and conflicts. In the end, it is contended that these constructs have empirical adequacy, but are under question regarding logical coherence and consequential validity. Chapter 10 provides a panoramic review of translanguaging theory and draws a distinction between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ versions of this

theory (García & Lin, 2017). The author strongly commits himself to the view that bilingual education should not be restricted to dichotomous views and loaded terms like “strong” and “weak”, instead he suggests the concepts of *Unitary Translanguaging Theory* (UTT) and *Cross-linguistic Translanguaging Theory* (CTT) as alternative theoretical orientations. Although different flaws and inadequacies are enumerated for these orientations, Cummins believes that both UTT and CTT regard languages as social constructs, endorse dynamic understandings of multilingual cognitive functioning, see pedagogy and students’ lives interconnected, and condemn instructional separation of languages.

Part 3, entitled “*Instructional Practice in Dialogue with Theoretical Concepts*” includes only one chapter, Chapter 11, which focuses on the linkage between theoretical constructs mentioned in previous chapters and instructional practice. Additionally, it discusses the ways through which theory and practice in this domain can inform each other making reference to transformative pedagogy and translanguaging/crosslinguistic pedagogy to elucidate the dialogical relationship between practice and theory. Cummins, in this chapter, also presents some initiatives and projects carried out by teachers and educators in Canada concerning multilingualism that are intended to improve minority group students’ learning and achievement. Cummins classifies such initiatives into two broad themes of “*Actuality implies possibility*” and “*Teachers as knowledge generators*”. The first theme posits that educational projects that have been carried out effectively in one context can be implemented, in principle, in other contexts, as well. Hence, the misconception that multilingual learners’ L1 cannot be integrated efficiently into classroom instruction is no longer warranted. The second theme highlights the active role of teachers and educators as knowledge generators, who constantly take instructional initiatives that considerably contributed to theory in this area. They are no longer pure knowledge consumers, but prime agents of knowledge production. Furthermore, this illuminating chapter provides an organized account of various multilingual projects implemented by university scholars prior to and after the advent of the concept of “translanguaging”.

On the whole, this provocative monograph is praiseworthy for its contributions to the literature for a number of reasons. The first unique feature of this book lies in its writing style by which the author mostly presents personal reflections on the developmental trajectories of bilingualism and multilingualism, while sporadically resting on others’ ideas as supporting evidence. The second strength of the monograph is its evidence-based arguments to respond to the criticisms cased against some of the fundamental theoretical constructs of this line of research. The author adroitly evaluates the credibility and legitimacy of such critiques using three widely-endorsed criteria. Another particular merit of this book is making an effort to bridge the gap between theory and practice of bilingual/multilingual education by presenting practical ideas and activities from successful initiative projects run by other educators. This eloquently written monograph is also insightful in that it presents a synthesis of what has happened in this research strand for 40 years and culminates in innovative pedagogies regarding multilingualism including cross-linguistic and multilingual pedagogies.

However, it would have been more useful if the author had included a synopsis of each of the chapters at the end because lengthy chapters are difficult to remember by the readers without a concluding section that is not observed in all chapters. Moreover, this pioneering monograph would have shed more light on the issue of multilingualism if more empirical studies from various contexts had been included in to scientifically support the arguments

in defense of the critiques. Furthermore, it could have been more insightful if the book had had a chapter on the research instruments common in the measurement of theoretical constructs of this area of research. The book also has limited the scope to theoretical and practical aspects of multilingualism without making references to other influential factors determining the success of such programs. It would have been beneficial if the most prevalent demographic, personal, contextual, and psych-emotional variables pertinent to multilingualism were offered by the author. The monograph could be more advantageous for the readers if the author had devoted some parts to the assessment issues of this domain. Nothing is said about the way assessment and testing are carried out in educational settings including students from minority groups and the consequences of such assessment decisions. Despite these shortcomings, the present collegially written book deserves to be commenced by educational communities and stakeholders for offering provocative insights and practices that add to our understanding of how bilingual and multilingual education can boost academic success among all students regardless of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this engaging monograph will be considerably useful for different parties including teachers, students, researchers, materials developers, content creators, policymakers, school principals, and program designers at the macro level in the sense that they can realize how to deal with the issue of multilingualism and generate success in academia.

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