

○ **B. E. LAMBERT, *FAMILY LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION: ACTORS, ISSUES, OUTCOMES***

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This book is an in-depth exploration of the process of family language transmission (henceforth, FaLT). It analyses the experiences of 20 families in Australia with German as the language to be transmitted. The topic is all the more interesting when we take into account that according to Census data, German is one of the Community Languages in Australia that has been most affected by a high rate of shift (cf. p. 6).

The volume is based on Lambert's doctoral thesis, which was jointly awarded the 2007 Michael Clyne Prize¹ by the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia and the Australian Linguistic Society. Indeed, this study is a welcome addition to the broad area of language maintenance and shift, with findings that go beyond the immediate Australian context. It also enriches the already vast body of knowledge about the German language in Australia, well established by Michael Clyne's work. It must be clarified that, following Fishman, Lambert makes a distinction between language maintenance and language transmission. While the latter, which is the focus of her analysis, refers to 'a concentrated language input stage for dependent children' (p. 94) on the part of the parents, the former indicates the time when the parents' language continues to be used by the adult bilinguals in an autonomous way.

The first major contribution of this volume is the approach taken by the researcher. While studies on intergenerational language transmission have in the main explored the child's (or 'receiver's', in Lambert's terminology) perspective, here the focus is instead on the 'transmitter', generally the parents, as major contributors of FaLT. Another important aspect is the notion of language transmission as a process that involves – and is in need of – a great degree of planning on the part of the parents in order to be successful. As different goals are set by different parents, higher expectations and more child-focused types of motivation lead to more careful planning, more comprehensive transmission strategies, a greater use of resources and also more successful outcomes. The study therefore highlights the close relationship between the parents' motivation type, their transmission approach and the linguistic results that are achieved. The success of FaLT is also predicated on the fact that it must be the result of a harmonious decision taken by the family members, particularly where there are partners with different languages.

The book is divided into 7 chapters. In the first chapter, the author sets the scene by outlining the scope of the study and discussing the situation of German as a pluricentric language, and its presence – in both diachronic and synchronic terms – in Australia.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework of the study within the context of literature on bilingualism, and more specifically studies that deal with issues related to the process of language transmission and planning within the family site. The model adopted for the analysis falls within the paradigm of Functional Pragmatics, in that it is the framework that best accommodates the different perspectives (i.e., sociolinguistic, social-psychological and sociological) considered in the study. FaLT is represented as an action pattern that includes the three stages of planning, implementation and outcomes, and the various issues and aspects concerning each stage (e.g., motivation, attitudes, etc, cf. the diagram on p. 20).

Chapter 3 details the methodology adopted in the study. The sample includes 31 participants and the corpus consists of 25 interviews (some people were interviewed together). The interview revolved around language transmission decisions and experiences, but the interviewees also reported about the FaLT roles of other family members. The participants ranged widely in terms of date of arrival (from the early 1950s to the late 1990s) and they were from different places of origin (Germany but also e.g. Switzerland or Swabia), including Australia (with participants of German background but also German-speaking Anglo parents). Lambert also explores several methodological issues, in particular the reasons and the benefits of a qualitative case study approach, and aspects of the relationship between researcher and participants in the context of the research interview as a speech event.

Chapter 4 analyses the transmission histories of the families, giving ample space to the participants' voices. It is organised into four different historical phases in which FaLT took place (the 1950s and 1960s; the 1970s and 1980s; the 1990s; the new millennium). Every case study is discussed in depth, taking as a departure point the broad historical and social context and then providing a detailed account of family circumstances. The linguistic experience of each family is conveyed from the point of view of the transmitter as well as from that of the other family members involved, in particular partners and children. The diversity and complexity of these life experiences make it a very insightful reading into the challenges of raising children bilingually in Australia (but also elsewhere). The findings that emerge from each family are conveniently summarised and discussed at the end of each historical stage and of the chapter.

Chapters 5 and 6 elaborate the findings, the first focusing on the variables at play in the transmission phase, the second on the implementation stage. Chapter 5 is organised

around the social, linguistic and affective factors that influence the transmitters' decision to transmit (or not) the language. Through the exploration of social factors (e.g., birth-place, links with German speaking countries, settlement in Australia, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, and so on), linguistic factors (i.e., the broader capacity of participants' language transmission, including language experience in all its facets) and affective factors (e.g., identity orientations and motivation), Lambert shows how the participants' decision to transmit the language is the combined result of 'attitudes and beliefs' (p. 227) developed through their life experience together with the experience in the migration context where German is in contact with English. Chapter 6, on the other hand, delves into the practicalities of the three phases of the transmission cycle: planning, implementation and outcomes. In discussing the planning, the author takes into account such aspects as the role played by all the family members involved, the circumstances in which language transmission began, the parents' goals and expectations, and the configurations of different family units. The implementation stage highlights the importance of support outside the family site for the success of FaLT, for example in terms of access to resources. Of particular interest in this section is the parents' choice of standard German over a dialect as the variety to transmit, and the prevalence of the children's perspective. Indeed, Lambert notes that 'Uptake of the transmission language ultimately proceeds on the children's own terms, regardless of parental expectations' (p. 262), hence the importance of adopting a child-centred approach in order to motivate the child. Finally, in the discussion of the outcomes, the author stresses how they are closely related to the goals set at the beginning of FaLT, and how such goals also determine the ability for the receivers in turn to become language transmitters for their own children.

The main findings are summarised in Chapter 7. Lambert's study confirms that FaLT is influenced by the interaction of different social variables, and identifies as particularly meaningful the parents' type of settlement as well as their educational background and partner, social mobility, interaction with other German-speaking friends and the impact of the social policies of the time. A noteworthy finding is that non-native German speakers who had forged contacts with German through different avenues also acted as transmitters of the language. Other findings concern the affective orientations associated with the transmission of German. Firstly, it was found that the symbolic, communicative and cognitive functions of German were more important than any instrumental value, hence the importance of the heritage factor. Secondly, despite the different parental motives for FaLT, it emerged that in any case FaLT supported the transmitters' linguistic identities, common to both native and non-native speakers of German. Thirdly, the prevailing motivation associated with FaLT was intrinsic and depended largely upon the

quality of the child-parent relationship, thus confirming previous studies (e.g., Döpke, 1992).

Lambert's study is rich, detailed and meticulous, and presents a wealth of data and findings to which I cannot do justice here. As well as reading it in its entirety, the interested reader will find it useful to consult specific aspects of the language transmission process (e.g., the type of input strategies that can be adopted and the role of siblings). The book is also well presented, with several useful tables and very few typos or omissions.

This volume will be of interest to students of bilingualism but also more generally to parents interested in knowing more about raising children in bilingual households. Particularly encouraging and promising for all Australian parents – not just those with a non-English speaking background – is the notion that bilingualism can be pursued independently of ethnocultural links (p. 281). In personal terms, as a mother of two bilingual children, I could relate to the many experiences presented by Lambert, and I certainly concur with her statement that ‘... adolescents ... will be motivated to speak the transmission language by personal conviction rather than by simply conforming to the parents’ wishes’ (p. 262). Lambert herself best expresses the essence of her work to all those interested in FaLT: ‘Ultimately, it is the parents’ commitment, their interactional style and the quality of the parent-child relationship that stabilizes the transmission process and thereby secures the advantages of bilingualism for their children’ (p. 282).

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The Michael Clyne Prize is awarded to the best thesis with a focus on an aspect of immigrant bilingualism and language contact.

REFERENCES

- Döpke, Susanne (1992). *One parent one language: An interactional approach*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.