Book review

Young, R. F. (2008). *Language and interaction: An advanced resource book* (Routledge Applied Linguistics). London and New York: Routledge. 330 pp. ISBN 10: 0415385520 (hardback)

Richard Young's new book, *Language and interaction: An advanced resource book*, in the Routledge Applied Linguistics textbook series, was designed for students of applied linguistics and communication at the upper undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as for scholars and researchers interested in social aspects of language and interaction. Young takes an interdisciplinary approach to his subject, with discussions of concepts and theories taken from linguistics and anthropology, as well as from philosophy, literature, sociology, semiotics, and pragmatics. The tools for analyzing texts have their sources primarily in Systemic Functional Grammar and Conversation Analysis.

In his preface, the author orients readers to the focus and perspective of the book: 'The study of language in social interaction is a door into understanding how people function in society' (p. 3). For Young, the study of language use and social interaction necessarily go hand in hand. Following the organizational scheme of the Routledge Applied Linguistic series of textbooks, Young's book is divided into three sections. *Section A: Introduction* presents key terms, concepts, and analytical tools and orients the reader to their historic and disciplinary contexts. *Section B: Extension* explores excerpts from texts that discuss and illustrate concepts referenced in Section A. Included in this section are pre- and post-reading questions and tasks to familiarize students further with tools for analyzing texts. *Section C: Exploration* provides references for more in-depth reading, along with more short texts, language data, questions, and research activities, all designed to help students gain more experience with concepts and analytical tools.

Young's general approach to analyzing language in interaction can be seen in his framework for describing discursive practices. Discursive

practices are defined as 'talk activities that people do' (p. 69). The framework (p. 71), groups the resources that participants employ to construct a particular discursive practice into three main categories:

- Identity resources
  - *Participation framework*: the identities of all participants in an interaction, present or not, official or unofficial, ratified or ungratified, and the footing or identities in the interaction
- Linguistic resources
  - *Register*: the features of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar that typify a practice
  - *Modes of meaning:* the ways in which participants construct interpersonal, experiential, and textual meanings in a practice
- Interactional resources
  - *Speech acts*: the selection of acts in a practice and their sequential organization
  - *Turn-taking:* how participants select the next speaker and how participants know when to end one turn and begin the next
  - *Repair:* the ways in which participants respond to interactional trouble in a given practice
  - *Boundaries:* the opening and closing acts of practice that serve to distinguish a given practice from adjacent talk

Most of the methods and tools that Young presents for analyzing *linguistic resources* come from Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). As discussed in Unit 3, the basic unit of language in SFG is the text, which is any instance of language produced in speech or writing. Texts have various purposes or functions, which are referred to in Young's framework as *modes of meaning* and in SFG as metafunctions. The interpersonal metafunction concerns social relationships between people, ideational refers to the use of text to describe or construe our experiences in the world, and the textual metafunction is how utterances are connected to the linguistic context in order to create a coherent text.

Interactional resources are what participants use to carry out social actions. Terminology and methods used to describe and analyze interactional resources, introduced in Unit 3, are taken mainly from Conversation Analysis (CA). Three of the important concepts from CA included in Young's framework, action sequences, turn-taking, and repair, are argued to be the main constituents in creating *intersubjectivity* among participants in a conversational interaction. Intersubjectivity refers to the sharing of perspective.

Interactional competence, intersubjectivity, and co-construction of discursive practices are some of the principle concepts of *Language and Interaction*. A key discussion of these concepts can be found in Unit 6A. After summarizing the *competence* theories of Chomsky, Hymes, Canale and Swain, and Bachman, Young presents Kramsch's theory of interactional competence as a departure from these earlier concepts in that her theory deals not with an *individual's* knowledge or ability, but with how *multiple* participants in an interaction reciprocally and mutually employ resources to co-construct a discursive practice.

Unit 6C, which is titled *Assessing interactional competence*, is organized around data, activities and questions. The first set of data consists of transcription segments from two different dyadic interactions. One segment is from an oral proficiency interview between a learner of English and a native English-speaking interviewer in which the participants appear to communicate successfully. The other segment is from an informal conversation between roommates, one an English learner, the other a native English speaker, in which participants have difficulty understanding each other's meanings. A corresponding activity asks students to compare the structures of the two interactions by considering the interactional resources the participants employ. Next students are asked to compare linguistic resources employed by the participants, and then to compare the relative differences between the linguistic and interactional resources of each participant.

A subsequent activity asks students to consider whether an individual's interactional competence transfers from one context to a different context, a subject of interest to many in the field of language testing and assessment.

> What are the differences between an interview and an informal conversation? What can you infer about a participant's interactional competence from those two practices? If someone is a good conversationalist, would you expect them to interview well? (p. 285)

In response to these questions, many readers will conclude that because the first non-native speaker successfully employed an array of resources and did well in the interview context, he would probably also do well in an informal conversational context. Unfortunately there is no further discussion at this point on this relationship between context and competence, and the focus of discussion changes to a different topic. Readers of *Language and Interaction* who are interested in testing and assessment might wish for examples, analysis, and

discussions allowing them to consider more in depth an individual's interactional competence across different contexts, but these types of data and discussion are not provided. Nevertheless, it is implied that readers have the tools to do this kind of analysis on their own.

Those who are familiar with Young's *Talking and Testing: Discourse approaches to the assessment of oral proficiency* (1998, co-edited with A. W. He) in the *Studies in Bilingualism* series will be advised that Young's new book takes a different perspective. *Language and Interaction* does not focus on testing or on second language use. Analysis of texts and language testing are certainly related to each other, but Young's approach in this new book has little to do with testing, and very few of its examples and activities involve contexts commonly associated with second or foreign language issues. One exception in addition to the example already mentioned above is an activity for students found at the end of *Unit 6C:*

> How is oral proficiency in foreign language assessed at your institution? Ask permission to record an oral proficiency assessment. How valid do you think the procedure is as a measurement of interactional competence? (p. 288)

The term *valid* is used here in its ordinary sense; the book contains no discussion of test validity as understood by language testers. And the term *measurement* occurs very rarely in this book.

For readers interested in solving problems related to teasing out interactions between variables related to social context, genre, personality, and language proficiency for testing purposes, this book may pose more questions than it answers. But perhaps having new questions to ask may result in approaching some aspects of testing from fresh or broader perspectives. The main perspective that Young encourages readers to adopt is that all participants co-construct a particular interaction, rather than considering static characteristics of individual speakers or writers. The author often touches on the concept that even monologic texts are dialogic – they address and are received by an audience, the co-participants, and are therefore interactive.

This perspective of co-construction takes into account Young's identity resources in particular. For example, who are all the participants in the interactional context of a language test or assessment, and what are their roles and stances? What kind of identities are constructed within the context of a particular test or assessment, how, and by whom? Readers looking for more specific guidance in how to incorporate these perspectives into their language testing development and practices will have to look for it within the

language testing community. However, Young's book provides a worthwhile compendium of information about possible variables to consider when developing and researching language tests.

Despite its gaps in focus for readers interested in language testing and second language studies, Young's book is admirable in its scope and depth. As a textbook for courses in sociolinguistics or discourse analysis, its biggest strength is the great variety of types and sources of texts, examples, activities and references to be found throughout the book. Not only scholarly books and articles, but novels and short stories, dictionaries and on-line encyclopedias, internet archives and social networking sites, newspaper articles and obituaries, speeches and songs, paintings and photographs are all employed to interest and educate students about language and interaction and the social world. This variety of genres and subject matter shows students that opportunities for learning about and analyzing language and social interaction are all around them.

Although *Language and Interaction* is a textbook, its readership should not be restricted to students and teachers. The book has a lot to offer scholars in a variety of disciplines who are interested in social aspects of language use. Readers will come away from this text able to approach further reading, discussion, and debate on social aspects of language use from a more informed stance.

Reference

Young, R., & He, A. W. (Eds.). (1998). *Talking and testing: Discourse approaches to the assessment of oral proficiency.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.

Nancy Kauper
Purdue University, USA
nkauper@purdue.edu