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To the memory of the thirty-five Syracuse University students who lost their lives in the terror bombing of Pan American Airways flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, on December 21, 1988, and to all other innocent victims of terrorism.
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We are grateful first and foremost to the contributors, whose cooperation in putting this work together was nothing short of remarkable. Our heartfelt thanks are also due to a number of people at Blackwell including particularly Danielle Descoteaux, the Acquisitions Editor in Linguistics, Julia Kirk, our Project Editor, and Tessa Hanford, Project Manager, for their unstinting patience and encouragement.

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In addressing issues in the study of bilingualism and multilingualism, one immediately encounters a terminological issue. The terms bilingualism and multilingualism have come to be used, respectively, to refer to the knowledge and use of two languages and the knowledge and use of three or more languages. Hence, a term is needed to refer to the full range of phenomena including both bilingualism and multilingualism in these senses. Rather than repeat the awkward ‘bi-/multilingualism’ in this introduction and the other introductions in this volume, we will use the term plurilingualism to refer to both bilingualism and multilingualism, as Mackey (chapter 28, this volume) and others have proposed.

Whatever the terminology, there is no doubt that plurilingualism constitutes a major fact of life in the world today. Plurilingualism is not such a rare phenomenon; there are, in fact, more bilingual/multilingual speakers in the world than there are monolinguals. The Ethnologue (2009) estimates more than 7,000 languages (7,358) are spoken in the 194 countries of the world, or approximately 38 languages per country. According to the Ethnologue, 94% of the world’s population employs approximately 5% of the world’s languages. Furthermore, many languages such as Hindi, Chinese, Arabic, Bengali, Punjabi, Spanish, Portuguese, and, of course, English are spoken in many countries around the globe. Such a linguistic situation necessitates that many people live with plurilingualism.

In fact, David Crystal (2003: 69) estimates that two-thirds of the world’s children grow up in a plurilingual environment. Considering only bilingualism involving English, the statistics that Crystal has gathered indicate that, of the approximately 750 million people worldwide who speak English, over 41% or 235 million are plurilingual in English and some other language(s). The processes of globalization now in progress can only increase the extent and character of plurilingualism, as people the world over continue to recognize the advantage of adding a world language to their verbal repertoires. One must conclude that, far from being exceptional, as many laymen believe, plurilingualism (which, of course, goes hand-in-hand with multiculturalism in many cases) is currently the rule throughout the world and will become increasingly so in the future.
Perhaps not surprisingly, research on plurilingualism, whether theory-driven or practically-oriented, has grown dramatically in quantity, quality, and breadth in recent years – in particular, since the publication of the first edition of the current work. These developments have resulted in the founding of three major journals for the publication of basic research in the field since 1990s – The International Journal of Bilingualism (1997–), Bilingualism: Language and Cognition (1998–), and the International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism (1998–). Two notable journals prior to 1990s were the: Bilingual Research Journal (1975–) and Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development (1980–). The International Symposium on Bilingualism (ISB) held its first meeting in 1997 and has met biennially since then; the eighth meeting, held in Norway at the University of Oslo in summer 2011, attracted over 600 abstracts (Elizabeth Lanza, personal communication). In addition to international conferences like the ISB, many more national and regional conferences on the topic of plurilingualism are held on every continent.

This Handbook – the second edition of a work published by the same publisher and co-editors in 2004 (hardcover) and 2006 (paperback) under the title The Handbook of Bilingualism – is intended to contribute to these vital trends with 36 chapters presenting state-of-the-art reviews of developments in both theoretical and practical research areas ranging from the study of the bi-/multilingual brain to bilingual education and literacy to the state of plurilingualism in a number of critical regions of the world. The addition of ‘Multilingualism’ to the title reflects the dramatic development over the last eight years of research on the knowledge and use of three or more languages – research that was just getting under way at the time of the compilation of the first edition. These developments have been recognized generally in a number of ways. To cite just one example, beginning in 2013 the international symposium referred to above will be called the ‘International Symposium on Bilingualism and Multilingualism.’

As was true of the first edition, the contributors to this volume – each one a top, internationally known scholar in his or her field – have been given full rein to develop their chapters in the way that seems most fitting to their areas of expertise. The volume is fully revised and updated from the first edition. There are new chapters by new authors, new chapters by many of the authors who contributed to the first edition, and updated and revised chapters from others. In fact, this edition is sufficiently different from the first edition that it should properly be thought of as a companion to the first edition rather than a replacement of it. Since the contributors represent fields as diverse as linguistic theory, neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, speech and hearing, experimental psychology, developmental psychology, clinical psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology, language education, deaf education, and area studies, the Handbook is not only an exhaustive area-by-area treatment of the field, but a mosaic of different approaches to the study of plurilingualism as well.

The new Handbook is divided into four Parts, each addressing one aspect of plurilingualism, with each Part introduced by one of the editors. Part I provides a general orientation in the study of plurilingualism; Part II addresses questions
concerning the plurilingual individual; Part III surveys the role of plurilingualism in society in general; and Part IV consists of case studies of plurilingualism in eight different areas of the world.

In bringing the work of the field together in one place for the advanced student and the researcher in plurilingualism as well as those who apply such research, we hope to have contributed to the deepening and broadening of our understanding not only of the many facets of plurilingualism, but also of the human mind/brain in general.

REFERENCES


Part I  Overview and Foundations
Introduction

TEJ K. BHATIA

The investigation of plurilingualism is a broad and complex field, which includes the study of the nature of the individual plurilingual’s knowledge and use of two (or more) languages as well as the broader social and cultural consequences of the widespread use of more than one language in a given society. The two chapters that make up Part I provide a general orientation to this complex field.

In Chapter 1 – ‘Bilingualism and Multilingualism: Some Central Concepts’ – John Edwards provides a bird’s-eye view of the field by examining a wide range of issues that are addressed in greater depth in later, more specialized chapters of the book. Edwards opens his chapter with a description of ways in which individual and societal plurilingualism differ and how societal plurilingualism arises. He then proposes a framework for classifying instances of societal plurilingualism and discusses a number of ways in which these cases of plurilingualism have been dealt with in these societies. Edwards then addresses issues in the study of individual plurilingualism, including popular questions about the capacity to acquire more than one language, ways in which degree of bilingualism has been measured, the relationship of bilingualism to general intelligence and cognitive development, and the process of becoming bilingual (that is, second-language acquisition). Finally, Edwards discusses the relationship between language and social identity in instances of plurilingualism.

Li Wei’s Chapter 2, ‘Conceptual and Methodological Issues in Bilingualism and Multilingualism Research,’ opens with the presentation of three presuppositions required for the coexistence of more than one language in a given society: that there are different languages in the world at large; that speakers of different languages (and the languages themselves) come into contact in a particular sense; and that the usual consequence of this contact is plurilingualism both in
individual speakers and in the society in which they interact. He then moves on
to discussions of three different approaches to the study of plurilingualism and
their accompanying methods – the psycholinguistic, linguistic, and sociolinguistic
approaches – and calls for the development of a combined transdisciplinary
approach to the study of plurilingualism in the future. (It should be noted that
this chapter is intended to complement – rather than replace – François Grosjean’s
Chapter 2 in the first edition.)