

## REVIEWS *COMPTES RENDUS*

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### **The Northern Route: An Ethnography of Refugee Experiences**

**Lisa Gilad**

St. John's, NF: Institute for Social and Economic Research,  
Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1990. 369 pp.  
ISBN: 0-919666-68-X

By both title and theme *The Northern Route* identifies itself within a broad and well-established tradition of Canadian exploration. The subject itself evokes images of hardy souls who would trade relatively comfortable lives for the romance and possibilities of a new and uncharted land. The explorers of this book, however, are not eighteenth century military men but modern refugees. These latest explorers no longer face the perils of icebergs and scurvy, but must learn to navigate even more treacherous channels of international bureaucracy, often without maps and charts. Leaving political turmoil in various parts of the world, they are seeking, in ways not unlike their earlier counterparts, the riches afforded by a new world: peace and security.

Based on ethnographic research conducted in 1987, Lisa Gilad has documented the journey of various types of refugees and of refugee claimants to and through Newfoundland. Why Newfoundland? It is because the airport at Gander, a refuelling stop for older Soviet bloc aircraft, has provided a small window to the west for an increasing number of refugee claimants (499 people in 1989). Early in her book, Gilad graphically describes tension-filled scenes during which sojourners contemplate their surrender to immigration authorities. She is then able to compare this experience with that of refugees who arrive through established government channels.

The book provides valuable insights into the world of refugee resettlement. While many ESL teachers work with such people as students, few of those lucky enough to be Canadian-born can truly fathom the dynamics of becoming and being identified as a refugee, of choosing a destination with little or no background information, or of attempting to settle permanently in a strange and sometimes hostile land. Each individual has his or her own story of struggle and achievement, but, in most cases, the stories remain untold. Gilad has set about to bring some of these stories to light in order to describe the

full process to people like us who may ordinarily experience only a small part of it.

The book is divided into two parts, focussing first on aspects of the refugee condition, then on the character of Newfoundland and the national context. Gilad analyzes the variety of push and pull factors which create refugees and distinguishes between those who are victims of active persecution (Baha'i, Vietnamese) and those who leave their countries for ideological reasons (Poles, Czechs, Cubans). Such a distinction is useful in some ways because it helps to explain the differential problems and treatment of groups throughout the world, but it also tends to oversimplify the motivations of individuals and the conditions which create refugees. While there are Vietnamese refugees who are victims of persecution, there are others who might be called economic migrants. Among Latin Americans, there are refugees with both leftist and rightist political leanings. Gilad's distinction may be more useful as it relates to the Canadian side of things—the determination and processing of refugees from different parts of the world—for it is at the policy level that strategies for the treatment of refugee applications are devised and implemented. Conditions among would-be refugees are, in reality, extremely diverse and changeable.

Treatment of the Newfoundland side of refugee reception is very well documented. Part Two begins with a useful overview of the historical treatment of newcomers in Newfoundland, framing modern attitudes and practices within traditions established in pre-Confederation times. It documents the leadership role taken by Canada Employment and Immigration in the development of an infrastructure for the settlement and adaptation of refugees, allowing narratives of those involved in the process to speak for themselves. Provision for settlement counselling and ESL, as well, are discussed, describing the gaps in service and omnipresent "seat purchase" system so favoured by funders across Canada.

The views of refugees themselves are highlighted in Chapters Seven and Nine, which focus on experiences and emotions during initial settlement and the process of secondary migration. The stories contained in these chapters are valuable insights into the day-to-day lives of people in transition, allowing the reader to experience the tensions which naturally exist between refugees and their sponsors (often the government), between the present and the future. Disputes about money are primary during initial settlement, with newcomers pointing to their need for independence and the ability to plan their lives and government officials citing examples of abuse of the system. Planning for secondary migration from Newfoundland is almost

inevitable, with a clear majority of refugees choosing to leave within a year or two. There are simply not enough employment possibilities in the island community for the majority of refugees who arrive there.

Gilad's analysis of her research should have begun by acknowledging the enormous scope of the task that she has undertaken, and by tying together the thematic elements of a process, the settlement of refugees, which is complex and little-understood by the majority of Canadians. Instead, she proceeds with a puzzling explanation of what the work is not, attempting to situate it relative to her previous anthropological writings about family, gender and ethnicity among refugees and immigrants. While alluding to these deeper human aspects of refugee experience, their last minute introduction seems somewhat pedantic and out of place, detracting from the integrity of the work presented. This discussion might have been better placed in her introductory chapter. Her analysis of the problem of the label, "refugee", however, returns her focus to the complexities of the world and the predictable vagaries of international policies and politics.

*The Northern Route* occupies a relatively rare place in Canadian academic writing. It documents the stories of ordinary people who have been subject to extraordinary events. While each of us has lived and worked through events like the collapse of communism in eastern Europe, the Vietnam War, the civil wars in the Horn of Africa, we seldom stop to reflect on how such developments impact our lives, our country, our people. But they do. Each link in the chain of producing a refugee and welcoming an immigrant touches upon us as human beings, citizens and teachers. There are many too many episodes like the Gander story documented by Gilad which remain parts of a fragile oral history: the ESL protest in Winnipeg, the stories of immigrant doctors, stories of struggle for literacy in English. Somehow, we must learn to value and share these stories.

Gilad's book will be of interest to a variety of readers, including student and practising teachers, researchers and policy makers. Since her research predates the massive recent changes in eastern Europe, and because immigration regulations are always changing, some of the book's content is now historical. The pressure on Gander will be reduced with fewer refugees coming from former Soviet bloc countries. Nevertheless, this volume provides a fair introduction for readers across Canada to the bewildering maze of international intrigue, government regulations and massive personal disruption which characterize the refugee resettlement process.

Laura E. Ho

## **THE REVIEWER**

Laura Ho is currently a doctoral student in Education at the University of Alberta, where she is pursuing research concerning the experience of immigrants in adult education. She has worked variously as an ESL classroom teacher, educational counsellor, ESL consultant and teacher educator.

## **To Change This House: Popular Education Under the Sandinistas**

**Deborah Barndt**

Toronto, ON: Between the Lines Press, 1991.

ISBN: 0921284373 (paperback)

ISBN: 0921284365 (clothbound)

## **Educating for a Change**

**Rick Arnold, Bev Burke, Carl James, D'Arcy Martin, and Barb Thomas**

Toronto, ON: Between the Lines Press, 1991.

ISBN: 0921284489 (paperback)

ISBN: 0921284470 (clothbound)

These two books come to us from authors tried and true in their dedication to social justice and to educational methodologies consistent with honouring the dignity of the learner and the ability of communities of people to change their own lives for the better. They are reviewed together because they present, each in their own way, two parts of a circle: the theory (Arnold *et al.*) and the practice (Barndt), although each book contains elements of both.

The strength of Barndt's book is in the number of situations she presents to us, each of which shows how the ideas of popular education must be adapted to the particular context in which they are being applied. Writing from her broad experience in work with the literacy campaign in Nicaragua, she shows us how "education was an important part of organizing people; it helped develop the knowledge, skills and analysis necessary for the decisive actions" (p. 10).

After reading Barndt's book, the reader is left with no doubt as to the distinction between liberal education which reforms but does not change the underlying structures of a society and popular education which enables oppressed peoples to understand and change their reality. This book is for educators who are working with learners who do not have equal opportunities in our country, educators who are willing to confront traditional ways of teaching in order to find ways of genuinely making a difference to the learners' ability to effect radical change in their lives. Barndt's excellent photographs ensure that the ideas are fixed in our minds with strong visual images of hope.

The second book provides a tool box of sorts for those who are committed to doing this kind of education. It comes complete with step-by-step directions for using various processes and some appropriate cautions so that we do not harm either the learners or ourselves by using them without being prepared for the consequences. One good example is the section on conflict which sees conflict not as something to be avoided but as an arena in which we can come to better understand ourselves, our situations, and our possibilities for positive action.

I am always leery of how-to books when it comes to critical education because to use these tools without the values and understandings which they are intended to accompany is to trivialize their power and diminish their potential effectiveness. However, these five authors write from a strong background in doing critical education, some having come from the labour movement. From that background, they write in anticipation of the misunderstandings which could arise and give the reader enough information that those who should not use these tools probably will not want to.

These are books written in Canada for Canadian educators, among others, and we are fortunate to have this calibre of material coming out of our country. I commend both of them to those who see teaching as more than technique and curriculum as more than content to be covered.

**Virginia Sauvé**

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## THE REVIEWER

Virginia Sauvé is the director of English Language Professionals, Inc., a private company doing participatory education, primarily with immigrant women, in workplace settings and full-time job training programs. Her recent Ph.D. dissertation was based on working with learners who had little formal education in their countries of origin.

## Dumb Foreigners: Language and Cultural Barriers to Canadian Relations with Asia and the Pacific

Diana Lary

Toronto, ON: University of Toronto–York University, Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, revised edition, 1990.

ISBN: 0-921309-90-2

A frequent sojourner in China, I approached Diana Lary's *Dumb Foreigners* with personal as well as academic interest. In neither sphere was I disappointed although I often found myself wanting to say, "But wait a minute...." For the most part, her observations were in accord with my own experience of working in Asia, especially China, but when they were not, I found myself taking exception.

Lary's report of a study of the social habits of CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) personnel working in Asia and Africa is a case in point. According to the study (Hawkes and Kealey, 1981), 70% of CIDA experts "spent less than 10% of their social, non-working time with natives of the country in which they were working" (Lary, p. 7). Although I have close Chinese friends in Beijing where I frequently work, I fear that I would fall into that 70% but not because of any "sense of threatening difference." Rather, the intensity of the working relationship and the social habits of our Chinese friends limit our social encounters. On our project, we frequently work ten to twelve hours per day. At the end of a working day, our Chinese colleagues usually want to go home to their own families, and although they sometimes invite us to their homes and we often invite them to join us, there are a great many other barriers which conspire to keep us apart. One is the simple fear of intruding on the private time of people whom we know to be deeply committed to their families.

Another "wait a minute" reaction was to Ms. Lary's example of Caucasians viewing Asians as all looking the same which she took from an article in the *Financial Post*. The writer described Japanese executives as looking "like they were turned out by some great corporate cookie cutter in the sky." I've often heard something very similar said of New York executives, and while the observation may be stereotypic in *both* instances, it is not necessarily racist nor does it say anything particularly about the Japanese.

Ms. Lary makes worthwhile observations about the importance of Canadians learning Asian languages if they are going to do business there. She also does a fine job of dissecting the reasons why we are

so reluctant to do so. But again, wait a minute.... While I am the first to agree that learning the Asian language in which one is doing business is important, it is also the case that it does not guarantee understanding of the host culture. I know two Canadians who have been working in China for a number of years. One has studied Chinese history and culture but knows only about 50 words in Chinese. The other has studied the Chinese language intensively and communicates well in Chinese. Yet the former is far more sensitive to and understanding of their Chinese colleagues than the latter in the view of *both Canadian and Chinese* observers. Language helps, but it does not compensate for any lack of sensitivity which one may have to other people whatever their culture.

Similarly, not having control of the language is not the only reason why foreigners live in "foreign enclaves." Sometimes, there is simply not any other choice. In the project I have been associated with, the Chinese gave us no alternative. We lived among them in the sense that we lived on the university campus. But we lived in a foreign guest house because that was all they had available. Incidentally, this was hardly a community of Canadian expatriates. The residents of the guest house where I stayed included Russian, Italian, Japanese, German and Mongol natives, only the last of whom spoke Chinese.

*Dumb Foreigners* is worthwhile reading for anyone who knows little or nothing about Asia (most of us, apparently) and who may be planning to work there. It is a good introduction not to Asia but to our ways of thinking about Asia. Lary's discussion of the reasons behind our persistent English-only thinking is also worthwhile. On the whole, I would have to say that *Dumb Foreigners* has only one major flaw and that is that it has not undergone sufficient revision. Much has changed since the first edition five years ago and not enough of that change is reflected in the text (aside from allusions to the Tiannamen massacre). China, in particular, is changing very rapidly. Not only is Canada better known there than it was five years ago—I am less often assumed to be American and am frequently asked intelligent questions about Canada when I speak to university students in China—but English is gaining speed as a *lingua franca*. In Beijing, I am increasingly frustrated in trying to speak my incipient Chinese. Most of the time, I don't get an opportunity to utter more than two Chinese words before my Chinese interlocutor speaks to me in incipient English. Nevertheless, *Dumb Foreigners* lives up to the promise of its subtitle. It addresses clearly, mostly accurately, and in a most readable manner the *Language and Cultural Barriers to Canadian Relations with Asia and the Pacific*.

Terry Piper

## THE REVIEWER

Terry Piper is Professor of Education and Director of the TESL Centre at Saint Mary's University in Halifax. She has written a number of articles on second language teaching and learning, and her new book *Language for ALL our Children* is being published by Merrill/Macmillan in August.

## Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers

**Iлона Leki**

Portsmouth, NH: Boyton/Cook, Heineman. 1992. 151 pp.

ISBN: 0-86709-303-X (paper)

As the populations in educational systems in North America become more diverse, increasing numbers of teachers in all domains are coming to work with students whose native language is not English, a task they may find challenging and uncertain in face of their previous experiences or expectations. Iлона Leki has prepared a guidebook for such teachers who wish (1) to understand better the phenomena that tend to characterize ESL students' writing and (2) to adopt pedagogical strategies and attitudes that current research and educational experience suggest would benefit ESL learners' writing development. The book is primarily directed at composition instructors in colleges and universities in the U.S., although much valuable advice and orientation appears for experienced and preservice teachers in all subject areas that involve students in extensive writing at either the secondary or post-secondary levels in Canada. As such, readers of the *TESL Canada Journal* will find this book a notable item to recommend to their professional colleagues in other teaching disciplines (but perhaps also as a source to inform some of their own practices or ideas in ESL instruction).

This book is unique, not only for its broad purposes of teacher orientation but also because Leki succeeds in competently and intelligently addressing most of the specific concerns that teachers or professors not already familiar with ESL education and research may have. She does so by drawing carefully on three relevant bodies of knowledge: recent empirical research on second language writing and acquisition; her own extensive experiences with adult ESL students as well as those documented by colleagues; and the pedagogical conventions common to composition instruction in academic settings. Moreover, Leki skillfully combines these three sources to create a very readable, balanced discussion that teachers will find speaks directly to their practical interests, their existing pedagogical knowledge, and the need for reliable sources of information.

True to the book's title, *Understanding ESL Writers*, Leki's discussion helps to illuminate the backgrounds, goals, and problems that ESL students usually have in regards to writing in English while proposing how teachers might best anticipate and act on these issues. Sections of the book focus on processes of learning a second language;

characteristics of ESL students (and differences they demonstrate from other populations), their classroom behaviors, and their writing performance (in terms of cognitive processes, text features, and common difficulties); as well as ways for teachers to organize writing tasks, evaluation practices, and feedback to accommodate such learners. Each section summarizes current knowledge by presenting relevant research and theory along with compelling anecdotes of specific students' experiences.

Most readers will find the value of each section in the sensible implications drawn for educational policies and practices. For example, teachers are encouraged to appreciate the particular circumstances of ESL students in view of the time and processes needed to acquire another language, the cultural values ESL students may hold and express through their writing and classroom interactions, and the specific difficulties they may confront while composing or demonstrate in their texts. At the same time, much specific advice is presented on ways to structure and respond to writing assignments for ESL learners, the categories of syntactic errors and rhetorical differences to anticipate in ESL writing, and the strategies to facilitate effective composing in another language.

Despite these valuable purposes and achievements, two queries can be raised over the content of the book. One query is whether by describing the characteristics that make "ESL students" distinct from students raised in Anglophone North America, Leki's book inadvertently constructs an image of an "other" population, as distinguished from an elusive American norm, that may in itself limit teachers' conceptions and students' opportunities. For example, in any specific situation, how might we decide who is or is not an ESL student? (Leki does carefully distinguish the learning problems of speakers of English dialects and basic writers from those of ESL populations, but discussion of students visiting the U.S., recent immigrants, and very diverse cultural groups are merged in a way that may obscure integral differences in their educational intentions, personal interests, or social backgrounds.) Similarly, at what point in a learner's personal history does the label of ESL lose its educational relevance? The dangers of stereotyping or deficit arguments loom in any effort to ascribe uniformity to ESL education, even though Leki's discussions appear consistently sympathetic to the problematic situations of ESL learners, the important knowledge they possess, and the prejudices they face.

The second query is whether current research and theory on ESL writing is actually more limited than the book might lead uninformed readers to believe. On the one hand, Leki's book appears to be the first full-length pedagogical monograph that is able to base its sources

almost entirely on studies of second language writing—without having to rely unduly on studies of mother tongue composition. The state of knowledge and professional deliberation has advanced that much in recent years. But, on the other hand, even though many systematic studies of ESL writing have been conducted over the past decade—and Leki adeptly draws on the full range of these sources—most have been case studies of small numbers of people with specific or mixed cultural backgrounds performing restricted kinds of tasks in particular educational contexts. Firm principles for educational practice are still difficult to make from such a knowledge base. And comprehensive theories are still non-existent. I would agree that certain aspects of second language writing performance have been well documented in recent years, and some common myths dispelled, as Leki points out, such as confusions between rhetorical styles and students' thinking or knowledge, or the dubious value of restricting students to sentence-level exercises that barely resemble composing or the development of academic knowledge. But most of the educational complexities regarding teaching, learning, literate knowledge, and societal conditions in second languages still remain to be addressed and the optimal pedagogical alternatives and conditions for learning accurately determined.

**Alister Cumming**

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## **THE REVIEWER**

Alister Cumming is Associate Professor in the Modern Language Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto. His research focuses on writing in second languages, curriculum evaluation, and thinking processes in second language instruction and learning.

## Vocabulary

**Michael McCarthy**

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990 173 pp.

ISBN: 0-19-437136-0

Once again, Michael McCarthy has given us a timely and thought-provoking, yet practical guide to the complex issue of vocabulary teaching. The book is part of the Oxford University Press professional development series, **Language Teaching: A Scheme for Teacher Education**, edited by Christopher N. Candlin and Henry Widdowson and as such is designed to lead language teachers towards "critical appraisal of ideas and informed application of those ideas in their own classrooms." (Introduction). Given this premise, it might be inferred that the book is largely theoretical and not necessarily of interest to the practising teacher. This is not so. The book is very readable, written in a clear, concise manner with numerous, highly illustrative examples and tasks. It is, in fact, an extremely useful volume for the classroom teacher.

The book's format has been determined by the series' internal design and has significant impact on the effectiveness of the book. It contains three sections as do all the books in the series, each comprising explanatory text and a sequence of tasks which "engage the reader in a principled enquiry into ideas and practices." (Introduction). The first section, **Explaining Vocabulary**, addresses the theoretical ideas related to the topic and provides a conceptual framework for the rest of the book. The second section, **Demonstrating Vocabulary**, shifts the focus to how the ideas in the first section have informed vocabulary teaching materials and lexical reference books. The third section, **Exploring Vocabulary**, provides a number of intriguing tasks intended to involve the reader in an exploration of the relevance of the ideas of the previous two sections to the classroom and an evaluation of one's own teaching activities. The book concludes with a glossary, some suggestions for further reading on the topic and a substantial bibliography.

Section One begins by posing four questions which provide the organizing framework for the rest of the section:

1. How is vocabulary composed? What sorts of elements does it contain?
2. Is the vocabulary of a language organized or is it just a gigantic list of items, every one unique?

3. If it is organized, can we use its structuring principles in language teaching in a way similar to the way we utilize the regularity and organization of grammatical structure?
4. How can anything so vast as the vocabulary of a language, particularly a second language, or even a relatively small part of it, be acquired by the human mind, stored, and made retrievable when required?

McCarthy responds to these questions through discussion of a variety of topics that include among others, word formation, lexical relations, the mental lexicon, vocabulary in use, and vocabulary as data for learning. He reminds us that we really have only a scant knowledge of language and the mind, and stresses that we should not assume that the mind organizes a second language lexicon in the same way as it organizes the first. Nor should we assume that the processes of comprehension and production operate similarly in L1 and L2.

Let me say at this point that McCarthy could have been tempted to use this section to bewilder us with his erudition—topics such as *collocation* or *componential analysis* provide ample soporific opportunity! Fortunately for us, McCarthy is plainly an educator intent on communicating ideas clearly and succinctly. His manner is straightforward and far from patronizing. McCarthy's use of vivid images to introduce new ideas is highly effective. The description of collocation as a "marriage contract between words, [in which] some words are more firmly married to each other than to others" is a good example.

The second section of the book uses premises developed in the preceding unit to examine the criteria used in second language teaching to select vocabulary for teaching. McCarthy recognizes that many teachers have little control over what vocabulary they teach. This decision frequently rests with others, such as syllabus designers. He argues, though, that without a clear understanding of how the syllabus has been designed and by what criteria, teachers will have difficulty evaluating syllabuses and materials. It will also be difficult to explain to their students and themselves why certain words are being taught.

The third section of the book is a further exploration of the many issues introduced in the previous two sections. The section is composed of a number of intriguing tasks in which the teacher and potentially the students can investigate various aspects of vocabulary learning right in the classroom. These tasks are very practical in nature, with significant implications for classroom vocabulary teaching. One particular task of note explores to what degree topic-based materials satisfy learners' perceived vocabulary needs. It involves

students' identifying ten topics they would each most like to cover in a short-term course, then listing ten words in their L1 which they consider to be important to that topic. This could be followed up with a comparison of results among students and to their course material. (p. 149).

In conclusion, Michael McCarthy's book, *Vocabulary*, is a valuable resource to teachers grappling with the complexities of vocabulary teaching. It will provide practising teachers with a principled basis for decision making and evaluation of syllabuses and vocabulary instructional material. It is a source of pertinent, innovative classroom-based research activities. It is also a convenient reference for teachers in training. I highly recommend its inclusion in any ESL professional library.

**Joanne Pettis**

#### **THE REVIEWER**

Joanne Pettis is the Coordinator, Adult ESL Curriculum Resources for the Adult Language Training Branch of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship. Her interests include second language vocabulary development, particularly in ESP programs.