

## Book Reviewed

**Learning the Arts of Linguistic Survival: Language, Tourism, Life.**  
**Phipps, A. (2007). Channel View Publications, Clevedon, ISBN-1-84541-054-8, (viii+205pp.)**

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As part of the rapidly emerging critical social literature on tourism, *Learning the Arts of Linguistic Survival* is intended to increase awareness about the relationship between language learning and the everyday practice of tourism. In this book, Alison Phipps raises several important issues that redress the predominant focus from the teaching and learning of languages for the purpose of mere linguistic competence, to a broader capacity of understanding language and culture, the inextricability of both, and the socially situated processes of communication and meaning-making in everyday tourism contexts.

Discursive competence, the ability to understand and produce discourse in concrete situations, has been shown to comprise the joint activation of three knowledge dimensions: linguistic, textual and situational (Capucho & Oliveira, 2005). Further, any experience of 'linguaging' (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2004) is one of participation in the whole range of a communicative competence, understood as the capacity to negotiate and create meaning between speakers who actively engage in the struggle to live the otherness and co-construct complex and creative identities. While the staging of encounters in tourism is by no means new to academic perspectives, *Learning the Arts of Linguistic Survival: Language, Tourism, Life* approaches the issue from the specialised perspective of language and communication. In particular, Phipps' analysis shows how language comes to be ritualised and commodified in tourism performances – what Jack and Phipps (2002) refer to as the 'linguaging and translating' of the tourist landscape.

In the current intellectual climate of language learning discourse, students, teachers and researchers alike commonly agree that one of the most effective and efficient means for becoming proficient in a second language is study abroad. Learners who opt to spend time in the country of the target language are exposed to frequent and intense opportunities to interact with native speakers, to activate their linguistic and socio-linguistic skills to achieve real communicative goals, and to experience the tangible and visible manifestations of the target culture first hand. Numerous statistical studies attest to the value of study abroad in terms of proficiency outcomes (e.g., Stansfield, 1975; Carroll, 1967; Freed, 1995), essentially establishing study abroad as the sine qua non of successful language acquisition.

Indeed, all languages, as suggested by Dann (1996), convey messages, have a heuristic or semantic content, and operate through a conventional system of symbols and codes. In this book, it is shown that tourism, in the act of promotion, as well as in the accounts of its practitioners, likewise has a discourse of its own. *Learning the Arts of Linguistic Survival* is a book about socio-linguistic processes in "quick" tourist language learning. From ordering a coffee to following directions, this book offers an insightful contribution to the deceptively complex relationship between the study of tourism and languages.

It is probably true to say that the socio-linguistic treatment of tourism is still in its infancy. Any new book which continues the exploration of this infant area of study is therefore potentially exciting, especially if it contains accounts of hitherto unpublished empirical research, as is the case with *Learning the Arts of Linguistic Survival*. Alison Phipps has done an excellent job of bringing her book into the age of socio-cultural theories of language schooling and constructivist theories of language teaching and learning. What is more, she has brought her book up to date without mentioning those theories

much at all. By avoiding excessive description of theory and research, Phipps has both challenged and improved on a criticism common to much language learning discourse; namely, its inaccessibility to practicing teachers. In Phipps' own words:

"...modern language professionals have spent much time and energy demonstrating that 'languages are about much more than learning to order a coffee'... There are hierarchies that are constantly appealed to by those who teach other languages, in which tourism is the lowest of the low... But it is my contention, in this book, that far from being the first aspect of language learning to be dismissed, as is so often the case, the desire and willingness to order a coffee in another language, to step outside one's habitual ways of speaking, to let go of one's normal fluency and linguistic power point to aspects of social and moral life that are of fundamental significance" (p. 6).

It is precisely this kind of strictly linguistic or socio-linguistic approach which, it is argued here, can make a useful contribution to the already interdisciplinary tourism literature. Indeed, part of the impetus for this move comes from within the field of Tourism Studies itself, where writers like Franklin and Crang (2001) advocated the need for a more 'multi-sense' understanding of tourism, and a concomitant reappraisal of its undue emphasis on the visual – typified by the sway of Urry's (2002) otherwise trenchant notion of the 'tourist gaze'. To some extent, any lack of scholarly attention to language is explained by nature of the tourist experience itself; in Cronin's (2000: p. 82) words, 'sightseeing is the world with the sound turned off'. As Dunn (2002: p. 3) further explains, tourists usually end up 'gazing' simply because they cannot understand the languages spoken by the objects of their gaze. Either way, analyses of language and social interaction in tourism have been noticeable by their absence. With this said, the book being reviewed here very well demonstrates the application and relevance of language learning to a very significant domain of everyday, inter-ethnic interaction – in fact, one of the most substantial cultural industries today. It is precisely such concerns which ought to stimulate readers' interest in the ideological and discursive functions of languages other than English as they are represented in everyday holiday travel.

It may seem reasonable to presume, moreover, that language learning in the context of holiday-taking occurs in comparatively authentic, motivating, and memorable contexts. Host languages add exotic 'flavouring' to the destination and can be used with relative ease to get things done (e.g. facilitating service encounters), or to have fun with, or indeed to poke fun at, local people (e.g. while socialising). Language thus conceived, is authentic not simply in that 'scenes from real [daily] life' are enacted but also in that, for many learners, engaging habitual behaviours in a foreign language may itself be a learning objective. It is the real life exchanges that provide the most challenging situations of communicative struggling, and hence the importance of life-long learning and of a commitment to developing attitudes of positive appreciation of otherness, as well as the will to interact in the complexity of negotiating and co-constructing meaning.

It is not possible in a short review such as this to give the reader a feel for the rich detail and the style of this book. Given the detailed level of analysis to be found in the core chapters of this volume it is not easy to single out individual chapters. Indeed, this is very much a book that needs to be read as a whole if one is going to benefit from the details contained within it. The core themes of the work are framed by a useful introductory chapter that situates the research in a much broader context, and a conclusion that is suggestive of future research agendas as well as the need to rethink current theoretical perspectives. The first chapter in particular, emphasizes the import of learning another language for tourist purposes. Throughout the remaining chapters, Phipps asks the deceptively simple yet provocative questions: Are tourists really motivated to use and learn a foreign language? Do they perceive language-learning as a lifelong process? The central question addressing the social, cultural and political significance of learning to speak a tourist language and its broader implications for a meaningful sense of dialogue, perception and cultural understanding certainly provides food for thought across a range of conceptual and empirical concerns.

Phipps' book is an interesting monograph that is useful both for cross-cultural understanding, global travel and business relations, and general reading. I have to offer some caution: this book provides a general understanding only; it should not be used to conclude the pattern of cross-national behaviours. Stereotypes often develop when we consider some common gestures and behaviours to be the guiding pattern. In the current scenario, where identities are constantly changing and globalisation is the buzzword, gestures and behaviours do not anymore remain sacrosanct. However, notwithstanding, this book will undoubtedly find its way onto the shelves of university libraries, as well as many methodology and/or pedagogical libraries in school staff-rooms. It is after all a book in a prominent series (Tourism and Cultural Change), on a topic of much current interest, written by a well-known research-

er in the field. It seems unlikely, however, that this will ever come to be regarded as a key book in the area of language strategies study. The book will be read for different purposes by different people on different occasions, and probably with varying degrees of satisfaction.

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