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Introduction

There is much recent historical background to books such as this one, situated and positioned, as it is, on the U.S.-Mexico border. For example, Robert DeChaine (2012), in his book *Border Rhetorics: Citizenship and Identity on the US-Mexico Frontier*, states that “a principal source of border scholarship began to emerge within the field of geography as early as in the 1950s” (p. 4). Drawing on the work of Thomas Wilson and Hastings Donnan (2012), DeChaine goes on to note, “Scholars who engage ‘the anthropology of borders’ have examined how borders influence the cultural process, reflect communal values and traditions, and bear upon ‘issues of nationalism, political economy, class, migration and the political disintegration of nations and states’ (Wilson and Donnan 4)” (p. 4). However, somewhat conspicuous by its absence is any reference to language and linguistic factors, in spite of DeChaine’s earlier mention of “the rhetoricity of borders and of their power in public discourse” (p. 3).

In an earlier work, Kimberley Grimes (1988) wrote about people migrating from Oaxaca, in Mexico, to New Jersey, in the United States, in *Crossing Borders: Changing Social Identities in Southern Mexico*. Although Grimes discusses aspects of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, race, religion, and ideology, again there is relatively little reference to language as an essential aspect of crossing the border from one life in one country to another life in a neighboring country, especially when the two countries and contexts are so close to each other.

A number of other books also focus on this particular border crossing, such as Pablo Villa’s (2000) *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders: Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the US-Mexico Frontier*, Thomas Wilson and Hastings Donnan’s (2012) 600-page *Companion to Border Studies*, and others which show that, over the last 10 to 15 years, this has become an area of study in its own right. However, few of these books focus on language, which is one of the important contributions books such as this one make, adding knowledge, understanding, and insight not only to the field of TESOL, but to other fields as well.

In Chapter 1, Dr. Alfredo Urzúa explains, “At a personal level, as an applied linguist, second language teacher educator, and program coordinator, my work in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands has been closely connected to my educational and professional experiences” (p. 1). This has become one of the recurring themes of the books in this *ELT In Context* series, in which the writers can share personal experiences with readers, in addition to offering professional insights.

In relation to border crossing, in Chapter 2 Dr. Urzúa notes that UNESCO defines an international student “as any person who has ‘crossed a national or territorial border for the purposes of education and [is] now enrolled outside their country of origin’” (p. 8). In Chapter 3, on the local context in El Paso, Texas, he points out that, in the “long and complex history of social, cultural, economic, and political ties between the United States and Mexico” the “issues of language, immigration, and education are also entangled in those ties . . . and knots” (p. 13).

Chapter 4 focuses on the situation at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), which is a public university located less than one mile from the U.S.-Mexico border. To help readers get as deep an understanding of the local language teaching and learning context as possible, each book in the series has a short chapter on *A Day in the Life of a Teacher* (in this book, “Diana”) and one on *A Day in the Life of a Learner* (here, “Javier”), in the author’s particular LTO (Chapters 5 and 6), based on composite characterizations.

In Chapter 7, on the Big Picture, Dr. Urzúa connects the dots, using UTEP as a case study, and states:

Much can be learned from exploring English language teaching at institutions of higher education located in the borderlands, especially in terms of understanding the effects of national and regional educational policies on both sides of the border, the impact of such policies on English language learners, and how issues associated with transnationalism may affect English language teaching. (p. 46)

This illustrates the fact that, although this book is about teaching and learning English on the border between the United States and Mexico, lessons can be learned that can apply to English language teaching and learning in other border situations and contexts.

In the eighth and final chapter, reflecting on what he has learned from having researched and written this book, Dr. Urzúa highlights some of the reasons for creating this *ELT In Context* series:

A substantial body of research highlights the important role played by contextual factors in second and foreign language learning, including contact with the target language and culture, learners’ experiences and interactions in the language, and the specific characteristics of the learning setting. (p. 53)

He concludes that “it is these factors that may, in the end, explain the effects of our teaching and the way learners approach the learning task” (p. 53).

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