

ISB4: Afterword and Closing Remarks

Jeff MacSwan
Arizona State University

ISB4 appears to have been a great success. The meeting was hosted by Arizona State University from April 30 to May 3, 2003. The organizing committee included Jeff MacSwan, Chair, Arizona State University; Dawn Bates, Arizona State University; Holly Cashman, Arizona State University; Elly van Gelderen, Arizona State University; David Ingram, Arizona State University; Nicholas Miller, University of Newcastle upon Tyne; Melissa Greer Moyer, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; Kellie Rolstad, Arizona State University; Jeanine Treffers-Daller, University of the West of England – Bristol; and Li Wei, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Additionally, James Cohen and Kara McAlister served as the Conference Coordinators.

The conference was attended by 653 participants from 32 U.S. states and nearly 50 countries, presenting their research in keynote addresses, colloquia, paper sessions, poster presentations, and workshops. Topics included bilingualism and the brain, multilingual language policy, linguistic and psycholinguistic studies of bilingual language mixing, simultaneous language acquisition, and many others. Linguists, psychologists, educational researchers, sociologists, anthropologists, medical researchers, biologists, and many others participated in this multidisciplinary event.

We were extremely delighted that the conference was, by and large, positively evaluated by participants. In the post-conference survey, for instance, 55% of respondents (N=351) ranked ISB4 among the top 5% of conferences they had attended, with 20% of respondents ranking it as the best ever. Below are a few representative comments made by participants who took the survey:

I enjoyed the wide variety of speakers from all over the world. It broadened my perspective enormously. It was very interesting to get a glimpse of the research done by other people on bilingualism all over the world.



The most enjoyable part of the event was being able to attend top quality presentations that were followed with lots of informal opportunities to dialogue with colleagues (including the presenters themselves) about our respective efforts related to the topic. I loved being able to sit on the grass, have a picnic, relax, and talk with colleagues from around the world. All the keynote speakers were outstanding! I returned home renewed and inspired!



ISB4 was/has been the best conference I have ever attended. The organization was great, and it was a spectacular gathering of professionals in the field. It could not have been better! I also enjoyed the social gatherings that truly brought people together. It was great having the meals included! Certainly, it made things easier! Thanks!

And finally,

The quality and variety of the research presented was exceptional. The possibility of discussing work in lunch breaks/social events with participants was especially important to me (plus those events were absolutely terrific). I also enjoyed the personal contact with researchers and eminences in the field, meeting new colleagues and reuniting with old friends. In general I enjoyed every minute of the symposium. The organization was very good, and the web pre-orientation (including registration) was most useful.

It was especially pleasing to hear from graduate students in bilingualism. The following comment was made in email, immediately after the conclusion of the event:

I just wanted to take an opportunity to tell you that as a doc student going to my first big conference, this was an amazing experience. I could not have asked for more, especially with the incredibly thoughtful reduced student rate! I had a great time presenting, meeting colleagues, and learning about international issues related to bilingualism. I have told everyone I know that you guys did a fabulous job with the food. The lunches were fantastic!!! The banquets were great too, but way to go on lunch!

On a more personal note, as a traditional 'outsider' to bilingualism (I study first and second language acquisition in Deaf children) I felt so incredibly accepted by everyone at the conference. I have also told colleagues about this aspect of my experience. I think the organization committee should be commended, as well as the panel of submission reviewers for being so open-minded and accepting.

Thank you for such a rewarding experience. See you in Barcelona!

Clearly, these compliments are owed much more to the general body of participants at ISB4 than to the organizers and organizing committee.

Of course, some participants made very reasonable complaints as well. The design of the printed program was not as optimal as we had hoped, some of the meetings were not ideally scheduled, we might have found a better use for conference resources than fancy badges and pens, social events should have begun earlier, and keynote speakers should have started later.

But the comments and feedback were very positive on balance, and the organizers and members of the organizing committee are extremely pleased to have been part of making ISB4 possible, and hope that the meeting has played a role in advancing our enterprise.

Michael Bernstein of Casacadilla Press, the publisher of these Proceedings, requested that the text of the Closing Remarks be included in this volume. The remarks, appearing below, were made by Jeff MacSwan to a full session of conference attendees, having dwindled to an estimated 400 people or so, on Saturday, May 3, 2003.

Closing Remarks

Jeff MacSwan

Chair, ISB4 Organizing Committee

Saturday, 11:45 AM - 12:00 PM

Memorial Union, Arizona Room

In the final count, 653 people checked in or registered on grounds at ISB4. This has been the biggest ISB to date, as Li Wei and others have pointed out, and of course it has only managed to achieve this stature by standing on the shoulders of ISB1, ISB2, and ISB3. As a field and as an organization, we can be proud to have seen this week some extremely diverse and very high quality research by colleagues spanning the globe.

When promoting ISB4, one of our slogans was that it has become, in an extremely short time, “the premier *international* forum for the discussion and dissemination of research on bilingualism, regularly attracting the most visible members in the field.” The word “international,” while certainly true, was really intended as a bit of a hedge, a way of avoiding comparisons to scholarly organizations which do not have an international focus. But after this week, I feel very comfortable leaving it out – ISB, I think, has really become the place where scholars in bilingualism feel at home, regarded not as a peripheral aspect of a conference program, but as the core group itself. Although it has only now completed its fourth iteration, ISB is, to my mind, without a doubt the premier scholarly conference in bilingualism worldwide.

As our organization continues to grow and establish an identity, it is my personal hope that we will morph into a large, highly focused, extremely diverse, interdisciplinary, and international professional organization or association, committed to high quality research and inquiry in bilingualism.

An important reason for us to organize into an official body of some kind, in my personal view, is that it would provide a forum in which the intellectual community could speak with a strong and unified voice on matters of social and political importance which touch upon our domain of research. For instance, in the United States, extremist efforts to eliminate multilingual education often rely on propaganda claiming that the U.S. is the only country with multilingual schools, or multilingual institutions, and that other countries, far wiser than us, have the good sense to ignore the linguistic talents and resources of their newest citizens and of their newcomers. Or, more generally, rather than answering questions of social importance in bilingualism by applying the methods of empirical research, those in power in this country are content with speculation and intuitions based on anecdotes and ideology. I’m not sure we’d ever be heard, but as Chomsky has said, “It is the responsibility of intellectuals to tell the truth and to expose lies.” A professional organization might give us, among many other benefits, a platform from which we could fulfill this important responsibility. In addition, of course, it would provide a home for ISB so that it continues to grow and thrive.

I’d like to mention a few of our accomplishments. In particular, I would like to mention one effort that we are especially proud of. Following a tradition established by Jeanine Treffers-Daller during the organization of ISB3, we felt it was extremely important to include scholars from economically disadvantaged regions, whose personal and institutional resources were such that it would have been impossible for them to even seriously consider attending ISB4. We obtained a grant from the Ford Foundation to provide full travel awards to *eight* scholars from regions of particular interest to Ford, and whose work was consistent with Ford’s funding priorities, and we used other conference resources to fund an additional *thirteen* international scholars. An additional twenty two applicants to our competition for this award were offered complimentary registrations; some of these colleagues were able to use our meager offering to muster other resources from home, and managed to join us here this week. In all, about 50 percent of all participants who applied for a travel award received full funding, and nearly all of the remaining applicants were offered complimentary registrations.

We also established a Home-stay Program, originally suggested by Kellie Rolstad of the ISB4 organizing committee, which allowed students and others to stay as guests in the homes of ASU-affiliated individuals. This sort of program might not work everywhere, due to local living situations and cultural perspectives on privacy and so on, but because of the hospitality of a number of ASU

students and faculty, we were able to help offset the expense of travel to Arizona by placing 31 visitors in the homes of ASU students, staff, faculty, and, in some cases, their extended families. We are pleased to report that we managed to find a host for everybody who requested one.

We are also proud to have obtained two very prestigious scholarly grants to support ISB4, one from the Linguistics Program of the Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences of the National Science Foundation, and another from the National Institutes of Health, jointly administered by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders. We wish to acknowledge and thank these agencies for their support, but also to note that their support signifies that the work we do here is regarded by the broader scientific community as extremely valuable, socially and scientifically significant, and of very high quality.

Other sponsors to whom we are deeply indebted include Multilingual Matters, which sponsored the Friday night party and also provided us with mailing lists to promote the conference and with complimentary subscriptions to Colin Baker's journal as a thank-you gift to hosts in the Home-stay Program. We also wish to thank the Ford Foundation, as mentioned, the Arizona School Boards Association and the California Association for Bilingual Education. We're also grateful to a long list of ASU-internal units which supported us, especially the College of Education and the three wonderful scholars who have held the deanship in that College since our organizing efforts began – David Berliner, Sarah Hudelson, and Eugene Garcia. We also received substantial support from the Office of the Vice Provost for Research, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the ASU Graduate College, the ASU Committee on Linguistics, the ASU Infant Child Research Programs, the Department of Speech and Hearing Science, the Department of English, the Department of Languages and Literatures, the Southwest Center for Education Equity and Language Diversity, the International Programs Office, the Department of Anthropology, and the ASU American English and Culture Program.

Finally, three groups of individuals remain to be sufficiently acknowledged for their contributions to the success of ISB4. You saw their names printed in long lists in the conference program and supplement, and you saw them running down the halls of the Memorial Union directing traffic and processing registrations. You *didn't* see them loading and moving boxes upon boxes of materials, stuffing bags, proofing text and line-editing abstracts; you didn't see them stuffing envelopes and checking and rechecking the schedule for errors. These are the student, staff and community volunteers here at ISB4. I would like us all to offer them our heart-felt thanks! The meeting would not have been possible without them.

You also noted the list of 109 reviewers in the program, some of whom are directly responsible for our presence as individuals here at this event. The reviewers logged on and pored over hundred of proposals, finally generating as a group 1,217 reviews. The high quality of research we've seen presented here at ISB4 this week is due to their diligence, mentorship, and scholarly sophistication. While some conferences like to brag about their selectivity and rejection rate, the ISB4 organizing committee decided we'd rather brag about our inclusiveness and desire to mentor new scholars who are still struggling with emerging ideas. While we believe we've kept the bar high in terms of the quality of scholarship represented here, we have also kept the bar high in terms of our willingness as a research community to make a place for new participants.

Speaking of the organizing committee, I would like to take the opportunity to thank them as well. You know them all by reputation if not personally. They are Dawn Bates, Holly Cashman, Elly van Gelderen, David Ingram, of Arizona State University; Nicholas Miller, of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne; Melissa Greer Moyer, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; Kellie Rolstad, of Arizona State University; Jeanine Treffers-Daller, of University of the West of England – Bristol; and Li Wei, University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

While all of the members of the organizing committee were extremely helpful, a greater burden naturally fell upon the local members. Dawn Bates, Holly Cashman, Elly van Gelderen, and Kellie Rolstad, in particular, gave hours upon hours of their time to assist with acceptance decisions, travel award decisions, and many other important activities.

Finally, last but by no means least, I would like to thank the two pillars of ISB4, James Cohen and Kara McAlister. More than you know, they have worked countless hours in dedication to the organization of this event, and went far beyond the call of duty on a daily basis. At every turn, they showed a passionate commitment to the task of organizing this event, and I assure you, with absolutely

no false humility, that the nuanced and profound attention to detail that has made ISB4 a success is entirely their doing. In all of these efforts, they were assisted by the gifted and diversely talented Daniel Mahoney. Please join me in thanking Kara McAlister, James Cohen, and Daniel Mahoney!

As of this morning, the ISB4 email inbox, which has all the messages ever sent to isb4@asu.edu, had 9,105 messages!

Yesterday James was looking particularly tired. I asked him what was wrong. He looked up, and in a reluctant voice, meekly asked, "Can I take Monday off?"

James, Kara: You can have the whole damn week off!

Thank you all very much. We'll see you in Barcelona! *¡Nos vemos en Barcelona!*

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edited by James Cohen, Kara T. McAlister,
Kellie Rolstad, and Jeff MacSwan

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