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The Multilingual Reality: Living with Languages

Anuja Sarada & Usree Bhattacharya

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BOOK REVIEW

The Multilingual Reality: Living with Languages, by A.K. Mohanty, Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters, 2019, 288 pp., US \$49.95, ISBN 978-17-889-2197-8

Mohanty's (2019) book, *The Multilingual Reality*, unpacks, as renowned linguist E. Annamalai notes in the Afterword, how 'Multilingualism itself is minoritised' (214) within society. The book opens up the door to a new paradigm of study based on multilingualism. It captures people's complex experiences navigating multilingual societies, which make up a large majority in our world. He also attempts to generate dialogue about language rights and justice for linguistically minoritized communities. This book serves as an excellent resource for those interested in learning about multilingualism as a paradigm of study and also those who are interested in learning about cutting edge research in multilingual education. This book opens up a space for dialogue on mother-tongue based multilingual education with educators, researchers and policymakers. It targets graduate students, educators, researchers, and practitioners in the field of bi/multilingual education, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and education.

The book begins with a powerful preface by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and a fascinating foreword by Jim Cummins, both internationally-recognised scholars of language education who help outline Mohanty's (2019) principle arguments and also underscore the importance of this work. Introduction: *Languaging without Borders and Binaries*, the first chapter of the book, outlines the book's main purpose. Through his work with the Kond community in the state of Odisha, Mohanty (2019) reflects on the meaning of multilingualism from the perspective of a minoritized community. This chapter articulates the various social and educational contexts that influence the negotiation of languages among people at the margins. These are more exhaustively detailed and developed in consecutive chapters. *The Multilingual World: Conceptual Issues*, the second chapter of the book, homes in on the case of India to illustrate his complex take on multilingualism. He uses a functional approach to define multilingualism; according to him, 'Multilingualism is not about how many or which languages one uses and with what levels of competence; rather, it involves the use of a flexible and dynamic set of languages in a synergistic network for functionally effective communication' (22). With a keen eye on the fluidity of linguistic boundaries, he spotlights the functional competence necessary to navigate multilingual contexts. In fact, even in the early period of language development in children, Mohanty (2019) highlights that children are conscious of language hierarchies and recognize implicit norms for code-switching. This chapter illuminates how children acquire an understanding of critical issues of language maintenance, marginalization, as well the demands of complex multilingual interaction. It also brings to light the formation of linguistic identities that shape individuals living in multilingual contexts. In chapter 3, *Multilingualism: A Resource or Burden?* the author examines the case study of Kond monolinguals and bilinguals to argue for the cognitive advantages that bilinguals have over monolinguals. He develops his arguments by drawing on research spanning different disciplines like psychology, neuroscience, and linguistics to conclude that multilingualism is a powerful resource.

In *Language, Power and Hierarchy: The Double Divide*, chapter 4, Mohanty (2019) sheds light on language discrimination and language disadvantages experienced by the Kond tribal community. With the official status given to but few languages in India, many languages—particularly indigenous, tribal, minority and minoritized languages (ITM)—struggle as a result of lack of recognition and privilege. A further complication is that these languages are marginalized within educational contexts as well, jeopardizing language maintenance (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). While focussing on the specific case of India, Mohanty (2019) connects local issues to broader currents of linguistic discrimination

of ITM languages all over the world. He illuminates language policy provisions in different multilingual contexts across the world that manifest hierarchical relationships between languages. Such policies act as a catalyst for perpetuating linguistic inequalities and help sustain the vicious cycle of disadvantaging of ITM languages. Borrowing the concept of 'double divide' (Ramanathan 2005a), he describes the divisions that exist within multilingual societies, especially where English plays a dominant and dominating role. The importance given to languages in education is set on the basis of their position within the established hierarchy. The hegemonic language at the top of the pyramid becomes the most important language in education. Local languages, he argues, become relegated to acting as media for gaining access to more powerful languages. This concept is critical in understanding the minoritizing ideologies and practices against ITM languages and the role of formal education as a tool for perpetuating inequalities and the loss of linguistic diversity in the world.

In chapter 5, *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Societies*, the author excavates 'the dynamics of language marginalisation/ shift and assertive maintenance' (96). He examines these processes using social psychological and sociolinguistic theories. Using Berry's model (Berry 1990, 2001) of cultural relations in plural societies, he considers the impact of language contact in the forms of assimilation, integration, segregation/separation, or deculturation/marginalization. He applies this model to his studies in Odisha and Assam to further his argument on identity negotiation that occurs for speakers based on societal power relations, political processes, and competing language ideologies. *Language Disadvantage, Capability Deprivation and Poverty*, chapter 6, talks about the subtractive effect of non-mother tongue (MT) medium school on children. The number of languages offered as instructional media keeps decreasing as and when an individual progresses from the primary to secondary and finally to higher education. A powerful examination of a local tribal case, built on analytic theory drawing on welfare economics, leads Mohanty (2019) to unravel the complex, intertwined strands of poverty, mother tongue neglect, and hegemonic language educational practices. As a result, the marginalized Kond community is unable to acquire the technical training that is necessary to join a skilled labor force, without which upward social mobility is rendered impossible.

In chapter 7, *Multilingualism and Language Policy in Education*, Mohanty (2019) takes the example of language-in-education policies in India to highlight how the dynamics of sociolinguistic hierarchies shape policies and practice, resulting in the neglect of ITM languages in the process. Due to the absence of language as a resource approach (Ruiz 1984), the practices associated with language-in-education currently have led to impoverishment, marginalization, and endangerment of languages. With the detailed examination of the Three Language Formula, the Right to Education Act 2009 and the National Curriculum Framework 2005, Mohanty (2019) elucidates the hierarchical positioning of languages in the policies. *Educational Models in Multilingual Societies: Rethinking Multilingual Education*, chapter 8, raises the following question: How do the systems of education in linguistically diverse societies meet the challenges of multilingualism? The author then uncovers the different models of multilingual education that circulate in Indian classrooms. With the help of examples from other multilingual societies like Latin America, Africa, Nepal, and Bangladesh, he points out the burden of dominant languages being the common problem running in different countries inhibiting the implementation of multilingual education. He argues for centering multilingual educational programs for the benefit of all. The last chapter, *English in Multilingual Societies: The Dynamics of Dominance* is a commentary on the extent to which English functions as a lingua franca in multilingual societies and how it varies depending on sociocultural, economic, and linguistic contexts. He not only pushes fiercely against the myth of its superiority in India, he also positions English as emblematic of a new caste system. With supporting conceptual framework of 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson 1992) and 'killer language' (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000), he encourages educators to assess the role of English and its political consequences critically. He makes an appeal to resist and counteract policies that privilege English at the expense of other languages.

The book uses a multidisciplinary approach to analyze the meaning of multilingualism and its features from the perspective of India as an example of a multilingual society. But most importantly, it

looks at the perspectives of minoritized language communities. By taking the example of a specific minoritized community, Mohanty (2019) analyzes the process of language dominance and the hierarchical relationships among languages from a social, psychological and a sociolinguistic lens. He sheds light on language discrimination, maintenance and marginalization in multilingual societies by discussing the concept of 'Double Divide' (Ramanathan 2005a). Through the concept of 'Double divide', he is able to make connections with educational disadvantages that some languages encounter and unpack their direct relationship with poverty, capability deprivation and loss of linguistic diversity. Mohanty (2019) critically analyzes different language-in-education policies and their implementation within multilingual education, zeroing in on gaps that continue to perpetuate inequalities.

Ajit Mohanty's (2019) book, *The Multilingual Reality: Living with Languages*, provides an in-depth introduction to multilingualism examining the fascinating case of India. In addition to elucidating its complex linguistic diversity, Mohanty (2019) sheds lights on how the education of minoritized children occurs at the intersection of language and power. What stands out in this book is the author's commitment to make the perspectives of the minoritized visible to a larger audience. He defines multilingualism from their perspectives to highlight the challenges that ITM languages face at the intersection of language, ideology, practice, and power. He expands on linguistic inequities and the disadvantages experienced by the marginalized not only as a result of language contact but also due to social hierarchies. Mohanty (2019) brings in a fresher perspective, keeping the focus on the understudied ITM languages. While the narrow focus on India may appear to come at the expense of larger global connections, the takeaways from the book resonate deeply across multilingual contexts. There is something in here for everyone.

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Anuja Sarda
University of Georgia

 Anuja.sarda@uga.edu  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3888-7466>

Usree Bhattacharya
University of Georgia

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