

2014

Multilingual Trends in a Globalized World (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Kissling, Elizabeth M. Review of *Multilingual Trends in a Globalized World*, by Navin K. Singh. *LINGUIST List*: 25.398 (2014).

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Review of Multilingual Trends in a Globalized World

Reviewer: Elizabeth Maria Kissling
Book Title: Multilingual Trends in a Globalized World
Book Author: Navin Kumar Singh
Publisher: Cambridge Scholars Publishing
Linguistic Field(s): Applied Linguistics
Sociolinguistics

Review:

SUMMARY

This book presents current trends in language education as reflections of and responses to globalization. The intended audience is a diverse group that includes students in linguistics and education, policy makers, educators, and activists. The main thrust of the book is to advocate for bilingual and multilingual education, positioning multilingualism as a resource rather than a problem.

The introductory chapter presents a variety of definitions of globalization, approaching the concept first from a cultural perspective and then from a linguistic perspective. Singh argues that globalization can result in both the homogenization and heterogenization of languages and cultures. The next chapter briefly presents different perspectives on the relationships between language forms and functions, with an emphasis on sociolinguistic approaches, generally, and the systemic functional linguistic approach (Halliday, 1976), in particular. Singh notes that Halliday categorized language functions broadly as ideational, interpersonal, and textual (1976) but other categorizations are possible, such as Schievella's typology of functions: ceremonial, expressive, aesthetic, practical and logical (1987). The chapter concludes with a case study from Japanese that illustrates the "misunderstanding that arises in confusing form with function" (p. 35)

Chapter 3 discusses global practices and prejudices with regard to mother-tongue education. Singh provides a brief history beginning in the early twentieth century and examines in detail the UNESCO declarations of 1953 and 2003, which advocated that all children be taught in their mother tongue for as long as feasible. The case studies from India, Nepal, South Africa and the Baltic states constitute an interesting set of examples of various mother-tongue education policies, challenges, and success stories. Following the case studies are several empirical studies (e.g., Hudleson, 1987; Swain et al., 1990; Thomas & Collier, 2002) that demonstrate a linguistic and academic advantage for learners who receive sustained education in their mother tongue.

Chapter 4 examines the influences of a first language (L1) on the learning other languages, focusing on the concepts of positive and negative transfer at multiple levels of language: phonological,

morphological/grammatical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, rhetorical, and metalinguistic. Though Singh enumerates several examples of negative transfer (in which the L1 hinders acquisition of an L2), he argues that the pedagogical implications to be deduced from research on L1 influences is that, in general, “the learner’s L1 should be seen as constituting potentially a positive resource rather than as an inhibiting factor in the language learning process” (p. 86).

Chapter 5 returns to the topic of trends in language education, drawing on examples from India, South Africa, and the United States. The United States is described as a historically multilingual population in practice, with a *laissez faire* attitude towards language policy, and as subject to cyclical patterns of advocacy for and opposition to multilingual education. It is argued that in this globalized world, children should be provided with an education that is multilingual and multicultural, or better yet, translingual, adopting a perspective that eschews the arbitrary separation of languages from one another and from other learning processes and types of knowledge. On the other hand, the author notes that such programs face numerous limitations, including a lack of funds to provide instruction in multiple languages and resistance from parents who prefer that their children be educated in English or other locally dominant or prestigious languages because of their erroneous assumption that L1 education could hamper their development.

Chapter 6 examines the globalization of English, describing the economic and political impetuses behind the increasing use of English as a *lingua franca*. Singh argues that the spread of English amounts to linguistic imperialism and provokes *linguicide*, but Singh balances this critique by also including viewpoints from language communities that have chosen to use English for their perceived benefit.

Chapter 7 introduces the concept of *diglossia*, the situation in which a single language community uses two language varieties, often for complementary functions and contexts. Singh relates *diglossia* to language revitalization efforts and provides several examples of how *diglossic* practices can either facilitate maintenance of a local language (such as with the high variety of Eastern Cham in Vietnam) or encumber such efforts (such as with Luxembourgish, now considered a low variety losing prominence to English).

Chapter 8 describes the social aspects of code switching (rather than, for instance, the structural constraints), drawing on seminal and current research in the areas of discourse and conversation analysis. Bilingual speakers employ both situational and metaphorical code switching for a variety of effects, which include providing contextualization cues, creating footing within a conversation, and constructing identities. The chapter concludes with a pedagogical focus, noting that code switching (both between languages and between varieties of one language) should be embraced in the

classroom environment because it can have a positive effect on language learning.

The brief concluding chapter reports a few studies of parental practices and beliefs towards language and the effects these can have on the promotion and success of bilingual education in majority and minority languages. Several studies point to a trend that parents in the US are becoming more positive towards multilingualism and favoring bilingual education (Robinson, Brecht, & Rivers, 2006; King & Fogle, 2006). Conversely, parents tend to believe that monolingual instruction in English will provide an advantage to their children in other communities such as Taiwan (Shang, Ingebritson, & Tseng, 2007) and Korea (Linse, 2011).

EVALUATION

This book has many strengths, including its broad coverage of many areas relevant to the main topic and its highly accessible prose. Each chapter provides case studies or detailed examples and references that describe the multifaceted linguistic realities of communities around the world. These examples cover such a wide range of geographic areas that most readers are likely to find something new of interest. In general, the theories and empirical studies referenced are described clearly and succinctly. Most chapters conclude with a section that draws pedagogical implications from the chapter's theme, which will be of interest to the readers Singh hopes to reach: policy makers, educators, and activists.

The book makes a few noticeable omissions. For instance, the explanation of exactly why or precisely how mother-tongue education should provide cognitive or academic advantages is quite cursory (p. 57) in Chapter 3, and so the reader would have to read the studies referenced (e.g., Cummins, 2009) to fully understand the theoretical underpinnings of mother-tongue education principles. The Chapter about L1 influences on second language acquisition (Chapter 4) makes no mention of a language acquisition device or the generative tradition generally, nor does it reference contemporary theories of L2 phonological acquisition. Though Chapter 5 discusses language education in the United States, there is no mention of the highly important and contentious 'No Child Left Behind Act' of 2001. The book also suffers from incoherence at times. The forward, for instance, presents a scathing critique of the ethnocentrism of the United States and the resulting inadequacies in US language education policies, leading the reader to believe that the book will focus on the United States more than it actually does. In fact, just two sections deal with US cases in detail, whereas the rest of the book presents examples from a wide variety of communities outside the US. The second chapter's discussion of forms and functions of language seems tangentially related to the rest of the book and better suited to an introductory linguistics textbook than this volume. There are also a few minor distractions, such as repeated sentences (pp. 112, 116) and typos (e.g., p.

143), but these are few and far in between.

In sum, this book achieves its goal of relating current trends in language education to the larger phenomenon of globalization. It excels at succinctly presenting the myriad manifestations of those trends around the globe and various related topics, all while maintaining one unifying narrative thread: language diversity is a resource to be valued rather than problematized. This book is perhaps best suited to relative novices in the area of multilingualism, for its broad coverage comes at the expense of depth in any one area. Overall, it provides a solid introduction with a wealth of important references for additional reading.

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