H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Kenneth Harrow, Kizitus Mpoche, eds. *Language, Literature and Education in Multicultural Societies: Collaborative Research on Africa.* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008. vii + 381 pp. $39.99 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4438-0344-1; $79.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84718-563-1.

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Published on H-Education (August, 2011)
Commissioned by Jonathan Anuik

Multilingual Education in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities

Second-language learning is often associated with globalization: knowledge of more than one language gives people an "edge" by improving their communication skills and exposing them to diverse cultures; this, in turn, increases their employment opportunities. This argument is fine as far as it goes, but Europe and North America, the richest continents with the highest literacy rates, also have the lowest rates of linguistic diversity; in fact, in these geographic areas, bilingualism and multilingualism, and, by extension, bilingual and multilingual education, are more a matter of choice than necessity. The situation is different in Africa, where multilingual nations are the norm, and result from traditional groups being brought together in newly independent states upon decolonization. The educational significance of this multilingualism is the focus of Kenneth Harrow and Kizitus Mpoche's *Language, Literature and Education in Multicultural Societies*, a collection of twenty-two essays derived from a conference held at the University of Yaoundé I, in Cameroon, in 2006.

The volume's terms of reference seem broad, but while countries in Africa, other than Cameroon, are mentioned in individual chapters (for example, those written by Gabriel Mba and Edgar W. Schneider), it focuses, for the most part, on language education and policy in Cameroon. This is no bad thing: the focus on Cameroon presents a fairly precise picture of the current state of affairs there, which is more useful than presenting readers with a superficial analysis of the situation in a number of countries. Moreover, Cameroon is perhaps the best possible example for illustrating both the problems and the potential of multilingual education: while English and French were the official languages adopted upon unification in 1961, estimates of the number of languages spoken in the country range from a conservative 200 to over 280. Cameroon is, therefore, what Loreto Todd, in her useful model of "Malvolian multilingualism," refers to as "a country that was born multilingual" (p. 7). Indeed, as Blasius A. Chiatoh explains, in Cameroon "the average citizen speaks at least three or four languages–the mother tongue, a language of wider communication (LWC), the first official language (OL1) and the second official language (OL2)" (p. 87). Given this situation, Edith Esch is right to observe that in Cameroon the roots of multilingualism precede schooling, and children's linguistic socialization is "characterised by *complexity*, as well as *flexibility* and *fluidity*"–even before they learn to read and write–a process that inevitably takes place in a language other than the mother tongue (p. 29, emphasis in original).

While Cameroonian society is multilingual, the state's education system is structured around the two official languages: French and English. Various issues arise from this situation. The two systems are very different: one is based on the "strongly guided and front-led teaching" common to the metropolitan French model, in which "school knowledge is presented as pre-existing and incarnated by the teacher"; the other on the English model, in which there is a "strong element of individualisation … in method of learning" (pp. 36-37). Insofar as both language and pedagogy are culturally rooted, this affects national identity and unity. One of the more interesting attempts to merge the two systems is analyzed by Innocent Mbouya Fasse in "An Atypical Case of Dual-Medium Education Programme in a Complex Multilingual Setting: The Horizon Bilingual Educational Complex in Cameroon." Located in the largely francophone city of Douala, the Horizon Bilingual Educational Complex is a dual-medium, dual-curriculum school whose reputation among educationalists is sure to grow. The fact that it is successfully "overcoming the obstacles of its outstandingly complex multilingual setting to produce

real bilingual and biliterate citizens" makes it a model of educational reform for societies where official bilingualism needs to be more firmly rooted in the educational system (p. 156).

Language, Literature and Education in Multicultural Societies also deals with the classroom ramifications of multilingualism. Esch calls for more research to be done into the means by which multilingual teachers negotiate multilingual classrooms, when students are being taught in what is essentially a formal English or French immersion setting. Practical, pedagogical considerations are also dealt with in several essays, in which the authors analyze various linguistic features of Cameroon English and argue that its distinctive nature needs to be taken into account when educational materials are being developed. Daniel Nkemleke's contribution is entitled "Frequency and Use of Modals in Cameroon English and Application to Language Education"; Mpoche explores the pedagogical implications of English anaphors (a word or expression, like a pronoun or a noun phrase, whose meaning depends on its antecedent) on second-language learning; and Samuel Atechi's analysis of the causes of communication breakdown has relevance for teaching. Furthermore, in a study that has applications beyond the Cameroonian classroom, Luther Zogang questions present-day, language-teaching orthodoxy that favors communicative approaches, and suggests that the absence of lexico-structural learning in a multilingual setting like Cameroon can lead to linguistic codes like "Franglish," which is, according to him, "a real handicap for the communication of knowledge" in an academic setting (p. 219).

Cameroon's complex linguistic history is outlined in chapters by Schneider and Stephen A. Mforteh. What emerges from the volume as a whole, however, is that little has changed in the country's educational system since unification; as a consequence, one topic that unites virtually all of the chapters is the need for reform. Most contributors seem to agree on the direction this reform should take: education in the two official languages has sidelined mother-tongue education, and academics believe that it is time to reverse this situation. With the help of organizations, like the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) and the African Union, which "declared 2006 the year of the MT [mother tongue]," various projects have been initiated to facilitate the eventual implementation of mother-tongue education (p. 55). The Basic Standardisation for Unwritten Languages of Africa program aims to develop writing systems for indigenous languages; another program aims to ensure literacy in mother tongues; and, in addition, mother-tongue summer language institutes have taken place at universities, and ACALAN is working to improve the availability of mother-tongue information technology resources. The need for more generalized policy reforms is tackled by Chiatoh in "Language, Politics and Educational Innovation in Cameroon" and Michael E. Apuge in "Language Conflict and Pedagogic Implications in Cameroon." While both chapters deal with the subject of reform in practical terms, neither is concerned with the resource implications. Nonetheless, they build convincing cases for the need for a more coherent national language policy that reflects Cameroon's linguistic reality, with Apuge calling for a quadrilingual (English, French, Cameroonian Pidgin English, and mother tongue) system to replace the current, bilingual one.

Because many mother-tongue languages do not have fixed writing systems, the lack of pedagogical materials, and reading material in general, is a stumbling block for teachers and students. Unfortunately, the chapters in *Language, Literature and Education in Multicultural Societies* that deal with literature tend to conceive of it as purely didactic in function, and the analyses they offer are, therefore, of limited value: texts are worthy of study because of their "message" or because they are written in nonofficial languages, and authors seem to be little more than agents of linguistic reform. One chapter goes so far as to accuse authors of "mak[ing] things difficult for Cameroonian languages" by choosing to write in English or French, rather than working with linguists to develop and enhance the writing systems of nonofficial languages (p. 71).

The collection contains some thought-provoking chapters; overall, however, it has a slapdash feel to it and it would have benefited from more rigorous peer review, editing, and proofreading. The book is riddled with typos, bibliographic errors and omissions, and confusing and/or incomprehensible passages. An index would also have been useful. Some of the volume's shortcomings may stem from its conference origins. Conferences allow for an exchange of ideas and for common points to emerge organically through discussion whereas books transfer knowledge and provoke enquiry in a way that requires editorial signposts indicating what those common points of discussion were. Editors Harrow and Mpoche have not provided these signposts, and the essays are organized without any apparent guiding principle. This problem is compounded by the absence of an introduction by the editors, which would have provided a rationale for the inclusion of specific chapters (for example, the chapter on e-mail discourse in Cameroon or, more puzzling still, the chapter on James Joyce's *A Portrait of*

the Artist as a Young Man [1916]). Organizing the essays by topic or theme (for example, educational history and reform, mother-tongue literature in the classroom, second-language pedagogy, and English and Cameroonian Pidgin English) would also have given the volume a more cohesive framework. In sum, *Language, Literature and Education in Multicultural Societies* is a decidedly uneven collection whose chief merit lies in the light it sheds on the history of official language education and mother-tongue education in Cameroon since unification, and in the sharing of examples of educational innovation that are currently taking place there.

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Citation: Katherine Ashley. Review of Harrow, Kenneth; Mpoche, Kizitus, eds., *Language, Literature and Education in Multicultural Societies: Collaborative Research on Africa.* H-Education, H-Net Reviews. August, 2011.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32558

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