

Rosalie Finlayson, Sarah Slabbert, eds.. *Language and Identities in a Postcolony: Southern African Perspectives*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005. 228 pp. \$47.95, paper, ISBN 978-3-631-53177-8.



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This book will be of interest to researchers and practitioners working in a broad range of language related fields—language education, language policy, and language planning, to name a few. It will be especially pertinent to those working in societies whose languages, firstly, are unequally endowed with status and power and, secondly, intersect with other sociopolitical fault lines, like race, class, and nationality.

Intersections like these are, of course, usually not coincidental. Consecrated notions of "The Language" are more often than not tailored to the image of broader identity projects, such as aspirations to cultural authenticity, national sovereignty and unity, and societal modernization. But not only does language achieve ideological solidity and subsequent currency in reference to identity projects. Identity projects in turn are very frequently legitimated (symbolically) and activated (both symbolically and materially) through idealized and ultimately engineered language images and practices—like language purity regimes, standardization and literacy training, and national language planning.

Neither language nor identity could thus be reduced one to the other. Still, political mobilization around language almost routinely stake its claims on identity, while identity claims frequently, if certainly not always, resort to language as one of the most persistent emblems of cultural (e.g., ethnic) and political (e.g., national or "civic") authenticity. The aim of social science devoted to language and politics is to unpick the when, how, and why of such constructions, and the effects of these on the different languages and language varieties (and their speakers) in a social space. Whether addressed at the macro-level of language history and language planning or at the micro-level of interpersonal interaction, relationships between language and identity are mediated through the demands of specific geopolitical realities. In this book language and identity processes are approached as mediated through the particular historical, political, and psychological challenges of a "postcolony"—further specified in the subtitle as "Southern African perspectives," but with the focus in fact overwhelmingly on South Africa.

With respect to language and identities this volume casts a wide and varied gaze—perhaps too wide and varied, as it is never entirely clear exactly how the different approaches to and uses of identity represented here combine into a coherent framework for the book, or even what the dimensions of theoretical disagreements are. The editors' attempt at a theoretical orientation (chapter 1), claiming that the chapters "belong to what could be called the post-structuralist paradigm" (p. 20), is too vague to be really helpful in this regard. As it stands there are discussions of the role language had played historically in the political construction of ethnicities, of the negotiation and management of linguistic (especially minority) identities in multilingual societies, and of the role of language (and especially language policy and planning) in the construction of national unity and modernization. Identity is addressed both at the macro-levels of "ethnicity" and nationality construction and the micro-levels of interpersonal interaction. In some of the best chapters, these levels of analysis combine. For example, Nkonko Kamwangamalu (chapter 2) addresses both the historical and situational negotiation of racial ("colored") and linguistic identities in Wentworth, Durban. With this he contributes to the existing research on a generally neglected population (those classified under apartheid rule as "colored," and here specifically a colored community outside the Western Cape province, where the majority of this population group is concentrated) but also gives a good indication of the historical and situational fluidity of identity, especially as it is articulated in relation to language and language ideologies (the different ideas and images about languages circulating in a society).

A similarly dynamic approach to the relationship between language and identity is to be found in Nigel Crawhall's discussion (chapter 4) of the role of language in recent Khomani (Bushman/San) debates about cultural identity and historical authenticity, de Kadt and Ige's discussion of positionings around Nigerian migrant identities in

South Africa (chapter 6), and Andrew Chebanne's very interesting discussion of the continuities and contradictions of Setswana identities in the border region between Botswana and South Africa (chapter 8). Ernst Kotzé and Theresa Biberauer (chapter 5) address what will almost certainly become an increasingly popular research topic: the role of Afrikaans amongst white South Africans living abroad, in this instance the United Kingdom. While they, too, treat language as dynamically related to constructions of identity, they also seem to at times assume an *a priori* link between a language, "its culture" and identity—instead of making this nexus a matter of empirical inquiry. Their survey offers some fascinating observations, but these are left largely unexplored at a deeper, more qualitative level. The same can be said of Thondlana's research on language and identity in Zimbabwe (chapter 3). Her use of survey material indicating "language attitudes, choice and use" (p. 63) at times impose identity on the data as a descriptive and analytic category, rather than asking whether it is indeed identity that is at stake in the linguistic processes and shifts observed.

Whereas the majority of chapters approach language and identity at the level of individual and group identification, three of the most interesting and rewarding chapters (Neville Alexander, chapter 7; Mbulungeni Madiba, chapter 9; and Karen Calteaux, chapter 10) aim at the more formal levels of language policy, language planning, and language rights. Although all three chapters refer to similar developments in other countries, they focus on South Africa. This is unproblematic, as the successes and failures of language planning and policy issues in post-apartheid South Africa will certainly be instructive to other multilingual contexts. Besides useful overviews of language policy developments in this country especially since the granting of official status to eleven languages in the 1996 constitution, all three chapters provide thoughtful criticisms of and well-grounded suggestions for lan-

guage planning in South Africa. Although there are differences in accent between these chapters, the authors seem to agree that multilingualism is a resource rather than a problem, that modernization and national unity need not be achieved at the cost of minority languages, and that the ethnization of language and identity is a threat that should be confronted through rational language planning, not by denying the realities and demands of multilingual ecologies.

As mentioned earlier, the volume promises to address language and identity "in a postcolony." This is further specified as Southern Africa, while the majority of chapters in fact address language in South Africa. A focus on South Africa is useful: this country is not linguistically exceptional, and can serve as a case study of processes relevant to other postcolonial societies, but also to the West—as in the Spanish-English debates in the United States and debates about English, national languages, regional languages, and immigrant languages in the European Union. Indeed, there are probably more overlaps between the politics of language in different parts of the world, all affected by similar forces of globalization, than there are differences.

However, the title still seems slightly misleading, if only because invoking the notion of the postcolonial creates certain political and theoretical expectations. To risk simplifying somewhat, the notion of "the postcolonial" may be used in a number of ways: firstly, to refer to geopolitical regions that share comparable experiences of colonization, liberation, nation building, and economic marginalization; secondly, to refer to multicultural spaces developing within former colonizing centers (for example, Indian communities in London); thirdly, to refer to the kinds of political and economic relations that affect prior colonies and shape their current position within the current world political system; and fourthly, to theorize the socio-psychological dynamics of cultural ownership and identity politics in former colonial sub-

jects. In all these dimensions language can be argued to play an important, perhaps even crucial role. What is more, there is a large literature arguing precisely this.

Whereas most of these meanings of the term "postcolonial" is to be found scattered throughout the volume, explicitly and implicitly, the book on the whole offers little grasp on exactly what role language had played in different colonialisms, and how it continues to be enmeshed in political, economic and psychological dynamics best described as "postcolonial."

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