

Book Review

The Politics of English Language Education and Social Inequality: Global Pressures, National Priorities and Schooling in India, by Maya Kalyanpur, Padmini Bhuyan Boruah, Sarina Chugani Molina and Sunaina Shenoy. Routledge, 2023, 220 pp., USD 35.96 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-367-64618-9

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India, a multilingual and multicultural nation, has always faced issues about language in education since its independence. Such issues have been an area of contestation amongst educators, policymakers, politicians, and activists. Dominant language ideologies favoring specific languages (e.g., English and Hindi) have established a condition for linguistic hierarchies, in which some languages are privileged, and other languages face their loss. Such ideologies have plagued language policies and practices, and their effects can be seen in educational contexts worldwide. For instance, the Three Language Formula (TLF) in India was conceptualized with the idea of strengthening Indian languages in education and asking Indian states to offer a primary level of education in three languages: the first language or home language as the medium of instruction, and second and third language as school subjects. However, the broad articulation of the TLF has led to different permutations across schools in the country, making language choices in education complicated. Indian states often choose standard and dominant languages (English, Hindi, and other regional languages) in schools in favor of non-dominant languages (such as indigenous, tribal and minority and minoritized languages), thus pushing them to the verge of endangerment. The formula thus perpetuates language hierarchies in the context of education.

To this end, Kalyanpur, Boruah, Molina, and Shenoy's seminal book *The Politics of English Language Education and Social Inequality: Global Pressures, National Priorities and Schooling in India* brings to the forefront "the politics, policies, and practices of language and language education and the effects they can have on social inequality, especially on marginalized groups in society, as well as on national and individual linguistic identity" (p. 19). In this book, the authors have examined the privilege of access to English, the associated loss of heritage languages in today's globalization context, and how English creates social inequities. Implications from the book are associated with social, economic, and educational disadvantages related to English as a medium of instruction in schools in India. Teachers, teacher educators,

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policymakers, curriculum designers, and researchers will benefit from the content and scope of this book. This book can be an excellent resource for researchers in the field of TESOL, applied linguistics, and sociolinguistics who are looking for an in-depth understanding of the role of the English language in increasing social and educational inequities and differences globally.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1, which contains chapters 1 and 2, gives readers a glimpse of the global landscape of language policies. Part 2 of the book consisting of Chapters 3-6, explores the language policy and language education policy in the Indian context at a national level and its influence on teachers and students in particular schools. Part 3, consisting of Chapters 7 and 8, suggests de-colonial resistance for teacher educators, policymakers, and teachers based on the studies presented in the book and the author's own language experiences.

The book begins with a prologue where the authors share their language and literacy backgrounds that helps readers understand the different ways in which language has impacted them personally. Despite speaking different languages, all authors have English as a common point and experienced the loss of their regional/mother tongue language in a context where there were hierarchies of languages and “where local languages were considered inferior to a national or a global language” (p. 1). They also have similarities in research related to language despite coming from different disciplinary specializations. Chapter 1, *Introducing a postcolonial perspective on language education* explains the three main arguments in the book surrounding the loss of heritage language in the presence of global lingua franca English; the dominance of hegemonic Western-centric epistemologies and ontologies dictating teacher education and language education policy and practice; and the limited access to English as a language of opportunities for low-income students (p. 19).

Taking the contexts of Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong as examples, Chapter 2, *Language, linguistic and equity: Navigating the tension between heritage, national and colonial agendas*, explores how global languages have been classified in these countries and how they have navigated the language policy and planning. These contexts also help readers understand the language tensions in these regions and the varied forms of linguistic oppression persisting within the borders of these nations. For example, in Pakistan, the authors establish the prestigious status of English in the country, accessible to only a few elites, and consequently, the devastating consequences for other heritage languages existing in the nation. They elaborate on Urdu's political predominance over Punjabi and Sindhi despite the country's majority usage of these languages. These dynamics between the languages have caused tensions in Pakistan. Some other countries like Bangladesh, Taiwan, China, and Taiwan also demonstrate similar tensions within their borders.

Chapter 3, *Language contestations and the illusions around English in India's Three Language Formula*, is an in-depth analysis of the Three Language Formula in India where the authors have offered a robust critical analysis of “how English has been

claimed, disclaimed and reclaimed by social, economic, political groups and movements in India” (p. 65). This chapter highlights the ambiguities in the three-language formula along with other language policies since independence and how it has led to unclarity regarding what counts as a first, second, and third language in different states and the positionality of English as an emancipatory or a divisive social tool.

The authors in Chapter 4, *English language teachers and teacher education: Challenging normative linguistic positions*, provide a detailed account of the impact of language education policies on language teachers and the practices in teacher education, which are often stuck between the demands for English and literacy outcomes. The authors argue for framing language teacher education from a sociocultural framework that challenges and moves away from deficit language teacher preparation that often ignores students' language repertoires in learning English. I believe that this framework is a timely discussion concerning the National Education Policy 2020 that proposes building robust multilingual pedagogies practices for the overall development of children from minoritized backgrounds.

Chapter 5, *English medium private schools: Teaching bilingual and multilingual students in the context of inequality*, portrays a picture of the approach to language pedagogy for English education in the Indian context and how it fails to consider the bilingual and multilingual characteristics of the country. Using empirical data from Shenoy's (2015, 2016) research study in Karnataka, the chapter establishes the inequality in English language education that exists in private schools in Karnataka where teachers encounter bilingual/literate students from different home language backgrounds. Using empirical data from Shenoy's second research study in Karnataka, Chapter 6, *L2 English language acquisition: Dyslexia and learning inequalities in private schools*, highlights the educational impact on students with dyslexia in low, middle, and high-cost private schools in India. Shenoy has explored the connections between monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual readers and dyslexia and the educational repercussions on these students who learn in classrooms where English is the medium of instruction.

Chapter 7, *English language education and the case against neutrality* brings our attention back to how coloniality still has its roots deeply entrenched in the language education policies and practices despite efforts in the field of English language education to “neutralize” the English language (p. 144). The authors argue how the English language is associated with monolingual and raciolinguistic ideologies. These ideologies consider the language of the colonized as inferior and label the colonized as “languageless” (p. 144). The authors' understanding of raciolinguistic ideologies is informed by the work of Flores and Rosa (2015).

In the context of India, the authors discuss the role of race and caste and its intersection with the English language. For instance, they share how Indian call centers negate “Indian English” and the “unaccented” variety spoken by English-speaking elites in India. They also problematize “the caste tensions of access to English for Dalits as a

means of economic and social mobility and emancipation” (p. 150). The chapter ends with a discussion on using critical reflexive practices and pedagogical approaches to English language education as developed and used by Sarina Chugani Molina (one of the co-authors). Such methods are grounded in asset-based perspectives that recognize and honor their students’ histories, cultures, and linguistic repertoires and expose the presence of colonial harm in English education. The final Chapter 8, *Challenging disadvantage through language education policy and practice*, is a dialogue about the implications of all the issues and challenges brought to the forefront in the previous chapters. The authors reiterate the discussion surrounding decolonizing resistance and critical pedagogy, “which seeks to deconstruct the hegemonic assumptions in colonial/postcolonial epistemologies and value indigenous knowledge within the context of national language education policies and practices” (p. 164).

By contextualizing the conversations in the book in the multilingual landscape of India with a complicated relationship with English, the authors provide constructive guidance for implementing critical resistance in the Indian context that goes beyond the nation’s boundaries. The biggest takeaway as a reader is how the authors have drawn on their rich linguistic experiences with linguicide, transnationalism, and English as a medium of instruction and weaved these stories with theory and empirical data to discuss the complex dilemmas around language in education policies.

It is a timely contribution to present critical pedagogical alternatives and narratives to multilingual education through de-colonial practices that also increase teacher agency. While the book pushes towards enhancing language teacher education by lessening “the distance between the content of teacher education and the lives of teacher candidates by making connections to teacher candidates’ identities and histories” (Motha et al., 2012, p. 25), more discussion about the role of deficit language ideologies of teacher candidates influencing their teaching practices and ways to counter these harmful ideologies would have enhanced an exceptionally well-written book (Lew & Siffrinn, 2019; Woodard & Rao, 2020).

THE AUTHOR

Anuja Sarda is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Educational Theory and Practice at the University of Georgia. Her work explores the language and literacy histories, ideologies, and teaching encounters of transnational teacher educators and its implications for multilingual and multicultural education at elementary grades across the United States.

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