Book review : ANCHIMBE, Eric A. (ed.), linguistic identity in postcolonial multilingual spaces

Leong, Ping Alvin

2008

Leong, P. A. (2008). Book review : ANCHIMBE, Eric A. (ed.), linguistic identity in postcolonial multilingual spaces. *English world-wide*, 29(3): 370-374.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/100776>

<https://doi.org/10.1075/eww.29.3.10leo>

© 2008 John Benjamins Publishing Company. This is the author created version of a work that has been peer reviewed and accepted for publication by English World-Wide, John Benjamins Publishing Company. It incorporates referee' s comments but changes resulting from the publishing process, such as copyediting, structural formatting, may not be reflected in this document. The published version is available at:
[DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/eww.29.3.10leo>].

Downloaded on 26 Apr 2023 13:20:26 SGT

Eric A. Anchimbe, ed. 2007. *Linguistic Identity in Postcolonial Multilingual Spaces*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. xi + 350 pp. GBP ??? / USD ??? (hb; ISBN 1-84718-327-1).

Reviewed by Leong Ping Alvin

This book is a useful addition to the growing literature on postcolonial studies. It is an ambitious volume, addressing issues on language, culture and identity in three regions — Africa, Asia and the Americas. In scope and purpose, it resembles Mair (2003), but whereas the latter is focused on English as a world language, this present book includes the use of other languages (e.g. Koshur, Malay, French) in identity creation.

The first part of the book, comprising five chapters, is devoted entirely to the linguistic and socio-political situation in Africa. In Chapter 1 (*Arguments for multilingual policies in public domains in Africa*), Bokamba argues for the implementation of multilingual policies in Africa, with selected languages being given specific functions in public domains. He refers to this as the 3±1 formula, modelled after the multilingual Indian system. In broad terms, this takes the form of an European language for wider (usually international) communication and at least two indigenous languages for intra-national communication (within or among states and provinces), with the possibility of other indigenous languages being added to the mix. He carefully outlines several reasons — notably the preservation of indigenous cultures and the eradication of illiteracy — in support of such policies.

In Chapter 2 (*Linguabridity*), Anchimbe examines the language situation in Cameroon, focusing on the use of English and French. He

coins the term *linguabridity* (linguistic hybridity) to describe the situation where people, particularly children, are able to switch between languages belonging to different cultures, but do not assume the identity associated with either language. Instead, they assume a hybrid identity “by virtue of their cultural blend, since two cultures and languages fuse in them” (p. 75).

The discussion on the language situation in Cameroon continues in Chapter 3 (*In search for new identities in multilingual Cameroon*), where Mforteh examines two questions: (1) the impact of the colonial languages (English and French) on the indigenous languages, and (2) how the growing influence of English will likely affect the Anglophone and Francophone identities currently in place. Mforteh notes that Cameroonians are “caught in a constant process of identity fluctuation and opportunism” (pp. 92–93). He anticipates that the efforts by French-speaking Cameroonians to adapt to Anglophone spheres of influence will lead to the growth and dominance of French-English bilingualism.

In Chapter 4 (*English as lingua franca*), Oduol argues that the use of English as a lingua franca for gender discourse has a negative effect on Kenyan national languages, such as Dholuo (used by the Luo community). The arguments in support of this position, however, are not very convincing as the main issue appears more to do with cultural sensitivity than the use of (the English) language *per se*. As Oduol herself agrees, citing Samovar and Porter (1995: 67), an indigenous perspective on gender relations should be seen in terms of “beliefs, values and attitudes” (p. 116). In attempting to relate language to such beliefs, values and attitudes, Oduol’s writing exhibits a strong Whorfian character (cf. the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), as witness her claim that the “linguistic divergences between African languages and English [...] impact on the

representations of African knowledge and reality of life” (p. 109). While Oduol is perfectly entitled to her views, the reader may wish to note that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which underlies the basis of her reasoning, remains a contentious issue to this day.

The linguistic examples Oduol provides are themselves open to query. She cites the following, reflecting her respondents’ understanding of gender in the Luo and other African communities (p. 118):

Gender is respect and patience, co-operation between husband and wife in bringing up their home, neither should burden the other and all benefits should be used with an understanding.

She also cites from Mama Asiyo, whom she regards highly as a role model in the struggle for gender equality. The following is taken from p. 119:

I am horrified at the way the modern African (Luo) woman behaves. She will dash from a meeting because she has to get home by a certain time. It is the behavior that brings inequality in her relationship with her husband. She is scared stiff of the husband. She will abandon important meetings and very useful opportunities for personal growth and empowerment and even contribution to national development, and run home because of an individual, her husband.

Admittedly, there could be many justifiable reasons why Mama Asiyo would regard such a woman as being weak and subservient. But one cannot also help but wonder if the woman in that example had to rush home because of an understanding that was reached between her husband and herself (e.g. to prepare the evening meal). Indeed, her very presence at home could be taken *positively* as a sign of “co-operation

between husband and wife in bringing up their home”, where neither burdens the other.

In Chapter 5 (*Light English, local English and fictitious English*), Schmid presents a descriptive study that looks at the degree of entrenchment of concepts in indigenised Nigerian English. Using an attribute-listing technique, Schmid differentiates among “light English” (concepts carrying few attributes, due possibly to unfamiliarity with such concepts), “local English” (concepts with fully-fledged local meanings) and “fictitious English” (concepts where the listed attributes do not match the local notions of these concepts; the concepts, as it were, assume a fictitious status). Of these categories, only “local English” concepts were found to be firmly entrenched in the minds of the speakers. The nature of this entrenchment (involving local or locally-flavoured concepts) leads Schmid to conclude that his study “presents more evidence against the existence of an identification with the English language ... than for it” (p. 156).

The second part of the book, entitled “Asia”, comprises four chapters. In truth, the essays in this part cover only *south* Asia, with a heavy emphasis on India. The language situations in the rest of Asia, particularly southeast Asia, are conspicuously missing.

In Chapter 6 (*Linguistic traces of colonial structure*), Cardoso makes an appeal for the official recognition of Indo-Portuguese (IP) in India. Focusing on the island of Diu, Cardoso describes the use of Standard Portuguese (SP) vis-à-vis the Diu IP variety (DIP). Unfortunately, the bulk of the discussion revolves around SP; little is presented about the *specific* role of DIP in the culture or lives of its native speakers. Indeed, given that DIP is a distinct variety of IP (p. 168), it is difficult to see how any appeal

for the recognition of IP can be made on the basis of a weak discussion on DIP. For this reason, his claim that “IP is indeed a native language of India, fulfilling essential social needs not only among its native speakers but also among the Hindu and Muslim communities” is unconvincing.

In Chapter 7 (*Koshur today*), Kabir provides a descriptive account of the status of Koshur, the Kashmiri language. Its competition with Urdu and the political conflict in the area, among other factors, have led to its linguistic under-representation. Kabir argues for its oral survival (and so the survival of the Kashmiri identity) through the spoken word, song and drama.

The role of English in urban India is addressed in Chapter 8 (*Postcolonial and foreign*) by Pande, who observes that English, notwithstanding its association with India’s colonial past, has come to be adopted as “a powerful tool that could be used in the expanding economic horizons of the Indian market” (p. 216). The gradual nativisation of English in India raises the question of how this variety will shape the identity of (urban) Indians. Pande suggests that the answer lies in the economic importance of the language, and the link between language and culture.

In Chapter 9 (*Identity alignment in the multilingual space*), Lim and Ansaldo discuss the language shift among the Malays in Sri Lanka from Sri Lanka Malay (SLM) to English and Standard Malay. They suggest that this shift be viewed as alignments (in terms of language and identity) in response to changing circumstances. The conscious shift from SLM to Standard Malay, in particular, exemplifies a move towards what Lim and Ansaldo term *identity alignment* with an accepted, global Malay identity.

The final part of the book is titled “The Americas and Beyond”. In Chapter 10 (*Folk linguistics and post-colonial language politricks in Jamaica*), Farquharson examines the national discourse on language in Jamaica through an examination of clippings from two Jamaican newspapers. His anti-colonialist position notwithstanding, Farquharson provides a fair and reasoned analysis of the folk-linguistic sentiments expressed through these clippings. These reflect the views of two broad camps — the progressionists (who support the use of English) and the nationalists (who argue for the proper recognition of Jamaican). Farquharson’s commentary about the paradoxical nature of the conflict between these two camps is especially interesting — it turns out that both accuse each other of the very same agenda. While the progressionists are accused of seeking to maintain their own elite position by promoting English as the only means of progress, the nationalists themselves are accused of seeking to keep the masses in intellectual darkness by having them use an “inferior” language (i.e. Jamaican). In both cases, the agenda is a political one of exclusion, and Farquharson’s term *politricks* (politics+tricks) describes this situation aptly.

Chapter 11 (*On Cannibalists and sociolinguistics*) is refreshing in its philosophical treatment of identity. Bendor sees in the symbol of Brazilian cultural identity — *Antropofogia* (“Cannibalism”) — a metaphor that does justice to what the Cannibalists sought to achieve: “absorb European cultural imperialism while remaining distinctly Brazilian” (p. 265). This characterisation underscores the cultural autonomy of the Brazilians; they are not defined by who they are, but by what they do (Dunn 2001: 19). The “doing”, and therefore the dynamism, provides a

new perspective on the notion of hybridity — Bendor argues that it is neither a system nor a state, but a process.

In Chapter 12 (*“Irishness” in Hiberno-English*), Shimada gives an illuminating account of the shift from Irish to Hiberno-English in relation to the Irish identity. She observes that the seeming decline of the indigenous language has not led to a decline of the Irish identity. Instead, as she argues, it is the Irish identity that has “vigorously [constructed] language practices” (p. 304). This is seen in the case of Hiberno-English, the Irishness of which is manifested in its grammatical features (e.g. *be after* construction) and lexicon (e.g. *craic*, meaning “fun or enjoyment”). Hiberno-English, that is to say, serves as a means to help maintain the Irish identity, rather than to supplant it.

The final chapter (*Linguistic identity, agency, and consciousness in Creole*) by Klein compares the linguistic features of the Creoles used by the Gullah and Geechee community in the United States (GG) and the Middle Caicos community in the Turks and Caicos Islands (MC). On the whole, however, the discussion comes across as uneven. Although Klein does openly admit to using more GG examples in the chapter, the extent to which the discussion on GG crowds out that on MC is unexpected. MC is mentioned only cursorily in Section 5 (*Shaping lexical semantic and song lyrics*). The discussion on the monophthongisation of /aw/ in MC (Section 6) is also in sharp contrast to the coverage of GG features; the former is discussed in only two short paragraphs whereas the latter is spread over three pages. The uneven treatment of the two Creoles affects the focus of this chapter, making it difficult to see the comparative element that Klein set out to show (cf. p. 314).

In terms of the layout of this book, readers will find the careful attention to signposting especially welcome. The book has a useful introduction outlining the broad concerns of all the chapters and key concepts. Each part of the book is also introduced by an overview. The only minor problem is the absence of a combined reference list at the end of the book (each chapter has its own reference list). This may trouble the occasional reader who would like to find out the publication details of, say, a particular article, but cannot quite recall where it is located in the thirteen chapters of this book.

Overall, this book is a useful reference for scholars interested in the complex relationships linking language, culture and politics. The efforts by communities to create discernible identities of their own are an ongoing process, and, notwithstanding the flaws in some of the essays, this book adequately captures the range and interplay of issues involved.

References

Dunn, C. (2001). *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.

Mair, C. (Ed.) (2003). *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizons in Postcolonial Cultural Studies*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Samovar, L. A. and Porter, R. E. (1995). *Communication between Cultures*. Belmont: Wadsworth.