

Resenha de *Decolonising Multilingualism: recentering silenced voices from the Global South*

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Important issues regarding the use of different languages in educational settings and in day-to-day interactions in communities that live with several linguistic practices are broached in *Decolonising Multilingualism*. The book brings to the fore some relevant and current discussions involving the use of a multiplicity of languages and linguistic expressions as it relates to education, language policy, and immigration in Africa, while also contesting long-lasting approaches to the study and understanding of language itself. This is done as the authors explore new theories and tendencies in the study of language, particularly within Sociolinguistics, question well-known ideas and approaches, and advocate for a way of looking at language that places their users at the center, taking into account the reality of the Global South, and with the broader aim to “decolonize knowledge.” Specifically, we are invited to look critically at our practices as researchers and to examine the origin of the thoughts orienting much of the principles that have determined how research is done and how our actions as language theorists and educators can provide a path to support and promote inclusion, or to cement and strengthen colonial models and thoughts.

In chapter 1, *Myths we live by: multilingualism, colonial inventions*, the authors begin with a consideration of multilingualism and how it has become a “buzzword in public, political and scholarly debates” (p. 1). The concept is often deployed to represent best practices involving diverse communities, including issues related to educational policy, immigrant service, and integration. However, as the authors discuss throughout the chapter, the views surrounding the concept of multilingualism are based on a notion of languages “as quantified objects and less a relational social practice” (p. 2). The authors go on to question such views, especially with regards to the understanding and application of multilingualism-oriented practices to the reality of African linguistic communities. Further, the views surrounding these

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so-called “African languages” are based on conceptualizations devised in the metropole and reflect Eurocentric and colonial ways of looking at language.

In chapter 2, *Unsettling colonial roots of multilingualism*, the authors present a “historiographical account of the colonial origins of standard languages” (p. 26), illustrating how the characterization (or rather, compartmentalization) of African languages as they are known today was part of the “colonial project of manipulation and control” (p. 28). Indeed, as the authors discuss, such artificial divisions and grouping of languages by outsiders (sometimes missionaries, not linguists) contributed to providing an imperfect view of these languages and of their use by their speakers. This, in turn, contributed to other significant artificial identity boundaries, which still repercusses in how members of these communities are seen today. This artificial homogenization of languages is seen as fitting in with the broader project for control over the colonized populations. “Colonial linguistics,” the authors point out, was based on four pillars: 1) colonial imperialism; 2) Christian modernity; 3) ideologies of modern nation-state; and 4) technologies of orthography and orthodoxy. The chapter problematizes the uncritical reproduction of methodologies and conceptualizations based on competing perspectives on language, or as it is articulated in the chapter, “Western imposition of languages and multilingualism and language and multilingualism as indigenous discursive and communicative practices” (p. 34).

Chapter 3, *Unsettling multilingualism in language and literacy education*, points to the shortfalls of current approaches to literacy that ignore the cultural constructs informing “African indigenous knowledge systems, epistemologies and culturally relevant pedagogies.” The authors base their considerations on qualitative data from two community-based participatory researches in South Africa, arguing for educators to “speak less and listen more” in order to better understand what role multilingualism plays in the everyday lives of “real people” (p. 38). The authors go on to discuss how literacy in standard languages, such as English, French, and Portuguese, takes precedence over local languages. These languages are often perceived as a hindrance to the acquisition of English literacy, for example. Thus, the chapter argues for the use of *ubuntu translanguaging*, which considers the local ways of sense-making, a collaborative practice whose principle is “I am because you are. You are because we are.” Further, the authors contrast Western and African literacies with practical examples to demonstrate how a pedagogical approach that ignores the specificities of the local communities is likely to reaffirm stigmatized views, based on colonial practice. For example, the authors contrast the preference for circumlocution and indirection in African communities to the direct approach privileged in English writing models and communication more broadly. The chapter finishes with a recommendation for academics and researchers to “slow down and allow communities to talk back” to promote the decolonization of language and literacy education.

Chapter 4, *Decolonizing multilingualism in higher education*, looks more closely at the issue of access to higher education in South Africa, discussing how a “monolingual orientation” can be detrimental to multilingual students’ “full expression” and their way of learning (p. 55). Whereas, traditionally, unilingual practices mediated by “English-only” approaches have

prevailed, the authors' research shows that students' multiple repertoires can contribute to disrupting such monolingual biases (p. 55). The chapter provides an important discussion on the pre-colonial history of multilingual practices in Africa, showing that "fluid multilingualism has always been a cultural competence of speakers of African languages" (p. 56). Given these inherent modes of communication and practices in these African communities, the preference for pedagogical models that privilege monolingual linguistic applications in educational settings seems not only inadequate but also ineffective. The research activities discussed in the chapter present alternative ways to promote *ubuntu translanguaging* in African universities to decolonize multilingualism. Such practices prioritized the students' "ways of being and sense-making" (p. 70), further demonstrating that African languages can be "simultaneously and strategically used to improve multilingual identity construction" (p. 70).

Chapter 5, *Decolonizing multilingualism in national language policies*, opens with a discussion on the still-prevailing colonial views that shape language policy in Africa. Such views include the perception that some linguistic variants spoken in the region are, indeed, different languages. The authors use the term "coloniality of language by stealth" to refer to this situation, showing that these "invented versions of languages" are, indeed, a mechanism to maintain "political control, manipulation and subtle cultural normalization" (p. 75). One of the central arguments in this chapter is that, to change the "colonial mindset" and devise policies to truly benefit students, language education policies need to be tuned to their "diversity of cultures and language profiles." The application of pedagogies that discount the multicultural, multilinguistic and "transdisciplinary" nature of these communities cannot accomplish the goal of decolonizing longstanding views of language. As the authors assert, such an approach seeks to "highlight the various ways by which students can find richness and strength from their linguistic capabilities" (p. 90).

Chapter 6, *African vehicular cross-border languages, multilingualism discourse*, includes a discussion around the concept of Vehicular Cross-Border Languages (VCBLs), or "languages that are common on two or more states and domains" (p. 94). The authors problematize the use of this concept, pointing out to the fact that the conceptualization and attempts to promote these linguistic expressions to the level of "vehicular-cross border languages" are based on similar processes employed in the division and compartmentalization of other so-called African languages. The issue surrounding the use of these languages and their identification as multilingual activities misses the point, as it seems that there is more of a concern with identifying numbers of languages (or quantifying them) than with the "multiple and diverse views on dialects, language forms and other communicative modes" (p. 97). The problem also seems to hinge on the application of methodologies and points of view originating in Western, Eurocentric traditions and which do not consider the entire picture of the complex usages and contexts where such languages are employed. The authors conclude with the recommendation that the "architects of African integration" conceptualize solutions of models for the realities of African "multiversity" of "non-standardized language forms" (p. 104).

Chapter 7, *African multilingualism, immigrants, diasporas*, presents the case of African immigrants in Australia to understand mobility and multilingualism. The chapter introduces the concept of “denizen”, displaced individuals who are disadvantaged “economically, socially, politically, linguistically” and in many other ways” (p. 109). Such individuals are foreigners without legal permanent status, and are often thought to benefit from proficiency in English to advance their chances of “living good-quality lives” (p. 109). However, as the authors discuss, in their everyday lives, denizens participate in several linguistic practices, encompassing “African cross-border languages, refugee journey languages, small ethnic languages and symbolic languages” (p. 111). Nevertheless, these resources are often ignored when multilingualism is approached in connection with this group. The chapter includes data samples collected in group or one-on-one interviews in which the participants were asked to narrate their stories about migration journeys and highlight their linguistic experiences. The results show that African denizens in Australia use a variety of “multiple and complex linguistic resources” (p. 115), and some of their statements confirm that, although they appear to understand the need to learn English, there is also a desire to maintain quality communication with their own children. This suggests the need to rethink multilingualism “in terms of functionality” (p. 127), considering the multiplicity of resources that denizens deploy daily, but also the different functions that these practices seek to accomplish.

Chapter 8, *Multilingualism from below: languaging with a seven-year-old*, presents a discussion on the effectiveness of long-standing traditional practices and methodologies often associated with multilingualism. This discussion is based on a narrative told by one of the authors, depicting his unplanned encounter with a 7-year-old boy (Omphile) during break from a conference in Johannesburg, South Africa. The author goes on to describe how he and Omphile engage in an interaction that involves the use of several languages while they play soccer together. This narrative foregrounds a discussion on “how language works in everyday life” (p. 131) and the need to rethink our theoretical approaches to linguistic practices by “situating it in the sociocultural complexity that surrounds speakers” (p. 132). The author questions why research is still done using conventional methodologies, especially those that perceive languages as quantifiable objects, and advocates for the use of autoethnography as an alternative approach to access data. According to the author, as a methodological tool, autoethnography allows for “reflexivity in ethnomethodology”, including the voice of the researcher, never just a mere “objective observer.” The chapter argues for the integration of “praxis, theory, action and reflection” as way to transform the traditional ways to produce knowledge.

In chapter 9, *Recentring silenced lingualisms and voices*, the authors put forth a more elaborated argument for the application of a “socially realistic multilingualism” (p. 155), grounded in practices that reflect the complexities and cultural diversity of real people. This is an “African multilingualism” and involves going beyond well-defined notions of nation-states or linguistic boundaries. To achieve this, the authors propose that new epistemologies, effectively causing the researcher to “step away from inherited Eurocentric habits,” are emphasized, in addition to methodologies that originate in “colonial linguistics” (p. 156).

Reaffirming a central tenet of the book, the authors invoke the need to change the focus from languages as “enumerable” entities to “communities of practice” (p. 172).

In line with a current tendency within studies that follow a sociolinguistic orientation, the volume argues for significant changes, for instance, from a different understanding about the concept of language to a proposal to adjust and incorporate innovative methodologies to better reflect the kinds of issues that have concerned linguists today. It is worth noting, however, that sometimes the advocacy for such changes appears to strongly discount that the present state of the discipline – which motivates the kinds of considerations presented in the book – was part of a long project. As far as epistemological and methodological evolution is concerned, the same works that today appear to be out-of-date and in need of adjustment – if not complete erasure – made fundamental contributions to how we view languages (not as enumerable objects) and the issues in its intersections with society today. For that reason, one only hopes that, by the time that we tear all the old “Eurocentric approaches” to how we do/did linguistics, there will still be a place to recognize the importance of contributions made before and elsewhere to the evolution of our understanding of these issues today.

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