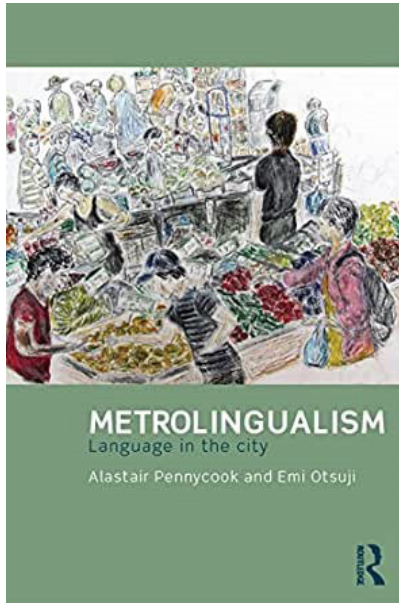


BOOK REVIEW



Title: Metrolingualism: Language in the city
Author: Pennycook, A., & Otsuji, E.
Publisher: Routledge
Year: 2015
No. of pages: 206
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In “Metrolingualism: Language in the city”, multilingualism in urban spaces was captured by Pennycook and Otsuji in a provocative and research-oriented fashion. Central to the book were descriptions of the everydayness of conformity and contestation. To which, the authors theorized (and raised awareness thereof) the dynamic engagement of the linguistic interactions in those surroundings, and demonstrated new ways to reconceptualize languages in messy cityscapes such as Tokyo and Sydney. Metrolingualism was then conceptualized as a dynamic process of meaning-making in superdiversity spaces. Additionally, the authors contended that cities, the sites of segregation and inclusion, always go through a period of changes marked by “marginalization, resistance, order and disorder” (p. 115), and that “the way we think about cities has major implications for languages”.

For us, the book is unique in two aspects. First, the narrative writing style is inviting, welcoming readers to appreciate the sights and sounds of life in diverse urban landscapes via authentic conversations, photographs, and stories. Second, the ethnographic lens through which these sites were viewed helps broaden the various ways in which cityscapes can be interpreted. Nevertheless, the repetitive writing style is one downside of this book, as words and ideas were often repeated unnecessarily in more than one chapter. With multi-images, dialogues and gratified writings as sites of contestation, “Metrolingualism: Language in the city” is organized into eight chapters.

Chapters 1 and 2 mainly captured the atmosphere of city landscapes in Sydney and Tokyo during working hours. The excerpts of the conversations among multiethnic immigrants (e.g. Cantonese, Arabic, and Maltese) in those places showed the concept of ‘metro multitasking’ as a term we use to capture how linguistic resources, everyday tasks, and social spaces are intertwined. ‘Multilingualism from below’ (the use of languages from everyday settings) was then introduced through the conversations as multilingual practices that take place in mundane interactions over prices, markets, or restaurant practices. As such, linguistics and

business networks were often interconnected since the use of various languages, accents and dialects among multiethnic populations is present. These multiethnic immigrants would live and work with minimal knowledge of English and communicate by using their first languages or English in their own dialects and accents, thus creating their own ethnolinguistic networks and supporting the growth of businesses and cultural activities across the city. This is the result of another concept discussed by the authors, termed 'labor mobility' which describes people from different cultural backgrounds coming into contact with each other due to shared labor. Strongly insightful, these chapters help readers to see how human social actions, multilingual practices, and globalization are ultimately connected.

Chapter 3 focused on rhythms and mobility in the city, with reference to linguistic resources and affiliations. Connected to Chapters 1 and 2, the authors indicated that mobility in the city lead to the rhythms of the city, which took place when people gathered in the same place and spoke to their linguistic companions in their own languages or Englishes at different times and speeds. A splendid example from the book was a situation on a train where commuters in Sydney would communicate in different languages to different people through different devices at different times. It was then inferred that mobility created new linguistic mixtures of *translanguaging* (the use of different languages at the same time) for the purpose of harmonious communication.

Chapter 4 explored the idea of 'spatial repertoires'. The authors pointed out that humans do not need to overcome linguistic diversity solely through a shared language. This chapter helped raise the awareness of cultural differences when sharing information with people from different backgrounds. The authors indicated that it was also necessary to integrate our semiotic activities with our interlocutors. 'Spatial repertoires' were then introduced as products of multitasking interactions involving objects, movements, non-verbal activities, verbal activities, and linguistic resources. Examples of such repertoires could be found in a pizza kitchen, for instance, where jargons (e.g. "six halves of ham"; "12 mozzarella"; "*pizza* (in Italian) *mo* (in Japanese) two minutes coming.") were used, and objects in specific scenarios (e.g. the sounds of kitchen utensils, chopping ingredients, and footsteps) came into play. This chapter also helps readers realize that 'spatial repertoires' are shaped by people's life trajectories to places in which different linguistic resources are deployed.

Chapter 5 was the most interesting chapter since it discussed language politics, discrimination and racism out of multilingualism. Through the concept of 'conviviality' (harmoniously getting along together), the book illuminated the breadth of "living together" from different stories of how people from diverse backgrounds convened, negotiated and resisted in urban spheres. The residents, while struggling with the city in different ways, attempted to claim their identities at the same time. One such example was that when residents in Sydney struggled to communicate in English, they would often resort to speaking in their own first languages (i.e. Greek, Macedonian, Croatian, or Turkish) until native Australians were able to accept their differences and coexist with them habitually. This was the strongest argument in this chapter.

Chapter 6, on the other hand, connected metrolingualism with food. Here, the authors showed how food and languages could be meaningfully blended in busy spots of contact. What is worth reading in this chapter is how social identity and cultural capital were captured in food vocabulary through an excerpt from real marketplaces. An example is the use of new culinary jargons, such as *moussaka* (a traditional Serbian food) and *makanai* (Japanese lunch), which were used together in the English language in harmony (i.e. “poor *makanai*, *moussaka* is with mashed potato?”). The authors describe this process as ‘re-localization’ to demonstrate how food and languages have eventually been shaped and reshaped.

Chapter 7 revisited multiculturalism from historical perspectives. This chapter seemed to not offer any new perspective. Its major argument was that understanding signs in public spaces, which is usually taken for granted, helps trace the past to the present. Meanwhile, Chapter 8 tackled the concept of ‘metro-lingua-franca’ by problematizing the lingua franca as a language of capitalism, and developed the concept of “metrolingual franca” with the argument that metrolingualism should involve linguistic practices based on varieties of competing linguistic repertoires. Using the example of authentic interactions among stall keepers in Sydney, the authors showed that participants use Cantonese in order to negotiate different linguistic codes. However, although Cantonese is used as a lingua franca due to its market value, people still brought other varieties of Cantonese for bargaining purposes and product descriptions.

Overall, “Metrolingualism: Language in the city” helps move the paradigm of multilingualism forward. Particularly, the book can appeal to a wide range of readers interested in sociolinguistics, linguistic landscapes, and linguistic ethnography. Moreover, it also fits well into qualitative inquiry classes because of its comprehensive and relevant literature review, and its rich and vibrant stories, all gathered from authentic research sites. Together with a methodical process of authentic, participatory ethnography, the way the authors narrated and reshaped the stories definitely make the book both a new and fascinating addition to the field of applied linguistics.

THE REVIEWERS

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