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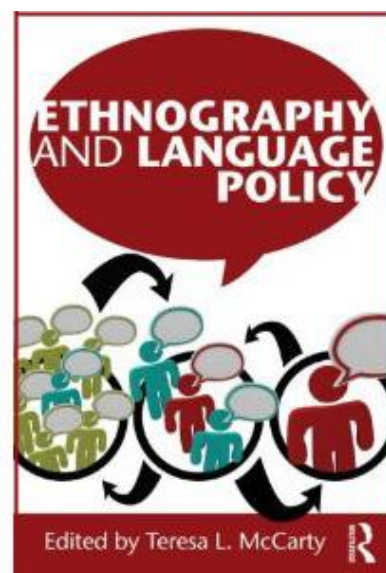


McCarty, Teresa L. (Ed.) (2011) *Ethnography and Language Policy*. NY: Routledge.

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Reviewed by Jon Reyhner
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The origins of this book are in the editor's endeavor to put together readings for a graduate seminar in ethnography and language policy. The contributors explore through "thick descriptions" from their research what can be produced from interviews and close observation of various communities whose languages are being impacted by various factors, especially today by globalization and other forces of modernity. The various case studies of Navajo, Hopi, Corsican, Hindi, Māori, Tamil, Welsh and other language use provide the reader with an understanding of the complexities of doing ethnographic research as an insider or an outsider in terms of who researchers choose to or can interview and what they choose or are allowed to observe. This in turns highlights the complexity of understanding the factors that surround the struggle non-world



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languages face to survive as spoken languages in our modern globalized world.

McCarty dedicates her book to the memory of Dell Hymes who argued that the latent function of school is to label some students inferior, especially those that don't share the language and culture of those in power. English more and more around the world is becoming a maker of social status and civilization and minority languages are associated with backwardness and poverty. Throughout the book Hymes's work is used to inform the ethnographic research of the contributors.

McCarty along with Mary Eunice Romero-Little, Larisa Warhol and Ofelia Zepeda discuss in the first chapter how language is associated with national identity, which in the United States and many other countries tends to be an ethnocentric "one nation, one language" ideology exemplified in the U.S. by states making English their "official language" and efforts to pass a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of the U.S.

In the second chapter Hopi scholar Sheilah Nicholas notes that the current decline in speaking Hopi is seen by adults to be associated with youth's "unHopi" behavior leading to gang activity and disrespect of elders whereas the Hopi language is associated with traditional values of hard work, reciprocity and humility.

McCarty includes commentaries, discussions, and synthesis by prominent language scholars to the ten studies presented in her book. In Perry Gillmore's commentary on chapters one and two, she notes how the data in the studies "voice complex narratives of shame, stigma, humiliation, and a deficit discourse surrounding languages and identities" (p. 123). However, she also finds "counter-themes of pride in identity, use of the home language, and respect for community values, rituals, and knowledge" to assimilation and notes, "equating language and nation is an historical and ideological construct" (pp. 124-125).



Teresa L. McCarty is the Alice Wiley Snell Professor of Education Policy Studies at Arizona State University. An educational anthropologist, she has been a curriculum developer, teacher, and coordinator of American Indian education programs at the local, state, and national levels. She has served as president of the Council on Anthropology & Education in the American Anthropological Association, and is a former editor of *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*.

A. Suresh Canagarajah has an especially interesting third chapter examining how Tamils from different social classes who emigrated from Sri Lanka have either held on to or jettisoned their heritage language. The upper classes that learned English before emigrating as “professionals” and speak a Tamil dialect of English are more interested in passing on Tamil to their children than the lower classes (and women) who emigrate as “victims” of the Sri Lankan Civil War and who see learning standard English as a way to improve their socioeconomic status. For them, Tamil currently lacks utility and has little attraction in contrast to during the Sri Lankan Civil War when families sent “their children to die as suicide bombers for language rights” (p. 95).

Chapter 4 is a study of an English language missionary school in Namibia by Rodney K. Hopson who, citing Diane Lewis, maintains that anthropology as a discipline “has supported the ideologies of those in power” (p. 102). However, that ignores the work of the contributors to this volume and that of anthropologists going back to Franz Boas who have often sympathetically portrayed the cultures they studied. Boas’ concept of cultural relativism certainly has not supported the assimilationist Social Darwinist idea that we are progressing from Indigenous savagery to civilization. Some anthropologists have certainly “used” Indigenous peoples to advance their careers without giving anything back to the communities they studied, but many others, and more and more today, are responding to the wants and desires of Indigenous communities and given much back. Interestingly, in Namibia the English language was appropriated by the Indigenous peoples for the decolonizing goal of countering the influence of Afrikaner apartheid.

Richard Hill and Stephen May’s chapter “Exploring Biliteracy in Māori-Medium Education” examines the changing attitudes on teaching Māori is especially interesting to me because of my interest in language revitalization. The authors note that teaching Māori helps children know who they are and as they were told by one interviewee, “if they know who they are, they are able to stand strong in the world” (p. 172). Critics of Indigenous language revitalization can see such efforts as backward looking, but Hill and May see the goal of Māori-Medium education is for students to “*become citizens of the world*”

(p. 173, emphasis in original). Their research finds that seven years of Māori-Medium education starting in preschool gives children a solid foundation that can withstand the onslaught of learning and becoming very competent in world languages such as English.

My state of Arizona is undergoing an often ugly anti-immigrant reaction that most recently was illustrated by former Republican presidential nominee Senator John McCain accusing illegal immigrants of starting wild fires despite evidence from the U.S. Forest Service. Mary Carol Combs, Norma González and Louis Moll focus on how in Arizona where there has been a long-term and still ongoing “concerted effort of assimilation and subordination of the Mexican population, especially through coercive Americanization programs in the schools and the imposition of the English language at all costs” (p. 185).

The complexities of efforts at language revitalization are illustrated in Alexandra Jaffe’s examination of how Corsican is taught in schools in chapter 4. Language purists look for some untainted form of their language before it was impacted by French, Spanish, English, Portuguese, or some other more “powerful” language, but there is no such “golden age,” and such efforts can lead to teaching a form of a language, in this case Corsican, that is only taught and used in classrooms. Such efforts produce a school-based “monoglot standard” that has little likelihood of catching on more widely. Sociolinguist Joshua Fishman in a speech I heard some years ago gave an example of walking in town with some Irish students who learned Irish in school. When they overheard Irish spoken in a café, they commented they did not realize Irish was spoken outside of school!” This same language artificiality is noted in Kendall A. King and Marleen Haboud’s chapter, “International Migration and Quichua Language Shift in the Ecuadorian Andes.” There, in the last two decades Quichua has left the home and become mainly a school subject.

Marilyn Martin-Jones chapter “Languages, Texts, and Literacy Practices: An Ethnographic Lens on Bilingual Vocational Education in Wales is a study of how Welsh is being used in specific situations as attempts are made to increase its usage outside of school. The Welsh Language

Act passed in 1993 now requires all students to study it as a first or second language for eleven years. She notes how Welsh web sites becoming important as an instance of how the language is retaining relevancy in the modern world.

The last case study, Vaidehi Ramanathan's "Researching-Texting Tensions in Qualitative Research: Ethics in and Around Textual Fidelity," revisits her study of English and vernacular teaching in the Indian state of Gujarat. There she finds instances of "vernacular chauvinism" where right wing ideology aiming to free India of colonialism "over-value all things Hindu" and silence minority voices in school textbooks and elsewhere (p. 260). She maintains,

No longer is it enough for the researcher to situate herself in the texts, policies, and communities she is in the midst of; it seems crucial now that she openly acknowledges how her thinking and cognitions are shaped and constrained by them, since they have direct bearing on how knowledge about policy issues in our field is thought about, assembled, and disseminated. Ethics and representation have as much to do with issues that prod her to maintain a silence about some issues as they do with voicing and texting a community's concerns about language policies. (p. 268)

In the concluding chapter, Nancy H. Hornberger and David Cassels Johnson provide a discussion and synthesis of the studies presented in this book. One of the key issues brought up is whether in their efforts at promoting social justice, some researchers have jumped from one extreme of devaluing Indigenous languages and cultures to blindly accepting that local communities are always right. They note,

...the tendency for ethnographers to treat the views and interests of the community as always right can lead to a dilemma when community members take up a perspective prejudicial to other groups in a multilingual context, or espouse a position seen by scholars, educators, and policy-makers as uniformed. (p. 283)

Overall, I find that McCarty offers an illuminating selection of examples of ethnographic research along with reflections on that research. The contributors to

Ethnography and Language Policy provide a nuanced view of issues surrounding ethnography and language policy. I highly recommend this book.

About the Reviewer

Jon Reyhner is a Professor of Bilingual Multicultural Education at Northern Arizona University. He taught and was a school administrator in schools serving American Indians for over a decade. He has written extensively on American Indian education and language revitalization. His fourteen books include *Honoring Our Heritage*, *American Indian Education: A History*, and *Teaching American Indian Students*. He has also written over fifty book chapters and articles and has given over a hundred workshops, presentations, and speeches at regional, national, and international conferences. He maintains a Teaching Indigenous Languages web site at <http://nau.edu/TIL>.



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