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Review of Marcyliena H. Morgan, "Speech Communities"

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Speech Communities. By MARCYLIENA H. MORGAN. (Key Topics in Linguistic Anthropology) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2014. X+190 pp. £18.99. ISBN 978-1-107-67814-9.

In this thorough introduction to Speech Communities, Marcyliena H. Morgan provides a bird's eye view of social and communicative practices and presents a number of insightful examples taken from speakers' exchanges in a wide array of contexts. Chapters on ethnic minorities, youth culture, gender and sexuality, and online communities offer a wide range of examples on the varied nature of speech communities, while also providing a detailed analysis of how the communities function and of the characteristics that lie at the heart of their construction. Chapter 4 offers a particularly good example of this contribution. While describing the African American speech community, Morgan also provides some good examples of how speech communities rely on specific grammatical devices (besides lexical choices) in order to protect their messages from outsiders (both present and presumed) through "camouflage". This invites the reader to develop a combined understanding of sociocultural issues, such as identity construction, with that of more structural linguistic concepts like grammar and grammatical relations.

Throughout the book, a strong focus is placed on the concept of communities as being in constant "flux" (e.g. p. 111) and on the role of the imagined community (p. 19) which is then expanded and rendered free from geographical limits in the case of online communities (chapter 7). Besides being extremely relevant to current

and developing practices, the chapter on online communities is also particularly insightful from a theoretical perspective, as it shows how core concepts associated with more traditionally defined communities are actually transferable to new domains (pp. 106, 107).

Issues of discrimination - be it racial, sexual, or socio-political – also form a central thread throughout Morgan's book. In particular, issues of ideology and of dominant values are brought in to contextualise and ultimately explain how prejudice is manifested in speech communities and how communicative practice can conceal dominant ideological values as simply being "normal". In chapter 8, these issues are skilfully brought together to shed light on recent debates on language policy, standardisation, schooling and social justice. However, while Morgan points out how the linguist's perspective on language variation "fell on deaf ears" (p. 129) she unfortunately did not consider issues of intelligibility in defining the concept of speech community. Though intelligibility is briefly mentioned on p. 1, its potential role in defining speech communities is not explored. This is a potential drawback, as the low levels of intelligibility between Standard American English and AAVE/Ebonics might have offered a more complete analysis of schooling and of language ideology beyond issues of attitudes towards "literacy practice" and "education norms" (p.127). A deeper consideration of intelligibility issues would have allowed for a discussion of the fact that African American children's mother tongue (Ebonics) is only marginally intelligible with the school's language, making them two separate languages in the "linguist's sense" (Dixon, R. M. 1997. *The rise and fall of languages*.

Cambridge University Press.). Nevertheless, Morgan provides a thorough analysis of media coverage of the Oakland proposal, showing how (negative) linguistic attitudes may have a profound effect on educational policy.

Expanding on issues of power and ideology, chapter 10 shows how speech communities can vary greatly in size, from local communities to the "global speech community" (p. 148). In the same chapter, Morgan analyses conflict across but also within speech communities, as the author's own work on "Project Blowed" (p. 150) demonstrates.

The book does not actually provide an overall conclusion section. However, the conclusions given at the end of each chapter often refer back to issues tackled in earlier chapters, further contextualising information for the reader. Each chapter is also followed by suggested "discussion questions" and further reading, maximising the book's potential as a classroom tool.

Morgan's book is a knowledgeable and informative introduction to speech communities, their formation, development and organisation as well as a valuable analysis of the interaction between speech communities and the socio-political structures in which they are immersed.

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