

## BOOK REVIEW

### **A new and sharper look at languages and globalisation.**

Rassool, Naz. 2007. *Global Issues in Language, Education and Development; Perspectives from Postcolonial Countries*. (Linguistic Diversity and Language Rights 4). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. xii + 291 pp. (Pbk ISBN-13: 978-1-85359-951-4)

by *Seraphin Kamdem*, SOAS, University of London

### **Introduction**

At the heart of debates about recent world history and ensuing globalisation is the question of the place of local cultures and languages. They can either be perceived as a necessary part of the globalisation agenda, or as the epicentres of resistance to the globalisation trend. Yet, as Rassool points out in the introduction, her book is “not about language *per se*; neither is it explicitly about language rights discourses” (p. 1). The focus of the book is on the role that “language-in-education policy” (p. 1), throughout history, has played in shaping development possibilities within the countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Three complementary parts of different lengths make up the book. The first part focuses on language diversity, and is made up of four chapters. The second part is the case studies, made up of three chapters. The third part is a concluding chapter analyzing issues related to globalization, language(s) and development within the post-colonial contexts.

### **Review**

The first four chapters describe and analyze the historic evolution of colonial and post-colonial social policies, weaving in the analysis, the language problems, and the educational policies that resulted from the contentious relationship between the colonising European Empires and their colonies in Africa and Asia.

The first chapter, “Language and the Colonial State,” analyzes the origins of the social policies and the linguistic planning agenda that developed with the expansion of the European colonial Empires. The creation of nations out of the colonies, and the development of colonial states with a centre/periphery tension resulted in an unbalanced connection of the countries in the South to the European metropolises, and in “unresolved questions regarding the choice of language(s) that would best support economic and social development” (p. 15). The resulting educational systems were entrenched in inequalities with the European languages imposed throughout societies which themselves had their own languages, but which could not be used in education. This chapter also makes a critical analysis of “policy effects” of “language-in-education policy” (pp. 26-27) where the exclusive choice of colonial languages in education directly created a rigid and discriminatory social ladder with people literate in European languages placed high in the chain of power and status. Furthermore, the provision of education, and access to literacy as a tool for social development, were marked and conditioned by this unbalanced Empire-colonies relationship. Rassool questions the civilizing agenda of the colonial enterprise: “Like their Indian counterparts, Africans also were constituted as objects of study, and their languages and cultural experiences, became reified in

the arbitrary classificatory knowledge frameworks of 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary scholarship” (p. 42). This chapter also tackles the issue of reification of African cultures and peoples, or their perception in Western scholarship only as “workers, not citizens” (p. 42), and consequently, as human resources to be civilised and to be moulded as economic contributors to a centre-periphery dynamics marred by inequalities and exploitation.

The second chapter, “Post-colonial Development, Language and Nationhood,” discusses the theoretical development of the concepts of “nations and states.” Going back to the liberal democratic framework in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this chapter looks at the connections of these two concepts to the project of colonialism, and analyzes the emergence of national identity and the power of states within the sub-Saharan African and South Asian regions. Throughout the chapter, there is a critical analysis of the connection between the colonial and postcolonial realities as an organic relationship marked by a strange continuation of colonial practices despite the Independences which should have marked a severing of the unfair and exploitative colonial links; “the habitus of subjectification” (pp. 61-62) being at the heart of these relationships. The colonial construction of new cultural identities in the South is embroiled in the false identification with the colonial constructs leading to post-colonial realities still trapped in the colonial politics of “divide-and-conquer” (p. 64) of the European colonial Empires. Looking at the transition from the colonial era to the Independences’ decade of the 1960s, the resulting policies regarding language use in social communication and education, the building of the emerging nations, and the social philosophy of modernization, a number of intrinsically inter-related issues are analyzed: linguistic minorities, education provision, literacy-based inequalities, and developmental policies of the new nations.

The author surveys critically the cultural and economic legacies of colonialism, and the current relationship between the former colonies and the former colonising European Empires. A number of interesting revelations emerge from this critical survey: governance in post-colonial Asia and Africa is marked by “control, containment, and economic benefit” (p. 67); economic management gives priority to the interest of the colonial economy through “the underdevelopment of the national economic base” (p. 68) of the colonial regions; and the education system is set up and functioning actually as/with “major impediments to postcolonial social development” (p. 68) with a planned “differential access to education for different groups” (p. 69). In the same vein, as concerns human resource development, “the majority of the population [has] been denied opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to access higher level skilled jobs within different sectors of the economy” (p. 69). Regarding language relations, “the incorporation of colonial languages into economic, political and sociocultural institutions contributed to [European] languages becoming a potent form of hegemonic cultural capital, representing that which everyone had to have in order to function effectively within society” (p. 71). Regarding infrastructure, there is a false “mirror image of the metropolitan education system” (p. 71) with under-developed infrastructures, inappropriate and inadequate, resulting in under-qualified teachers, under-developed literacy (in both the European colonial languages and the local languages). As for social cohesion, the colonial policies have led to mass displacement and division of ethnolinguistic groups in the South, and the seeds of potential ethnic and religious conflict have been “sowed in the divide-and-rule policies of colonialism” (p.72), contributing to “the lack of a cohesive societal/national identity on which to build post-colonial nationhood” (p.72). And finally,

regarding the colonial model of development, it “was grounded in the sociocultural, political, and economic *under-development* of the colonized territories” (p. 73).

The author contends that postcolonialism is a “contested and multifaceted concept” (p. 74), but also argues that “... the fact that the notion that colonialism brought rational order and development to colonized countries, is fractured by the reality of social displacement and dispossession, not only of material goods but, more importantly, of people and their political and cultural rights” (p. 79). Overall, there is “a legacy of unresolved problems, and ambiguity around issues of languages and identity” (p. 79) in post-colonial Africa and Asia. Again, looking at the modernization and human resource development of post-colonial nations, the many issues of language and literacy that are observed in India, Pakistan and sub-Saharan Africa are marked by the colonial cultural hegemony based in the fragmentation of the colonies, the grip of colonial languages in the very fabric of post-colonial societies; but also the struggles of the emerging nations and peoples in the South to promote their languages and develop institutions that will enable societal and sustainable development. But clearly there are still ever present ghosts of colonialism in the emerging independent African and South Asian societies, accompanied by questionable governance, international dependencies, corruption, and unstable and impoverished social systems.

The third chapter, “The Global Cultural Economy: Issues of Language, Culture and Politics,” looks at the concept of global cultural economy as it dominates the literature and development today. Globalization as a “political, economic, and cultural process” (p. 97) is discussed as a global continuation of the colonial enterprise motivated “by the drive for modernization, the rise of capitalism, the production needs of industrialization and the needs to expand markets” (p. 97). Rassool in this chapter looks at the interconnected realities and concepts of “colonialism and development” (p. 98), “linguistic and cultural imperialism” (p. 98), and “intertextuality” with its core argument that “language and communication practices and processes” “lie at the centre of the interactive global cultural economy” (p. 100). As concerns the mapping of the global cultural economy, transnational governance and economic relations with huge multinational corporations and international intergovernmental organization as major political and economic definers in the global economy play a central role in the vast movement of labour forces and political and economic refugees (pp.101-104). Economic agendas built on the backbone of a dynamic labour market are analyzed as they relate to linguistic identities and educational provision, the powers of nations and their organization in political and economic global institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and the international institutions of the United Nations system. There is a necessity for popular actions in “contesting globalization” (p. 106) and the “cultural hegemony” (p. 109) of the developed world, through transmigration and mass movement of peoples and cultures in-between the developing countries and between the global North and South (p. 119). The economic, political and cultural synergy of “language as a global economic resource” (p. 122) interconnects powerful colonial European languages and oppressed and suppressed languages from former colonies, and calls for unearthing the various “language issues within the global cultural economy” (p. 123). In this regard, the migration and transmigration and their impact on the economies of the South are also analyzed.

Chapter 4, “Language in the Global Cultural Economy: Implications for Post-colonial Societies,” focuses on the political economy of language in the world today. The chapter

demonstrates how language is central in the global cultural economy, and looks at the necessity for finding proper solutions to issues regarding languages in developing countries. As a complex set of skills, knowledge, and know-how sustain human resource development, the connections to, and the importance of, languages is further highlighted. In the global cultural economy, language plays a central role (p. 126), as “higher order language and communication skills” (p. 127), such as “multilingualism, information processing skills, knowledge of different subject registers, subject knowledges, inter-cultural communication skills, awarenesses and knowledges, data handling, decision making skills, problems solving skills, research skills, analytical competence, interpreting meanings, oracy skills (speaking and listening)” (p. 127), are the foundations of the current modern “language-based economy placing high reliance on a range of sophisticated linguistic skills, discursive knowledges, and worker awarenesses, which play an important supporting role in the capital accumulation process” (p. 127). The building, preservation, maintenance and distribution of these language and communication skills within ethno-linguistic groups and within nations determine the resource supply and the productivity of each group and/or nation (pp. 129-130). In the “global linguistic markets” (p. 131), and the “knowledge economy” (p. 133) in which globalization is driving the world, and following the Bourdieusian theory of cultural capitals, powers and economic markets, the powerful languages and linguistic competences in those language drive the labour forces and orientate the flux of refugees, skilled workers, and guide the flow of capitals and political powers. Knowledge exchange follows similar patterns (p. 139) Looking at “the political economy of ‘world’ languages” (p. 139), the European languages have established a “global cultural hegemony” (p. 140) in the media, the press, the production of literature, and especially the online world which is increasingly gaining in prominence as the main channel of transfer of knowledge and information (p. 141). In a leading position in this linguistic trend of world dominance is English, whose status as “world” language (p. 145) is undoubted yet challenged in its use by some scholars in “their counter-hegemonic discourses” (p. 143) against colonialism.

The economic evolution of the world, both from the technological and from the political aspects, has brought about changes and marginalization of the local languages, which in themselves have contributed to a kind of social development in the post-colonial countries that needs to be deeply reviewed. Since “a society’s linguistic capability includes the collective and individual accumulated stock of language and communicative competence – the cultural capital – to exchange within different sectors of the global labour market” (p. 128), this chapter problematizes these issues and addresses the questions of changes and choices at the level of individuals and societies as concerns the languages, globalization, migration, labour markets, information exchange, and knowledge transfer. The “world” languages, such as English, stand to lead the trend of choices and to benefit from the current situation in terms of social development of the West, whereas minority languages in the South do not stand to benefit or contribute in the global cultural economy. Rassool addresses the critical implications for language planning in the post-colonial societies.

The second part of the book presents three case studies, looking closely at linguistic issues and literacy practices in three countries: Mali, South Africa, and Pakistan.

Chapter 5, “Language and Education Issues in Policy and Practice in Mali, West Africa” is written by Maggie Canvin. She provides a sociolinguistic profile of Mali (pp. 157-161), and then surveys the literacy situation in the country (pp. 162-165). She examines the

language policy frameworks, combining a historical overview with a synchronic analysis (pp. 166-167); and the use of Malian languages in education and the legal framework and institutional change surrounding that use (pp. 169-174). She also discusses language attitudes and language choices, looking closely at societal use of local languages and parental choices (pp. 175-176). Regarding key human resources development issues (p. 176), economic issues come first, with Mali being a very poor country with a chronic scarcity of financial resources to cover the costs related to the implementation of language policy reform. Other related issues are technologies, namely radio, television and internet – which play an important role in the promotion of European languages (p. 178), and health issues of the school population. Other crucial domains regarding language policies and development are curriculum issues, the production of teaching materials, the scarcity of decent classrooms, problems with teachers' supply, and the challenges of training and supervision of teaching staff (pp. 179-186).

Chapter 6, “Language and Literacy in South Africa” is written by Kathleen Heugh. After providing a sociolinguistic profile of South Africa (pp. 188-193), she discusses the literacy levels for the country (p. 194-197), the “language policy frameworks and their debates” (p. 198-200), and the cultural, economic and political factors surrounding the linguistic and educational situation in the country (pp. 201-203). Again, like in the case of Mali, a similar analysis covering language attitudes and choices (pp. 203-205), key human resources development issues (pp. 206-207) and curriculum issues, materials and assessment, teacher qualifications, supply and pedagogical implications (pp. 208-212) is presented. In these complementary analyses, there emerges a pattern recurrent in sub-Saharan Africa, namely the complexity of multilingualism, the challenges in the use of local languages in social communication and education, the hegemony of colonial languages inherited from colonization, and the material constraints in terms of designing appropriate curriculum, training and providing teachers, and producing didactic materials in African languages.

Chapter 7, “Contemporary Issues in Language, Education and Development in Pakistan” is written by Naz Rassool and Sabiha Mansoor. The chapter opens with the sociolinguistic profile of Pakistan (p. 219) showing the strong ties with the socio-political evolution of India whose partition created Pakistan and Bangladesh. The national language policy is presented (p. 222), showing the intricate connections between Urdu as a national language and the political and religious complexities of the country. The authors then examine the “language in education struggles” (p. 226) and give an overview of the educational and religious landscape of Pakistan, with details on literacy levels, and tertiary education (pp. 227-230). Research and development are also discussed (p. 232), and a critical debate is provided on political discourses about language and nation in Pakistan, looking at regional languages and their use in universities and the ensuing debates and challenges (pp. 233-239).

Overall, the three case studies provide interesting data and insights on the socio-linguistic profiles, literacy levels and the history of linguistic policies of three post-colonial nations. They show that there are strong similarities in post-colonial Asia and Africa regarding the cultural economy and political factors which impact linguistic policies, and the attitudes and choices regarding languages in society. Similar challenges are also faced in the three countries in the domains of human resource development, curricular issues, production of didactic literature, teacher training, pedagogical issues, evaluation, and literacy organization.

The third and last part of the book, Chapter 8, is the concluding chapter, “Post-colonial Perspectives: Issues in Language-in-Education and Development in the Global Cultural Economy.” The author reviews most of the points presented in earlier chapters, discussing among other things the persistent “enduring dilemma with regard to language planning and language policy in developing countries” (p. 245). Examining “the political economy of language-in-education policy” (p. 248) in post-colonial societies, Rassool analyses some related key issues such as “the ideological function” of language choices (p. 248); the economic functions and their “ensuing postcolonial dilemmas” (p. 250); the critical socio-cultural issues connected to human resource development and cultural and symbolic capital (pp.252-254); and the rise and role of international inter-governmental organizations spearheading globalization and managing the allocation of resources and powers between the developed and under-developed national economies (pp. 256-262). Drawing from the analysis and descriptions presented in Parts 1 and 2, the last chapter brings language back to the heart of the debate about the global cultural economy. Language as cultural capital is analyzed as it relates to issues of identity, inter-generational and inter-societal knowledge transfer, and clashes of cultures. The last part of the book also investigates how all this connects to socio-economic development.

### **Conclusion**

The interest of Rassool’s book is, among other things, in the author’s attempt to blend a critical analysis of language issues from the theories underlying social development with an illuminating diachro-synchronic approach in which she unearths the trends from the colonial and imperial agendas through the post-colonial and neo-colonial societies. One central argument in the book which unquestionably stands out is that

... because of the dynamic and discursive forms of interaction taking place within the global terrain, language as a social practice does not centre only on the languages spoken, levels of literacy, and/or the representation and identity of language groups within particular societies. Although these factors are indisputably important, the unprecedented extent that language is now integrated into economic, cultural and political processes means that, discussions about language in the world today should be concerned also with how power is exercised through language within, and through institutional, societal and global power processes (p.126).

The solidity of the theoretical and conceptual tools employed in the book is complemented by solid data from case studies, themselves collected and analysed by researchers who are seasoned practitioners of linguistic research, language education, or literacy practice in their respective countries of study.

This book is at the intersection of three complementary domains: languages, education, and socio-economic development. But clearly, there is more to the book than descriptive studies and sound theoretical analyses. There is overt questioning of socio-cultural and linguistic planning and choices, and the critical exhumation of the impact of the colonial and post-colonial planning and choices on life chances, education provision, ethnic identities, knowledge exchange, and cultural preservation and maintenance of peoples in the global South enmeshed in the effects of globalization single-headed and single-handed by the powerful West.

One of the constructive peculiarities of this book is its tone: compelling and committed. It is compelling because of the solid body of empirical data from the case studies. It is committed in the stance taken by the author through a critical approach to colonial and

post-colonial history and their consequences in the current globalized relationship between the North and the South.

My feeling while reading the pages is that the authors position themselves as the voice of the “unspeaking” communities, i.e. those who are underprivileged, and those who are forgotten when it comes to the decisive moments of sharing the driving seats of globalization. Rassool, Canvin, Heugh and Mansoor want to unearth and restate the pleas of the silent majority in the global South. And this rather political stance is visible right from the beginning of the book, when Tove Skutnabb-Kangas – the editor of the ‘Linguistic Diversity and Language Rights’ series in which this book is published – presents this book as a platform giving voice to those critical academics who are sometimes silenced because of the strong position they take on issues of languages, neo-colonialism, and power. Skutnabb-Kangas aptly sums up the merits of Rassool’s book, as she writes that it is “a necessary and courageous counterweight to myths and outright lies about colonialism and its present day continuation by other means”, and “a warmly welcome addition to multi-disciplinary analysis of the economic and political forces behind increasing poverty and gaps between haves and never-to-haves and at the same time behind the disappearance of the world’s linguistic (and cultural) diversity” (p.ix). Rassool’s book is a very welcome addition indeed.