

Book Review

Translingual Discrimination, by Sender Dovchin. Cambridge University Press, 2022, 92 pp., USD 22.00 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-009-20973-1

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Against the backdrop of globalization and human mobility, an increasing number of people now choose to move to other continents, longing for better educational and financial opportunities (Dovchin & Dryden, 2021). However, a vast majority of transnational migrants find themselves in the throes of identity crisis and language discrimination, factors that are often neglected in current scholarship of translingual practices. Sender Dovchin's book *Translingual Discrimination*, which was published within the series *Elements in Intercultural Communication*, is thus timely, as it reveals the less-research area of translingual practices by collecting and analyzing various incidents of translingual discrimination encountered by transnational migrants. This book plays a vital role in raising language educators' attention to this issue and reducing its negative impact on transnational migrants.

Part 1 (Chapter 1) lays the groundwork for the remaining chapters. It begins with the story of Zhikai Liu, a Chinese national studying in Australia, who committed suicide due to severe depression and anxiety about his poor English proficiency. This tragic story introduces the book's target group: transnational migrants. By illustrating and comparing the advantages and disadvantages of two important conceptualizations of linguistic discrimination within applied linguistics – interlingual and intralingual discrimination – the author points out that both are inadequate to address the many linguistic possibilities and contexts of current transnational situations as both conceptualizations have flaws. The interlingual account reduces language discrimination to conflict among standard language categories, while the intralingual account revolves around nationally defined or standardized sub-varieties within the same linguistic community or nation. Therefore, to reflect social inequality in language use, this book adopts the concept of translingual discrimination, which refers to “the language-based discrimination against transnational migrants in the host society, whose sociolinguistic backgrounds and linguistic practices are displaced, subverted, and challenged” (p. 10). It also argues that communication in situ should go beyond recognizing the playfulness of

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translingual practices because such playfulness can sometimes create injustice or language use bias in social settings, leading to translingual discrimination.

Part 2 (Chapters 2 and 3) addresses two major forms of translingual discrimination: name discrimination and English discrimination. First, Chapter 2 indicates that the primary cause of name discrimination is that the names of transnational migrants usually connote their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities and reflect naming norms that differ from those of their host societies, thus leading to misunderstandings and stereotypes against them. It is common for the *curricula vitae* (CVs) of transnational migrants to be screened out in the first job application step because employers perceive such applicants as less competent than their local counterparts simply due to their ethnic-sounding names. In their efforts to find well-paid jobs, transnational migrants have thus adopted an antidote called “CV whitening,” a practice in which “migrants attempt to avoid anticipated name stigma by minimising or downplaying their ethno-racial clues in job applications by Anglicising their birth names” (p. 23). Such CV whitening not only offers more opportunities to secure an ideal job but is also a strategy for avoiding name microaggressions.

Chapter 3 focuses on translingual English discrimination, including translingual accentism, stereotyping, and hallucination. Translingual accentism refers to “the ideologies and practices used to marginalise, contest, and exclude transnational migrants’ biographical English accents against any forms of standard-English accents” (p. 33), and it is primarily applied to Asian accents. For instance, a Vietnamese girl and a Ukrainian girl studying in Australia were discriminated against by locals, who laughed and made faces in response to their accents. Furthermore, some Eastern European women’s accents have been stigmatized as being sexy and a way to make money. Translingual stereotyping refers to the practice of judging migrants’ English skills based only on their looks. An example presented in the book is that of a Somali Muslim woman whose classmates are shocked by her fluent, native-like English because she looks African. Translingual hallucination refers to the practice in which “transnational migrants’ English accent is grossly exaggerated and imagined in the minds of some native speakers of English as they start hearing a foreign accent that is non-existent” (p. 42). For example, in the translingual discrimination cases illustrated in the book, certain English accents are judged based on speakers’ skin colour. Therefore, many migrants work to eliminate their accents, causing their interest in their heritage language to wane.

Part 3 (Chapter 4) focuses on the psychological and physical problems caused by translingual discrimination. One is foreign language anxiety (FLA), which is a negative emotional reaction that involves “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (p. 50). When communicating with native speakers, transnational migrants are prone to belittle their own English skills, which aggravates their stress about communication going awry. In addition, FLA sufferers may experience physical symptoms, such as perspiration, shivering, and dry mouth.

A second problem is translingual inferiority complexes, which arise from “the harmful psychological, emotional, and physical damages inflicted on the victims of translingual discrimination” (p. 52). Put another way, translingual discrimination deals a heavy blow on transnational migrants both mentally and physically. For example, in one of the book’s research cases, a Chinese student named Wang became averse to speaking English and felt a strong sense of not belonging when he experienced overt discrimination in Australia. Similarly, two Mongolian women – Gerel and Altai – started to drink heavily and suffered from eating disorder, while others became depressed or even wanted to commit suicide. To solve these problems, these transnational migrants created “safe spaces” in which they could communicate with their compatriots in their first languages. This strategy not only gave them a way to vent their negative emotions but also helped them develop a strong sense of belonging.

Part 4 (Chapter 5) reviews the contents of the previous chapters and then proposes some solutions and appeals. First, it calls for policymakers to prioritize the issue of stigmatizing transnational migrants’ names and counter the idea that names reflect people’s capacities. It further argues that language educators must remain mindful that translingual discrimination – including small incidents, such as calling someone by the wrong name – can happen in class at any time, leaving students with potential psychological trauma. Therefore, to maximize the effectiveness of their English learning practices and facilitate communication among migrants in their host societies, educators should introduce language-respecting and culturally sensitive content and resources into their classrooms. Likewise, schools should provide migrants with psychological counseling services and various social activities that are conducive to improving their overall communication in the host society and should create spaces in which migrants can actively advocate their cultures, identities, and languages.

Overall, this book offers the following key contributions to the field of applied linguistics. First, it brings to the fore the concept of translingual discrimination, which has been frequently simplified and outshined by playfulness in translingual perspectives over the past few years. For those who yearn to move to new countries, this book’s discussion of translingual discrimination will not only raise their awareness that translingual practices are not an unalloyed boon but also encourage them to consider whether moving abroad is suitable for them, thus preventing tragedies like that of Zhikai Liu. Second, this book expounds on the harm caused by translingual discrimination. As the author points out, even subtle forms may have harmful impacts on students. The book draws language educators’ attention to this issue and fills the gaps in applied linguistics research on this topic (Fang & Dovchin, 2022). In addition, it adopts the qualitative research methodology of linguistic ethnography to give credence to every concept, utilizing data from many interviews to paint a pessimistic picture of translingual practices. This not only supports the validity of the issues discussed in the book but also enhances readers’ understanding.

However, the book has two main limitations. First, it is short on concrete solutions for combatting translingual discrimination. The recommended efforts by language educators and policymakers outlined in the final chapter seem more like appeals than solutions. The second shortcoming is that most interviewees are translingual migrants in Australia, resulting in a lack of data from other English-speaking countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Therefore, this book is essentially a case study of transnational immigrants in Australia. More data collected from other English-speaking countries would lend support for generalizing the book's conclusions.

Despite these limitations, this book undoubtedly makes a great contribution to the domain of language education. It uncovers how migrants experience translingual discrimination and view themselves and helps people comprehend their reflexive understanding of translingual discrimination. In sum, this book sheds light on theoretical concerns, issues practical pedagogical guidance, and provides up-to-date suggestions for related research. Hence, academics, practitioners, and students of language and education would benefit from reading this book.

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