

## *Research Africa Reviews* Vol. 2 No. 2, August 2018

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Russell H. Kaschula, Pamela Maseko and H. Ekkehard Wolff (eds). *Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication: A South African Perspective*. Publisher: Wits University Press, Johannesburg. 352 pp. Year: 2017. ISBN: 978-1-77614-026-8.

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*Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication: A South African Perspective* is a comprehensive analysis of the issue integrating indigenous languages into the administrative, cultural, educational, financial and political life of a post-colonial (in this instance, post-apartheid) African state.<sup>(1)</sup> The author addresses the myriad attendant questions (2), conversations and concerns surrounding such a project. With focus on South Africa, many experts explore the issue through the prisms of history, politics, education, culture and society, along with the ways in which hierarchies of language and culture inform the choices nations make vis-à-vis the languages that represent them.

In particular, *Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication* interrogates the role of language in a country's economic and political development, as a factor enabling or impeding progress. The book outlines the process by which language expands or restricts access to education, employment and participation in civic and cultural life. The connections between language – specifically, language equality and language policy – and development are of particular importance in sub-Saharan Africa. With few exceptions (Ethiopia and, to a lesser extent, South Africa), the countries of the region have chosen the languages of their colonial pasts as the languages of commerce, education, and politics, effectively marginalizing the masses for whom these languages remain foreign. The book uses South Africa as a case study, a country that has 11 official languages (9 of which are indigenous) and that has identified language equality as an explicit policy goal. *Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication* examines the historical context of the “language question” in South Africa, the policy decisions post-apartheid, and the related conversations surrounding said decisions, the implications for vital state and private institutions (e.g. education, law enforcement, etc.), and steps taken to achieve language equality and their results, along with suggestions going forward.

*Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication* is divided into five sections. The first part, “African Language Empowerment: Concept Formation and Intellectualization”, explores the current conversation regarding the relationship (or lack thereof) between indigenous African languages and higher education, including the exclusion of indigenous languages from the campuses of African universities both during the colonial period and in the present. The contributors address common justifications for the continued predominance of colonial languages and examine the arguments for and against a program of “intellectualizing” indigenous languages. Key to the discussion are the country's policy imperatives to offer students multilingual higher education as a

means of redressing the negative effects of a brand of monolingual education in which most students are instructed in a language largely foreign to them. The authors conclude with offering policy prescriptions and suggestions for best governmental practices.

The second part of this work, “Language Planning, Terminology Development, and Dictionaries”, recounts the history of language planning in South Africa. The intellectualization of Afrikaans in the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the development of indigenous languages as written languages during the colonial period, and the development of isiXhosa dictionaries are important topics mentioned in this segment. There is also a discussion of the ways in which the current dominance of English (and to a lesser degree, Afrikaans) privileges a minority of students for whom English or Afrikaans is their mother tongue. This norm is to the detriment of the majority of students who are most familiar with indigenous languages, as evidenced by performance on certain standardized tests.

Parts Three (“Language in Education”) and Four (“Language in the Professions: Law, Media, Science, and Language Technology”) investigate the efforts underway to transform schools and the workplace from monolingual sites to multilingual atmospheres. Included in these efforts are the intellectualization of indigenous languages for the academic and professional realms and an increasing acknowledgment of the ways in which the choices to elevate English (or Afrikaans) reflect a hierarchical arrangement of language and culture. The ways in which multilingualism can contribute to the establishment of a new egalitarian order are explained in this part of the text.

The final portion of the book, “Language, Culture and Intercultural Communication”, examines the theoretical framework informing South Africa’s language policy, as well as the ways in which music and literature are mining the country’s rich linguistic heritage in order to produce works that facilitate a greater degree of intercultural communication. The book closes with the case of a German Studies program at Rhodes University, detailing the opportunities this course of studies offers for fostering greater awareness of a “foreign” culture through the study of its language. Through their system, students are able to reflect on their understanding of their “home” cultures. By using the study of German language and literature to inspire a greater understanding and appreciation for German culture, the university strives to realize the greater societal aspirations of the post-apartheid government through its espousal of a multilingual society.

*Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication* provides an excellent articulation of the entire debate surrounding the full integration of indigenous African languages into the public sphere. It argues convincingly for the academic, economic, philosophical and political imperatives for such an undertaking. The theoretical justification provided for the realization of a truly multilingual South Africa bolsters the contributors’ detail of the issues connected to the practical realization of such a program in the institutions in which monolingualism is entrenched. The work is a beautiful balance of the abstract and the practical, examining both the historical and philosophical foundations of the emergence of preferred languages and the best ways to achieve a multilingual South Africa.

The question of a multilingual South Africa resonates throughout the Continent, and to a degree in the African Diaspora, as language has often served as a tool to marginalize Africans and people of African descent. In its interrogation of the traditional justifications for the continued dominance of European languages in sub-Saharan Africa (often languages from the colonial past), *Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication* reminds us of the thinly veiled anti-Black racism often at the heart of such arguments. More importantly, readers are reminded of the reality of the failure of monolingual education in European languages – education that is ostensibly intended to enable greater success – to serve students in a meaningful way. The work masterfully dismantles decades of ingrained, biased attitudes concerning indigenous African languages, and the authors honestly assess the strengths and weaknesses of current policy prescriptions. In its advocacy for the use of indigenous languages, *Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication* hints at the potential throughout the Continent and the Diaspora for creativity, progress, and new policies that approach African and African-derived languages and cultures as assets rather than defects. This work is a powerful reminder to be intentional about the choices we make vis-à-vis language policy, as they can result in a language either binding or empowering us.

## References

<sup>1</sup> *Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication: A South African Perspective* will henceforward be referred to as *Multilingualism and Intercultural Communication*.

<sup>2</sup> Including the fundamental question of whether or not it is a worthwhile endeavor in the first place.

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