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Review: Applied Linguistics; Sociolinguistics: Lim, Stroud, Wee (2018)

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**Subject:** The Multilingual Citizen

Book announced at <https://linguistlist.org/issues/29/29-967.html>

EDITOR: Lisa Lim

EDITOR: Christopher Stroud

EDITOR: Lionel Wee

TITLE: The Multilingual Citizen

SUBTITLE: Towards a Politics of Language for Agency and Change

SERIES TITLE: Encounters

PUBLISHER: Multilingual Matters

YEAR: 2018

REVIEWER: Alicia Pousada, University of Puerto Rico

## SUMMARY

This edited collection of papers resulted from a 2007 workshop held in Cape Town, South Africa titled "The multilingual citizen: Towards a politics of language for agency and change." The workshop was funded by Swedish and South African research agencies and focused on articulating the concept of "linguistic citizenship" and exploring its implications for an "empowering politics of language for agency and change" (p. 3). "Linguistic citizenship" (LC) refers to situations in which "speakers exercise agency and participation through the use of language (registers, etc.) or other multimodal means in circumstances that may be orthogonal, alongside, embedded in, or outside of, institutionalized democratic frameworks for transformative purposes." (p. 4). Most of the papers contained in the volume critically contrast LC with the prevalent Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) approach that characterizes much research and activism regarding global multilingualism today. Evidence supporting an LC perspective is provided from empirical case studies in Cameroon, Mozambique, East Timor, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Malawi, and South Africa. Because the book is organized around

the concept of LC as articulated by editor Christopher Stroud in various papers which are referred to by all the contributors (e.g., Stroud, 2001, 2009; Stroud & Heugh, 2004), the volume is quite cohesive.

The content is divided into three sections. Part 1: “Language rights and linguistic citizenship” deals with definitions and theoretical concepts. Part 2: “Educating for linguistic citizenship” gives fieldwork-based evidence concerning educational programs in several nations. Part 3: “Linguistic citizenship in resistance and participation” discusses instances of local activism and participation in other countries that follow an LC perspective. The 13 chapters were contributed by 17 prominent researchers in the fields of multilingualism, language contact, language planning, literacy, language endangerment and revitalization, critical ethnography, critical discourse analysis, and language and identity. While most of the papers are case studies, three serve as critical commentaries upon other papers and indicate points of disagreement regarding certain key theoretical issues. Various chapters also contain retrospective statements that update and refine the original content to take into account new developments which occurred over the ten years it took for the published volume to come to fruition,

In Part 1 of the book, Chapter 1: “Linguistic citizenship” by Christopher Stroud (U. Western Cape & Stockholm University) contextualizes the volume and delineates the LC framework, explaining why it is more effective in dealing with development contexts than the LHR perspective. Chapter 2: “Essentialism and language rights” by Lionel Wee (National U. of Singapore) explores the problem of essentialism which plagues and weakens the LHR model. Chapter 3: “Commentary—Unanswered questions: Addressing the inequalities of majoritarian language policies” by Stephen May (U. of Auckland) critiques the preceding two chapters and maintains that while he agrees with much of their criticism of LHR, he does not consider that LC or deliberative democracy solve the problem of language hierarchies of prestige.

In Part 2 of the volume, Chapter 4: “Affirming linguistic rights, fostering linguistic citizenship: A Cameroonian perspective” by Blasius A. Chiatoh (U. of Buea) examines the case of Cameroon (where English and French have been favored over the national languages since unification of the former British and French colonies) and argues for a grassroots approach to language policy that depolarizes the situation and strengthens the voice and identity of local communities via revitalization efforts with an LC thrust. Chapter 5: “Education and citizenship in Mozambique: Colonial and postcolonial perspectives” by Feliciano Chimbutane (U. Eduardo Mondlane, Mozambique) analyzes the different language policies that resulted from Portuguese colonialism, Catholic and Protestant missionary work, anti-colonial liberation struggles, and civil war. It criticizes the current early exit bilingual education policy for not being explicit enough and for not obligating the State enough in terms of implementation, leaving citizens to organize efforts to force the State to develop participatory structures.

Chapter 6: “Paths to multilingualism? Reflections on developments in language-in-education policy and practice in East-Timor” by Estêvão Cabral & Marilyn Martin-Jones (Tilburg U., The Netherlands & U. of Birmingham, UK) gives historical background on the Portuguese and Indonesian occupations of East Timor but focuses primarily on language policy since the

armed Resistance resulted in independence in 2002. It provides detail on the transitional mother tongue bilingual education model currently used to ensure use of mother tongue national languages and Tetum as media of education in the early grades, along with mastery of Portuguese and learning of foreign languages in the later levels of schooling. Chapter 7: “Language rights and Thainess: Community-based bilingual education is the key” by Suwilai Remsirat & Paul Bruthiaux (Mahidol U. & Language Consultant) lays out the language ecology of Thailand which strongly privileges Standard Thai over regional varieties and minority languages under the rationale that the official language is essential to “Thainess.” The authors discuss the special situations of the Chong (whose language is seriously endangered and now being revitalized via community efforts) and the Patani Malays (whose Malay identity has not been recognized by the central government, leading to deadly conflicts in the southern provinces of Thailand). A pilot mother tongue bilingual program promises to defuse volatile ethnic divisions and improve student academic outcomes. Chapter 8: “Commentary—Linguistic citizenship: Who decides whose languages, ideologies and vocabulary matter?” by Kathleen Heugh (U. of Adelaide) comments on the LC implications of the four southern countries presented in Part 2, drawing out their similarities and differences and signaling the ways in which LHR programs are often “ineffective or used to amplify asymmetries” (p. 176) and do not provide meaningful opportunities for community empowerment. The chapter also analyzes the international debate over the term “mother tongue” and warns of the dangers of trying to apply universal views of multilingualism to different contexts.

In Part 3, Chapter 9: “Citizenship theory and fieldwork practice in Sri Lanka Malay communities” by Umberto Ansaldo & Lisa Lim (U. Hong Kong) reports on the case of the highly multilingual Sri Lanka Malay minority whose hybrid and stigmatized language has been threatened by the current Sinhala Only policy of the government. It describes community language revitalization and identity realignment efforts that involve a conscious language shift to Standard Malay to enable economic advancement, an act of LC that runs contrary to LHR defense of mother tongue education and defense but which exemplifies local agency at work and must be respected. Chapter 10: “Linguistic citizenship in Sweden: (De)constructing languages in a context of linguistic human rights” by Tommaso M. Milani & Rickard Jonsson (U. of Gothenburg & U. of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; and Stockholm U.) applies an LC perspective to a European setting, showing how even in a “perfect” multilingual setting like Sweden which recognizes the language rights of all groups, the lack of acknowledgment of non-standard forms like Rinkebysvenska (an urban dialect of Swedish spoken by immigrants and other youths in Rinkeby) leads to negative language attitudes and covert rejection of immigrants.

Chapter 11: “Linguistic citizenship in post-Banda Malawi: A focus on the public radio and primary education” by Gregory Kamwendo (U. of Zululand) examines the state of Malawi radio and primary school education since 1994 when the 30-year rule of Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the Malawi Congress Party ended and traces the process of opening up the airwaves to languages other than Chichewa and English and the role of local language associations in unblocking access to four other national languages. It also chronicles the changes in primary education since the 1996 institution of the local mother tongues as vehicles of education in

grades 1-4 and English as the medium from grade 5 on. In 2015, English was made the sole medium of instruction beginning in the first grade in a misguided attempt to improve the English proficiency of the students, leading to community reactions favoring English as the hallmark of quality education and academic and NGO reactions advocating a return to Chichewa. Chapter 12: "Making and shaping participatory spaces: Resemiotization and citizenship agency in South Africa" by Caroline Kerfoot (Centre for Research on Bilingualism, Stockholm U.) analyzes how and why meanings were mobilized in adult basic education workshops organized by local facilitators in the Northern Cape, utilizing a "pedagogy of possibility" framework that prepared unemployed youths and adult participants to become change agents in the resolution of key issues like alcoholism and deadly childhood diarrhea in their communities. Chapter 13: "Commentary—On participation and resistance" by Ana Deumert (U. of Cape Town) comments on the contents of Chapters 9-12 and identifies the problems inherent in LHR programs which are heavily invested in the State as actor. Deumert underscores the fact that language functions differently in different locales and also draws attention to the need to look at excluded and troublesome categories like "noise" (loud, messy, violent expressions), "community" (often treated as a uniform actor when it is inherently diverse), and "monolingualism" (generally ignored in LC studies).

## EVALUATION

The volume constructs a compelling and controversial critique of the popular Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) approach to multilingualism and offers in its stead Linguistic Citizenship (LC), a relatively new approach that goes beyond government institutions and national borders. In his introduction to the volume, Stroud explains that LC encompasses "what people do with and around language(s) in order to position themselves agentively, and to craft new, emergent subjectivities of political speakerhood, often outside of those prescribed or legitimated in institutional frameworks of the state" (p. 4). LC arose out of the contradictions of 1990s government and NGO-run mother tongue/bilingual programs which only truly succeeded when community members were able to use their local languages to obtain work, schooling, housing, and medical care. LC practices are those in which vulnerable speakers exert personal control over the varieties in their repertoires to avoid the 'othering' often created by programs purportedly seeking to defend linguistic and cultural rights. Examples include the use of chants, placards, and songs in South African street protests, the appropriation by Somali refugees in Uganda of spaces and materials destined for English literacy teaching for Arabic literacy development and Quranic study, and community members' active insertion of local language into a nutrition program in Mozambique.

Since LHR discourses are structured by the State and are based on pre-determined and essentialist linguistic and cultural categories (e.g., "mother tongue," "linguistic minority"), they may actually perpetuate colonialist thinking and force speakers into inflexible, state-ordained classifications that do not correspond to the complexities of their lives and the fluidity of their identities. LHR efforts tend to view non-metropolitan languages as requiring development or revitalization, which automatically puts them into a subaltern position with regard to the metropolitan languages. Because certain rights that apply to entire groups are sought, LHR

programs do not tend to promote diversity of voice or contribute to reciprocal “engagement across difference” (p. 18). As Wee explains in Chapter 2, LHR discourses erase key differences within groups and may even lead to modification of cultural and linguistic behavior (cf. creation of “artificial” national languages) in order to comply with the requirements for legal equality. Generally, mixed language varieties and cultural groups are seen as less “authentic” and therefore meriting fewer protections or rights.

In contrast, an LC perspective questions the historical, economic, and political foundations of language practices and views citizenship as a social institution in flux and not limited to nation states and their boundaries. LC projects are utopian in the sense that they utilize the potentialities of present situations to identify the conditions required for transformative future changes. Recent insurgent citizenship movements like Black Lives Matter in the U.S., Rhodes Must Fall in South Africa, and the Occupy protests in Greece and Spain have provided new discourses and modalities for expressing agency and participation (e.g., hashtag slogans, tattoos, use of public space, stand-up comedy routines, etc.). Another example is the Hip Hop opera “Afrikapps” analyzed by Stroud in Chapter 1 which reappropriates the much maligned variety of Afrikaans spoken by Blacks and “Coloreds” in Cape Town and questions the classification of creole-origin Afrikaans as “pure,” “European,” and the property of whites only. Such forms of expression challenge the normative view of institutionally approved language seen in LHR discourses, allowing new political voices to emerge.

The papers contained in this volume are united by the beliefs that contemporary superdiversity and intercultural interaction demand boundary crossing and multilingual fluidity and that existing language planning models are insufficient to fully empower minority group speakers who live this reality. The case studies in Part 2 of the volume focus on education in Cameroon (Ch. 4), Mozambique (Ch. 5), East Timor (Ch. 6), and Thailand (Ch. 7). They make it clear that multilingualism is the norm in Africa and Southeast Asia and that mixed varieties abound (e.g., Cameroonian Pidgin English, Swahili, Timor Creole Portuguese). They also demonstrate that simply having language human rights officially recognized (LHR framework) is not sufficient to resolve the deeper sociopolitical and socioeconomic problems of poor and marginalized communities.

In African countries like Cameroon and Mozambique, educational programs that seek to make a real difference and allow communities to create meaningful change have to negotiate a complex linguistic landscape made up of hegemonic European colonial languages (English, French, Portuguese) and multiple local varieties that have had “the status of irrelevance and silence” (Chiatoh, p. 75) imposed upon them. In South East Asia, East Timor struggles to find a balance between the colonially imposed Portuguese and Tetum (the Austronesian majority language), along with smaller local languages, languages of global communication like English, and Indonesian, the language of the former occupying force which still controls the western part of Timor. In Thailand, where 70 languages from five different language families co-exist, educational solutions must address the existing hierarchical relationships among

Thai (the official and national language), its major regional variants, and the highly endangered ethnic minority languages which are not spoken or respected by most young community members.

The authors of the case studies presented in Part 2 illustrate the ways in which an LC perspective could overcome some of the problems endemic to LHR bilingual or multilingual models which tend to be transitional and assimilationist in nature and clearly favor hegemonic metropolitan varieties over marginalized local or tribal varieties. They emphasize the need to utilize ethnographic studies in classrooms and communities to learn more about grassroots efforts to revitalize indigenous languages which are “invisibilized” by official bilingual language policies (e.g., the Chong Language Revitalization Programme initiated by Thai villagers along the Cambodian border, documented by Premsrirat & Bruthiaux in Chapter 7).

The case studies presented in Part 3 show even more pointedly how an LC framework can facilitate local activism. As Kerfoot explains in Chapter 12: “Expanding citizen participation in public decision-making means both incorporating previous marginalized groups into public politics and bringing a wider range of socioeconomic issues into the domain of politics” (p. 281). The projects examined are in Sri Lanka, Sweden, Malawi, and South Africa. They reveal how broad and intergenerational involvement by multiple stakeholders in programs aimed at developing language for societal purposes can be very successful. They also address the role of hybrid language varieties in the language repertoires of highly multilingual societies. Furthermore, the case studies make clear that some grassroots initiatives may not seem appropriate to linguists but must nevertheless be honored (the Sri Lanka Malays’ deliberate shift from their endangered vernacular variety to Standard Malay is a case in point.) As Ansaldo and Lim state in Chapter 9, “shifts and choices are never really intrinsically good or bad, but must make sense within the targets that a group of speakers has in terms of social, political and cultural positioning” (p. 211).

The primary merits of this volume lie in its presentation of Linguistic Citizenship (LC) as a conceptual model bolstered by case studies from mostly non-European areas in which people’s economic and political struggles are strongly linked to language and yet cannot be resolved by linguistic interventions alone. It is also valuable for its demonstration of how bottom-up language planning can be much more effective than government-imposed top-down policies. As Cabral & Martin-Jones observe in Chapter 6, “more attention should be given to local initiative and local participation in bringing about and consolidating changes in language-in-education policy and practice” (p. 139).

Another strong point of the volume is its emphasis on heteroglossia and multiple, competing voices that have been ignored for far too long. Its inclusion of hybrid language varieties as part of the active language repertoire that needs to be tapped in mobilizing local communities to redress social ills is particularly heartening, as is its inclusion of the multimodal discourses and virtual voices that characterize digital communication today.

In addition, the volume demonstrates quite clearly the danger of applying “one size fits all” international models and categories in highly multilingual areas of the world. As Heugh comments in Chapter 8: “The mapping of educational approaches in one setting onto another, even if couched in international discourses of language rights and equity, runs the risk of layering new hegemony upon old.” (p. 186).

A shortcoming of the volume for this reviewer is the lack of representation of Latin American and Caribbean speech communities among the case studies. This is most likely due to the research focus of the scholars at the original workshop that led to the publication, although one might question why the call for papers did not include Latin American and Caribbean concerns and researchers from the outset. Future work on LC should consider how the LC model fits with the Freirean approach utilized for literacy development and political consciousness raising in various locations in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The book should be useful to advanced graduate students and researchers dealing with language planning in highly multilingual and developing areas of the world. Economic and political policymakers and those interested in comparative or international education and grassroots organizing by linguistic or ethnic minorities will also benefit from its content. The theoretical denseness of the writing and the extremely long paragraphs will be off-putting to undergraduate readers, although the content of the book can certainly be utilized by professors in the preparation of undergraduate classes.

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## ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Dr. Alicia Pousada is a Full Professor in the English Department of the College of Humanities of the University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras. She received a PhD in Educational Linguistics from the University of Pennsylvania in 1984. Her teaching and research areas include: multilingualism, applied linguistics, language policy and planning, the teaching of English as a Second Language in Puerto Rico, language birth and death, and language and culture. She recently published a collection of linguistic autobiographies titled *Being Bilingual in Borinquen: Student Voices from the University of Puerto Rico*.

