Book Review: "Decolonising Multilingualism in Africa: recentering silenced voices from the global South" by Finex Ndhlovu and Leketi Makalela

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'Decolonising multilingualism in Africa: recentering silenced voices from the global South' published by Multilingual Matters offers fresh accounts of key concepts in the field of multilingualism from an African perspective. The authors, Finex Ndhlovu and Leketi Makalela, draw together the sociolinguistic mainstay 'multilingualism' and theories of decoloniality. This provokes a stimulating conversation in which 'the multilingual and decolonial turns rub up against each other' (xi). The book locates the conversation of how to decolonise multilingualism within an African setting, unapologetically offering the African linguistic context as a center from which to explore these concerns. The title of the book refers to this as a 'recentring' but in fact what this publication means is that the authors have placed Africa in the center of this corner of the academy for the first time.

The authors contend that 'there is no universal concept of language' (84) which opens the way for them to propose a plethora of language concepts from African ontologies and epistemologies. These will no doubt find a place within mainstream linguistic research. The book may deal with significant theoretical ideas, but it has its feet firmly on the ground in praxis. Fine-grained empirical studies in educational contexts and contexts of migration, African language invention studies, policy case studies, personal histories and autoethnography elucidate the arguments.

In Chapter 1, in order to emphasise that the book is concerned with the phenomenology of African multilingualism, both authors offer accounts of one of their parents and the kinds of meaning-making that they regularly participated in in the everyday practices of cattle herding and catering for the family. Through these stories they are able to demonstrate that language or meaning-making diversity is more complex than diversity according to quantity, or countable nomolanguages (Krause, 2021).

Chapter 2 offers a searing critique of African languages as linguistic entities, arguing that '"African languages" as we know them today are as recent as colonialism itself' (27). The examples used in this chapter are from Zimbabwe (Shona) and South Africa (Xitsonga), the home countries of the authors. The authors argue that these languages, along with African identities, have been invented by colonial administrators, missionaries and linguists. They also note that it is difficult to return to a pre-colonial era to inform our conceptualisations of multilingualism because scholars and populations have internalised colonial impositions of language categories.

Chapters 3 and 4 consider decolonising and unsettling multilingualism within school and higher education contexts. Key to the data analysis in these chapters is the notion of ubuntu translanguaging (Makalela, 2016). A unique perspective on multilingualism is given in the case studies of the interaction of community elders and educators in schools in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces of South Africa. Here the home-school binary is broken and elders' conceptions of multilingualism are given primacy in language planning in school. In data from higher education contexts in South Africa, ubuntu translanguaging is shown to be a key feature of multilingual languaging in multilingual seminars as well as in language learning classes. An important cornerstone of African multilingualism noted in these chapters on education is that not only languages, but styles of discourse such as circumlocution, mesh together for meaning-making in learning.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with language policy at the national and regional level, using the case studies of

South Africa's language in education policies and the project for the creation of African Vehicular Cross-Border Languages. The authors argue that while the intentions of those crafting VCBLs are good, they are mired in what they call, following Veronelli (2015), the 'coloniality of language' – a view on the world in which the nature of language is assumed to be that it coalesces as countable objects ready for reification in policy (76). This concept adds another strand to Quijano's (2000) taxonomy of coloniality (the others being coloniality of power, knowledge, being and nature), connecting to the arguments made in Chapter 2 about African languages being colonial inventions.

Chapter 7 addresses how language practices of African migrants in the diaspora enrich our conceptions of multilingualism, with a special focus on immigration into Australia. The idea of denizenship is reimagined to be a situation where migrants and displaced people inhabit a 'sphere of possibility' (109) where their acquired multilingualism presents new opportunities both in the host country and on the migration journey. Denizens have the freedom to deploy many language varieties which enable them to engage wider social networks, countering the assumption that denizens require more, or improved, English in order to function well in Australian society. Denizenship has parallels to another Southern concept: linguistic citizenship (Stroud, 2001). Linguistic citizenship leverages the political power built up in association with the notion of citizenship in order to emphasise the agency and voice inherent in multilingual speakers. Denizenship, as argued by Ndhlovu and Makalela, leverages the position of marginality which refugees and immigrants find themselves in as a place of potential and

thinking and acting otherwise (Mignolo, 2009). Both concepts emphasise the agency which is enacted by multilingual speakers even as the languaging occurs within a power differential. The notion of denizenship is further articulated alongside the notion of marginality. The authors show that the margin is a place of possibility where power is questioned and where multilingual linguistic capabilities of denizens become visible, for example, the use of African Englishes and Australian Englishes in the same community.

Chapter 8 describes an auto-ethnography by Ndhlovu in which he has a chance meeting with a young boy, Omphile, with whom he shares a conversation and a game of soccer. This data is presented in more detail in an earlier volume of this journal (Ndhlovu, 2018). The authors point to some characteristics of this multilingual interaction which they argue is typical in an African setting: neither party offered or asked for information about which languages were commonly held before speaking; the action of the soccer game was an integral part of the multilingual discourse; and language boundaries were fluid, aligning with the strong version of translanguaging. Significant about Ndhlovu's experience was that it took place just outside of formal conference proceedings on the topic of multilingualism. The interaction with Omphile stood in stark contrast to the weak version of translanguaging that Ndhlovu had just experienced during lesson demonstrations at the conference. This reinforced his understanding that African multilingualism 'in the wild' is feature-based rather than nomolanguage-based. It would have been helpful for the authors to draw attention to their use of nomolanguages in the

analysis of the Omphile interaction (for example on page 136), perhaps framing this as a methodological conundrum for further unravelling.

A very satisfying contribution made by the book is one in the area of decolonial methodologies. As part of the project of decolonisation in applied and sociolinguistics, calls have been made to decolonize research methodology (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020; Phipps, 2019). The offering of ubuntu research methodology (44) is an attempt towards this goal. It is a reiterative methodology which is highly participative and inclusive. In the community-based research conducted on conceptions of language in Limpopo reported on in Chapter 3, URM emphasizes complementary roles for the researcher and the participants with data collection and analysis being undertaken by both parties and results being shared. In addition, Chapter 8 reports on an autoethnography and argues for this approach being anti-methodological and breaking from a conventional scientific method. Anti-methodological approaches, the authors argue, move away from claims to universality, reading from the center/metropole and exclusion of non-Western methodologies that have characterized conventional scientific methods. Building on Li Wei's (2011) proposal of 'moment analysis', the authors put forward a case for autoethnography in research on multilingualism. The advantage of this approach is that it enables the narration to be engaging, emotionally rich and fine-grained, positioning the researcher as part of the story.

This book introduces and extends many concepts relevant to the study of multilingualism. In the discussion of the capabilities displayed by actors in positions of denizenship (Chapter 7), an

engagement with linguistic citizenship (Stroud, 2001), would have been useful. The convergence of denizenship and linguistic citizenship with their mutual focus on agency would make for an interesting discussion in relation to decolonizing multilingualism in Africa.

'Decolonising multilingualism in Africa: recentering silenced voices from the global South' advances the field of multilingualism studies both in Africa and globally. Indeed its international relevance is enhanced by the approach of presenting fine-grained research conducted in Africa as illustrations of decoloniality within language theorising. Future multilingualism research will certainly benefit from both the critiques of the coloniality of language and the propositions of decolonial linguistic concepts contained within the pages of this book.

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