

BOOK REVIEW

*Lisa Lim, Christopher Stroud and Lionel Wee (Eds.).
(2018). The Multilingual Citizen: Towards a politics
of language for agency and change. Bristol, UK:
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Waiting for the egalitarian agenda of universal human rights, and its related branch of linguistic rights, to be fulfilled through official political processes and structures is not an option. As the contributors to this volume discuss and illustrate, language rights policies and discourses have yet to provide comprehensive improvement of the well-being of members of multilingual and minoritized communities in many parts of the world. They call for investment in and recognition of other channels of political action, in particular the agency of local individuals who engage in language politics through forms of linguistic citizenship. This volume builds on the growing body of work which explores linguistic citizenship (hereafter LC) as an alternative to language rights and recognition policies (Stroud, 2001; Stroud & Heugh, 2004; Williams & Stroud, 2013), directing focus towards “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” (Introduction, p. 4). It is a welcome contribution to the scholarship on language policy and planning which gives serious consideration to the nature of language politics on the ground, and attempts to grapple with the inequalities that persist regardless of official pluralist policies (Canagarajah, 2005; Hornberger et al., 2018; McCarty, 2013; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996).

In support of the overarching argument, the volume brings together conceptual framing chapters, case studies with a focus on southern multilingual countries which are generally underrepresented in sociolinguistic scholarship, and critical commentaries by scholars who question

and push forward the development of the authors' contributions. As a whole, the volume makes conceptual and empirical additions to this growing domain of inquiry, and will be valuable to scholars and students of language policy, multilingualism, language education, development studies, and (post-national) political science, among other related disciplines. Considering the aim of the volume to take a step "firmly anchored in a transformative notion of linguistic citizenship" (Introduction, p. 12), several areas emerge which are in need of closer consideration in future research, in particular the relationship between micro-practices of linguistic citizens and the political affordances and constraints which they must negotiate, methodological approaches to examining citizenship practices, and the need for scholarly reflexivity towards the acts of linguistic citizen-scholars (as discussed further below in relation to the sections of the volume).

The first section on *Language Rights and Linguistic Citizenship* lays out the key conceptual arguments of the book, with chapters by Christopher Stroud and Lionel Wee, and a commentary by Stephen May. Stroud and Wee draw on diverse examples to argue for the limitations of linguistic human rights policies which require members of minoritized groups to envision social change within the confines of the state, and within the political processes allowed by the state. Stroud's analysis of a documentary which creates a positive representation of a typically-devalued speech variety ('Afrikaaps') offers insight into what LC can look in practice, including disrupting historical narratives, highlighting complexities, and making previously unheard voices audible and visible. This kind of spectacle

and performance, he argues, may be a more agentic form of visibility than the recognition afforded through linguistic human rights paradigms. In contrast to Stroud's focus on the affordances of LC practices, Wee focuses on the weaknesses of a rights-based discourse, noting that rights-based activism often contributes to essentialism through selecting certain languages or groups to recognize, pressuring groups to (re)invent themselves in relation to officially recognizable criteria, and neutralizing or making these processes invisible and fixed. He states that language, rather than being a static right, must always be "the target of debates and discussions that highlight its dynamic connections with the distribution of non-linguistic goods" (p. 57).

Stephen May's commentary on this section expresses agreement with the deconstruction of fixed notions of language and group identity, while arguing that language rights are an effective political tool in favor of minoritized groups and should not be dismissed so cavalierly. He questions "the extent to which such [local] agency and voice can actually achieve substantive change without simultaneously acknowledging and addressing systemic conditions and constraints" (p. 69). May's critique points towards the need for future research in this domain to demonstrate links between practices of LC and improvements in public recognition, support for, and well-being of minoritized language communities. While scholarship which illustrates acts of agency within minority speech communities is in itself a form of recognition and visibility, there is a need to further trace the interplay between agents and the political structures that they interact with, and to examine

strategies through which agency may be amplified and/or sustained to reverberate louder in structural spaces. While some of the chapters in this volume provide insight into relations between local acts of LC and political processes-- such as the example of a minority language gaining time on national radio due to the actions of a tribal chief in Gregory Kamwendu's chapter on LC in Mali-- the majority of the cases do not engage in rigorous analysis of the links between national and regional political processes, and the choices made by individual agents. While all authors present coherent arguments about the value of local agency, the way that the authors conceive of the relationship between individual agents and collectives varies; future LC scholarship would be enhanced by a more explicit understanding and examination of how agency permeates persistent structures of inequality.

The second and third sections provide case studies in which the key argument-- of language rights versus LC as conceptual and political frameworks-- is examined from different angles and under different circumstances. The second section on *Educating for Linguistic Citizenship* includes chapters focusing on Cameroon (Blasius A. Chiatoh), Mozambique (Feliciano Chimbutane), East Timor (Estêvão Cabral and Marilyn Martin-Jones), and Thailand (Suwilai Premrirat and Paul Bruthiaux), with a commentary by Kathleen Heugh. These chapters provide interesting case studies of language education policy, helpfully contextualized within historical political processes. However, they discuss this concern from primarily a top-down policy perspective, with little or no data about the actions and perspectives of local actors. The primary weakness of the many of the contributions to the volume

is a continued use of methodologies oriented towards the study of official policies, rather than tackling the close-up examination of actions of linguistic citizens in context. There seems to be a methodological inertia which leads language policy scholars to carry on the same trajectory of exploring case studies through the framework of national language policies and programs, even while aligning with a conceptual shift towards local agency. If the agenda-changing argument of LC is to be carried forward fruitfully, the empirical gaze must shift to actions which may not align neatly within nation-state frames, and scholars must focus on observation, interview, and other interactive methods for collecting data with the potential to illuminate LC practices. Heugh's commentary raises important points about the need to understand the local meanings of globally-popular concepts (such as Mother tongue-based multilingual education, MTB-MLE); an understanding which is likely to continue to be over-looked by national policy studies, but which locally-embedded, participatory research could help to highlight.

The final section on *Linguistic Citizenship in Resistance and Participation* assembles cases from Sri Lanka (Umberto Ansaldo and Lisa Lim), Sweden (Tommaso M. Milani and Rickard Jonsson), Malawi (Gregory Kamwendu), and South Africa (Caroline Kerfoot), with a concluding commentary by Ana Deumert. The cases of Sweden and South Africa include much-welcome analysis of LC practices at the local level, based on a variety of interactive research methods, and the interview and observation data that these methods afford. Additionally, Kerfoot's use of resemiotization as an analytical tool

(in this case, the resemiotization of participatory development discourses from an adult education program into the context of community-run workshops) is a valuable contribution to the previously-mentioned need to examine how LC practices are linked to wider political contexts. The theme of participation in this section contrasts somewhat ironically with the general lack of transparency about the positionality and degree of participation of the authors in this volume. While several of the authors make some mention about their role within the context of study, and Jonsson and Milani offer interesting reflexivity in their postscript, many authors maintain the typical academic pretense of being a voice from nowhere (to adapt from Gal and Woolard (2001)). Acknowledging the centrality of local agency in transformative language policy requires acknowledging the roles that scholars also inevitably play as agents and linguistic citizens. Future scholars of LC could strengthen their work through making this stance apparent, explicating their own political engagements where relevant, and working towards scholarship which is itself a form of social change. Deumert's discussion of disturbance, disagreement and noise encourages scholars to step out of comfortable frameworks of participation and the celebration of colorful multilingual practices to interrogate the forms that agency takes in the day to day, among those who resist as well as those who reinforce the status quo. She argues that scholars would do well to consider ways of writing and making meaning which are less prone to represent people in reductionist ways.

The scholarly and political agenda of LC is ambitious, yet welcome and timely, especially for researchers such as

myself who aim to do politically-relevant research and advocacy in contexts of sociopolitical instability. This volume offers insights and examples which help to advance this agenda, while also pointing the way towards further conceptual and methodological scholarly choices which may enhance future research in this domain. The choice to combine case study chapters with critical commentaries adds a crucial dimension of debate and dissent to the volume, enriching the overall contribution made towards ongoing discussions and initiatives around language politics and social change.

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