

Book Review

***Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics*, by Ingrid Piller. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, 283 pages**

The central premise of Ingrid Piller's most recent volume, *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice*, emerges from a deceptively simple question: how is it that multilingualism in developed Western countries can be celebrated in popular discourse, while all too frequently identified as a social and cultural problem in practice?

To begin formulating an answer, Piller lays out two aims in the introduction: first, to explicate the relationship between language and inequality in liberal democracies; and second, to reframe linguistic disadvantage as a category of structural disadvantage in itself. Chapters 2 and 3 are dedicated to development of a theoretical foundation, including a thoughtful acknowledgment of the problematic nature of language varieties, especially in contact zones such as between Chinese local dialects or between Afrikaans and Dutch. Though a closer engagement with the translanguaging perspective (Canagarajah, 2012) would have been appreciated, Piller makes a convincing argument for individual repertoires. In chapters 4-6, the construct of linguistic diversity is investigated in workplaces, educational settings, and social services, respectively, in English-dominant Western countries. The function of linguistic regimes to both exclude as well as include speakers of particular languages is well described. The examples of Vietnamese language in nail salons and Chinese in Australian construction sites are especially compelling. In chapter 7, the focus shifts to the emerging importance of English in non-English-dominant countries. Finally, the conclusion offers two historical illustrations of linguistic justice and identifies commonalities between the struggle for linguistic justice and the broader fight for social justice and economic justice.

This outward-expanding structure supports the argument that linguistic inequality is a global phenomenon manifesting in different local guises. Piller's consideration of English as the medium of global inequality is not perfectly congruent with a straightforward model of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992). Instead, it is a more nuanced argument that access to English is not evenly distributed—neither within nominally Anglophone, developed countries, nor in outer-circle, developing ones—and moreover, that this uneven distribution correlates with inequality in material well-being. It is an extension of the conception of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). The analogy between linguistic and financial capital, though not stated explicitly, is made clear by an example in chapter 7, when Piller describes how English-language teaching as a component of aid programs to Cambodia has tended to reinforce the position of the existing corrupt elite rather than facilitate mass uplift from poverty.

The preceding descriptions of pervasive linguistic injustice are balanced by two hopeful counter examples in the final chapter. The first is historical: the officially-decreed, protected status of ethnic-minority Armenian speakers in 17th century Persia. The second is contemporary: the policy of official support for linguistically-diverse patrons of the public library in Vienna. In each case, minority linguistic repertoires were explicitly recognized and valued, and in each instance the outcome was an economic and cultural flourishing. The premise is that linguistic diversity, too, can be normalized more or less within the existing status quo, and that perhaps it should be protected through policy as race and gender have been. Piller cites the example of the

linguistically and culturally diverse middle class in Australia as the product of successful social struggle to redefine what it means to be Australian more inclusively: a space was opened in which it is permissible to be other than white or Christian *as well as* Australian. By juxtaposing the struggle for linguistic diversity with that of the labor movement against the excesses of late-stage global capitalism, Piller seems to imply that differing forms of inequality share a common economic origin.

To what degree does Piller achieve her objectives? The examples and explanations strongly support the argument for framing linguistic diversity as a coherent phenomenon, and understanding it as a form of structural inequality alongside the canonical categories is analytically productive. However, this reader was not entirely convinced that language, at least narrowly defined, merits consideration as a *distinct* category of exclusion separable from race, class, or gender. Language proficiency, like other forms of social capital, remains open to redistribution in a way that other identity categories are not, at least in principle. Scholars of race and gender have often focused on language as one aspect of the struggle for recognition and legitimacy, as in the movement for linguistic self-determination in the United States. In foregrounding issues of language difference, is there some risk of giving other factors or social formations less than their due? Regardless of one's position on the precise relationship between language difference and other systematic inequalities, the examples offered in this book are enlightening and do much to raise awareness of language as a medium through which relations of inequality are reproduced.

Piller is a highly accomplished sociolinguist who has written widely on topics such as multilingualism and bilingualism, intercultural communication, and identity. In this foundational work, she foregrounds cases of the described phenomena with no more references to the literature than strictly necessary and makes regular use of personal observations from a lengthy and distinguished career. This is primarily a survey of people and their problems, not of research. The end result is highly accessible, readable prose that invites participation, both implicitly through its tone and explicitly on Piller's blog, *Language on the Move* (<http://www.languageonthemove.com>). The book will be especially valuable to advanced undergraduates or graduate students, as well as seasoned researchers and practitioners seeking a cogent introduction to its themes. It will be enlightening and enjoyable to anyone with interests in the linguistic aspect of social justice, or in the various forms of global Englishes.

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