Seeing Language as a Transformative Tool to Address Social Inequities: Reflection on the Book *Language and Social Justice in Practice*

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Language and Social Justice in Practice, published in 2019, is a case-study-based book edited by Avineri, Graham, Johnson, Conley Riner, and Rosa. The book contains 24 chapters and addresses five themes: race, education, health, social activism, as well as law and policy. The case studies were conducted by leading and emergent scholars and practitioners in the language education field to demonstrate how languages create inequity but also disrupt them as social actions and critical resources. This book enriches language education in a practical way by showcasing inequities in/of language use. Through these concrete examples, we can see that language is fraught with injustice as a result of power differences. Meanwhile, the cases also illustrate how a myriad of educators, researchers, and activists are fighting to reduce social inequities.

Part one (Chapters 1-5) is concerned with the ways in which language is racialized through white-centered discourse. Thereby language consistently has reinforced stereotypes, biases, and discrimination, and oppressing the language development of other racial groups in public spaces, such as media, school, and government. To give an example, in Chapter 2, Hodges discusses a case that illustrates public racialized ideology. In 2012, an unarmed African-American teenager, Trayvon Martin, was shot and killed by a neighborhood watch volunteer, George Zimmerman, before the police arrived. The media publicized an ill-considered language analysis which tried to determine if the language used by Zimmerman in the 911 call was overtly racist. However, the media failed to reflect on whether Zimmerman's killing of Trayvon Martin pointed to a deeper issue: systemic racism within society. This failure led the public to focus on the superficial linguistic symbols while neglecting entrenched racialized ideology as the main reason which caused Zimmerman to kill Martin.

Part two (Chapters 6-10) emphasizes how education—particularly bilingual programs, translanguaging, and language policy—can promote linguistic equity. The core premise of Part two is the idea that advocacy for minoritized groups' language use can enable different linguistic communities to access resources equitably. For example, Chapter 9 showcases an inclusive community learning mode of valuing learners' cultures to promote their multi-language development. Lauwo describes a local community library in Maasai, Tanzania, where Swahili and English are the dominant languages, welcoming learners to use and expand their linguistic repertoires. This library supports participants in using their familiar languages to access higher-order thinking and generate new ideas. The library achieves this by creating spaces for learners to identify and to "ethnify" (p. 93) themselves as multilingual speakers.

Part three (Chapters 11-14) contains case studies which adopt ethnographic views to examine language inequities in the health field. Both power relations between patients and medical service providers as well as marginalized or indigenous language groups' accessibility to medical resources cause concerns of injustice. In Chapter 13, Byrd and Monaghan share their investigation of 15 years on HIV/AIDS in Deaf communities. They report that patients relying on sign language interpreters have not received sufficient and appropriate support. Sign language services were either not available, or interpreters were unqualified, which led to these patients' needs being neglected in years of treatment. This section of the volume highlights that appropriate medical treatment requires effective communication between doctors and patients, and outlines how scholarship and activism can go hand in hand.

Part four (Chapters 15-19) features several inspiring cases about how people express their disapproval of injustice or participate in meaningful social change by using language as social action. For example, Abas and Damico, in Chapter 16, talk about Argentinian students who used signs with provocative images to express their resistance to U.S. power and influence in the region. Through creating this linguistic landscape, university student activists engaged in a deeper understanding of historical contexts and explicitly expressed their ideas in public.

Part five (Chapters 20-24) presents cases that address social justice issues as issues of rights and access in law and policy. Five cases reify not only inequitable language rights and accessibility but also "insidious ideologies that sustain inequitable institutions and their policies" (p. 13). In Chapter 20, Graham discusses the language of signage in an indigenous region, Xavante. Bilingual highway signs are used as a tool to advance the linguistic rights of Xavantes and a resistance tool to dominant colonial policy in Brazil. In this light, law and policy are supposed to advocate for justice and the accessibility to law and policy should also be equitable.

The book will benefit language teachers and researchers like me. These cases empower me to use language as a tool to address social inequities, both in my own language use and teaching, in three ways. First, social injustice permeates many contexts, such as textbooks and the media. Educators need to raise awareness about this fact to create an open and inclusive environment for learners. Second, while the power of individuals may be limited, the community can propel social change. As individuals, we need to participate in the community, no matter how large or how small and no matter what our background may be. In this way, we can use our multicultural backgrounds to foster diversity. Third, these cases can be used as teaching materials to practice critical pedagogy in language classrooms. If language educators can include social justice issues in their curricula, learners will be better prepared to promote an equitable society.

Through these chapters, we can also see that language can be transformative in social change, not only in the United States but also around the world. As Alim discussed in Chapter 19, the history of colonialism has left an impact not only on the territories once occupied but also on the languages used within these territories. Hence "we must also continue to language in ever more radical and transformative ways" (p.189) to (de)occupy language.

References

Avineri, N., Graham, L. R., Johnson, E. J., Riner, R. C., & Rosa, J. (2019). *Language and social justice in practice*. Routledge.

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