Series Editors' Preface

Some time between October and December, 2023, Australians will vote in a referendum for a proposal for a 'Voice to Parliament,' an advisory body to the Australian parliament and government in relation to the social, spiritual and economic wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Opposition to the proposed amendment to the constitution has come in various forms: Some have objected that this move is divisive, even racist, in singling out First Nations people for special access to government (though this argument depends on both historical blindness in relation to colonization and an a priori racialization of Indigenous people); others are concerned that there is no need to change a representative democratic system that works well enough (this argument evidently overlooks the many ways in which current practices and arrangements remain discriminatory and inadequate); for others, the proposal does not go far enough (there are calls for a treaty before this process of recognition and concerns that it will not provide the means to address the many forms of disadvantage faced by Indigenous Australians). It is not clear, at the time of writing, how this referendum will turn out.

The point, however, as far as this book is concerned, is that 'The Voice', as it is commonly known, is a profound political struggle for people to be heard. It is about history, colonization, violence, disadvantage and transformation. If reconciliation and rectification can have any real meaning, it is about setting up a process by which Indigenous people can be heard and non-Indigenous people are obliged to listen (though not necessarily to act, a misguided claim by reactionary opponents, and a concern for those looking for greater change). It is this sense of voice that is central to this book, an understanding that communication is a far more complex political process than models of production and reception would have us believe. The notion of voice can be easily misunderstood or co-opted for liberal (and less critical) projects. Voice, in its liberal conception, can be a notion akin to agency, an individual capacity to speak or act, something we can give people or that people can use. Or, we might view it as an intrinsic human quality, something we bring to light and develop, particularly through schooling. In this way of thinking, the broad inhibitions on agency or voice (social structures and ideologies in the classic sociological model) are given little space; instead, the issue is one of the

individual managing to speak or act. The limits on voice – all those ways in which people are silenced, the institutional practices that make it hard, if not impossible, for women, people of colour, people using a second language, deaf people, Indigenous people, and many more, to be heard – may be downplayed to bring an emphasis on an individual capacity to speak.

Several books in the Critical Language and Literacies Studies (CLLS) series have examined such inhibitions in detail, offering guidelines for transformative policy and practice. Ndhlova and Makalela (2021), for example, take up the marginalization of diasporic, multilingual voices from the Global South. The authors describe a prevailing deficit orientation in how receiving nations integrate disadvantaged migrants and refugees (i.e. denizens), devaluing their rich multilingual repertoires, aspirations and potential contributions. They also provide strong recommendations towards the decolonisation of the dominant linguisitic models involved. The title of Lorente's (2018) award winning CLLS book, *Scripts of Servitude*, foregrounds the domestication of voice and suppression of agency through the provision of language training for transnational Filipina workers, whose wage remittances maintain existing social hierarchies in the Philippines. The function of education policy and curricula in these systemic forms of silencing are also prominent in other CLLS books, for example, in Kanno's (2021) discussion of Brighton High School and its habitus of dysfunction in its ongoing failure to encourage or adequately support higher education aspirations amongst its English Language Learning population. In Sterzuk's (2011) book, classroom data reveal a continuing stigma against Indigenous Englishes and a white settler perception of its speakers as poor learners. As these texts indicate, the realization/expression of one's essential or preferred voice is no simple achievement.

This book deals with multilingualism - including sign languages and already, therefore, a more complex idea than the speaking voice – with a particular focus on two key concepts: voice and (socio)linguistic citizenship. Both aim to work from a bottom-up, grassroots understanding of how people are able to articulate their positions on and through languages. Claire Kramsch (2021) asks what it takes for language learners and users not just to be understood, but to be valued, taken seriously, treated with respect. This is a question – all too often silenced in language education and applied linguistics – of symbolic power, of being listened to rather than just heard. This is not, therefore, a question just of getting a chance to speak, of speaking one's mind, of finding the right words (or signs), but rather of creating a means to have one's words taken up in more significant ways. As the emphasis in this book on sign languages suggests, this notion of voice has much less to do with the act of speaking than with the capacity to be understood. Voice from this perspective can be seen as both a capacity to articulate what is not being heard and part of the

material being of language, the physical presence of spoken and signed language (Bucholtz & Hall, 2016).

Likewise the notion of citizenship – all too often seen as a comfortable community membership for those granted such status, yet more evidently a site of struggle for all those not allowed in – has to be understood in terms of political contestation. Various sociolinguistic frameworks have used the idea of citizenship in this more metaphorical sense: citizen sociolinguistics (Rymes, 2020; Svendsen, 2018) seeks to put sociolinguistic research in the hands of ordinary people, while (socio)linguistic citizenship (Stroud, 2018) looks at the ways that people position themselves linguistically in the search for new possibilities of political speakerhood. Sociolinguistic citizenship is often seen in this sense as an alternative to the problematic notion of language rights, and like the idea of voice, suggests a focus on the ways in which language users seek to establish a position from which they can articulate their own wishes, desires, concerns and political needs. This book, therefore, is about the ways in which refugees, sign users, language learners and others work to get the things they want to articulate taken up by others.

References

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