Foreword

Intervening Discourses, Representations and Conceptualizations of Language

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Rarely does one pick up a book that decenters epistemological knowledge and simultaneously expands understandings in dynamic ways, as it presents an inter-related perspective. Makoni and Pennycook's *Disinventing and Reconstituting Languages* is such a book. For the reader, and particularly for those of us who work on language scholarship, the image of the *banyan tree*, referred to in Makoni and Mashiri's chapter, comes to mind. Our understandings grow up, out and down at the same time. Although the book *disinvents* language, asking us to question languages, conceptions of language and metalanguages, it also *reconstitutes* it, warning us that the results of the invention are *real*, but that we must rethink what the social, political and economic consequences would be if we no longer posited the existence of separate languages. In other words, this book argues that the invention of languages has implications that are situated in very material language effects. Rooted firmly on the communication that takes place among people and not on language as 'a thing that leads a life of its own outside and above human beings' (Yngve, 1996: 28), the book takes a step beyond the allegations of language as imagined or invented and yet roots itself firmly in the discursive field that constitutes acts of *languaging*.

The book achieves its original dynamism by presenting the ideology of Dis/Invention posited by the two editors and the content of the individual chapters in ways that are inter-related and mutually implicated and that juxtapose different historical and philosophical scholarly traditions, spatializing time. Drawing from the scholarship on the invention of Africa (Makoni) and the invention of English (Pennycook), the editors refer to a dialectic process in which language and nation were constructed together. But Makoni and Pennycook's disinvention of language is also rooted in Hopper's concept of 'emergent grammar' and his claim that the system-

aticity of language is just an illusion, a regulated process of repetition in discourse, a product of performative acts. Signification is produced by the partial settling or 'sedimentation' of frequently used forms. And so language itself has been mediated by and constrained by, historically sedimented patterns of usage.

The process of disinvention of languages that the book proposes calls into question many of the significant issues that surrounded the study of language in the 20th century and that form the basis of our present under-standings of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics in the 21st century. Drawing on different situations of language dis/invention – the inventing of Bahasa Indonesian, language planning in southern Africa, English as an international language, sign language, Hiphop Rap/Discourse, language education in different contexts – the book challenges basic assumptions. For me, who has spent a lifetime studying language in schools and particularly bilingual education, this book has engaged me in further reflection about questions that I thought I had settled long ago.

Since I started teaching in 1970, I have defended the use of the students' mother tongue in their education and particularly the use of Spanish in teaching US Latinos. But in demonstrating how the indigenous languages of Africa were constructed, Makoni and Pennycook remind me that Spanish was also 'administratively assigned' to the colonized population and continues to be so in many parts of Latin America. In fact, Spanish has been shown to create and accentuate many of the social differences in Latin America. Although in 1970, most of my students in New York City were Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans, leading us to 'forget' the genocide of the Taíno indians and their language, today New York City Latino students are increasingly users of other languages, besides Spanish, confronting all of us with the complexity of identifying the students' mother tongue, or what it means to be a 'Spanish-speaker.'

Makoni contends that, instead of focusing on the invented indigenous languages, African language policy should be looking at urban vernaculars that are not 'hermetically sealed'. This also reminds me that my New York Puerto Rican students in the 1970s were not simply users of Spanish. Living side by side with urban African Americans and increasingly in contact with speakers of other contact-Spanishes, my students' vernacular often had little to do with either the 'standard English' of the autonomous texts used in schools, or the 'standard Spanish' that was purported to be their link to a better education in the bilingual education programs.

The bilingual education models that I have worked with throughout my professional career have always been founded on notions of differ-ence, ideas that in the United States are still considered inappropriate and

maybe even 'dangerous.' But Makoni and Pennycook remind us that, if language is an invention, then there is no reason to separate students into ESL classes or to advocate for bilingual education that simply is 'monolingual pluralization.' This book has engaged me in a key question that must surround the ways in which we think about bilingual education in the future: What would language education look like if we no longer posited the existence of separate languages? How would we teach bilingually in ways that reflect people's use of language and not simply people as language users?

This book proposes an innovative model of language education based on what the authors call 'translingual language practices'. Cen Williams coined the Welsh term *trawysieithu* (translanguaging) to refer to a language education pedagogy where students heard or read a lesson in one language and developed their work in the other. Baker (2003) clarifies that translanguaging is not about code-switching, but rather about an arrangement that normalizes bilingualism without diglossic functional separation. But in disinventing language, Makoni and Pennycook go way beyond William's pedagogical innovation. Language classification has been a construct to control variety and difference and thus it excludes mixed language practices, creoles and other ways of using languages in multilingual networks. Language teaching then, as Canagarajah tells us in his chapter, should aim not at mastery of an invented 'target language', but at developing negotiation strategies and a repertoire of codes. Students should, Canagarajah tells us, 'shuttle between' repertoires. And so the notion of 'Spanglish' which has been so controversial in the United States, is as invented as is the notion of Spanish or English. And the question that we should be asking is not whether code-switching is an appropriate responsible pedagogy, or whether 'translanguaging' is valuable in itself or whether 'Spanglish' should be accepted in the classroom. If language is an invention, then we must observe closely the way in which people use language and base our pedagogical practices on that use, and not on what the school system says are valuable practices.

Throughout my professional life I have defended multilingualism and linguistic diversity and have supported language policy that enables peoples to use their languages in public. I have often used language census data to show the strength of language diversity in the United States, but Makoni and Pennycook remind me that the enumerability of languages is an invention and acts as a measure to contain and control. With Phillipson I have argued against the linguistic imperialism of the United States, especially with regards to their language minorities. But Makoni and Pennycook critique linguistic imperialism by pointing out that the imposi-

tion is not of English as a language, but of the ways in which speech forms are constructed into languages. Multilingualism and linguistic human rights, this book tells us, may indeed romanticize plurality rather than question the language inventions and critique the damage it has caused. What the world needs, Makoni and Mashiri propose, is not linguistic human rights, but 'linguistic citizenship' (Stroud, 2001), interaction 'governed by stylistic and strategic deployment of numerous styles and a range of languages'. This is a novel idea, one that challenges, expands and builds on linguistic human rights. It is people themselves that have rights to use their styles and ranges of languages in whichever way they do. And our work is to support people, enhance communication between them and create 'communicative contexts which would enhance people's abilities to carry out their activities to improve their social welfare.'

This book, especially through the position of Pennycook, also argues against what I had believed to be accurate ideas about English in the 21st century – the fact that there are many Englishes, and that English is a world or global language. Pennycook reminds us that English is not a language per se, but could be considered a discursive field – neoliberalism, globalization, human capital. What is important is to study what people do with English, their Englishing, that is, their investments, desires and performances in English.

When I was asked to write this Foreword, I had no idea that I would find myself questioning some of my 'venerable' assumptions about language and education or language and minority rights. What is most valuable about this book is that it disinvents language without dismissing the effects that it has had in our scholarship, in our teaching, in our societies, in our schools. It links pre-modern discursive and communicative use with the present-day desires and performances that technology juxtaposes as people engage in the act of *languaging*. It offers then, not just a criticism of the invention of language, an intervention at the level of discourse, representations and conceptualization, but a way of reconstituting these to facilitate people's ability to carry out their activities to improve their social welfare.

Nowhere is this proposition more problematic than in school. And yet, as the children's linguistic heterogeneity is brought closer together through the communication enabled by technology in the 21st century, the distance between the invented languages that schools have chosen to teach and assess in and the children's practices only grows larger. Translation of instructional material, offering the tests in the child's language, bilingual teachers, bilingual pedagogy is not enough, for it is based on an invention and it rarely reflects the ways in which children communicate. The value of Makoni and Pennycook's proposition is precisely that it makes evident, at

least to me, that schooling is not about improving children's social welfare. The Dis/Invention paradigm facilitates for all of us who take it seriously, the ability to become aware and move beyond the ways in which language has been thought about in the real world and in particularly in socio-linguistic and applied linguistic scholarship.

References

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