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## **The influence of social multilingualism**

### **ABSTRACT**

This annotated bibliography talks about the influence of multilingualism, which is a globally growingly large issue in the last few decades. In some area, the practice of multilingualism, combining with the emerging of culture, has a significant influence on its resident in some ways or others.

According the narratives written by Ivy and Kelvin, they are greatly influenced by the multilingual practice in their neighborhood. In this essay, several books and collections studying the practice of multilingualism are summarized, in order to illustrate their author's view on how multilingualism in a society can influence its residents in a variety of ways, and possibly how the residents of the society contribute back to the social consensus on the use of multilingual practice.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Multilingualism is a growingly outstanding phenomenon looming large in the modern world. During the last several decades, several significant factors, including the two world wars, have greatly changed the population structure of the world. The development of technology also made the international communication and transportation possible to the public, creating opportunities for people who wish to work and live in another country. It is a human nature to live with the people who share a culture background with themselves. Therefore, it is common that immigrants, voluntary or involuntary, occupy a district in a foreign country and form a smaller and more "closed" featuring a

distinct culture and language. On one hand, in some societies people tend to preserve their own language along with the culture they inhabited; on the other hand, they need to communicate with “outsiders” of the community and emerge into the larger society. Several distinct patterns of social multilingualism are developed among those multi culture and multilingual societies all over the world. In Ivy’s narrative, she found it both necessary and easy to learn a “localized” language in order to communicate with friends; in Kelvin’s narrative, he found the learning of English made him unable to inherit his own Hispanic culture. In order to understand how the multilingual society works, researchers conducted case studies all over the world. From smaller neighborhoods in America to the exile governments with a huge population, from the early French colonial rule in America to the modern international district, from the multilingual structure to inter-culture lifestyle, a wide range of topics has attracted scholars to conduct researches in different levels. Here I will highlight some books and collections to summarize their view on how multilingual practice influence the residents of a society in multiple aspects, and sometimes how people in the society contribute and affect the way people use different languages in the same time. Perhaps this will help us to understand why Ivy's friends in Shenzhen persist to use Cantonese, and how Kelvin's learning of English compromised his Spanish skills.

### **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**1. *Rethinking multilingualism : issues and problems* / edited by Shailendra Kumar Singh.**

**Guwahati : EBH Publishers (India), c2009.[ISBN 9788190781237] (#002460233)**

As stated in its title, essays in this collection majorly concern about the problems raised with the increasing practice of multilingualism in India. As a nation with diverse cultural and lingual background, India is an ideal place to study the effect of multilingualism, as the editor states that it has

lots of languages blossoming in the country, as“(a)English is booming like flowers, (b)Hindi is fluttering like butterflies and (c)lesser known languages are chirping like birds.”(p.IX) As a country with 1652 “mother tongues”,(p.XI) it faces several tensions and dangers.(p.XXI) The edited collection collects essays discussing potential and actual problems raised during the multilingual practice, from a national wide perspective to regional issues on a group of people. The collection itself is a good sources to learn how multilingual practice create problems for people and society, but overall the studies are too “provincial”, which focus on cases dealing with the combining results of several factors. Therefore, the value of the studies presented in this collection is compromised for lacking the ability to be generalized or used in a different situation. In conclusion, it is an useful source when studying specific topic in India, but not an inclusive or comprehensive “starter guide” in learning the practice of multilingualism.

“*Accommodating Deviance: Tibetan Exiles in India*” by T. Dorjee et al gives us a example on how multilingualism negatively affect people’s life. According to the study, a huge number of Tibetan exiles resides in Northeastern part of India, having a society of their own Tibetan culture, which significantly differs from the culture of other tribes residing in that area. (p.29) As a result of Tibetan exiles’ strong connection of the religion life, they make every effort to preserve their own language and writing system.(p.29-30) The Tibetan exile in India is aiming for preserving their identity,(p.32) so the educational system was designed to be the most “pure” Tibetan.(p.34) But as an exile group residing in a foreign country, they are influenced by foreign cultures and languages in some extent. A research was conducted to learn the manipulation styles of speakers.(p.47) As a result, most young Tibetan exiles have difficulties speaking honorific Tibetan;(p.52) patterns of deviance were shown on most Tibetan exiles.(p.49) Therefore, the preservation of the Tibetan language was not that successful among the Tibetan exiles in India. The negative effect of multilingualism may influence the self-identification of their people, deviating the Tibetan exile from their initial aim of preserving their identity and language,

as they just become a few more common citizens of India. In another word, learning another language, or simply being a member of a multilingual society, according to the study, may cause one lose the ability to use his mother language in a precise and accurate manner, and probably even makes him confused with his own culture background and identity.

Rethinking about Kelvin's narrative on his childhood, the neighborhood of Dominicans and Puerto Ricans are basically doing the same thing: people are trying to preserve their own culture and language in a small and concentrated neighborhood. But sadly it is only a desperate struggle; the emerging of culture and practice of multilingualism become the big trend which is tough to overcome. As the trends continue, more and more people are getting confused with their own identity. Fact is, we are losing the culture and lingual diversity as aftermaths of multiculturalism and multilingualism, but it is hard to judge whether it is beneficial or not, that one day everyone on earth, speaking identically same language, can only identify themselves in the identical way: the citizen of Earth.

***2. Globalization and language in contact : scale, migration and communicative practices / edited by James Collins, Stef Slembrouck and Mike Baynham. London ; New York : Continuum, c2009. [ISBN 9780826497987] (#002549366)***

This book is a relatively comprehensive and comprehensible description on multilingual practice from several different approaches. It gives us an overall glance of multilingual practice all over the world. It is particularly noticeable that the book features descriptions of specific and localized multilingual practice in China, North America, Africa, Europe (p.12) written by contributors expertise in the particular field, while the book as a whole runs in a highly organized idea flow that each case analysis give us ideas on how multilingual practice work in some particular field. In general, I would say the book emphasize the multilingual practice in a relatively large scale. In the first part, it argues

that multilingual practice in a large scale make it different not only in quality but also "quantity", or property, which matches my conclusion in Project 2. In a multilingual practice involving a large population, factors like political or cultural influence have to be taken into consideration, which make the case much more complex.(19) Part II talks about migration. The mass number of migration rise the issue of "dislocation" and "relocation", foregrounding some distinct pattern of multilingualism including identity recognition and spatialization.(14) The third part of the book study the multilingualism versus the elapse of time and change in space. Overall, this book is a good starter's guide for us to have an empirical understanding of multilingualism. Unlike the 1st and 3rd sources in this project dealing with regional issues, this book gives a comprehensive description on the studies conducted on multilingualism, and in most time case studies in this book is more representative, giving us a liable and versatile tool to understand multilingualism.

Chapter 9 (p.170) of the second section gives us some ideas on how multilingualism affects people's lives in a foreign country. It compares the interview with two groups of Polish post-communist migrants who arrived England in 1989 and 2004 respectively.(p.170) By comparing the style of talking of people in those two groups, we can see how the multilingual environment can shape people's language over time.(p.174) It is concluded that the post-1989 group speak very differently in the style compared with post-2004 group. The following chart was adapted and summarized based on the conclusion in p.183. We can clearly see that the group which is longer influenced by multilingual practice (post 1989 group) speak in a much story-telling style. The study itself doesn't tell if it is because people are under the influence of British English-styled way of talking, but we can make a fairly good hypothesis to say so. The difference in speaking style is concrete enough to show that living in a multilingual culture does influence the way people speak in some way or other.

	POST 1989 GROUP	POST 2004 GROUP
<b>Form</b>	full narrative	short narrative
<b>Emotion</b>	Emotionally charged adjectives	lack of emotionally charged language
<b>Tellability and narrativity</b>	high	low
<b>Information delivered</b>	performance	information
<b>Language use</b>	lots of repetitions	omission of verbs

Also, the book gives a good example on internal immigrants in China, who experience accent bias in Beijing. As described in the book, Putonghua and monoglot ideologies in China has a positive influence on the politics and economics that it greatly enhanced the mobility of the society. (49) But it also created a problem that migrant workers, typically coming from an area of lower social and economy status, are experiencing bias due to the dialect they speak. In another word, they are "silenced by their accent". (49) Under such context, a migrant workers speak his own dialect with people from his hometown, but try to learn "Putonghua" in order to avoid being a victim of dialect bias. This provides an alternative explanation why Ivy need to learn Cantonese in Shenzhen, Guangdong(Canton). She initially learns "Putonghua" or Mandarine as most Chinese people living in a city do. But Cantonese has their own dialect that most people use. Differed from the Putonghua-bias in Beijing caused by the monoglot ideologies implemented by the central government there, Cantonese values their own language for their regional pride due to the fact that it is the second economically prosperous region. Similar to Beijing, they have bias to other dialects too. So it is not hard to understand why a Putonghua user as Ivy need to learn Cantonese in order to emerge into the society in Shenzhen.

**3. *Towards global multilingualism : European models and Asian realities* / edited by Rosemary Khoo, Ursula Kreher, and Ruth Wong. Clevedon ; Philadelphia : Multilingual Matters, c1994.[ISBN 0585270171 (electronic bk.) :] (#000056174)**

This collection, edited and created from the conference “Language in Contact in a Multilingual Society: Implication for Language Learning and Teaching”, discussed the global multilingualism phenomenon with detailed analysis of examples from Asia and Europe. It is apparent that Asia and Europe are two great place to conduct the research of multilingual practice, for both of them have long history and a large quantity of countries with different language and independent culture background. This collection, summarized European practice as a model, and give several analysis on Asian multilingual practice and education. The collection is organized from overview to details. It begins with an overview on the bilingual education in Europe, then ASEAN, followed by studies of individual topics on education in a various country.

Education is a important factor of one's life. As we are analyzing how multilingualism can affect people's life, we cannot ignore the role bilingual education, if presented, played in the early stage of people's lives. In a larger scale, a general education conducted in a bi- even tri-lingual manner may enhance the multilingual practice in the society. The passage *When is a language worth teaching?* *Native languages and English in India* by a Singaporean researcher M. Tickoo gives us an analysis on the necessity of bilingual teaching in some special circumstance. In this particular case, Kashmiri, the first language of a large number of Indian people, features like a minority language in both daily life and educational system in modern days.(p.29) M. Tickoo concludes some of the reasons that lead to Kashmiri's loss of place to other languages, including English, a foreign language. He points the axes to the policy makers and government who failed to realize the rightful place of the language and its relationship with cultures.(p.41) A failure in bilingual education make Indian people lost one of their

own languages and cultures. In short, a failure in education can make a language less dominant in a society, thus education is an important factor deciding the prominent language in a society. Now we may further understand Ivy's narrative that why Cantonese values their language so much. The education system in China, similar to India, fails to realize the importance of a local language or accent, Cantonese. Therefore, in order to protect their own language inherited from their family, Cantonese need to propose a way to preserve it outside school- they teach Cantonese in family and practice it in daily life. This counterbalanced some of the effect brought by the monolingual education in Putonghua. Therefore, Cantonese is much better preserved than Kashmiri, thanks to the efforts of local people who actively preserved it from disappearing. People's reorganization and protection of their own culture, according to this comparison, can shape the atmosphere of multilingual practice.

Another interesting study in this collection is an experiment done to Chinese students studying in Singapore. In the essay "*Strategies for the construction of meaning: Chinese students in Singapore writing in English and Chinese*" by R.Y. L.Wong, evaluations are done to compare individual's Chinese (mother language) writing skills with his or her English (secondary language) writing skills. (p.95) After analyzing the data they collected, it appears that a good Chinese writer, when learning English, can "transfer" the writing skill into English writing, as they tends to be better English writers, making use of "a common underlying proficiency."(p.103) While the single experiment may not represent the relationship between all other languages, if the conclusion of this study is universal, we can conclude that a good learner of one language tends to be a good learner of other languages. As Singapore is a multilingual country with dominance influence of both Chinese and English, (p.95) and the experiment shows that Chinese skill positively influence one's English skill, we can say it is beneficial for a bilingual education of English and Chinese to be implemented into school system. Therefore, a multilingual environment can positively influence one's skill in both languages. Comparing this

conclusion to the study of Tibetan Exiles “*Accommodating Deviance: Tibetan Exiles in India*” by T. Dorjee in the first collection I described, we can find the results seemingly contradictory on whether the acquisition of one language improve or compromise the skill of another language. Both studies make good points, yet they focus on different aspect: the Tibetan exiles lose their pure language identity and culture while engaging in a multilingual practice, while Chinese students in Singapore successfully transferred their writing skill between Chinese and English, making them better writer in both languages. The multilingual practice make some people’s life worse, and some better.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

Multilingualism, a phenomenon that draws interest of scholars, becomes a more and more important element of the model world. As mentioned in the source I cited, it is both beneficial and harmful to individual's in different ways. In a larger scale, it combines with other factors such as political, economical and educational variables and create complex pattern. We need to be careful to deal with it, for a wrong approach can harm people suffering from bias and write off a valuable culture from the society, but if we use it in a decent way, it may create a more connected world for us to collaborate with each other.

The multilingual practice change the way we speak(Collins et al), live (Collins et al), and even identify ourselves.(Guwahati). Looking back to the three sources I analyzed, it is hard to argue whether the multilingual practice is beneficial or destructive to human culture and living, and the argument itself maybe pointless. Even in a specific topic, we still can’t effectively evaluate its pros and cons. The presence or education in one language, can both positively (Clevedon, et al, the study on Chinese student in Singapore) and negatively (Guwahati, the Tibetan exiles in India; Collins, the Beijing Migrant story) affect one’s mother language. When it comes in a large scale and combining with other

factors (Collins), it can affect people's life in many different ways. Therefore, the appropriate conclusion is that how multilingualism affect people's life can't be concluded; or the attempt of concluding multilingualism itself is an inappropriate approach in studying this subject. When analyzing how multilingual practice affect people's life, we have to take consideration of every possible factors; otherwise we may have a totally opposite result.

Undoubtably, the study of multilingualism is far from over. We only see a small peak of the ice mountain, which remains almost entirely underwater. Because of the complex nature of the multilingual practice, we are far from concluding how we can do to multilingual practice in order to create a better life for individuals and the whole society; but the history have already taught us a lot in how improper handling of multilingualism can harm us in a various way, and how taking the advantage of multilingualism can boost the success human beings.

**Citation**

1. *Rethinking multilingualism : issues and problems* / edited by Shailendra Kumar Singh. Guwahati : EBH Publishers (India), c2009. [ISBN 9788190781237] (#002460233)

2. *Globalization and language in contact : scale, migration and communicative practices* / edited by James Collins, Stef Slembrouck and Mike Baynham. London ; New York : Continuum, c2009. [ISBN 9780826497987] (#002549366)

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4. *A step Forward*, Mengqi (Ivy) Liu, <http://ivytequila.weebly.com/a-step-forward.html>

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