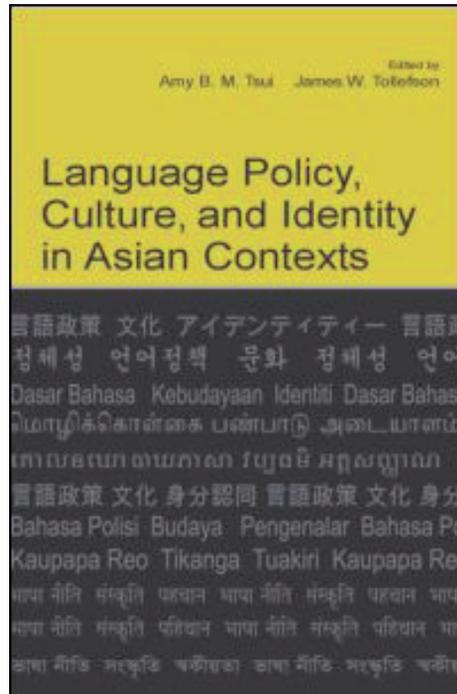


Book Review

Bal Krishna Sharma

The last few decades have witnessed an unprecedented spread of English worldwide. This has had a great influence in the language policies and practices in countries where English is used as a second or a foreign language. As a country that underwent a drastic political change after a decade long Maoist insurgency to comprehensive peace agreement to abolition of monarchy to introduction of republican state, Nepal has seen an upsurge in issues of language policy. The political changes have exerted influences as well as created conditions for language policy changes both in education as well as in status and role of vernacular languages. The number of English medium schools has increased more than ever before, mother

tongue education program has been started in more than eighteen local languages, and all languages spoken in the country have been recognized as national languages. Such changes have rarely been acknowledged or reported in the applied linguistics scholarship in terms of academic publications. The present book *Language Policy, Culture, and Identity in Asian Contexts* includes one chapter on language issues in Nepal and also provides a basis



Language Policy, Culture, and Identity in Asian Contexts

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to compare and contrast those issues with other twelve countries in the Asian context. This volume by Tsui and Tollefson is a welcome addition in the existing body of literature in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. It explores how the globalization of English is reflected in language and education policies and practices of Asian countries, and how this affects the relationship between language, culture and national identities. The book is organized into three thematic sections which provide case studies of twelve different Asian countries. These three sections are preceded by an introduction chapter in the beginning and a concluding chapter at the end.

The first part of the three thematic sections consists of five chapters which discuss the case studies of five Asian countries, and mostly focuses on how these countries have responded to the globalization of English in their government policy documents. Hashimoto in Chapter 2 notes that the Japanese government has realized the increased value of the English language, and English is seen as an asset to enrich Japanese culture fostering bilingualism and multilingualism. Similarly, Sungwon in Chapter 3 argues that

Korean government regards English as a powerful tool to compete with the outer world, and English textbooks and curricula do not only represent globalization but also reflect Korean national identity with the inclusion of Korean history, cultural values, social facts, etc. Chapter 4 offers David and Govindaswamy's analysis of English textbooks written by local textbook where they present a balanced approach taken by these textbook writers to present content from both global and local perspectives. In Chapter 5, Chew's study shows that Singaporean users of English are motivated more by pragmatic value of language, and standard variety of English has attracted the younger generation at the cost of local language varieties. Chapter 6 offers Clayton's arguments on political and cultural transition of Cambodia, and its future challenges to incorporate minority linguistic and cultural groups to foster multilingualism and multiculturalism in the country.

Part two of the volume entitled 'language policy and the (re)construction of national cultural identity' has three chapters which present case studies from Hong Kong, Brunei and New Zealand. Tsui in Chapter 7 discusses in length the colonial history and its impact in language education policy of Hong Kong. Tsui reports that though Hong Kong's adoption of the Chinese language as medium of instruction in schools has connected its history and cultural traditions with China again, there is still a tension between globalization and nationalism in shaping language policy. Saxena in Chapter 8 discusses the ideological tension between socio-cultural philosophies of Hinduism, Islamic and Western thoughts, and policy pressures from above and sociolinguistic practices from below are crucial factors for forming and reforming of multilingual and multicultural identities in Brunei. Benton (Chapter 9) provides a succinct account of Maori people's struggle to revitalize the Maori language without excluding English. Benton notes that there still is unequal power relationship between English and the Maori language. These chapters in Part two explore the language policies from historical perspective, and focus on the changes and conflicting discursive practices for identity construction before

and after colonization.

Part three consists of four chapters on India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. These chapters discuss the positive and negative roles played by the English language, and role of English in multilingual and multicultural conflicts in those countries. Agnihotri in Chapter 10 points out that language has been used to achieve political ends in the history of India, and shows that dominance of English and Hindi in India has marginalized other languages like Hindustani. In Chapter 12, Rahman, based on his survey, argues that English has promoted the hegemony of elites by marginalizing the local languages. He, therefore, suggests that English-medium schools be phased out and Urdu and other Pakistani languages be used in schools. Hossain and Tollefson in Chapter 13 bring the picture of Bangladesh where English-medium education has been confined to the urban middle and upper class people for their access to higher education and employment. These chapters on South Asian contexts show that English has played an 'empowerment role' for a handful of elites, but at the same time it is a socio-economic divider between *haves* and *have-nots*.

Because most readers of this review will be English teachers in Nepal, let me more elaborately summarize the Chapter on Nepal. Sonntag in Chapter 11 shows how political movement can be instrumental in social inclusion of linguistic minority groups in Nepal. Sonntag situates Nepal's multilingualism and language policy in the country's broad politico-historical context first and then moves on to the political and educational tensions created by English and local languages both inside and outside educational policy and practices. This is followed by the author's attempt to explain Nepal's present language policy in the global context. She is aware that English is creating a gap between *haves* and *have-nots*, further allowing the social stratification of the society in terms of socio-economic backgrounds of the people. She also points out that English has been a powerful tool to fight against the dominance of the Nepali language by the language minorities. Interested readers should explore into further details.

The greatest strength of the book lies in its presentation of issues of language, culture and identity from both local and global perspectives in both policy and practice levels. The chapters offer discussions and debates on language-related issues of countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Brunei, Cambodia, etc. which have not been much featured in publications for the international audience. The contributors are the scholars who are either the researchers of the respective countries or the people who have spent significant span of time in those countries so that their arguments and observations provide more emic perspectives. They not only express their perspectives on issues of language and society, they also provide evidences through empirical research findings. The introduction chapter is quite successful in guiding the readers on what to expect in the rest of the text, and the final chapter quite succinctly summaries what has been discussed in the previous chapters. Some chapter contributors, however, are less successful than others in making the material accessible to its readers. In addition, some chapters within each thematic section vary in their focus and length in the discussion of issues; readers, therefore, cannot easily expect to make a parallel comparison of the issues and perspectives across different countries within each section. Since the editors focus that this volume will be of use for university students as a course book (p. viii), I would have loved the book even the more if had given some discussion questions at the end

of each chapter. University students and researchers should nevertheless consult other complementary materials for the comprehensive discussion of the issues. As far as the English teachers in Nepal are concerned, the book provides a useful resource to reflect on the political and consequent language changes in Nepal, and interpret those changes taking reference to the internal changes as well as changes in the global context. The readers can compare Nepal's language policy with other Asian nations and draw implications for multilingual policy on language education.

Overall, Tsui and Tollefson's contribution fills a gap of a dearth of such materials in the field, and its coverage of issues and perspectives and their detailed accounts overshadow its subtle weaknesses. This volume is one of the very few resources of its kind and will be equally useful for novice and experienced researchers and students in the field of sociolinguistics, language policy and planning, education, applied linguistics and critical pedagogy.

Bal Krishna Sharma is an East-West Center scholar at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He is currently doing his M. A. in Second Language Studies in the same university specializing in language and social interaction. He also teaches an academic writing course to international graduate students, both online and face to face. He is interested in discourse and conversation analysis, critical pedagogy and technology use in language teaching. Bal Krishna is one of the founding members and great contributors of *NeltaChoutari*— an online blog for the English teachers in Nepal. He is a life member of NELTA as well as one of the editors of the present volume of this journal.