Book Review

Citation: Gruenewald, D. A., & Salsbury, T. L. (2006, October 5). [Review of *Reclaiming the local in language policy and practice*]. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 21*(11). Retrieved [date] from http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/21-11.pdf

Reclaiming the Local in Language Policy and Practice. A. Suresh Canagarajah (Ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: 2005, 297 pp., ISBN 0-8058-4593-3.

Reviewed by

David A. Gruenewald and Thomas L. Salsbury
Washington State University

Reclaiming the Local in Language Policy and Practice illustrates the tensions between local language and the teaching of English around the world. The settings for the 11 case studies are incredibly diverse (only two in the United States) and all involve some discussion of indigenous communities and their responses to the pressures of economic and political globalization.

Though on the surface this book may appeal mostly to those with interests in English language teaching and/or sociolinguistics, it is fundamentally a book about local places and local people and how they are responding—at the level of community and culture—to globalization. This book serves as a provocative reminder to monolingual English-dominated academics and researchers that the language we take for granted is contested currency and is at the heart of local conflicts over global change. Each of the chapters shows how developing an understanding of a community's cultural practices is necessarily also about understanding a community's language practices. Linguists have always known this, of course. But the standardization and globalization of English has meant that most academics and educators do not think much about how their own language has local, geopolitical roots and represents only one of many ways of thinking and expressing cultural experience. One of the many virtues of Canagarajah's volume is to present Anglophone readers the great variety of language and the great diversity of cultures still thriving in specific places around the world.

Before proceeding with our review, we wish to note that reviewing this book provided us with an opportunity to work together that we may otherwise not have had. Though we work in the same Department of Teaching and Learning, Tom's role in English as a Second Language and David's role in Foundations of Education and Cultural Studies have, until now, kept us from sharing the same conversation. This book is powerful to us because it shows how important it is that our two specialties merge more than they have.

A Cultural Studies' Lens on Language

Canagarajah's chapter ("Reconstructing Local Knowledge, Reconfiguring Language Studies") locates this work in the field of cultural studies and emphasizes current conflicts between local experience and the increasingly globalized world of politics and economics. This theoretical chapter is valuable grounding for the cases that follow, and it is also worth considering by itself, especially for its implications for rural experience and education. The editor's view of the local has a critical, postcolonial perspective that is often missing from conversations about renewing the local in the United States. Canagarajah differentiates between a modernist and postmodern context for the relationship between the local and global: "If modernist globalization tried to eradicate local knowledge, postmodern globalization incorporates it in its own terms. If modernism suppressed difference, postmodern globalization works through localities by appropriating difference" (Canagarajah, p. 8). From a postmodern, cultural studies perspective, the power of globalization on local people and places should not be seen as an ultimate colonizing power, but as a network of changing relationships that are everywhere contested and negotiated. This does not mean that postmodern colonization is any less powerful or any less destructive than modernist colonization, nor does it mean that modernism and its exploitative conditions of industrialization have come to an end. Canagarajah only wants readers to consider that the impact of globalization can really only be understood by examining local contexts,

Correspondence concerning this review should be addressed to David A. Gruenewald, Department of Teaching and Learning, Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164-2132. (dgruenewald@wsu.edu)

and that these local contexts are best understood at the level of local language practices.

The development of local knowledge through the interplay of language is a topic that should be of particular interest to rural educators. What kinds of knowledge production, in other words, should rural educators attend to? What kind of education will best serve the rural (or indigenous) community now and in the long run? Though this volume does not explicitly link such questions to a rural United States context, its case studies of other places, cultures, and languages everywhere hint at the kinds of questions rural educators might ask themselves. Canagarajah provides an interesting perspective on local knowledge that may help educators appreciate the implications of the case studies for rural education:

> Local knowledge is a process—a process of negotiating dominant discourses and engaging in an ongoing construction of relevant knowledge in the context of our history and social practice. . . . Ideally, this epistemological practice envisions not just changing the content of knowledge, but the terms of knowledge construction. Rather than merely replacing one set of constructs with another, this practice aims to relentlessly critique and democractize knowledge construction. (Canagarajah, p. 13)

This is what this volume can help do for rural educators: change, or at least call into question, the terms of knowledge construction. What follows is a discussion of several of the case studies and some concluding thoughts about the relevance of the volume to our own research and teaching.

Case Studies: Contested Knowledges, Local/Global Tensions

Many of the chapters in the volume (e.g., Bhatt's "Expert Discourses, Local Practices, and Hybridity: The Case of Indian Englishes," Ryon's "Language Death Studies and Local Knowledge: The Case of Cajun French," and Rajagopalan's "The Language Issue in Brazil: When Local Knowledge Clashes with Expert Knowledge") deal with the tension between expert and local knowledge or high status and low status knowledge. Drawing on Foucault, Bhatt presents the idea of expert discourses and ties it into notions of authenticity, authority, and proper knowledge that "denigrate local knowledge practices and promote the global norm" (p. 28). At issue in this chapter is the status of local varieties of Indian English, which are competing against Standard Indian English, the variety of English in India that approximates the global norm. Bhatt's chapter opens with a brief history of English in colonial India when English was the medium of education and "interface with the civilized colonizers" (p. 27). In today's India, many local varieties of English now exist, but these are reduced to the status of Pidgin.

Like Ryon's chapter on Cajun French, Bhatt questions the paradigms of the academic disciplines whose mission it is to study language learning and sociolinguistic phenomena. The author questions typical dichotomies in sociolinguistic research such as standard-nonstandard language, native-nonnative speakers, language-interlanguage, and target-fossilized, referring to these dichotomies as habits of thought in professional research and educational organizations such as Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Many language teaching professionals and defenders of localism will be sympathetic to Bhatt's unveiling of biases against nativized Englishes which for too long have been categorized as fossilized, nonstandard varieties. By extension, the discussion fits into the current debate surrounding the issue of nonnative English *teachers* of English as an additional language. Nonnative English teachers compete with native English speakers for jobs and professional recognition, and they are under greater pressure to show their proficiency in the language in addition to their expertise at teaching the language. Accents can be interpreted as a lack of proficiency—where this interpretation may in reality reflect a bias toward a nativized variety of English.

Bhatt masterfully recasts the dichotomies of standard-nonstandard language and native-nonnative speaker by illustrating three dimensions of hybrids between English and the local language and culture in India. First, Bhatt shows how linguistic forms such as undifferentiated tag questions in unassertive and mitigated tags (*You said you'll do the job, isn't it?*) blend the local, cultural norms into the medium of English. Second, code switching and code mixing allow "multilingual experiences of cultural differences as well as a sense of entanglement of different cultural traditions" (p. 41). Examples are given of untranslated Hindi idioms in English-speaking newspapers which require knowledge of works such as the Ramayana and which function as vehicles of cultural memory. Code switching between English and Hindi enables "representation of local-indigenous social and cultural practices in a global idiom" (p. 43). Finally, Bhatt illustrates hybridity in literary forms that subvert and corrupt the "purity" of English. Examples come from selected writings of Salman Rushdie.

In Chapter 3, Ryon continues the central theme of *expert discourses* and their accompanying dismissal of local knowledge. Ryon sets out to show that academic orientations to a phenomenon, in this case the "loss" of Cajun French, are in stark contrast to the realities lived by local communities. Drawing even more heavily from Foucault, the author links expert discourses or "the regime of truth" to trends in classifying linguistic minorities in the academic literature. Ryon cites examples of researchers' lack of interest in real community efforts at Cajun French immersion programs and other linguistic preservation efforts. Ryon argues that

research disseminated among the target community has the potential to raise the level of confidence in language revival efforts. However, research on Cajun French presents a "distorted, unilateral and fragmented representation" (p. 57) of the lived experiences of the Cajun French speakers, which focuses only on linguistic loss and not on linguistic recovery.

Ryon's critique of the academic community's one-sided portrayal of language loss is valid and powerful. We are reminded that, as researchers, we find support for the phenomena we seek, but it is often the unsought phenomena that carry the greater weight, particularly to those for whom it is a lived reality. Ryon turns to local folk songs and poetry to make this point and to address attitudes toward *assimilation*, the final topic in the chapter. The assimilation of Cajun French speakers into mainstream culture tends to be portrayed as a natural and peaceful process. However, not documented are the repressive measures and institutional intimidations that maintain this process. The evidence that Ryon presents from local folk songs and poetry express language loss and assimilation as a "painful, humiliating, confusing process; one that brings both despair and anger" (p. 64). The claims that Ryon makes are well founded, although other sources of ethnographic data, such as interviews and focus groups, would strengthen the arguments regarding both the revival of Cajun French as well as the process of assimilation.

Expert discourses play a major role in establishing language policy and may actually hurt a majority group, in whose benefit the language policies are initially established. In the chapter, "Negotiating a Language Policy for Malaysia: Local Demand for Affirmative Action Versus Challenges from Globalization," David and Govindasamy present the historical context for the establishment of Bahasa Malay as the unifying or national language for Malaysia. In the aftermath of independence from Great Britain, English-medium schools were converted to Malay schools. Two other major ethnic groups (Chinese and Indian) were forced to make this conversion as well. However, non-Malays believed that an English education opened doors to a more global perspective and a "better life," so these communities opened vernacular elementary schools to teach English along with the mother tongue (Mandarin or Tamil). Nevertheless, secondary schools and all institutions of higher learning require fluency in Malay; thus, minority students were, and continue to be, under immense pressure to be academically fluent in the national language.

Today non-Malays are frequently tri-lingual while the majority Malay ethnic group is increasingly monolingual. The authors describe the Malay language policy implemented after independence as a kind of language policy affirmative action. They are critical of the hastily implemented policy that was designed to empower the historically disempowered; that is, the policy rhetoric was to unite the diverse population of Malaysia with a single language and culture. Instead, they argue that ethnic Malays' lack of proficiency in English poses a threat to their ability to compete in the global markets vital to the national economy. Such an observation has caused the Malay government much concern, prompting it to liberalize education with English-medium schools and more emphasis placed on proficiency in English. David and Govindasamy conclude by pointing out the irony that local knowledge among the minority Chinese and Indian ethnic groups in Malaysia emphasizes translocal interests and values.

With this insight, David and Govindasamy introduce another recurring theme in the volume: local communities thinking (and acting) translocally. In Chapter 2, Bhatt shows how Indian Englishes are the medium through which communities disseminate local practices to a global audience. David and Govindasamy's presentation in Chapter 6 of the efforts by minority Indian and Chinese groups in Malaysia to educate their children in the mother tongue, English, and the national language have contributed to these groups' ability to successfully compete in global markets. In contrast to these pictures of successful translocal communities, Utakis and Pita in Chapter 7 ("An Educational Policy for Negotiating Transnationalism: The Dominican Community in New York City") present a sobering picture of failed educational policy in New York City with the transnational Dominican community whose lives are divided between families and culture in the Dominican Republic and, in the United States, higher paying jobs and a chance for a "better life." Dominican children living in New York City are forced to carve out a transnational identity in the face of severe discrimination and poverty, suffering from low educational attainment and low levels of English literacy. As a result, Utakis and Pita claim that many Dominicans are forced to remain transnational to overcome blocked opportunities in the United States.

The authors are critical of language policy in New York City, which seeks to replace the students' native languages with English as a necessary and desirable part of the process of Americanization. Replacing Spanish with English is an unacceptable choice for Dominicans who then suffer academically when they return to the Dominican Republic and study in Spanish-medium schools. The authors provide suggestions for a pedagogy that better serves a transnational community, calling for more cooperation from educational and governmental organizations as well as adaptations of practices at the local level. They cite the notion of language planning from the bottom up and the reinterpretation of bilingual education as giving equal status to both English and Spanish. They also call for the development of a bicultural curricula with materials that are relevant to students' lives and that include local knowledge, community-based texts and vernacular resources. The authors recommend integrating Dominican history with a special emphasis on the relationship between the United States and the Dominican Republic. Finally, they advocate critical pedagogy around

issues of language variation and the relationship between language and power.

Issues of identity and the concept of "self" tie together the discussion of local, transnational communities. The Dominican students discussed in Chapter 7 struggle with the dual identity of being simultaneously Dominican and American. Then, in Chapter 8 ("Convergence and Resistance in the Construction of Personal and Professional Identities: Four French Modern Language Teachers in London"), Block presents a portrait of four French nationals living in London and teaching French as a foreign language. Interviews with the participants reveal dissatisfaction with the British National Curriculum and the students they teach, whom they characterize as lacking in knowledge about grammar, both English and French, and desirous of nothing short of spoon feeding. They complain that English students lack discipline, an ability to self-correct, and preparedness for class. What is most relevant in this chapter to the discussion of "self" is Block's claim that the young, fairly inexperienced teachers "invoke an imagined French way of teaching and learning" (p. 185), one based not on actual teaching experience in France but rather on a particular "discourse of education which is 'out there'" (p. 186): a kind of symbolic reserve. Foreign nationals teaching language in a host environment can well identify with the feelings of frustration articulated in the interviews that appear in this chapter. In fact, Block refers to the general benefit of the interviews to the professional development of the teachers, providing a space for them to unload their frustrations, talk about and reflect on teaching practices, and feel empowered in a largely disempowering educational context (or perception of disempowerment). It is through confronting serious educational and cultural differences and then talking about this that teachers work "dialectically toward a third place pedagogical identity" (p. 192).

Whereas Chapter 7 of the volume focuses on *teachers* in the discussion of "self," Jasmine Luk in Chapter 11 ("Voicing the 'Self' through and 'Other' Language: Exploring Communicative Language Teaching for Global Communication") concentrates on students developing the notion "self" or "voice" through foreign language learning. The chapter looks at the case of English language training in Hong Kong. At issue is the applicability of the Communicative approach to Language Teaching (CLT) that has predominated in most English language training curricula over the past two decades. The author argues that successful CLT must provide genuine opportunities for students to express their lives and that it needs to assert local identities, interests and values. She illustrates her point by contrasting two CLT classrooms. In the first classroom, we see students uttering words in the target-language, English, in a contrived communicative event (*finding grandma's false teeth*) in which the students' own meaning and expression—their voice—are completely absent. Luk paints a convincing picture of the "unbearable boredom" (p. 256) of the students in this setting, adding that the technique of pairs negotiating in the target language to find information that the partner has (an *information gap*) is a hallmark of CLT. In contrast to this first case, Luk describes a second foreign language classroom that is largely teacher-centered in that the teacher is guiding the discussion. However, unlike the first case, students are engaged in genuine dialogue with the teacher and the class as a whole. Although there is no space in the class for pair or group work, the teacher allows ample opportunities for students to make their voices heard in a whole-class setting.

What this chapter says to us is that ultimately learning an additional language is about making that language one's own. It is not the act of communicating just to communicate but rather the expression of one's identity, beliefs and being in meaningful discourse. The teacher in the second case scenario appears to have engaged his students more successfully than the teacher in the first scenario by making the content and discussion relevant to the students' local reality. Luk shows us an effective hybrid teaching technique (communicative classroom with a traditional teacher-centered approach), countering the "expert discourse" which would warn against such an approach to language teaching.

English as a Necessary Evil

Educators in the United States often assume that English is synonymous with language, that English is the only language, or that proficiency in standard English is a prerequisite for success in education. *Reclaiming the Local* calls such assumptions into question on several levels. First, the varieties of languages, and the varieties of Englishes throughout the world, are expressive of diverse cultural experiences and ways of knowing that ought to be embraced and developed in students, rather than subjugated. Rather than assimilation through English as a second or foreign language, this book presents an alternative view of language use, and teaching, in local contexts. We see multiple examples of communities working to maintain their local identities in a globalized world that threatens those identities. In some cases, these communities have nativized English in ways that express local history and development. In other cases, we see communities protecting themselves from the spread of English just as some communities are protecting themselves from the spread of "big box retailers." In some places, such as Brazil, globalization through English is seen by many as a negative cultural force.

One of our insights after reading this book is that in a multilingual, global context, English as a lingua franca is a necessary evil for many individuals and communities. That is, it is necessary from a utilitarian perspective, but that it comes with risks to culture and identity. In today's world, we see uprooted communities that take advantage of global communication and transportation to improve their economic conditions. However, foreign students in American class-

room, or anywhere, are misunderstood if we believe that their desire is to become Americanized. If cultural pluralism is a value in American education, at the very least, we can recognize that multiple varieties of English exist. Listening to these varieties can potentially teach us about a world we too often ignore, or assume we know and understand.