

## Book Review

### **Dynamic Ecologies: A relational perspective on languages education in the Asia-Pacific region**

Neil Murray and Angela Scarino (Eds.). Springer, 2014. 233 pp. ISBN: 978-94-007-7972-3

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Globalisation has not only reinforced the role of English as a *lingua franca*, but has also caused English to significantly influence other languages in many parts of the world. *Dynamic Ecologies: A Relational Perspective on Languages Education in the Asia-Pacific Region* is a welcome addition to Springer's *Multilingual Education* series about roles of multiple languages in contexts. This book offers a clear and comprehensive view of how languages, especially English, are intertwined with cultures; and how they coexist to form a larger ecology in a community. Divided into three parts, the book illustrates in detail how locally available languages in the Asia-Pacific region interact in policy-making, language use and language learning practice. Part I (Chapters 1 – 8) provides in-depth analyses on the changing dynamics between English, mother tongues, and other second languages in various Asian countries, and Part II (Chapters 9 – 13) discusses the challenges of teaching, learning and assessment of Asian languages in Australia. Part III (Chapter 14) summarises some of the tensions caused by the competition for space between languages, and offers valuable insights of the implications for linguistic diversity. Given the focus of this journal on English within Asian contexts, this review will concentrate on the first part of the book.

The introductory chapter lays the foundation for the chapters that follow by explaining the impact of globalisation on the increasingly multicultural and multilingual world. The authors call for a relational view of languages and cultures because language learners today need to develop their intercultural communicative capabilities while learning the language in the context of the target language community. They explain that tensions and conflicts occur, which require language users and learners to mediate meanings. Chapter 3 also revisits shifting attitudes from the monolithic to the plurilithic view of English and discusses the consequent impacts on pedagogy, learning, assessment, planning and politics. Some of these influences are exemplified in Chapter 4 in relation to the multi-ethnic nation of Singapore, with discussion of the struggle between glocal and global roles of English as the working language. Chapter 5 cites examples from Australian politicians to illustrate the internal competition in the role of English and other Asian languages because Australia, 'the torn country', is trying to be recognised as an 'integral' part of Asia (p. 59). This is similar to the conflict in Malaysia between Malay as the official and national language and English which evolved from a colonial to a foreign, and eventually a global language (Chapter 8).

Apart from tension in the broader societal context, the book also touches on ecologies in the education sector. Chapter 2 discusses why a growing number of universities in Asia are adopting English as the medium of instruction (EMI) but shows that alongside their attempts to attract international students and raise their international profile, there is a lack of language policy to protect the status of local languages. This is echoed in Chapter 6 in which the profound impact of internationalisation initiatives in a Hong Kong university is discussed. At the other end of the educational continuum, Chapter 7 looks at how early English education in Changzhou, China is affected by parental social economic status and beliefs.

Each of the eight chapters in Part I provides an inspiring and detailed view of the complex language ecologies of some of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region. These chapters draw on the research and insights of prominent scholars in the field and successfully demonstrate how languages impact on one another. Of particular interest is how the authors envision the future implications of the struggles between English and local languages, and how these disruptions can generate new opportunities to learn English and Asian languages. Perhaps the book would have been strengthened with the inclusion of a wider range of Asia-Pacific countries and with more cross-border comparisons. It should also be noted that, although not covered in this review, about half of the book examines the consequences of an Australian Government white paper designed to strengthen the importance of Asian languages, namely Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian and Japanese, in the region. This may be a strength or weakness of the book depending on readers' interests.

*Dynamic Ecologies: A Relational Perspective on Languages Education in the Asia-Pacific Region* is of great value to researchers in education, key stakeholders and policy-makers in the field of language policy and education, as well as general readers. It is an up-to-date guide from renowned experts offering a stimulating and inspiring read to invoke reflection about languages from a relational viewpoint which echoes van Lier's (2004) point that ecology is not just a handy metaphor for applied linguistics, but a profound opportunity and challenge for practitioners and researchers.

### **About the reviewer**

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### **References**

- van Lier, L. (2004). *The ecology and semiotics of language learning: A sociocultural perspective*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.