

Gupta, V., Agnihotri, R.K. and Panda, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Education and Inequality: Historical and Contemporary Trajectories*. Orient Blackswan, 776 pages, Rs. 1650.

Reviewed by Jyoti Raina

This edited anthology presents a broad-based problem of the relationship between education and inequality from cross-disciplinary points across history, education, psychology, economics, political theory, linguistics, and natural science. It is divided into five parts, each part with five chapters. This review is limited to part three of the volume. The central element of the five chapters in part three is language inequality.

Agnihotri, in Chapter 12, endows language with dynamism, diversity and fluidity rather than an object. He proposes multilinguality, defined as a wide array of linguistic entities that draw from an innate universal language faculty as the 'reality of human condition', firmly wired in the brain. He elaborates that such a view of language makes it unnecessary to maintain conventional demarcations of the L1 and L2 languages

or attempt standardization which teachers tend to do in the formal teaching contexts. This chapter highlights that learning theories (from early behavioural theories like Watson, Skinner and Tolman to works of European psychologists in Piagetian tradition and Russian psychologist Vygotsky's theory) do not provide an adequate account of *the full* range of language learning witnessed in children. So, it may be useful to study how children have an innate language faculty to acquire any language, mainly involving the synchronization of the universal grammar to the language of the community. The chapter presents application-oriented theoretical arguments about the relationship between language and learning, stressing that language cannot be viewed as "vocal responses to stimuli" (Wood, 1988, p. 117) but involves the development of a system of grammatical rules that "children acquire when they discover how to understand and produce speech" (Ibid).

In Chapter 13, Kathleen Heugh argues that perspectives on linguistic diversity are based on frameworks from the global north. Even though the latter may be in criticality, they make for a less than whole understanding of southern viewpoints. She explains that a dominantly northern understanding of multilingualism is 'ahistorical', 'contextually limited' and extends to only select human endeavours. Northern epistemologies, in some ways, view multilingualism as a concept that in certain ways parallels monolingualism. On the other hand, the southern theory considers it a 'human linguistic facility which allows communication that utilizes the entire linguistic repertoire'. This may well be among the reasons for the failure of colonial and postcolonial literacy and education programmes drawn from global north epistemes for more than the last 150 years. There is a widely perceived general all-around failure in learning to read, to which arguably the policy response has been emphasising on foundational literacy. However, language learning remains an elusive ideal calling for a re-think of language pedagogies in schools.

Minati Panda, in Chapter 14, critiques India's language policy for remaining a 'politically imposed' project of linguistic and social assimilation aligned with state and market forces. Language policy and planning based on the ideas of home speech communities, mother tongue, the three-language formula and home language have resulted in a pyramidal structure. So, when more than one language was used in education, languages appeared hierarchically, resulting in a monolingual

education system. Consequently, home language disappears quite quickly in favour of regional language, and national language in favour of other international languages. The absence of equal access to education is thus not the only factor that leads to educational inequality, but language inequities play their role in perpetuating it. Our Constitution envisioned education as an equalizer, but language policy and practice have drifted our society in the opposite direction. An alternative could be a praxis-based pedagogical paradigm of multilinguality, multilingual education and southern epistemological frameworks; this may be the much-needed panacea in Indian school education. For example, understanding the concept of multilinguality erases hierarchies between languages, varieties, and dialects inside the classroom. They provide a direction to teachers on how to use multilinguality as a linguistic and cognitive resource, with possibilities to transact knowledge of all kinds in all languages. Multilinguality also implies that students from social backgrounds of languages of lesser power do not suffer the disadvantage in school learning since all languages are epistemological equals. Multilinguality and multilingual education offer the possibility of turning them into equal participants in the education project. Advocacy for the first language-based multilingual education programmes and resulting language pedagogy to support school language learning has been regarded as an aspect of equity in language learning (Jhingran, 2017).

Chapter 15 is Agnihotri's second contribution to part three, which analyses the draft national education policy (DNEP) 2019. The draft celebrates Indian languages in general and Sanskrit, particularly. At the same time, Agnihotri articulates a broader case for valuing multilinguality, multilingualism and all languages. DNEP 2019 ignores the critical question of education in languages of lesser power which has slipped from the policy radar. He eloquently explains the theoretical unsoundness of the three-language formula, which continues to be an important part of language policy. He clarifies that human nature can acquire two to three languages, especially if they are part of the learner's community in informal contexts. This educability, however, does not necessarily transfer to a formal teaching-learning context where learners may not exhibit the same natural tendency to learn several languages as a school subject. This learning gap is exaggerated when the second or third language is not a part of the learner's social context, which

is the case sometimes for the three languages selected as part of the three-language formula. DNEP 2019 is a companion text to National Education Policy (NPE) 2020 that is currently being implemented. The latter is far less detailed than the former. Nevertheless, the chapter has undiminished relevance since these policy texts draw from the same economistic orientation, essentializing observable learning outcomes while overlooking structural inequality (Raina, 2021, p. 29). NPE 2020 policy text speaks of a complete restructuring of the school education to a new 5+3+2+2 system in which children begin to attend school at a tender age with the danger of formalizing childhood experiences in the name of foundational learning and literacy.

The pitfalls of a formal approach to language education become resonant as part three opens with: Kumar Shahani's Chapter 11 speaks of cinematic attempts to bring together the essential human qualities inherent in language that are frequently embedded in oral cultures but 'transmit themselves and with it, the full weight of history'. Thus, language functions as a humanizing tool replete with the possibility of action, something that writing may not always capture. The votaries of early literacy in school settings need to be alerted by these foundations of linguistics.

Social reproduction through education (Bourdieu, 1992) is a widely acknowledged empirical reality in India, as in most other parts of the world. The volume's greatest strength is that it highlights this worrying outcome of social exclusion through education that excludes the majority of our populace and their languages, knowledge, and worldviews. The book is further valuable for teachers and education practitioners as it does not just catalogue theory, research and principles as mere technicalities but raises key questions and offers a variety of possibilities in language education. Are we wired for learning a language? How does language acquisition occur? What is the role of formal instruction in the process of language learning? The possibilities emanate from understanding that no language is more competent than the other, and multilinguality and multilingual education can serve as the basis for an alternative praxis-based language education programme to recover critical thought.

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Jyoti Raina teaches at the Department of Elementary Education, Gargi College in the University of Delhi. For a longer review of this book, see her publication in *Social Scientist*, 50(3-4).

[jyoti.raina@gargi.du.ac.in](mailto: jyoti.raina@gargi.du.ac.in)