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# Anthropology Book Forum

Open Access Book Reviews

## **Communication and Articulating Identity: A Cultural Approach**

**Review by Rafal Kleczek**

*Language and Identity across Modes of Communication*

by Dwi Noverini Djenar, Ahmar Mahboob, and Ken Cruickshank (eds)

De Gruyter Mouton, 2015

The anthology *Language and Identity across Modes of Communication* is an excellent publication, both for those looking for an introduction to contemporary research focusing on its central themes, and for those attracted by a particular subject covered by one of the chapters. A broad range of subjects treated by fifteen contributors makes the publication of interest to scholars from a diverse range of fields, not only linguistic anthropology, but also the anthropology of modernity, education, and impact of modern communication techniques on social behaviour.

The skillful arrangement of the anthology makes it accessible also for beginners in the field. The first three chapters, dealing respectively with communities of practice, style and quantitative research methods, provide basic information necessary to access the more intricate, research-oriented chapters. The chapter written by Brian Paltridge relates the theory of communities of practice to the subject matter of identity and language. The chapter by Mary Bucholtz analyzes style, its construction and transformation, and interprets it as a mode of social action. An account by Miriam Meyerhoff on the use of quantitative research methods presents an analysis of data gathered by the researcher during her recent fieldwork on a Caribbean island Bequia, simultaneously reflecting on the place of quantitative methods in sociolinguistic research.

Ken Cruickshank, in his chapter, presents research on community language schools in Australia, a point of departure for a reflection on the hybrid identities of transnational families. The chapter of Linda Tsung is concerned with the subject of second language learning in Hong Kong, with a particular focus on South Asian immigrant children, their identity and struggle against discrimination. Antonia

Rubino analyzes code-switching of an intergenerational conversation in a multilingual, Sicilian-Australian family.

Chapters written by Ahmar Mahboob, Nerida Jarkey and Wei Wang analyze the publishing industry as a means of promoting certain ideologies, identities and lifestyles. Mahboob's research is concerned with Pakistani school textbooks, particularly with biographies presented therein and the limited number of models offered to students. Research of Jarkey is concerned with identity management by *The Housewife's Companion*, a Japanese women's magazine, largely responsible for promoting the image of "professional housewife." Wang also presents an analysis of the contents of a magazine, the Chinese *Duzhe*, popular mostly among the underprivileged. The researcher undertakes analysis of narration and of formation of narrative identity.

Dwi Noverini Djenar looks at teen literature in Indonesia through the theoretical lens of style analysis. The main point of focus is authorial identity of teen literature writers. The chapter written by Sue Starfield is concerned with negotiating identity in academic writing in English, with particular attention to the use of the first person singular, "I". The piece is based largely on the author's own publishing and teaching experience and explores the theme of presence and absence of academic author in text. The chapter by Caroline Lipovsky is focused on the subject of professional identity constructed through Curriculum Vitae. Research, gathered in France, underlines importance and analyzes techniques of linguistic creation of identity in the process of applying for job. The following chapter, by Zuo Cheng Zhang, also analyzes the subject of professional identity. The focus here is the unfolding and creation of professional identity among Business English students at a Chinese university.

Jianxin Liu presents his research on online social visibility through the case study of a Chinese female blogger. The researcher analyzes the blog through the lens of performativity and indicates how the blog assists the user in creating identity beyond social class. The anthology concludes with Cynthia D. Nelson's chapter, devoted to the subject of stage identity. The author states the need for linguists to explore other modes of communication, presenting the idea of "performed research."

One could expect that an anthology comprising such a broad variety of subjects is a work lacking consistency. It is true that many authors did refer to different theories, and their research was based on different varieties of data. It comes as a pleasant surprise, though, that the editors put much effort into making the anthology accessible. Articles concerned with similar subjects are grouped together, in a manner which may at first appear counterintuitive. Chapters are not grouped according to the geographic or cultural region they are concerned with, and so, for example, several chapters based on Chinese data appear in several places of the anthology, but turns out to be well thought of, given structural or theoretical similarities. What could make the book more accessible is distinguishing

thematic sections. Abandoning these was a conscious decision of the editors, who wanted to maintain the conversational style of meetings and workshops in which the anthology was conceived. It should be added, that the introductory chapter explains the structure of the anthology in a very lucid manner.

Editors of the anthology, given the common subject of language and identity, possibly had to deal with instances of repetitive paragraphs between chapters. It would not be uncommon for more than one researcher to refer at length to the same theory. It is visible, though, that information exchange between members of the editorial team, as well as between authors themselves, was kept at a very high level. Not only are there no repetitions, authors often refer to works published in the same volume, whenever a theory proposed by another author is of significance.

Authors contributing their chapters are, with no exception, experts in their fields, and base their contributions on very sound research. Fieldwork, being the method of obtaining data for some chapters, was conducted recently, a circumstance that makes the publication of much value to anthropologists interested in respective fields. Competence of authors, whose contributions are based on analysis of literary sources, is also obvious. Chapters based on literary data contain valuable historical introductions.

**Rafal Kleczek** is a Sanskritologist pursuing his PhD in Indian theories of cognition at the University of Hyderabad. Besides Sanskrit, his interests include Tamil, linguistic and political anthropology, and comparative mythology.



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