



Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity. Fishman, Joshua, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 468 pp.

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As Joshua Fishman, editor of this ambitious volume, notes in the introduction, "the literature on ethnicity is already huge and is constantly being added to" (p. 3). Complexity, as well as scale, is an issue. The literature is not only huge, but it encompasses many disciplines and subspecialties in the social sciences and humanities. Fishman addresses this dilemma by dividing the volume into two sections: Part 1 covers Discipline and Topic Perspectives while Part 2 deals with Region and Language Perspectives. The 13 chapters in the Part 1 cover: economics, linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork, education of minorities, history, nationalism, political science, psychology, sign language and the Deaf community, social psychology, sociolinguistics, sociology, and second-language learning. In Part 2, chapters cover four regions/areas: the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. The authors are well known in their fields, but only four of the 31 authors are non-North American or non-European. The relative space given to different regions/countries is also revealing: the Americas and Europe (where fewer than 19 percent of the world's languages are spoken) are given 152 pages, while Africa, Asia, and the Pacific (where more than 81 percent of the world's languages are spoken) are covered in only 90 pages. Thus, for better or worse, the "world" presented here is largely viewed and theorized by Western-trained scholars writing in the world's most powerful language, English. If, as many of the authors claim, language and ethnicity are closely linked, perhaps this volume should be subtitled "A Western Perspective."

The *Handbook* includes a great variety of topics and approaches, and I find this to be its strength. Handbooks and encyclopedias are susceptible to dry, authoritative accounts of received wisdom. Few of the chapters fall into this category. While there are the inevitable redundancies and inconsistencies concerning definitions (e.g., ethnicity), chapter authors present a great deal of fascinating material and arguments debunking stereotypes. Some of the chapters are polemical and highly personal (for example, the chapters on African American Vernacular English, and Amerindians). Several chapters are especially useful in demonstrating the relevance of particular disciplines for the study of language and ethnicity. Francois Grin, in his chapter on economics, provides a lucid and informative account of how economic principles can be applied to assess the efficacy of language policies. The excellent chapter by Glyn Williams provides a history of the development of the field of sociology, especially in North America. Williams shows how "ethnicity" within sociology became a dichotomized construct, contrasting the normative/standard group—a unitary citizenry speaking a common language ("us"), and nonnormative/nonstandard groups—including those speaking other languages ("them").



The cure for the "problem" of nonnormativity, according to early American sociologists such as Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, is acculturation followed by assimilation (p. 172).

The naturalizing of a sociological construct (ethnicity) informs the widely held popular view that "reasonable" (modern) people should naturally become part of the culture of the state, speaking its language, while "irrational" (traditional) people tend to cling to their ethnic language and culture. This unistate monocultural/monolingual model continues to be the preferred norm throughout the European/Europeanized world, and tends either to be supported (overtly or covertly) by states and societies, or deconstructed and problematized by some scholars (as Williams has done in this chapter). Yet the prevalence of multilingualism and cultural hybridity throughout the non-Western (and, increasingly, Western) world suggests that traditional received views are no longer descriptively adequate. As Robert Phillipson notes, languages such as English are pluricentric and pluriethnic, and it is no longer possible to regard language and ethnicity as coterminous (p. 102). Phillipson argues: "to assume that a language is necessarily associated with its native speakers is a Western way of looking at linguistic identity, one that is remote from the reality of many non-Westerners for whom multilingualism is the norm" (p. 103).

The post-national world poses new challenges for the study of language and ethnicity. Joshua Fishman is concerned that language loss entails a "drastic change in the content of ethnic identity and behavior" (p. 451). Given current demographic trends and migration patterns, the forces of globalization and transnational capitalism, and the continuing pressures on the viability of thousands of minority languages competing in the market place with more powerful (i.e., more instrumentally functional) regional and world languages, his concern may be, quite literally, academic. Linguist Michael Krauss, in a paper at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1995, reported that only about 600 languages are assured of being around in 2100, or less than ten percent of the current number of oral languages.

This volume achieves its stated goals—it is accessible to nonspecialist readers and provides a wealth of interesting information for specialists. Yet one is left with the strong sense that the role of Western scholarship in creating analytic structures and discourses that have helped legitimize hierarchies of inequality throughout the world is not adequately addressed.

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