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Review of “Sustaining Linguistic Diversity: Endangered and Minority Languages and Language Varieties”

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Harris proposes and situates the “ways of knowing” domain of enquiry in Giambattista Vico’s notion of knowledge. This approach does not privilege “scientific” knowledge over kinds of knowledge and might be for some readers both a strength and a weakness of the volume. However, it is from the interweaving of these conversations on multiple approaches to conceptualizing, crafting, and re-presenting knowledge(s) in anthropology and human life that social theorists, ethnographers, and users of ethnographic methods, who often want to look like anthropologists without being one, can come to know and appreciate the contributors’ ways of knowing or not knowing.

This plurality of discourses and forms and levels of writing challenge the notion of complexity–simplicity and often demand other knowledge(s) on the part of the reviewer–reader, coming out of the field of education, who does a coreading, rereading, and sometimes a misreading of the text. I preface my critique with this statement conscious that it puts my own projections at risk. In so doing, I ask: Does the use of a translated version of text in one of the chapters impede the reader’s understanding and cognition? Are these “new” or “re-newed” approaches in the anthropology of experience and learning? That said, I recommend this text to scholars in higher education struggling with ways in which to make anthropological ways of knowing an integral aspect of learning and teaching practices of classes.

The increase in graduate student diversity and often their research interests make this even more useful and appropriate for scholars in education and anthropology. That is, if they are willing to benefit from other readings and different perspectives on ways of knowing. However, the readers–scholars must be open to (1) viewing “education” more broadly than what takes place in the “classroom” and (2) embracing personal and fieldwork experiences of scholars outside of the United States.

The scholars can therefore be said to have done an excellent job of sharing their ways of knowing and coming to know. Their interpretations of some of the taken-for-granted theories about practice, embodiment, learning, philosophy, and anthropological methodology make it a text that will stir the imaginations of critical thinkers.

Sustaining Linguistic Diversity: Endangered and Minority Languages and Language Varieties. Kendall A. King, Natalie Schilling-Estes, Lyn Fogle, Jia Jackie Lou, and Barbara Soukup, eds. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008. 238 pp.
Reviewed by Kara D. Brown, *University of South Carolina*

Linguists estimate that only five to ten percent of the world’s 6,000 spoken languages are “safe” from the threat of extinction over the next century. The loss of more than 5,000 languages would constitute a mass-extinction of the world’s cultural and linguistic diversity that has no parallel in human history. *Sustaining Linguistic Diversity: Endangered and Minority Languages and Language Varieties*, a selection of papers from the 2006 Georgetown University Round Table conference compiled by Kendall A. King and four colleagues, offers a global, interdisciplinary perspective on attempts to understand and slow this rapid linguistic and cultural demise.

The volume includes theoretical analyses and case studies of efforts to support lesser-used languages. The 15 chapters, many by prominent scholars of linguistics, anthropology, education policy, cultural studies, and English, are divided into three sections entitled “Defining,” “Documenting,” and “Developing.” The case studies

present recent research on language development and revitalization efforts in three primary geographic areas: the United States, including Miami, Black Appalachian, Navajo, and African American Vernacular English (AAVE); the United Kingdom and Ireland with Gaelic and Irish; and South America, consisting of Brazilian Portuguese, Quechua, and Guarani. Two famous language-revitalization cases—Maori and Hebrew—are also presented. The attention to theoretical and conceptual issues connected with linguistic diversity is strong and noteworthy, particularly Hornberger's continua of biliteracy and Lewis's and Leonard's separate discussions of endangerment.

The role of power in maintaining or undermining linguistic diversity runs throughout these diverse cases. Romaine writes, "language death does not happen in privileged communities; it happens to the disposed and disempowered" (p. 9). Many contributors to language preservation are rooted in disparities of power, including poverty, isolation, segregation, severe restrictions on travel both into and out of a place, and a strict censorship regime that inhibits the introduction of new ideas. Labov for example, finds residential segregation to be a major force in maintaining AAVE (ch. 15). None of these conditions, however, are consistent with a free society, nor do they offer viable policy options. Moreover, the location of endangered-language speakers in these marginalized economic, sociocultural, and political spaces, although sometimes contributing to language preservation, also denies them opportunities for financial and cultural development.

One of the major strengths of this text is the attention across chapters to the complex relationship between policy and language change. Several cases illustrate the unintended effects of "successful" policies to support linguistic diversity. Ó hIfearnáin finds the standardization of Irish, although beneficial and essential for its development as a national language, has also contributed to language loss through the "new hierarchies of prestige," which have developed alongside the written standard (p. 127). Shohamy warns of unintended sociopolitical developments based on her research of the revival of Hebrew. She cautions that language revival and protection "may lead to supremacy and domination of some groups while marginalizing others" (p. 205). Labov suggests that policies aiming to improve the educational worlds of students like the integration of public schools in Philadelphia could unintentionally result in language loss and a shift from AAVE toward other dialects. Is saving linguistic diversity more important than improving the lives of its speakers? Labov concludes, "I am sure that many of us would regret the decline of the eloquent syntactic and semantic options that I have presented here. But we might also reflect at that time that the loss of a dialect is a lesser evil than the current condition of an endangered people" (p. 235).

Although the chapters are excellent, the editors miss an opportunity to draw out common themes, to integrate insights from the papers, and to locate the chapters' contributions within broader literatures. An expanded introduction, a conclusion, and thematic introductions to each part of the volume would have made it all the more valuable. When considering efforts and policies to develop endangered languages in part 3, readers will find that despite the significant threat of linguistic and cultural loss, we have no universal template for how to save a language. International treaties appear to have impact, as Huss (ch. 9) illustrates in her research on minority languages in Scandinavia, but what if governments refuse to sign these protective agreements? And although community organization is a crucial component of sustaining linguistic

vitality as we see in the Navajo immersion effort (ch. 11), many of the contributors of this volume voice a common concern that linguistic gains could be lost if parents opt not to speak language with their children. It is extremely difficult, admittedly, for authors to take in the entire range of relevant dynamics, from parental behavior, classroom practices, community organization, national policy, and global forces, yet these are all clearly shown to be relevant. Finally, a brief biography of the contributors would have illustrated the diversity of the field of endangered and minority languages.

Missed opportunities aside, anthropologists of education will find *Sustaining Linguistic Diversity* a useful volume in understanding contemporary attempts to contend with cultural assimilation and homogenization. Of special interest will be the ethnographic research on school-based language-revitalization efforts (Hornberger and McCarty, et al.). These chapters would be useful for both anthropology of education and qualitative research classes. Taken collectively, the volume illustrates, in varied and well-researched ways, the powerful political, cultural, and social implications of classifying and talking about languages in certain ways and the questionable boundaries between a defined "people" and language, both compelling issues for anthropologists.

Writing from These Roots: Literacy in a Hmong-American Community. John Duffy. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. 241 pp.

Reviewed by Theresa McGinnis, *Hofstra University*

"Pre-literate," "non-literate," and "oral culture" are labels often used to describe whole groups, such as the Hmong people. John Duffy's detailed historical account of the literacy development within a Hmong-American community serves to challenge these notions, and to present the complexities of the Hmong people's engagement with literacy overtime. John Duffy powerfully describes how the Hmong literacy story is deeply embedded in warfare, missionary work, immigration, and exile. That is, this book exemplifies how literacy development is intimately tied to historical, political, economic, religious, and military processes.

Distinctive to the text is John Duffy's careful and precise look at the historical processes that have shaped Hmong literacy. In the first section of the book, he discusses the political nature of the Hmong history in China and Laos. He foregrounds the political and oppressive conditions that shaped the literacy practices of the Hmong, which often led to their limited access to literacy. These political and cultural forces included: French colonialism, Laotian nationalism, missionary work, and the involvement of the CIA in the Hmong communities prior to and during the Vietnam War. Interesting to the Hmong literacy story is how each of these historical movements led to different writing systems and literacy practices and also to different identities of the Hmong as they engaged in the different writing systems or literacy practices.

As he follows the history of the Hmong literacy development to the United States, the relevance of examining literacy through a transnational lens becomes apparent. As Duffy points out, refugees, even those who have limited access to literacy, arrive in their new country with "long and freighted histories of literacy." Of particular interest is how the literacy instruction offered by the institutions the Hmong refugees encoun-