This Handbook has sections covering ‘Discourses about multilingualism, across political and historical contexts’; multilingualism in relation to education; other institutional sites, social and cultural change, and ‘Situated practices, lived realities’. There are 32 chapters, between 4 to 8 in each section, and a lengthy Introduction by the editors, a ‘sociolinguistics of multilingualism for our times’. The chapters each sum up a complex research field; many conclude with suggestions for further research. While many contributions operate with distinct languages sharing sociolinguistic territory, others iconoclastically reject this conceptual framework, embrace fluidity and hybridity, and generate a plethora of concepts to capture what is perceived as new diversity.

There is a risk of over-generalizing in Handbook articles. Most articles in this one treat speech as though it is synonymous with language. Some contributors tend to be reinventing the wheel or renaming it. There is also a tendency to overstate the local as though it applies globally, as in the incautious ‘the heterogeneity of languages found in most classrooms in the twenty-first century’ (p. 237). The impression is created that while social injustice regrettably occurs, sociolinguists of ‘our times’ should celebrate living in the best of all possible linguistic worlds, and produce academic theorization attuned to it.

The editors claim that recent descriptive and conceptual work in critical and ethnographic sociolinguistics signals a paradigm shift in our understanding of multilingualism. They track developments of recent decades, presenting how migration and superdiversity are interpreted sociolinguistically. They also summarize each article.

The editors are themselves somewhat uncritical when reporting on challenges identified by influential scholars. Has there really been ‘a shift from a discourse of rights to a discourse of profit’ (Heller, p. 8)? Only in certain contexts, or for some analytical purposes, but not generally. Several contributors refer to linguistic human rights, but most fail to present them validly (e.g. 446). Likewise there is impermissible either/or thinking when Pennycook (p. 8) wishes to replace seeing languages as discrete, countable entities with ‘local activities, resources and practices’.

Blommaert’s wish (8) to move away from language to a focus on ‘how you speak it’ has been common knowledge in class-based societies for centuries. On weaknesses in Blommaert’s approach, see Phillipson 2012. On Makoni, another fashionable postmodernist, see Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 2012.

The predominant focus on speech results in occlusion of the written language, which is unhelpful when considering norms in education. It is revealing that the Index has no entries for dictionaries, vocabulary, translation, or writing. Neoliberalism, colossally influential in the past two decades, is also absent, as are linguistic hegemony and imperialism. Duchêne and Heller write on the ‘new
economy’ but their findings (‘the linguistic market is not homogeneous in terms of language’, 376) ignore the reality of what exporting has required for centuries. They advocate use of Bourdieu’s concepts (habitus, linguistic capital) but fail to use them themselves.

There are state-of-the-art summaries by eminent contributors: McCarty & Nicholas on Indigenous education, May on language rights, Pavlenko on multilingualism and emotions, Sarkar and Low on popular culture, Woll and Adam on sign languages. Other articles are uneven, for instance the vast field of ‘Global English and bilingual education’ (Gardner) is solid on young learners and CLIL, but weak otherwise: some points suffer from A recycling B citing C (for instance Kirkpatrick misrepresenting Denison, cited by Hoffman, quoted by Gardner) and are therefore inaccurate. In general the expansion of English is seen uncritically as ‘natural’ (257), ‘global’ itself is seen as inherently positive, and apologists for English like Graddol – whose work is to promote British interests - and Vaish are cited, whereas scholars with conflicting views are ignored.

For instance Canagarajah & Liyanage present diversity in the Indian subcontinent as ‘amicable’, as if caste (misspelt) and conflict never existed in pre-modern times. They make many questionable generalizations before conceding that one should be wary of doing so. By contrast, Ramanathan’s empirical study provides rich documentation of how simplistic and ultimately false it is to correlate Gujarati with parochialism and English with cosmopolitanism: Gandhian educational philosophy can permeate either.

More rigorous quality control by the editors and publisher would have been needed. Some concepts are misused (e.g. diglossia, 233; legislative, 298; sign language, 300). There are errors of lexis (criterion, 232), concord (61, 240, 252), and spelling in the names of a country (Philippines, 354) and celebrated scholars (Cummin 252, Maurenen 247). Omoniyi considers Slovakia as former part of the Soviet Union, and classifies a text in Swedish as Finnish (362). A book applauding multilingualism fails to use the correct diacritics in Danish (6, 24, 51), French (173), German (250), and Swedish (238).

The book covers a wide range of topics, privileging description and self-referential theorization. It has many strengths but too many weaknesses. It needs to be read with an alert critical eye.