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BOOK REVIEW

Who's afraid of multilingual education?: Conversations with Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Jim Cummins, Ajit Mohanty and Stephen Bahry about the Iranian Context and Beyond (Linguistic Diversity and Language Rights), by Amir Kalan,

Bristol and Buffalo, Multilingual Matters, 2016, 185 pp., £89.95 (hbk) ISBN 978-1-78309-617-6, £18.00 (epub) 978-1-78309-619-0, and £20.63 (kindle) 978-1-78309-620-6

“What does multilingual education look like in Japan?” Being a researcher originally from Japan, I am often asked this question by my colleagues and students in Hawai'i. Given the diverse population of Hawai'i, multilingual education (MLE) has been an area of interest for educators and scholars locally. In fact, the Hawai'i State Board of Education has recently adopted the *Multilingualism for Equitable Education* policy, which ensures that (1) language services/programs are provided to students of different linguistic needs, (2) teachers are trained with necessary capabilities, and (3) additional support is provided to families (The Hawaii State Board of Education, 2016). At the practice level, the terms ESL/ELL (English as a Second Language/ English Language Learner) are gradually being replaced with MLL (Multilingual Learner) whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds are to be recognized as assets, not deficiencies.

At the other end of the spectrum, Japan, despite its ever-diversifying population, offers a quite different picture of MLE. Specifically, although the ideology of *tabunka kyosei* [coexisting with people of multiple cultures] has increasingly been appreciated (or appropriated?) in Japan, MLE remains largely underexplored if not unexplored. Students whose mother tongue is not Japanese are often expected to assimilate into the Japanese-speaking classroom with very little assistance (Taniguchi & McMahill, 2015).

As a researcher writing from both Hawai'i and Japan where two extreme examples of MLE may be observed, I find Amir Kalan's book relevant and informative. Kalan opens with a historical and sociopolitical account of Iran in order to situate the country within the ongoing international discussions about MLE. According to the author, the official language of Iran is Farsi but there are other 70+ minority languages that are (supposedly) protected by the Constitution. Despite such “cultural and linguistic mosaics” (p. 15), Iran has been oddly out of touch with the current debate over mother tongue-based multilingual (MTM) education elsewhere in the world. With his study, Kalan aims to have Iran participate in the worldwide debate of MLE, particularly of MTM education. Taking into account the political sensitivity of Iran where empirical studies on multilingualism are often unwelcome, Kalan proceeds to carefully and purposefully engage with four internationally renowned scholars of MLE. Specifically, by inviting the scholars to discuss MLE issues across different contexts and some of the major arguments against MTM education, Kalan attempts to “bring the [mother tongue] debate in Iran onto the international academic stage” (p. 18). The author then introduces the four scholars and their research areas. Based on the expertise of each scholar, the subsequent chapters are organized to focus on: (1) MTM education policies and legal complexities; (2) MLE and their implications for power and identity; (3) MTM education in the Indian context; and (4) MLE in the Chinese and Central Asian contexts. In the

concluding chapter, Kalan aims to refute some of the popular arguments against MTM education by drawing from the discussions in the preceding four chapters.

Chapter 1 almost serves as a literature review for Kalan's study. It covers a wide range of literature and studies that discuss language policies and practices in the world from the legal point of view. Specifically, Kalan's interlocutor of this chapter, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas references some of her seminal works on linguistic human rights and introduces examples from different parts of the world to establish why and how linguistic human rights need to be integrated into practice. Along the way, Kalan seeks answers to essential yet complex questions such as: in what ways can a language be divisive or unifying? (pp. 35–36) and what does a good MLE/MTM education model look like? (basic guidelines: pp. 51–54). Reviewing international cases largely from an egalitarian point of view, this chapter prepares the reader with basic notions of linguistic human rights and social justice surrounding MLE and MTM education before proceeding further into thinking about the Iranian context and its specificities.

In Chapter 2, Kalan and his interlocutor, Jim Cummins explore different MLE practices in the world and their implications for power and identity, with special attention to the Iranian context. Most importantly, Jim Cummins helps clarify the difference between not promoting MTM education (i.e. the *laissez-faire* approach) and suppressing it (i.e. "violation of linguistic human rights", to borrow from Tove Skutnabb-Kangas). Although research has repeatedly indicated that children learn well (if not better) if allowed to use their mother tongue in the classroom, governments in many countries including Iran, the U.S., Canada, and China take a *laissez-faire* stance by neither "encourag[ing] children to lose their mother tongue" nor "punish[ing] kids for speaking their language" (p. 85). While the *laissez-faire* approach seems indifferent in dealing with non-dominant languages, "if all of the rewards in society come from knowing the dominant language, then people will gradually switch to that over several generations" (p. 85). In other words, this *laissez-faire* approach may be "much more productive" (than the overtly suppressing method) if the government's (often covert) intention is to assimilate people into speaking the dominant language. From the pedagogical point of view, this chapter helps demonstrate the intersection of power, identity, and language practices on the macro to micro scale.

In Chapter 3, Kalan invites Ajit Mohanty in order to learn from the experiences of India – "Iran's civilizational cousin" (p. 13). Kalan emphasizes that despite resembling Iran's multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural outlook, India has fared better in MTM education. Yet, Mohanty reveals the complexities and challenges that exist behind the ideal notion of India as "an officially multilingual nation" (p. 103). For example, while no National Language is declared by the Indian Constitution, many regard English and Hindi as the de facto national languages of India. In reality, the Constitution lists 22 languages (including English and Hindi) as official languages yet the status of each language varies greatly. Mohanty maintains that the fundamental problem lies in the notion of the "supremacy of one language" (p. 107) endorsed by the government. In addition to reiterating what is evident in research on the use of mother tongue in classrooms, Mohanty urges us to acknowledge and embrace the dynamics of "multilingual modes of communication" (p. 114) wherein different languages are *organically* chosen and spoken across different domains of people's lives. Through the case of India, this chapter demonstrates the complexities and realities of multilingual societies which may stimulate, stymie, or regress the necessary changes when implementing MTM education.

In Chapter 4, Stephen Bahry is invited to examine the sociopolitical/linguistic climate of China and other Central Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan. Focusing on their geopolitical and sociohistorical proximities to Iran, Kalan reviews various approaches to MLE in the said countries and seeks to understand how such approaches

may be transferred to the Iranian context. Although this chapter highlights the challenging aspects of MLE approaches rather than their ideological outcomes, it helps shed a pragmatic light on the processes in introducing MTM education models to Iran. For example, in response to the often-discussed cost issues surrounding MTM education, Stephen Bahry recommends “a school-based curriculum [for it] is supposed to be more flexible and less costly, since it is developed by teachers already familiar with students and the context” (p. 137). Coupled with the technology available today, MTM education can be affordable and accessible while in the long run helping to “maximize the intellectual and linguistic resources of a society” (p. 86, borrowing Jim Cummins’ words). Although the important question of “how much or whether there should be central control of language still remains” (p. 131), this chapter certainly helps put ideas and ideologies into perspective.

In the concluding chapter, Kalan revisits the major groups of arguments against MTM education that were first outlined in Introduction. The initial four major groups are reorganized into six categories (with no explanation as to why) including (1) a common language creates a united nation; (2) dominant languages enjoy natural superiority because of their linguistic structure and historical privilege; (3) languages with a long history of written text production are culturally superior to other languages; (4) students should adopt the language of success as a pragmatic move; (5) mother tongue-based MLE is an appealing idea but not practical; and (6) mother tongue-based MLE will cause separatism and political disintegration. Under the six categories, Kalan presents evidence and arguments drawn from the interviews with the four scholars, with the intention to dismiss the claims against MTM education. In his final remarks, Kalan briefly discusses the guidelines proposed by an Azeri Turkish-speaking teacher on the use of Turki–Farsi bilingual textbooks and concludes his book with a powerful message from a 15-year-old non-Farsi speaking student on what a multilingual society means to Iran.

The vigour of Kalan’s study certainly lies in the design and implementation. It is a unique study especially in the field of MLE where the majority of studies are primarily empirical, primarily theoretical, or a combination of both. Kalan’s study, on the other hand, defies such categories in a good sense. While Kalan’s book sufficiently and effectively covers empirical data and theoretical discussions, what separates his study from others is the fact that he engages *directly* with the scholars of the field. Put differently, Kalan *facilitates* academic dialogue on an understudied context (Iran) of the field by conducting interviews with leading scholars.

Given the nature of his study, it would have been helpful for the reader if Kalan had elaborated on his methodology. For instance, although extensive document and literature search *seemed* to have shaped the interview questions and further guided the discussions with the scholars, no specifics are revealed as to which documents were combed in what way and for what purposes. Similarly, despite Kalan’s (somewhat explicit) support for MTM education throughout the book, there is no mentioning of his researcher positionality or research paradigm used for this study. While details of the interviews are not discussed, there appear to be a set of standard questions that Kalan asks all four scholars and a set of non-standard ones that are specifically designed for particular scholars. It would have been interesting to compare/contrast the four scholars’ responses (to the standard questions) in order to identify what may be *common* across the expertise of the four scholars or *specific* in one area *yet applicable* in other contexts. This extra analysis phase may have helped generate additional practical suggestions for the future of Iran’s MLE and MTM education.

As for the structure of each chapter, providing sections, subsections, and a summary may have helped ease the otherwise intense and lengthy discussions. Also, when interview questions are answered by Kalan’s interlocutors, he seldom follows up on the responses and moves to the next question. It would have been more powerful and productive if Kalan had followed up with

probing questions or played the devil's advocate and presented counterexamples. Such approaches may have stimulated more in-depth conversations around MLE and MTM education in general and specifically in the Iranian context. Yet again, this is contingent on the type of relationship between Kalan and his interlocutors, styles of interviews designed, and other factors that are not clarified in this book.

The above reflections on methodological and other structural details aside, Kalan's message is clearly and consistently articulated through the book: MLE (namely MTM education) should be accessible to all children regardless of their linguistic backgrounds. To elaborate, MLE (e.g. MTM education) not only helps protect the "linguistic human rights" of the children but also it "maximize[s] the intellectual and linguistic resources of a society" (p. 86). In this spirit, Kalan's book is perhaps intended to help invigorate the work of the activists and advocates for MTM education while also challenging the widespread arguments against MTM education.

On a larger scale, Kalan's study has implications for the fields of MLE and globalization studies. For example, Kalan's book covers a series of nationalist rhetoric widely used by the government to argue for or against certain practices across different linguistic and sociocultural contexts today. As such, Kalan's study has prompted me personally to revisit how and why such nationalist rhetoric may be used by the Japanese government (not the area of focus in Kalan's study but my own) during the last few decades. Precisely, the Japanese government has been utilizing an increasingly nationalist agenda of "protecting the Japanese identity" under a single language (or occasionally leveraging English language education to create a disguise of bilingualism/multilingualism in the country) through education policies. Comparing the political climates of Japan and Iran, notwithstanding their disparate linguistic diversities and histories, the two countries share a strikingly similar political platform. To elaborate, both countries at the policy level seem to prefer an "either-or" approach (e.g. *either* Farsi *or* non-Farsi mother tongue) rather than a "both-and" approach (e.g. *both* Farsi *and* non-Farsi mother tongue). This proclivity for the *either-or* approach, also pointed out by the four scholars throughout Kalan's book, appears prevalent across cultures and languages in today's globalizing world. On this very note, Kalan, by iterating the fact that research has time and again confirmed the effectiveness and efficiency of MLE (particularly MTM education) grounded in "both-and" thinking, calls for a paradigm shift in both conceptual and practical terms. While Kalan's call may have been directed at the fields of MLE and MTM education, it speaks largely to the political realm across different linguistic and sociocultural contexts today.

Overall, this book is an informative and stimulating work in thinking about what MLE may bring forth in a place where it has not yet taken root (e.g. Japan). It also inspires the reader to further participate in the public dialogue on how MLE can and should evolve, spurred on by contexts such as Hawai'i where MLE has been a subject of social and scholarly attention. While he engages with a range of discussions that are rich in breadth and depth, Kalan presents them in locally and/or globally relevant manners, ensuring the applicability of his book. In other words, despite its academic rigor, it is a work accessible to a wide audience from policymakers to schoolteachers to researchers. Further, the specific organization of the chapters not only helps maintain the coherence of Kalan's overall message, but also encourages the reader to reflect upon their own experiences and practices. It is evident that Kalan, while maneuvering the political sensitivities as an "insider" of Iran, has successfully presented a powerful account of how and why MTM education may be "a natural and organic need" (p. 164) in Iran as well as in other globalizing societies of the world.

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