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*Tension-filled English at the multilingual university: A Bakhtinian perspective.*

Maria Kuteeva. Channel View Publications, 2023, pp. 218.

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A continuous increase in the use of English – not least in university settings – is accompanied by stretching and being stretched, e.g. through bending and redefining norms. (p. 14)

This book starts off asking a question that was certainly on my mind, “Why write about English again?” Indeed, there is an abundance of research, both theoretical and empirical, regarding English as a global language, as well as its contentious landscape. However, the more recent move by non-anglophone countries like Japan to engage in what has been termed ‘linguistic entrepreneurship’ (De Costa et al., 2016), through universities offering English-medium instruction (EMI) programs, necessitates more nuanced analysis and research. This book progresses from a macro to a micro examination of the potential restrictions and liberations of the standardization of English as a *lingua franca* in global education and research dissemination in the non-anglophone context. Kuteeva, having written extensively in the field of English in university settings, starts from the premise that “English at the multilingual university is filled with and surrounded by tensions” (p. 14). The author draws on her extensive body of empirical work and utilizes the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1895-1975) (some would argue) radical philosophy of language and sociolinguistic insights to present “a theoretical argument accounting for the tensions” (p. 27).

The author’s use of Bakhtin’s work is refreshingly novel as his ideas are usually employed in literary criticism. Using a Bakhtian perspective has allowed Kuteeva to examine from the “macro-level of language policies and stakeholders’ perceptions to the more fine-grained details of individual lived experiences of language [gaining] further insights into the creative potential of such tensions” (p. 30). In Chapter 2, Kuteeva gives a deft explanation of Bakhtin's theoretical concepts that she employs in her analysis including: dialogism, which emphasizes that all ways of talking and communicating are social, value laden, and consequently ideological; heteroglossia, or different social dialects and language strata in the way we speak; and Bakhtin’s idea that language struggles between a “centripetal trend driving towards unification and language standardization and a centrifugal one pulling towards diversity and change” (p. 21).

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To illuminate the tensions of English at the multilingual university, the author presents interview data that was part of a larger case study focusing on an EMI program in business studies at a Swedish university. Interview excerpts from the five participants highlight several tensions regarding their perceptions of English as a standardized language, as a foreign language, and as part of translanguaging practices. The data is interesting as it shows on a micro level how Bakhtin's idea of dialogism is practiced in the multilingual setting through exchanges that often operate in the translanguaging mode, generating layers of meaning and redefining norms. Interview excerpts also raise interesting examples of Bakhtin's concept of double-voicedness whereby a speaker mingles not only their words but the words of others, layering different languages and meanings.

The book is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the main theoretical concepts of the book. Chapter 2 sets up the context of multilingual universities and uses Bakhtin's theory of language to discuss the three conceptualizations of English—as a standard language, a lingua franca, and as translanguaging practices. Chapter 3 explores language policies in universities and sets up Chapter 4, which discusses the reasons why disciplines respond differently to the standardization of English, and Chapter 5, which highlights ongoing debates about the preeminence of English in academic writing and research publications and how that influences knowledge construction and diversity in worldviews. Chapter 6 analyzes the qualitative empirical data and discusses how the interview participants experienced language production and usage at their multilingual university. In Chapter 7, more empirical data is presented focusing on two creative writing students who shared their experiences creating text in English. Numerous interview excerpts are provided making the book a rich account of the participants' lived experiences. In Chapter 8, the author provides a very clear conclusion, skillfully tying her arguments together and offering some suggestions for future research.

For GALE readers, it will be disappointing that the author does not utilize a gender lens in her interpretations and analyses. Bakhtin's omission of gender as a relevant dimension in his theories is not inconsequential (Booth, 1982; Halasek, 1992) and could be argued to limit his contributions and his impact. Indeed, few feminists have taken up the chore of integrating a gender lens into Bakhtin's theories, notwithstanding feminist scholar Dale Bauer (1988, 1992), and feminist literary theorist Julia Kristeva's use of Bakhtin's "dialogism" to develop her concept of "intertextuality" starting in the 1960s. Despite current research practices of including at least a nod to an intersectional approach, the author seems comfortable using Bakhtin's gender-neutral sociolinguistic theories without question. She uses the word gender a total of only five times in the book and one of those times is to clarify that her analysis "does not focus on gender issues" (p. 131). The author's analytic framework would have benefited from integrating some of the

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wealth of research examining the highly gendered aspects of language and communication, as well as of global English language education, especially since the aim in her book was to take a critical stance.

Relatedly, one small but puzzling aspect presented in the book that could easily be missed by readers, but stands out with a gendered read is the author's description of how she anonymizes the five interview participants:

Both genders were included, three males and two females. For reasons of anonymity, the year of data collection is not provided, and the students are given unisex pseudonyms. Also, for anonymity purposes, the proportion of genders is swapped in the presentation of the findings (three females, two males) and assigned randomly to individual participants. My analysis does not focus on gender issues, and this swap was made solely for the sake of clarity in the presentation of results and in order to avoid referring to all participants using the same pronoun. (p.131)

Her binary reference to “both genders” is concerning enough, but the “swapping” after giving pseudonyms seems oddly unconventional and unnecessarily complex. It is difficult to find a precedence for this or the need for such a swap. This seems like an inconsequential point to raise; however, combined with her omission of any gender or intersectional analyses, in a study critiquing standardization, it suggests the author falls “victim to the ideology of [her] language” (Halasek, p. 66).

Despite the author's intentional gender-blind approach, and the reader having to read through intersectional “correctives”, a point which feminist Kay Halasek (1982) wrote about specifically in relation to her experience with Bakhtin's omission of a gender perspective, this book contributes to important debates on the continued expansion of English as a standardized lingua franca in university settings and the knockoff sociopolitical and economic effects. It offers an abundance of interesting viewpoints for those interested in the use of English in non-Anglophone contexts. It is relevant to all academics who instruct, write, or publish in English and would be particularly informative for anyone working or studying in an English as a foreign language (EFL) or English-medium instruction (EMI) program.

For those of us working in education in Japan, the “tensions” regarding English language and its relationship with internationalization and globalization are often salient. The increased interest and awareness can be seen in recent publications such as Konakahara and Tsuchiya's (2020) edited volume entitled *English as a Lingua Franca in Japan: Towards Multilingual Practices*, as well as in

Japanese government education and research policy shifts. To point, last March, the Japanese government raised the target number of foreign students to 400,000 a year by 2030 aiming to attract more doctoral and master's students who can "help enhance Japan's international competitiveness" (Kakuchi, 2023). This expansion of EMI programs and the nudging of researchers to expand their publications and collaborations in English to help increase international rankings has both positive and negative effects on knowledge production, as Kuteeva reminds us. Bakhtin believed a move to monolingualism was unethical, but Kuteeva has found glimmers of evidence, at least at the micro interactional level, suggesting a more hopeful outlook; while English continues to expand as the global lingua franca, "fascination with English-medium education does not seem to erase multilingualism and does not impede the learning of the local national language" (p. 125). This doesn't sound unduly optimistic after reading her comprehensive discussion and analysis of this complex phenomenon in the book. It perhaps reflects the common adage "a rose can grow from concrete" and that the "tensions" lie in the cracks.

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