The book consists of eight chapters that delve into the concepts of ‘linguistic diversity’ and ‘(social) justice’, which are the two core concepts running through the veins of the book. These two are discussed in the context of case studies from all over the world and an attempt is made for them to be anchored in social change owing to globalization and high levels of migration. Language is primarily discussed as a means of exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage, but the positive content of linguistic justice is also reflected upon at the end of the book.

In the first introductory chapter, which provides an overview of the whole work, the intersection of language with gender, social class, status, race and legal status is highlighted and an attempt is made to spell out the three principal lines of inquiry: the dimensions of linguistic diversity related to economic inequality, cultural domination and imparity of political participation, respectively.

The second chapter is titled ‘Linguistic diversity and stratification’ and it provides a historical overview of linguistic ideological work focusing on attempts to homogenize (e.g. standardize) and (super)diversify languages and dialects. In addition, it makes the important argument that both these processes lay the groundwork for creating inequality, as they contribute towards the creation of linguistic domination and subsequent social stratification.
The title of the third chapter is ‘The subordination of linguistic diversity’ and it deals with the discursive processes whereby the aforementioned processes, namely normalization, standardization and demonization of linguistic repertoire deviation from the norms, are constructed. The main argument put forward here is that the territorial principle, namely the linkage of a particular language to a particular territory, not only obscures actual linguistic diversity but it also legitimizes specific social groups as ‘default’ members of a society; as a result of this, any learners of these imaginary linguistic norms who fail to achieve their goals are held responsible for their failure and, thus, are marginalized and discriminated against.

The next three chapters of the book discuss how linguistic diversity and the relevant aforementioned processes that characterize it intersect with social justice in specific contexts and situations. More specifically, the fourth chapter is entitled ‘Linguistic diversity at work’ and it looks into language proficiency and how it correlates with employment. It is argued that linguistic stereotyping, resulting from a wide range of reasons, including stigmatized ethnic names of job applicants and deviant (from the norms of the dominant language) pragmatic norms used when conducting an interview, usually works hand in hand with other forms of disadvantage, such as legal status and economic disadvantage. These usually lead to less privileged speakers’ deskilling or getting trapped into survival employment. In addition, suppression of linguistic diversity in employment environments and the exclusion of migrants from dominant job markets can result in injustice, inasmuch as they can create language regimes at work, which ghettoize people and create circumstances of exploitation and marginalization of weaker migrant groups by powerful monolingual native speakers of the dominant language and, sadly, by unscrupulous co-ethnics.

The fifth chapter of the book zooms in on ‘Linguistic diversity in education’ and it focuses on the ways whereby language undergirds disparities in educational environments. Through a discussion of monolingual habitus in multilingual schools’ submersion education – namely a system where students are made to study exclusively through the medium of a language that they have not yet fully mastered – and testing and assessment of language proficiency, the basic argument put forward in this chapter is that linguistic assimilation of second-generation migrants through the educational system of the host country without catering for these students’ first language is detrimental not only for these people’s linguistic development and academic achievement but also for the economy of the host country: their earning potential is decreased exactly because their linguistic proficiency is limited, and, as a result of this, the tax base is lowered and the demand for social services is increased.
Injustice experienced due to linguistic diversity is further explored in the sixth chapter of the book, whose title is ‘Linguistic diversity and participation’; here the focus is shifted into less clearly demarcated domains of community life, including social services, health care, civic and political engagement, leisure activities and ways through which people reflect on their sense of belonging. At the core of this chapter lies the argument that linguistic injustice, instantiated as linguistic discrimination through micro-aggression, abuse and violence, works hand in glove with the injustices of race, gender and class. In light of this, providing multilingual emergency services in linguistically heterogeneous contexts is quite demanding and challenging, but if the provision of such services is successful, it can secure fair and equitable access to wide social segments, including migrants and linguistically less privileged members of a given society.

The seventh chapter is titled ‘Linguistic diversity and global justice’ and it deals with the discourses and practices associated with the global spread of English. It is argued that global injustice is the product of an unjust neocolonial world order and global English is implicated in entrenching global inequality through the establishment of English-mediated centralized regimes of knowledge, which, at the same time, result in the self-marginalization of academics from the periphery.

Finally, the eighth and last chapter of the book focuses on ‘Linguistic justice’ and wraps up the discussion on a more positive tone. More specifically, what is explored in this chapter is the content of linguistic justice, which can be achieved through concerted efforts on behalf of individuals and states to change the sociolinguistic status quo in societies where linguistic diversity undergirds inequality, through initiatives including the ‘benign neglect’ approach, language rights approach, imposition of a ‘language tax’ and raising awareness of linguistic privilege. The first approach, despite its difficulty in application, translates into lack of interference of the state with citizens’ linguistic choices, while the second one, stemming from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is conceived as the activation and respect of individual rights with linguistic implications, such as the right to non-discrimination, the right to freedom of speech and the right of freedom to association. The third approach includes the imposition of a ‘language tax’ on states that have large numbers of native English speakers as well as establishing a coercive regime to ensure that the territorial language is spoken by everyone and, in this way, placing the cost of language learning on those who enjoy linguistic privilege. Finally, raising awareness of linguistic privilege can result in promoting empathy with the linguistically subordinated, which in turn can encourage ‘ally behaviors’ on behalf of a wide range of linguistically dominant categories, such as policy makers and employers, who can act as
effective allies and stand in solidarity with and prevent linguistically subordinated people from suffering the socioeconomic consequences of linguistic marginalization.

Overall, the book is very well written and well structured; it is written in a rather lay language, a fact that makes it accessible to a wide audience of both academics and non-academics. Its readability is also enhanced by the fact that all notes are presented in the form of endnotes divided by chapter, which are found at the end of the book. In this way, the reading and understanding of the content of each chapter is smooth and uninterrupted. Another big asset of the book is the discussion of a wide range of linguistic diversity and social (in)justice-related case studies belonging to different spatiotemporal scales (Prinsloo, 2017; Blommaert, Westinen and Leppänen, 2015), including areas that are not usually (and unfortunately) discussed in English-speaking sociolinguistic scholarship, such as the United Arab Emirates or the case of Székely Hungarians in Romania. In this sense, even though there is no explicit reference to sociolinguistic scales theory as such (e.g. Blommaert, 2007), the theoretical framework of the book is very pertinent to a recent shift of sociolinguistic epistemology towards more dynamic models of operationalizing sociolinguistic and discursive phenomena, such as the ones associated with linguistic diversity discussed in this book.

Of particular interest to me was the original discussion of public toilet use and the intergroup tensions that it can create, leading to challenging certain groups’ moral worth. This is done not only through the use of linguistic instructions found there but also through the different types of toilets (e.g. sit-down vs. squat toilets), which vary from continent to continent. I believe that this rather mundane type of data, which however influence people’s lives all over the world, can be analyzed through the recent ‘spatial repertoires’ approach (e.g. Pennycook and Otsuji, 2015; Canagarajah, 2017) with potentially very interesting findings with respect to the construction of sociolinguistic injustice. Moreover, the discussion of micro-aggressions and linguistic alienation merits an explicit mention here not only because these phenomena are, unfortunately, abundant in globalized educational and professional contexts, and therefore people need to be alert, but also because they are discussed very efficiently in the book. On the other hand, since part of the title of the book is ‘An introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics’, I would have welcomed an extended chapter that would explicitly address tangible actions (cf. chapters in Lawson and Sayers, 2016) that we, as sociolinguists (e.g. as researchers and educators), can exploit in order to deal with sociolinguistic injustice and to achieve social justice, which is very positively concluded in the last chapter of the book.
Finally, I believe that Ingrid Piller has done a great job putting together so many diverse pieces of evidence that support her argument that, despite the challenges created in the context of sociolinguistic diversity all over the world, social justice is achievable nowadays, if we become more sensitized to the ways injustice is produced and perpetuated and try to stop its formation from the very outset. As such, this book is essential reading not only to socioculturally minded linguists but also to policy makers, legal advisers and professionals who are interested in sharpening their intercultural skills.

References


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