

Book Review

Juan Jiménez-Salcedo, Christine Helot and Antoinette Camilleri Grima (2020). *Small is Multilingual. Language and Identity in Micro-Territories*. Series: Language, Multilingualism and Social Change. Berlin: Peter Lang. ISBN:978-3-631-83341-4

Linguistic diversity is a hallmark of many societies, and multilingualism, as opposed to monolingualism, is the norm, not the exception. Since, especially in Western states, historical processes have led to the standardisation of dominant languages, which are generally associated to the country in which they are spoken, there is the tendency to match specific states to one language: German to Germany, French to France, Italian to Italy, and so on and so forth. Nevertheless, this dominant "homoglottic ideology" (Lüdi, 2011) has many shortcomings, amongst which creating negative perceptions towards alloglossia: i.e. when a community uses language varieties, including areal dialects, which are different to those used by the majority of the population of the same state they inhabit, or of which they are citizens. Exposing the assets of alloglossia enhances their value, generates curiosity and demystifies ethnocentric myths (Scaglione & Caruana, 2014).

The volume, "Small is Multilingual. Language and Identity in Micro-Territories", is one of a kind not only because it values alloglossia, but because it does so by focussing on multilingualism in micro-territories, and on how different languages shape the identities of communities living in particular geographical spaces. Most notably, larger states have much to learn from the safeguarding and strengthening of multilingualism in these territories and the case studies presented in this volume are relevant to scholars who deal with different disciplines – including Demographics, Education and Sociology.

Jiménez-Salcedo & Hélot introduce the volume by providing insights into how geography and demography, among other factors, are reflected through language use. The notion of ‘micro-territory’ itself, and other nomenclatures used to refer to it, is aptly discussed in this introduction by referring to social and political issues and by drawing on the literature in the field. From the perspective of this volume, micro-territories are relevant realities as the nature and complexities of multilingualism are explored in the light of physical size and demographics – often characterised by densely populated areas and by contact. This holds true both for small nations and for regions which are politically part of larger states: their distinctive characteristics, shaped by history and culture, are often the outcome of tensions and struggles, sometimes a consequence of colonialism or other forms of political impositions.

Each one of the chapters in this volume deals with a different setting. These are divided into two sections – one on insular contexts and the other regarding enclosed territories. Excluding the Caribbean island of Grenada and Taiwan, all the others are in Europe: Malta and Gozo, Sardinia, the Balearic islands, Andorra, Val d’Aosta, Val d’Aran, Luxembourg and Aragon. Since geographical and demographic characteristics are central to the volume, each contribution provides a brief descriptive account of the area being investigated, which dovetails into the main themes to which the respective chapters are dedicated.

Four contributions are centred around territories characterised by contact between Catalan and Spanish, namely those dedicated to the Balearic islands (authored by Carbonneau), Aragon (Martínez Pérez), Andorra (Jiménez-Salcedo) and the Val d’Aran area (Carrera). Multilingualism in these areas also includes English (as a foreign language), French (Andorra) and Aranese (a variety of the Occitan language, in Val d’Aran). Challenges faced by minority languages to retain their status (both during and after the Franco era) and difficulties encountered because of globalisation are two common threads. Examples of these regard Aranese, and its struggle to preserve social and functional roles, and Catalan in the *Franja* region in Aragon. While education plays a central role, reference is also made to the importance of cultural vitality and to the need for active policies which favour language maintenance.

Baldacchino’s contribution, as well as Camilleri Grima’s, refer to the Maltese context, albeit from different perspectives. Baldacchino adopts a comparative stance, by referring to another small-island state: Grenada. Despite the physical

and cultural distance between the two islands, some remarkable similarities are attested, also because of their history of British colonisation. Camilleri Grima, on the other hand, focuses her attention on Gozo, an island within an island, and underlines the richness of local language varieties or *djaletti*. These are a living testimony of the Gozitan identity, a linguistic microcosm present in the towns and villages of this small island.

Virnes's and Chen's contributions deal with two much larger islands – Sardinia and Taiwan. The former's multilingualism is overshadowed by Italian, the latter's by Mandarin. Both chapters provide rich insights into the two realities revealing how “on the ground” experiences provide a very different picture to what often emerges from official, policy-making points of view. Undoubtedly, the complexity of both contexts represents a major challenge in the fostering of multilingualism, evidenced by the decrease in the amount of people who speak ‘local’ languages, some of which, especially in Taiwan, are now extinct.

Raimondi focusses on Val d'Aosta, one of the smallest Italian regions, which borders with France. While having a degree of political autonomy and a bilingual status, whereby both French and Italian are official languages, the former's role is generally marginalised despite the strong historical and cultural influence on this region. As Jiménez-Salcedo & Hélot observe in their introduction, the status of French in this area can draw comparisons with the role held by the same language in Andorra, where it is in contact with Catalan and Spanish. Furthermore, multilingualism and multiculturalism in Val d'Aosta are evident through other languages and dialects spoken, especially in mountain areas.

Gómez Fernández & Quintus's contribution on Luxembourg also focusses on a linguistically diverse area, but with very different characteristics compared to most of the other geographical areas covered in this volume. This chapter deals with the multilingual school system in Luxembourg, especially by taking into consideration Lusophone students, since Portuguese nationals represent the main ethnolinguistic minority in this state. While referring to some positive features of their schooling, attention is drawn to two major issues: languages are taught in an excessively compartmentalised manner; the home languages of culturally and linguistically diverse students are not sufficiently valued.

While each one of the chapters in this book tackles a specific context, it is the volume as a whole that leaves a mark on readers. Jiménez-Salcedo & Hélot's

introduction anchors the situations presented for each one of the regions covered and stimulates comparative reflections which go well beyond the geographical and demographic confines of what they describe. Indeed, many notions mentioned are relevant to the concept of multilingualism as a cognitive attitude and as a resource which is worth investing in, with flexibility and open-mindedness.

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References

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