



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Ingrid Piller, Donna Butorac, Emily Farrell, Loy Lising, Shiva Motaghi Tabari, & Vera Williams Tetteh. *Life in a New Language*. Oxford University Press, 2024, 216 pp. ISBN 9780190084288 Hardback.**

*Life in a New Language* serves not only as a book but also as a resource for sociolinguistics, migration studies, and teaching generally, as a source of real-life data for academics and non-academics and as a marker of quality collaboration. The authors, all female, hail from Germany, Ghana, Iran, Ireland, the Philippines, and Yugoslavia. They formed a rich team of authors for a work of nuanced context, and their diversity is relevant to its import.

Through ethnographic research and the re-use of six distinct sets of research data covering a period of twenty years, the authors systematically present and discuss the lived experiences of some 130 individuals. The generic theme of language and migration links the perspectives on their life situations, including using the Australian English language in a social context, settling in a new country (Australia) and into new work environments, overcoming linguistic challenges, dealing with family matters and issues of discrimination. The reader will find insights into these themes. Some I now summarise.

The authors consider the English language through multiple lenses, including English as a migrant language, as a legal instrument of migration management, and as a method of controlling human capital. They give an in-depth historical account of the ways in which the language has been used from such perspectives. Their systematic analysis of English as a legal instrument of migration management, for example, enables them to reflect on policies since colonisation in 1788 and to show that “migration policy has served to engineer English as a dominant language” (p. 7). The English language is well linked to the migration policies and requirements, and it is thus logical that in the economic world it serves as an “economic asset” for prospective migrants: a newly arrived migrant may be more or less advantaged proportionate to their depth of knowledge of English. As if it were merely the depth of knowledge of the English language! The lived experiences presented in the book unearth the cultural shock and impact of the different “Englishes”.

Those shocks in coping with the different Englishes indicate the severity of the impact on their lives. Having to write a required English test such as IELTS is usually done several times, as in the case of “Amin” (p. 22) and other participants, and can hinder severely job and academic opportunities. The levels of English literacy of people who have settled in Australia from many countries varies greatly; but the confidence of some participants in their knowledge of what they know to be called the English language was crushed by the sudden incapacitating situation of unintelligible and indiscernible “Australian English” caused by accent and speedy local speech. The deteriorating aspect for the individual migrant is when they feel judged and are perceived as “dumb”, “stupid”, “an idiot”, or “tedious” (p. 16). Such experiences must impact the academic, social and family life of many migrants as represented by the participants reported in the volume.

Indeed, family life, often stressful in the migrant situation for many reasons, may be further affected adversely when members adjust differently to the demands of a new language. Some adapt, but “some family relationships may fade away” (p. 68). Participants reported tensions as they tried to decide whether and how they could maintain languages other than English.

The authors provide suggestions on how to use the book in teaching, a testimony to the richness of the linguistic and pedagogical expertise they bring to bear on the book. They also provide suggestions for an informed understanding of possible solutions to the disparities sadly inherent in Australia’s projection of multiculturalism and the actual lived experiences of exclusion and marginalisation. It would be prudent for the government to consider such a rich and timely resource to strengthen multiculturalism in Australia. This volume captures remarkable in-depth and nuanced data and is an important source of information for potential and new migrants. Few books leave a lasting impact, but *Life in a New Language* will leave a significant one long after you engage with it.

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