

Politics of Language and Social Justice: A Review of *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice*

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Theme of the book

Nature, in its intricate design, weaves a tapestry of distinctions, providing us with nourishment and the essence of life. Variety and diversity are inherent to our essence, and linguistic diversity embodies this truth.

Following the Deluge, the biblical tale of the Tower of Babel unfolds in the Shinar region (Babylonia). In this narrative, the Babylonians sought fame by constructing a powerful city with a towering structure reaching the heavens. God's intervention disrupted their plans, introducing linguistic diversity among the workers, leading to mutual incomprehension. This ancient myth reflects the enduring concept of linguistic diversity, a phenomenon still present in contemporary times.

In the times that we are living in, diversity brings in hierarchy, stratification and subordination. Linguistic diversity, too, is not an exception. The award-winning book *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice* is a crucial example of bridging the chasm

between theory and praxis covered in eight chapters. The author Prof. Ingrid Piller emboldens the issues of linguistic injustices in democratic spaces encountering ceaseless changes owing to globalization and migration by factoring in case-studies and real-world instances.

The book focuses on concepts such as inequality, cultural dominance, and the unequal political participation experienced within the linguistic dimension, global dominance of English language. It delves into pressing issues, providing a detailed and thorough exploration of the intersection between linguistic diversity and inequality in key areas crucial to social justice, including education, democratic participation, and employment.

Author's Principal Arguments

In "Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice," Ingrid Piller offers a groundbreaking analysis, challenging societal stereotypes surrounding language, justice, and employment against the backdrop of globalization and economic disparities. Piller navigates the intricate interplay of linguistic hierarchies in education, the workplace, and community participation, debunking the notion that dominant languages ensure social cohesion. Integrating intersectionality, she emphasizes the complexity of language, culture, and identity dynamics, highlighting personal and economic hurdles in language acquisition. Rich case studies underscore the marginalization of minority languages, unveiling the vulnerability of linguistic minorities. Piller's work, a significant contribution to the discourse on linguistic diversity, urges a reevaluation of perspectives for a more inclusive global linguistic landscape.

Strength and Weaknesses of the book

Strengths: In her seminal work, Piller deftly navigates through the intricate layers of linguistic diversity, emphasizing the catastrophic impact of linguistic hierarchies on key domains, including education, the workplace, and community participation. Importantly,

her work is distinguished by the incorporation of theoretical frameworks like intersectionality, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of linguistic diversity.

A compelling aspect of Piller's argumentation is her reliance on a diverse array of case studies, illustrating the real-world implications of linguistic hierarchies and the marginalization of lesser-known languages. These cases offer poignant insights into the challenges faced by speakers of endangered and minority languages, amplifying the urgency for a more inclusive linguistic landscape.

Furthermore, Piller delves into the global dominance of the English language, critically examining its far-reaching impact on technology, education, and global policies. She contends that the ubiquity of English exacerbates the marginalization of local languages, regulating the employment prospects of minority language speakers and commodifying education on a global scale.

Weakness: The book's notable gap lies in the absence of real-time case studies from third-world countries, a crucial aspect in the intricate machinery of global bio-cultural and linguistic diversity. While Ingrid Piller adeptly argues that English, as a dominant language, contributes to the erosion of minority languages, there is a nuanced point missing. It is not solely the English language but any dominant language that tends to suppress languages from the margins, consequently affecting the equitable distribution of justice, employment opportunities, and community participation for their speakers. The oversight lies in the generalization of the impact to English alone, whereas the broader issue encompasses the hegemonic influence of any dominant language, a phenomenon prevalent beyond the scope of English. Recognizing this broader perspective is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by minority languages and their communities on the global stage.

Snippet of Each Chapter

The book comprises of eight chapters which engage the readers with the theme of social justice in the light of linguistic diversity.

This book unfolds in three parts: Chapters 1-3 illuminate human language omnipresence and diversity, exposing the subtle impacts of linguistic hierarchies. Chapters 4-6 examine social inequality in work, education, and community participation. The final chapters, 7-8, scrutinize how global structures amplify linguistic inequalities through regulation and control.

1st Chapter: Introduction

The initial chapter serves as an introduction, encapsulating the essence of the work and acting as a prelude to the subsequent chapters of the book. It delves into the intricate interplay among language, gender, class, ethnicity, and other factors. In this opening chapter, Prof. Piller dissects the line of scrutiny into the dimensions of linguistic diversity related to disparities in economic wealth, the exertion of cultural influence, and unevenness in political engagement, respectively. Further, she provides the reader with the notion of intersectionality as a theoretical framework to deal with these notions in the context of linguistic diversity.

2nd Chapter: Linguistic Diversity and Stratification

“Linguistic Diversity and Stratification” is the second chapter. It chronicles and outlines the works stemming from strong ideologies that attempted the standardization (homogenization) of various varieties and languages. It further emphasizes this notion by pointing out these efforts as reasons for establishing injustice and inequality. It adds to the discussion by outlining the dominations of certain languages leading to the creation of linguistic strata and unjust societies.

3rd Chapter: The Subordination of Linguistic Diversity

Chapter 3 includes an examination and analysis of cultural supremacy, isolation and territorial doctrines that wash out minority languages. She extends the debate and discussion by invoking the concept of “monolingual habitus”, which vanquishes linguistic diversity. Drawing on historical and contemporary illustrations, Piller delves into the ramifications associated with the belief that aligning with a dominant language not only validates migrant status but also serves as an indicator of moral standing and dedication to societal coherence. She emphasizes the limitations of this perspective, neglecting the intricate challenges individuals face, including personal, financial, cultural, and economic barriers that hinder language acquisition. Furthermore, Piller underscores the violation of fundamental human rights related to language choice inherent in such a standpoint.

4th Chapter: Linguistic diversity at work

In this chapter, Piller confronts the idea that linguistic proficiency is considered the singular hurdle to the employment of migrants. Here, she explains that language is not the sole reason for the reinforcement of inequality and discrimination in the workplace; instead, it needs to interplay with other structures of detriment.. Piller juxtaposes situations where migrants experience a decline in skill relevance and limited opportunities for advancing in their careers, in comparison to industries like phone shops and nail bars. Despite outwardly fostering a multilingual workforce, these sectors may expose individuals to potential exploitation.

5th Chapter: Linguistic Diversity in Education

This chapter brings in the notion of discrimination in education among the 1st and 2nd generation migrants. Education has the power to emancipate from the extant disadvantages associated with migration but owing to the ingrained beliefs about language, nationalistic objectives, and uniform strategies for teaching and evaluating, their apathy gets augments. All these vilify and create negative stereotype around these

minority languages. Language rights or linguistic rights are the rights of an individual or a society concerning the freedom of choice to use any language for communication in private or public domain. Language rights also include using one's language in legal, administrative and judicial domains.

6th Chapter: Linguistic Diversity and Participation

This chapter refers to the UN Human Rights legislations, which has promulgated the rights to take part in cultural enactments and benefit from broader scientific developments and innovations. It is agreed that indigenous, tribal, and minority communities must get the privileges of linguistic human rights. Language rights came to be seen as a way of emancipation.

The language rights were a matter of focus repeatedly in different UN documents. Unfortunately, educational and linguistic human right appears less prominently in many UN documents. Further, language and culture have appeared in general reference to ethnicity and religion in the early stages. However, in the later stage, many covenants took a stand on the language rights of the minorities in education.

7th Chapter: Linguistic Diversity and Global Justice

It addresses and challenges the global dominance of the English language. She argues that English has evolved as the mediator between education and global knowledge, fostering inequality and injustice. This system has been portrayed as the helm of the knowledge system, where English is perceived as the language providing access to broader knowledge, marginalizing minority languages.

8th Chapter: Linguistic justice

The last chapter shows light at the end of tunnel and talks about justice in the backdrop of linguistic diversity. The notion of linguistic justice is not a utopian idea and it could be

achieved by the acceptance of linguistic diversity as a norm and not an aberration. This merits a collective and concerted effort.

Brief Critical Analysis

In this comprehensive exploration, Prof. Ingrid Piller scrutinizes linguistic diversity's multifaceted dimensions, from its intersection with inequality to its influence on education, employment, and global justice. Each chapter dissects pervasive issues, employing historical and contemporary examples. Piller introduces key concepts like intersectionality and monolingual habitus to dissect societal intricacies. The book critiques English's hegemony, emphasizing its role in perpetuating inequality. While presenting global challenges, Piller concludes with a call for linguistic justice. Piller's nuanced examination, deftly navigating complexities while urging societal acceptance of linguistic diversity as a norm for achieving justice. The book exhibits a notable omission by not including real-time case studies from third-world countries, a vital component in the intricate dynamics of global bio-cultural and linguistic diversity. Ingrid Piller skillfully contends that English, as a dominant language, plays a role in diminishing minority languages. However, a nuanced aspect is overlooked; it's not solely the English language but any dominant language that tends to subjugate languages from the margins. This, in turn, impacts the fair dispensation of justice, opportunities for employment, and participation in the community for speakers of these marginalized languages.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, "Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice" by Ingrid Piller intricately examines the nexus between language and diverse facets of social inequality. The introductory chapter introduces the intricate interplay of language with gender, class, and ethnicity. Subsequent chapters explore linguistic stratification, the subordination of diversity, and its impact on workplaces, education, human rights, and global justice. Piller challenges English language dominance, concluding with a call for linguistic

justice. The book prompts a societal shift towards embracing linguistic diversity, framing it as a norm, not an aberration, and underscores the necessity of collective efforts for achieving linguistic justice.

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