

## **John Edwards: Multilingualism: Understanding Linguistic Diversity**

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In the newly revised second edition of *Multilingualism: Understanding Linguistic Diversity*, John Edwards examines both the history of multilingualism and its latest developments in today's globalized world, while exploring a wide range of topics, from language diversity and minority language maintenance to language decline and revival. Uniquely, Edwards provides a thorough and up-to-date overview of the complexities of multilingualism and its sociocultural implications, which would adequately appeal to readers of differing ages. Delving deep into the social life of languages, the author discusses what happens when more than one language exists and interacts in society at the cultural, political, social, and psychological levels; "languages are in dynamic relationships which are often asymmetrical in terms of power and status" (p. 34).

Unlike the first edition, this second edition includes new material on recent developments in multilingualism, particularly the "new speaker" phenomenon, linguistic imperialism, folk linguistics, and digital multilingualism. Highlighting postmodern theoretical perspectives, Edwards maintains a newly thematic structure throughout the book, emphasizing the dual nature of language through depicting languages as "totems as well as tools" (p. 2) and stressing their importance in communication, identity, and culture. In the meantime, the author provides a number of historical examples to support his viewpoints and critically calls for efforts to maintain linguistic diversity. Notably, Edwards concludes each chapter with a number of reflection questions so as to spark readers' interest and help them apply the knowledge they gain to their own experiences.

Throughout the book, Edwards critically touches upon language maintenance efforts and makes well-balanced arguments to back his perspectives. Most importantly, the author comes up with a myriad of illuminating ideas which include language equality i.e., all languages equally have a sense of complexity and expressive capacity; language identity of which language is an integral part; language change, decline, or death which are natural phenomena that can be tremendously affected by social, economic, and political factors; language intrinsicness at the social and political levels where multilingualism is not only a linguistic fact but also a powerful tool that has its own prestige regardless of languages being supported or suppressed; language planning/policy in which language ecology is to be taken into account when languages coexist in a broader environment; and language measurement in which estimating how multilingual a

society is or how many multilingual individuals there are is rather difficult due to the possible inaccuracies of self-reporting accounts and census data.

Divided into twelve chapters, Edwards begins the book with a prologue where he ascertains that multilingualism is not only a linguistic fact but also a social, political, and cultural phenomenon and that multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception, “the multilingual capacities that characterize the normality of multilingualism” (p. 1). Also, the author asks questions about how languages evolve and decline, emphasizing the fact that the study of multilingualism is not only educational and technical but also social and cultural, with a number of political implications: “multiculturalism often implies multilingualism” (p. 5). Furthermore, Edwards touches upon several themes, such as English linguistic imperialism, English in the world, multiculturalism, nationalism, and language “increases in linguistic diversity may strengthen the need for a cross-cultural lingua franca” (p. 3).

In Chapter 1, ‘Language Origins and Language Diversity’, the author discusses the historical origins of language, language evolution, language families, and the number of living languages. “Perhaps there was one original language from which all others evolved” (p. 17). Edwards also poses important questions about how language diverged and diversified, coming to the conclusion that “linguistic diversity comprises a vital component of human diversity” (p. 10) and that linguistic fragmentation — the presence of multiple languages in society — is an inevitable human outcome. Themes discussed include spiritual aspects of language, glossolalia—speaking in an unknown language perceived as one of the revelations of the holy spirit—, comparing languages, language development “languages develop according to the needs and beliefs of their speakers” (p. 21), language families “languages are arranged in families of related varieties” (p. 24), and so on.

In Chapter 2, ‘Interpreting Language Diversity’, the author affirms that cultural integrity and language shift may exist simultaneously: “cultural integrity can be maintained despite language shift” (p. 38), showing how language diversity is understood: “there is greater interest nowadays in preserving linguistic diversity” (p. 39). The author also critiques the disuse of heritage languages, “formal institutions often discourage the use of indigenous languages (p. 35) and tackles a number of themes such as dead and living languages, “we probably shouldn’t think of Latin as a dead language at all” (p. 36), the concept of who the ‘native speaker’ is, and the problem of naming languages.

In Chapter 3, ‘The Emergence and Measurement of Multilingualism’, Edwards defines multilingualism at the global, societal, and individual levels, highlighting the difficulties in measuring it, such as the presence of partial competence, lack of census data, and the unreliability of self-reporting accounts, thus advocating the use of more refined measures to pinpoint what multilingual speakers can do in the

language. Primarily, the author asserts that multilingualism is globally becoming more widespread than monolingualism is, though it is hard to quantify it; “it is clear that multilingualism has always been a widespread global phenomenon” (p. 43) and that politics contributes to shaping multilingualism, “political union among linguistic groups will lead to multilingualism” (p. 44). Other themes discussed include the rise of multilingualism, bilingualism and intelligence, multilingual assessment, ethnography, the observer’s paradox, and the linguistic landscape: “interest in the linguistic landscape has grown briskly” (p. 60).

In Chapter 4, ‘Dialects and Other Language Varieties’, Edwards shows how dialects are considered varieties of the same language and how it is easy for speakers of other distinct languages to understand one another using dialects of a specific shared language in a context in which a number of social and political factors come into play “a dialect achieves standard status because of the social power of society members” (p. 64). Moreover, Edwards relates language varieties to standard languages that are often socially constructed and politically consolidated, highlighting variations that both occur in a single speaker’s repertoire and are available within a dialect, such as style, register, jargon, slang, argot, and cant (see pages 71-72). Other themes discussed include evaluating dialects based on speakers’ attitudes and linguistic evidence, official languages and dialects, linguistic heterogeneity, and multilingual competence.

In Chapter 5, ‘Multilingual Abilities’, Edwards discusses themes of competence, performance, creative language use, and efficient switching between languages as examples of the multiple abilities which multilingual speakers possess: “multilingualism is a representation of the individual and group abilities” (p. 82). In addition, Edwards views multilingualism as both a set of context-based valuable resources that multilinguals can utilize and a marker of high status: “at socially elite levels, multilingualism has always been encouraged” (p. 84). Furthermore, the author explains how attitudes towards dialects reflect power relations, and how code-switching and style-shifting exemplify multilingual practices: “attitudes towards language(s) are important” (p. 84). Other themes discussed include learning a mother tongue and beyond, the social aspects of language learning, ‘language brokering’, code-switching, “different languages often intertwine via code-switching” (p. 80), cross-language influence, individual attitudes and abilities, polyglossia and personality, autism, and so on.

In Chapter 6, ‘The Consequences of Babel: Lingua Francas and Translation’, the author focuses on languages of wider communication, such as lingua francas, that are crucial for simplifying communication and reshaping power relations. Edwards also discusses translation and interpretation in terms of their power and limits. Moreover, the author emphasizes the salience of global English as a dominant lingua

franca, though this would create linguistic inequalities: “a multilingual world means that language divides exist” (p. 93). Besides, Edwards views translation and lingua francas as two major themes bridging language gaps, categorizing lingua francas into languages of wider communication that “achieved their power and status because of the social and political dominance of their users” (p. 94), languages with “restricted or simplified language mixture” (p. 95) such as pidgins and creoles, and less common ones “‘artificial’ or constructed languages” such as Esperanto (pp. 97-99). Other themes include translation in practice, computer-aided translation, “translation is simply a fact of multilingual life” (p. 102), ownership and secrecy, and voice appropriation.

In Chapter 7 ‘Keeping Languages Pure’, Edwards tackles a number of ideological issues, emphasizing the role of language academies and lexicographical efforts out of the need for language standardization “language academies and dictionaries both have substantial symbolic value” (p. 119), highlighting language and identity protection, and discussing themes of language purism, prescriptivism, standardization; that is, the author shows how purism is closely linked to concepts of nationalism “a strong connection between nationalism and language leads very naturally to desires to ‘protect’ and perhaps ‘purify’ that language” (p. 112), identity, and ideology in an attempt to keep languages “pure” and thus keep the foreign influence away “the notion of keeping a language free from foreign taint reveals a profound misunderstanding of the unfettered dynamics of all natural languages” (p. 112); accordingly, it is improbable to keep a language completely pure as languages are inevitably susceptible to change and contact.

In Chapter 8 ‘Languages and Identities’, Edwards views language as a symbol of pride and belonging, emphasizes the close relationship between language and identity, discusses power dynamics, and explains how language relates to the individual and group identity of which language is a crucial boundary marker “where language has ongoing instrumental value, its role as a ‘marker’ of group identity is obvious” (p. 126). Moreover, the author refers to hybrid identities in which multilinguals feel affiliated with diverse groups. Although multilingualism shapes such identities, it may trigger some tension. Besides, Edwards explains how language is often linked to loyalty, as is the case in colonial and postcolonial contexts, and tackles the theme of identity in terms of instrumental and symbolic language, language and religion, and language and gender: “men and women may use language for different social purposes” (p. 134).

In Chapter 9 ‘Language Decline and Revival: Basic Factors’, the author argues that language decline may occur at the social and political levels, especially in the 21st century, where many languages of low status are endangered and thus susceptible to ‘language death’. Also, the author touches upon minority languages

which “can be distinguished simply by numerical size” (p. 137). These language accommodations can be best exemplified by bilingual settings where “one language for home and hearth, another for the world outside one’s door” (p. 139), and language maintenance and revival where “isolation and lack of mobility are often prerequisites for language maintenance” (p. 145). Primarily, Edwards attempts to account for language decline, shift, or death, referring to some case studies to lend support to his views and highlighting a number of sociopolitical, economic and demographic factors in adopting languages such as government pressure, urban migration, intergenerational transmission, and so on “language decline and shift are symptoms of contact between groups of unequal political and economic power” (p. 141).

In Chapter 10, ‘Language Decline and Revival: Advocacy and Activism’, the author sheds light on the efforts made to revitalize declining languages, taking into account the role of governments and organizations, such as NGOs and grassroots activism. In this context, Edwards stresses the role of community members in the process of language revival through education, institutional support, protection, and cultural pride, urging language policy makers to be realistic about what can be achieved through empirical evidence and considering that revival can be maintained despite the fact that not all endangered languages can be practically revived. Themes discussed include language revival and collective will, commitment to a first language in a second one, activism and advocacy, bilingualism and the ‘new speaker’ “most ‘new speakers’ could be placed under the older rubric of ‘heritage-language’ learners” (p. 160), and minority languages and the internet (p. 161). The author also makes distinctions between “receptive (passive) and productive (active) bilingualism”, “integrative and instrumental motivation”, and “primary and secondary bilingualism” (p. 159).

In Chapter 11 ‘Language Planning and the Ecology of Language’, the author puts forward the idea that language planning, especially selection and implementation, “is a heavily value-laden exercise” (p. 169), encompasses “virtually all aspects of the social life of language” (p. 171), comprises status planning, corpus planning, and education planning, and is crucial for language survival; therefore, managing language use in society by means of making policy efforts is of paramount importance. Besides, Edwards delves into multiple themes such as language ecology, which relates to languages that coexist, evolve, and interact within complex and competing systems in a multilingual environment, “the holistic study of environments within which lives are lived and intertwined” (p. 173), language rights, linguistic imperialism, and the management of multilingual societies.

In the last chapter of the book (Ch.12) ‘Postmodern Perspectives’, the author views current multilingualism as fluid, dynamic, and context-specific, tackling and

reiterating a multitude of various debatable issues such as the notion of “new speakers” —those adopting a language later in life as is the case with immigrants—, linguistic landscape, how language and multilingualism shift, online code-switching, transliteration, the use of emojis, and digital multilingualism which often features in the blending of social media scripts, and so on. Other themes discussed include discourse analysis which “implies a close and/or ethnographic study of language, written or spoken” (p. 184), perceptual dialectology as ‘a subset of folk linguistics’ (p. 185), ‘critical’ discourse analysis as “part of the postmodern (‘deconstructivist’) thrust” (p. 187), postmodernism and its discontents where Edwards argues that “languages are social constructions – ‘inventions’” (p. 189), translanguaging, and superdiversity.

Notwithstanding his recognition of their influence as multilingual practices, Edwards seems to be critical of many neologisms which “the elemental reconsiderations of postmodernism have given rise to,” such as ‘translanguaging’ and ‘translingualism’, ‘polylinguaging’ and ‘polylingual languaging’ whose “use is almost invariably both unnecessary and ugly” (p. 190). In short, the author views multilingualism as a natural outgrowth of human contact and migration and concludes the book with an epilogue where he emphasizes the fact that “language is ubiquitous and is almost always more than an instrumental or communicative medium” (p. 197). Also, Edwards highlights the salience of group identity where “all discussions of the social life of language are ultimately discussions about group identity” (p. 198). Furthermore, the author reflects upon the future paths of multilingualism, arguing against the phenomenon of language loss and stressing creativity in multilingual practices and linguistic diversity worldwide, thus balancing language preservation with practicality.

Essentially, what characterizes this book is its accessibility and scope, as it is written in a clear and captivating style. Not only is this book considered an essential introduction and a valuable source of information for those interested in multilingualism, but it is also a highly recommended option for those with no prior knowledge of multilingualism. Moreover, the vivid descriptions and examples provided throughout the book make it worth reading, showing, for example, how language, identity, and power are interwoven.

In fact, this is the most useful book I have read about multilingualism so far, since it is substantially enriched with novel debates and perspectives on today’s multilingualism. Aesthetically, Edwards attempts to support his main viewpoints by adopting an interdisciplinary approach and utilizing anecdotes to connect with the reader emotionally. Although the author is critical of the improper classification of languages and dialects, of the problematic measurement of multilingualism, and of policies that disregard power relations, he tends to support the maintenance of

endangered languages by means of adopting a proper language policy, constantly showing how power, inequality, and politics shape multilingualism, and taking into account the fact that multilingualism is not only a linguistic phenomenon but is also inextricably entwined with social, economic and political power relations.

### **Reference**

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