



Richmond Embeywa
University of Arizona

REVIEW ESSAY:

Language and Tourism in Postcolonial Settings

by Angelika Mietzner & Anne Storch

Multilingual Matters, 2009. 171 pages.

Language and Tourism in Postcolonial Settings is a volume dedicated to facilitating an understanding of the intricate and emblematic sociolinguistic interactions by different stakeholders in postcolonial tourist settings, as well as the performativity of those conducting research in these spaces and their reflections on construction of Self vis-à-vis Other. The publication blends poetry with academic writing to deliver experiential narrations that challenge existing (hegemonic and Eurocentric) sociolinguistic conceptualizations of postcolonial tourism. The opening and closing poems by Tawona Sitholé and Alison Phipps transport the reader into a touristic postcolonial space, whether imagined or real, that allows the reflection of personal ideological dispositions. In addition to the poetic preface and bookending postscript, the volume comprises eight chapters and an afterword with contributor affiliations to fields in Linguistics and African Studies.

The volume editors Angelika Mietzner and Anne Storch, two specialists in African Linguistics with expansive professional experiences in postcolonial settings, take on the introductory chapter to explicate how language and performance in post- and neocolonial spaces are inextricably interlaced with colonial ideology. For instance, reflecting on beach interactions— vendor-tourist-researcher interactions—in Diani Beach, Kenya, Mietzner and Storch reveal that souvenir carvings designed to preserve memories of an ‘authentic’ exoticized portrayal of Africa that is both traditional and mysterious are ironically controlled by fair-trade and pro-poor organizations in Europe. Further, Mietzner and Storch argue that the recurring and referential discursive recourse

to cannibalism in creating the monstrous Other achieves a multiplicity of meanings: denoting “a shared past, a play with being othered [and] an unpleasant comment on a presumably failed interaction” (4). The orientalist desire for authentic experiences in tourist sites largely informed by the tourist gaze are also discussed. As a result, entertainers display mocking, exaggerated and ironic performances that serve to gratify the tourist gaze.

In calling for responsible research embedded in personal accountability, Christiane Bongartz (Cologne) warns that linguistic researchers risk advancing immanent prescriptivism when they fail to consider how personal dispositions, attitudes, privilege or even one’s mere presence in specific research contexts influences findings. Bongartz’s initial attempt to achieve a “context-free re-contextualization” (24) of linguistic landscaping in Jamaica—“de-peopled static documentation of literary artefacts”—compels her to confront her self-imposed censored role behind the lens, privileged education in the Global North, her presumption of a separateness between colonizer (English) and local (Patwa) language, her anticipation of the ruination of the language, and most importantly, her power in choosing the postcolonial space and how it influences her interpretation of experiences (28). Her own encounters in Jamaica reveal to her personal linguistic values in bilingual/ biliterate educational systems and independence of Patwa from standard British English, however, it also unravels her own habitual predictions about the ruination and separateness of Patwa. Linguistic ideas, as Bongartz contends, can effect real societal change such as the actualization of bilingual programs that were inspired by Jamaican linguists Hubert Devonish and Fred Cassidy. Bongartz further critiques the intrinsically monolingual linguistic ideologies in postcolonial educational systems that tend to “sort out [linguistic] messiness” or mark “local flavor” as variants of standard forms (29). While the intent to distinguish different forms of language may be well-intentioned, Bongartz concludes that it is unenlightened to not self-criticize one’s own contextualization, and as such, calls for the decolonization of monolingual linguistic systems that perceive language, operating from a system of separateness instead of acknowledging the translanguing fluidity between various linguistic repertoires. Finally, Bongartz suggests that linguistic researchers can benefit from taking a reflexive stance where they self-criticize and employ a deep-listening mechanism, particularly in dealing with pervasive discursive topics of the 21st century such as ‘white privilege,’ racism and sexual transgression to bridge the epistemological gaps exposed by ‘scientific’ research methods.

Luís Cronopio (Cologne) characterizes backpacking as an experience that relies on an interactional system (between the observer and the observed) and is hinged on emotions and interpretation of people’s own *realities* rather than explanations that may be susceptible to bias. Cronopio argues that backpackers’ desire to guard their ‘fraudulent’ identities may lead them to resent other tourists whose presence threaten to unmask their staged performance. He compares such a performance to a theatrical play but without the “dramatic intentionality” (39). In his comparison, the home-like

immaterial and interactional company represents the stage, observable events mirror the plot of the play while the script juxtaposes an idealization of authentic experiences with an acknowledgement of subjectivity. This isolation from materiality, as Cronopio adds, risks re-enacting paradoxical tendencies as seen in the Hippie movement of 1960s / 70s, or exoticizing the Other. Instead, he calls for a self-awareness that embraces the Other. One wonders whether Cronopio's attempt to pass personal experiences and ideas as generalized beliefs and practices in the backpacking movement is well justified. Moreover, his support of Malinowski's anthropological methodology that urges researchers to distrust participants' self-constructed *realities*, his Eurocentric visualization of colonialism and his suggestion that the "coloniser turns into the exploited in a matter of seconds" when confronting linguistic unfamiliarity are somewhat troubling (40).

Sara Zavaree (Cologne) focuses her attention on the public ceremony of Zār in the Hormoz Island of Iran. Zār, a previously secretive exorcizing ritual intended to free persons possessed by spirits that cause discomfort or illness, which has transformed into a commercialized "inauthentic" performance meant to satisfy the tourist gaze. However, despite attracting growing international interest, the ritual continues to face hurdles such as waning beliefs among the people, criminalization of the ceremony by changing regimes, advancements in medicine and harsh resistance from partisans of the Islamic Revolution. As Zavaree explains, the association of Zār with Blackness has heightened debate on Black identity in Iran with terms such as *Afro-Iranians* or *Black Iranians* believed to be indicative of either an externalized designation or a preservation of *African* identity. Making Zār performances public has, however, not always attracted a positive reception and, as Zavaree observes, travelers predisposed to the tourist gaze characterize such 'inauthentic' displays as spiritually lacking in depth and genuineness.

Angelika Mietzner (Cologne) discusses a unique type of philanthropic tourism which she calls the philanthropic journey. This form of volunteerism, often organized by non-governmental organizations, affords donors from mostly Western countries an opportunity to monitor their philanthropy and establish a relationship with the beneficiaries of their benevolence. The locals in return get an opportunity to "demonstrate their well-being" (67). Through a long-term observation of four journeys in Tiwi, Kenya, Mietzner reveals how philanthropic tourists use photography to erect a barrier that helps them alleviate uncertainty and fear by establishing an emotional distance with the locals. These privileged and agentive photographers often demand real and authentic pictures that meet the expectations of their perceived exoticized Other, a representation that often highlights poverty, desperation and gratitude.

Anne Storch (Cologne) examines the naming system in Seaford Town, Jamaica, to highlight how discursive othering in heritage tourism—a unique type of othering that manifests through

racialization, deformation, marginalization and deprivation—“present[s] heritage sites as arenas of the freak show” (82–83). Here, the artificiality of experiences is juxtaposed by real colonial exploitation of the Indigenous Other that creates an objectified and imagined past that is undeveloped, poor and photogenic. Storch particularly focuses on the discursive treatment of a population of German immigrants —‘the forgotten Germans’—that emigrated from Germany after the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 in search of a better life, to demonstrate how naming has been used to designate persons and places as undesirable, a scheme for dominance that situates them in a state of epistemic closure as regards to their history, race, class and gender.

Raymund Vitorio (Singapore and London) explores narrative and linguistic discourse among tourist guides in the Philippine heritage tourism industry to accentuate the different sociolinguistic strategies they employ as a form of resistance to the structurally oppressive tourism industry. This form of postcolonial performativity involves the use of linguistic strategies and multimodal resources that gives tour guides agency in confronting the tourist gaze. Rather than largely focusing on the tour guide Charles who hails from a fairly privileged background with exceptional linguistic adeptness to examine “strategies that tour guides may adopt,” a reader could have benefitted from a broader participant involvement that would strengthen the validity of Vitorio’s core argument (113).

Nico Nassenstein (Mainz) details an exoticized linguistic practice at the Kenyan coast where atypical ‘exploring travelers’ acquire a catchy, simplified and historically traceable linguistic practice which he terms as the Hakuna Matata Swahili (HMS). HMS is often used in travel forums or on social media to relive nostalgic experiences or recommend sex workers to the growing number of sex tourists. While such language use may seem playful and harmless, it is a type of othering that degrades the language and marks it “too unorganised to be prescriptively rectified” (149). One aspect that appears to have gone unaddressed is whether similar playful and translingual sociolinguistic interactions among domestic tourists beyond the Kenyan coast (who tend to avoid using standard Swahili) is conceivable and what that would mean for Nassenstein’s argument.

The recurrence of similar themes within changing situational contexts across the eight chapters along with Adam Jaworski’s (Hong Kong) comprehensive afterword enriches the reading experience by allowing the reader to take up different imaginative roles in confronting both personal values and ideological leanings. The volume also succeeds in articulating an often-overlooked researcher perspective in the struggle of identity formation in postcolonial tourism settings. However, as Bongartz reminds us of our power to choose, the cover photo – two white men (presumably tourists) working on what appears to either be a kite or parachute and two black men curiously looking on (presumably beach vendors) – along with the paucity of narratives touching on domestic tourism, risks perpetuating a colonial imagery of who gets to be ‘the tourist in the postcolonial setting.’