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REVIEW ESSAY:
**DECONSTRUCTING LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES IN
SALSA COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE**

Salsa, Language, and Transnationalism
By Britta Schneider
Multilingual Matters, 2014. 143 pages.

Britta Schneider, sociolinguist and author of *Salsa, Language and Transnationalism*, presents ethnographic research from three separate salsa communities of practice—one in Frankfurt, Germany, and two in Sydney, Australia—in order to deconstruct language ideologies across national, cultural, and ethnic boundaries. The author uses the tools of discourse analysis to analyze language use and national / local language ideologies, in the context of transnational salsa communities of practice. She examines how salsa participants construct new, or reflect parts of existing national, social, economic and linguistic identities. In doing so, Schneider intends to discredit a model in which one nation is married to one culture / language by showing that language use is a multi-faceted combination of discourses that engage a complex realm of meanings and create new language ideologies in the course of their use. Schneider grounds her empirical research and discourse analyses with extensive conceptual support from scholars of language ideology and language identity, such as Jan Blommaert, Ulrich Beck, Alastair Pennycook, Susan Gal, and Ben Rampton, as well as many others.

The book has seven detailed chapters that describe and explain various aspects of the ethnographic study and its data. Chapter One outlines the methodology for the study: the

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researcher takes field notes from her observations and participation within the salsa communities; she interviews various participants and uses discourse analysis to evaluate the different language ideologies and social hierarchies of the three separate salsa communities. In addition, Schneider discloses her three main research questions (12):

- Which language ideologies are found in salsa communities?
- Next to national language discourses, which other societal or cultural discourses co-constitute language ideologies in salsa communities?
- What happens to the notion of *language* in language discourse in a transnational context?

Chapter Two, “Transnational Language Discourse,” begins with the rationale for studying language ideologies within a salsa community of practice as a valid endeavor in sociolinguistics. The culturally “Latin” salsa serves as the fluid context in which multilingual, multicultural participants meet for salsa dancing at certain times and in certain places, socially positioning themselves at these events. The author devotes significant space relating *transnationalism* to the concepts of *cosmopolitanism*, *globalization*, and *superdiversity* as she establishes the claim “that discourse shapes the social world, which is the basic theoretical tenet of studying transnational language ideologies” (33).

Chapter Three includes a brief history of salsa, including its social, political and multicultural roots; its significance and practice among different Latino nationalities; gender roles and their part in the creation of “an imagined ethnic identity” (42); and the descriptions of the different salsa styles “that relate to different discourses and ideologies” (43). In situating salsa as the context, Schneider provides insights into how this transnational leisure culture serves as a platform for new social constructions of identity for its local participants.

In Chapter Four, Schneider vividly depicts the Frankfurt salsa community of practice in which she participates. A sub-chapter “German Public Discourses on Multilingualism and Multiculturalism” contrasts broader societal discourses to those in that one multicultural, multilingual salsa community. One such observation on language and identity comes from a German female salsa participant interviewee, who explains that “in speaking Spanish, she feels she breaks out of a role that is given to her by other social discourses: the role of the ‘frosty middle European’” because “speaking Spanish makes

her feel joyful and happy” (58). The chapter analyzes many other excerpts that offer the reader a thick description of that particular salsa community and the interactive discourses within it.

In Chapters Five and Six respectively, the author contrasts two very different salsa communities in Sydney, Australia, one of LA-style dance and another of Cuban-style. Schneider shows how the commercialization and ballroom characteristics of LA-style salsa, along with a noted absence of, or even interest in, Spanish language or any images depicting a Latino culture, produce a capitalist discourse based on English monolingualism, exemplified by a business-oriented mission statement on the community’s website. She explains how this mirrors the cosmopolitan values of the immigrant population of Australia, a country whose national discourse values performance over ethnicity; a society which values the “universal” (89). The Cuban-style salsa community, on the other hand, uses Spanish to create a language boundary; through its discourses, this community reflects strong anti-commercialization while favoring a more authentic, less-prescribed salsa dance style than that of ballroom salsa dancing. The Cuban-style community embraces a Latin cultural identity as reflected in their use of images and symbols in everything from their website to style of dress. The reader is then able to gather a clearer understanding of how various discourses contribute to, and distinguish, the three salsa communities of practice under study.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, “Language in a Transnational Age: Mobile Meanings and Multiple Modernities,” the author closes the study with a theoretical reflection on, among other things, the sociolinguistics of globalization. The mobility of multilingual, multicultural populations across national boundaries influences conceptions of language when integrated into local community spaces. This mobility, in turn, is discussed in relation to *modernity* in its several conceptual forms.

Schneider’s book serves as a model for future ethnographic research into other diverse communities of practice in which one may seek to explore language use and ideology as co-constructed by its participants. She also provides a solid research survey for anyone interested in language and identity, as well as a methodological introduction to the tools of discourse analysis in sociolinguistics. It is a comprehensive contribution to the field in one situated context, making the concepts and theories easier to grasp for those new to the fields of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics.