

## ○ **J. E. JOSEPH, *LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: NATIONAL, ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS***

(BASINGSTOKE, PALGRAVE MACMILLAN. 2004. PP. XII, 268)

For the reader requiring an introduction to the broad, cross-disciplinary field of language and identity, this book is an excellent place to start. The book opens with a discussion of the components of the author's own identity, which immediately engages the reader. The book goes on to provide a broad evolutionary overview of identity theory, closing with an ethnographic study of two contemporary contexts where linguistic identities are political flashpoints, Hong Kong and Lebanon. Joseph's book stresses the importance of language in identity at individual, community and national level. Joseph argues that linguistics should be 'rehumanised' to include the study of how identity is constructed.

Joseph guides us through the range of interpretations of identity in the social sciences and humanities. Taking traditional structural linguistics as his starting point, the author weaves back and forth through history, tracing the origins of linguistic and social theories about national, ethnic and religious identities. In chapter 1, the author calls for the re-configuration of linguistics to take account of identity. Identity, he argues, is at the heart of linguistic analysis because language is shaped by cultural, national, ethnic and religious identities. In chapter 2, Joseph presents the case for an evolutionary theory of language, advancing the argument that our understanding of language cannot be complete without the consideration of identity. Joseph's arguments support his claim that identity is constructed in discourse, a theme that runs through the whole book and supports his analysis of language in identity in his two case studies.

Chapter 3 opens with a summary of the key tenets of traditional, structural linguistic analysis and its contributions to theories of identity. Starting with Aristotle and Rousseau, the author reviews early linguistic understandings of identity, showing how the social in identity came to be increasingly acknowledged. Thus, the author juxtaposes Saussure and Voloshinov; Jespersen and Sapir; Firth, Halliday and later structuralists; Brown, Gilman, Labov and others. The chapter briefly acknowledges the influence of feminism and gender theory in understandings of language in identity. Taking us through to the late twentieth century, Joseph shows how social network theory, the notion of communities of practice and the increasing awareness of language ideology marked an important turning point in understandings of language in identity, mentioning the work of Milroy, Eckert, Wodak, Schieffelin, Verschueren, Blommaert and Kroskrity, among others.

Chapter 4 reviews the contribution of theories from disciplines other than linguistics, such as sociology, exemplified in the work of Goffman, Bernstein, Foucault and Bourdieu. In this chapter, Joseph shows how language attitudes research, accommodation theory and the notions of symbolic power and habitus have informed our understandings of language in identity. Joseph notes how the notion of habitus has brought us back round to looking for explanations as to the role of human agency, or how individuals actively construct and reconstruct their personal identities. The chapter acknowledges the contributions of social psychology to identity theory. Joseph explains how social identity theory marks a break with sociological analyses concerned with power, reviewing the highly influential work of Tajfel, Turner, Giles, and Billig among others. The chapter goes on to review the contribution of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, which stressed the role of language in signalling complex, multiple identities. Their work, as the author points out, marks another major watershed in identity theory, in its understanding that identity is constructed in discourse. This broad-ranging chapter closes with a discussion of the philosophies of essentialism and constructivism, which represent two polarised approaches to language and identity that have been of influence in recent decades.

Chapter 5 provides an equally broad sweep through theories of language in national identities. Acknowledging that the nation is an inherently problematic concept, Joseph takes a constructivist line in pointing out the arbitrariness of national languages and identities. He makes an extensive survey of the emergence of nationalism, starting from the book of Genesis, taking us through the Renaissance and the American and French Revolutions. He also mentions Marxist notions of internationalism and Kohn's notion of voluntaristic, organic nationalisms. Joseph uses three key approaches to show that nations are artificial constructs, reproduced through cultural practice: Gellner's notion of nation-state congruity, which perceives language as the basis of national identity; Kedourie's view of language as simply one aspect of nationalism; and Billig's notion of banal nationalism which claims that identity is sustained through the everyday deployment of national symbols, such as flags and anthems. The chapter closes with a global survey of literature concerning national languages.

Chapter 6 presents a case study of national identity in Hong Kong. Joseph argues that the Hong Kong Chinese identify as Southern Chinese, rather than Chinese or British. This, he suggests, is a way of resisting the influence of the Beijing Government and past British colonialism. Hong Kong English, in the author's opinion, might well play a role in resisting Mainland Chinese incursions into Hong Kong's autonomy.

Chapter 7 gives us an informative overview of language in ethnic and religious identity, providing useful definitions of terms and discussing their politically loaded

nature. In an interesting discussion of personal names as indexes of personal ethnic and religious histories, the author argues for their inclusion in linguistic analysis. Finally, the chapter discusses language spread and identity levelling as features of globalisation. Joseph considers their implications for the survival of ethnic and religious identities. The author is optimistic that these forms of identity will continue to resist the forces of linguistic and cultural homogenisation.

The case study of Lebanon, in Chapter 8, focuses on the formation of Lebanese Christian identity. Arab-French bilingualism is an important signifier of identity for Lebanese Christians in the face of Islamic domination and orients Christians towards a European identity. However, this has been undermined by Arabic-English-French trilingualism in the national school curriculum. Joseph provides a fascinating historical account of the construction of Lebanese Christian identity in its Phoenician ancestry. Joseph interweaves this account with a biographical description of the work of Renan, who was largely responsible for promulgating orientalist attitudes towards the Middle East. In this chapter, Joseph reflects on how cultural constructs based on fiction are dangerous and unworkable because they are founded on essentialist assumptions.

Joseph's book is entertaining and informative. It puts the vast range of literature concerned with language and identity into historical perspective and provides an overview of the key paradigm shifts in identity theory. The chapters are dense and full of information, sometimes resulting in overload for this reader. The sweep through history does, at times, become rather overwhelming. The author also begins some intriguing discussions of several influential theories but these are undeveloped, leaving the reader wanting to know more. This was particularly true of the author's treatment of communities of practice, habitus and imagined communities. The author's discussion of personal names in identity also seems to sit outside the overall discussion somewhat. The two case studies were, for this reader, the most enjoyable aspects of the book. The author's strong sense of history made for an interesting treatment of the issues in these case studies.

What the book lacks in depth, it makes up for in its scope. This is perhaps to be expected given that the purpose of the book is to provide a broad overview of identity as a linguistic phenomenon that attempts to speak to people across a wide range of interests, as the author explains in the preface. The book is wide-ranging and highly readable, however, the reader will have to look elsewhere for deeper treatment of many of the issues. Yet, as an introductory overview, this book is a rewarding read and is highly recommended.

*Review by Kerry Taylor-Leech, Griffith University*