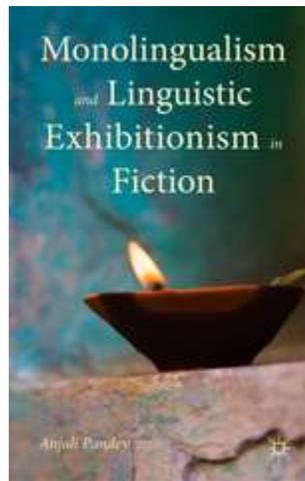


Book Review

Monolingualism and Linguistic Exhibitionism in Fiction



Author: Anjali Pandey

Book Title: Monolingualism and Linguistic Exhibitionism in Fiction

Year: 2016

Place of Publication: New York & Hampshire

Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan

Number of Pages: X, 302 Pages

Reviewer: Reviewer: Dr. Shadi Neimneh

Faculty of Arts, Department of English Language and Literature

Hashemite University, Jordan

Pandey's 2016 book is a rigorous discussion of multilingualism and monolingualism in prize winning, marketable fiction, a fiction that "Englishes" and re-Englishes our world in the service of globalization. Booker and Pulitzer winners and shortlisters—it is argued—use tokenizations, (self)translations, transliterations, and lexicalizations from different languages like Hindi, Arabic, Bengali, Turkish, and Urdu while making a case for or "visibilizing" more dominant languages like English, French, and Italian. The main contention is that momentary and shallow

multilingualism in this prize winning fiction, i.e. “cosmetic multilingualism” as Pandey repeatedly calls it, hides a turn to a form of long-term, more serious monolingualism. The book, therefore, makes literature, and fiction in particular, the battlefield for competition among different languages to gain global dominance. Accordingly, it is concluded that such writers are helping sustain current global linguistic hierarchies by peripherizing some languages.

The book is a significant contribution to postcolonial studies from a language-based perspective. Thus, one of the merits of this book is a multidisciplinary approach appealing to readers and critics working in the fields of applied linguistics, stylistics, postcolonial studies, multilingualism, sociolinguistics, translation studies, and above all cultural/globalization studies. Actually, this book might gain a good ground in critical studies nowadays, in tandem with the increasing popularity of postcolonial literatures in Western academic institutions since the 1990s and the surge of interest in the question of “Empire,” to use the title of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s 2000 book on globalization and international relations.

The book consists of an Introduction on languages in literature, a Conclusion on the efficacy of linguistic exhibitionism, and three chapters on award cultures and multilingualness in the era of post-globalization followed by four chapters on linguistic exhibitionism in the fiction of individual millennial authors.

The prize-winning transnational authors Pandey discusses in separate chapters are Salman Rushdie (his 2008 novel *The Enchantress of Florence*), Aravind Adiga (his 2008 novel *The White Tiger*), Jhumpa Lahiri (her 2008 short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth*), and Monica Ali (her 2003 novel *Brick Lane*). To reiterate Pandey’s contention, such writers seem to market multilingualism, linguistic diversity, and hybridity in their works while they are actually “Englishizing” our post-global world in the 21st century, thus rendering multilingualism to the superficially “cosmetic” status.

Pandey’s argument is reminiscent of Gayatri Spivak’s contention in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) that the Western intellectual, in a replication of neo-colonial power structures, can further the oppression and cultural erasure of the subaltern and be complicit in the project of imperialism. Likewise, such Western-trained writers may further promote certain dominant languages at the expense of other “minor” ones, pursuing what Spivak once labeled as “epistemic violence.” In other words, linguistic hegemony or appropriation is constructed in fiction just as “otherness” is constructed in language and via colonialist and imperialistic ideologies. And such transnational writers are complicit in such covert forms of normative monolingualism and linguistic violence.

From one perspective, the book justifies the hegemonic status of some languages like English in the post-global era, a status largely occupied through literature whereby it becomes the battleground for “linguistic wars.” Critics might have issues with the implicit assumption that diasporic prize-winning authors achieve their international status because of the ideological deployment of multilingual strategies in the service of globalization, not necessarily because of their artistic merits. On the other hand, it should be asserted that most of such writers achieved international fame and won prestigious prizes before the publication of the works Pandey discusses. Thus, their display of strategic multilingualism in the service of monolingualism can be seen as a reaction to their international fame and adoption by imperial centers rather than a cause of this prestige.

Moreover, the role of readers' responses, the publishing industry, and academic institutions in the creation of literary/linguistic tastes or distastes and global reception should not be downplayed. Furthermore, critics may argue that Pandey's selection of writers is not adequately representative, having that the writers chosen for analysis come from one continent, with Indian and Bangladeshi roots.

Finally, and as Pandey is aware, the conception of the book is not particularly new since language mixing is a noticeable phenomenon in postcolonial literatures. Chinua Achebe, for example, finds in English a convenient medium for conveying his artistic vision and African experience as expressed in his novels and non-fiction. By contrast, he occasionally uses Ibo in the form of translated proverbs and transliterated character names. The cultural dominance of English might justify the writer's adoption of English to address global audiences. However, Achebe's 20th century literary oeuvre is different in timeframe from the new and 21st century prize-winning fiction Pandey tackles. This book is compatible with the vogue of brittle "multilingualism" and logic of diversity characteristic of recent globalization discourses which mask different forms of hegemony and homogenization, linguistic and otherwise. The book's systematic analysis of code-mixing in literature as well as its sustained theoretical principles for the analysis of this phenomenon are notable.

All in all, Pandey's book is a timely good read for our post-global literary scene. It is a cogent account of linguistic imbalance in literature, literary capital, and canon formation. Interestingly, the book provides an insight into how scholars with a background in linguistics deal with literary materials. And Pandey's interrogation of the employment of language in literature is certainly worthwhile. The patient analysis and the great breadth of language-oriented research are also commendable. And the multiplicity of textual evidence of linguistic exhibitionism Pandey culls from the fictions under analysis is one of the book's main strengths. Contra its exposition of "cosmetic multilingualism," this book can be read as an ardent call for real multilingualism in fiction to help achieve more international communication and a better, symmetrical global interchange.

Reviewer: Dr. Shadi Neimneh
Faculty of Arts, Department of English Language and Literature
Hashemite University, Jordan