

Book Reviews

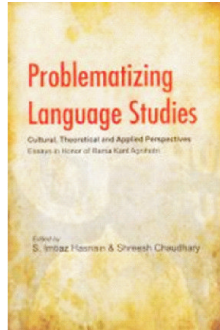
Problematizing Language Studies

Edited by Imtiaz Hasnain
and Shreesh Chaudhary
(2010)

Delhi: Aakar Books

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Reviewed by: *Vandana Puri*



Problematizing Language Studies is an edited volume that consists of thirty-six essays written in honour of Professor Rama Kant Agnihotri. Language is a multi-dimensional field of study: from the politics of language, to the histories of the individuals and societies that speak them, to the theories of how language manifests itself at the sentence, sound, word and meaning level, to the application of language in teaching and language planning. This book brings forth all these diverse perspectives on the nature of language in the context of Indian linguistics and language studies worldwide. The papers in the book have been broadly categorized under three headings: cultural (form and use of language), theoretical (theory of grammar, syntax, morphology, phonetics and phonology) and applied (language pedagogy, language planning and data bases, etc.). All the themes in this book are topics that Professor Rama Kant Agnihotri has been involved with in one way or another. The oriental linguists were very involved in understanding the Indian languages. The first two essays of this volume are concerned with the British colonial endeavors to understand the linguistic dynamics of the region. Franklin discusses the fascination of the orientalist with Hindu-Islamic art and the linguistic heritage of India; Dudney writes about the colonial views

on Indian vernacular languages, especially Braj Bhâchâ. Some other papers look at language and identity issues; Rahman talks about Urdu being the language of the Muslim political identity or/and of love and erotica. Similarly, both McCormick and Bhatt look at the use of language in media and identity issues. Chaudharay and Kidwai's papers expose two different approaches towards the question of Hindi-Urdu-Hindustani being a continuum or (culturally) distinct languages. Varma and Bhattacharya and Basantarani raise concerns about the possibility of the local languages dying and about minority language rights, and plead for more support for these languages. Hasnain and Patnaik examine 'context' based analysis.

This book also provides the reader with linguistic descriptions and analyses at the morphological, syntactic, semantic and phonological level. Rangila, in his paper, looks at verbs in Jenu Kuruba. Rajendra Singh argues that the notion of 'morphological complexity' be expunged for simple concepts such as 'length' (or 'weight'). Dasgupta discusses the long vowel problem in Hindi. Fèry argues that most Indian languages should be categorized as 'phrase languages' in terms of intonation. Fanselow explores German nominal compounds to see if there is only one mechanism that generates recursive structures or more. Kumar suggests that Hindi infinitives should be called a mixed category. Raina discusses compositional aspects of semantic restructuring in complex predicates.

Some of the essays in this book are theoretical in nature. Pandey talks about a certain way of reasoning as the main historical truth underlying the leading theories of today. Shailendra Singh suggests that Indian linguistics can be taken to new heights and can be 'destination next'. Udaya Narayan Singh raises concerns about the

future of literacy and education in plural settings, and argues that much needs to be done to bring the opportunities of the democratic world to India. He also suggests that we need to inspire people and not just impart knowledge. Ahmad discusses the notions of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ as complex concepts in research, and asserts that social identities and boundaries change according to the context. Narang and Cha present an empirical study to explore whether there is a difference in the processes of acquisition of a second language and a foreign language.

A recurrent theme of this book is the history, impact and linguistic features of English in India. Montaut explores whether English can be the language that gives India an equal footing in the world culture and create an internal dialogue between Indian cultures. Kak looks at the Kashmiri-English contact situation and observes that there is a progressive phonological assimilation towards English, especially in the younger generation. Hosali looks at the lexico-semantic features in current day Butler English, which she considers to be an unstable pidgin, and compares it to other pidgins and creoles. Bhat provides an overview of the history of English in India, from the missionaries to the introduction of English in the educational institutions in the colonial era, to the present day English in India—the symbol of prestige, modernity and upward mobility. Gupta and Gurtu explore the different kinds of lexical phrases used by educated second language users of English in Delhi in their writing, and assess how correctly and appropriately these phrases are used.

The next set of papers are about language pedagogy, and would be of special interest to school teachers. Some instructors believe in using the learner’s L1 as a medium of instruction for teaching a language and others believe in using the L2 only. In his paper, Khanna presents

both sides of the picture and shows how both these views are supported by various convictions and limitations from both the instructor’s and learner’s viewpoint. Second language teaching has undergone an enormous change all over the world; however, teaching Indian languages abroad still has a long way to go. Nihalani’s paper is about comprehensibility, intelligibility and interpretability in the global context, and suggests pragmatic approaches towards language teaching. These include exposure to different varieties of pronunciation, fundamentals of general phonetics and the importance of supra-segmental features in learning a language. Koul presents various aspects, difficulties, limitations and suggestions for teaching Indian languages such as Hindi or Urdu in foreign countries. He further discusses various aspects of teaching that might be useful for teachers of Indian languages in India and abroad; these include texts, supplementary material (including audio-visual, online material, etc.), evaluation, teaching literature, translation and culture, problems in translation and translation tools, etc. Mathew’s paper is very insightful for primary school teachers in English medium schools who wish to explore different ways of teaching English to young children. Through his paper, Mathew sheds light on how teachers need to be trained in teaching English to young children, the need for using English for teaching at least one subject such as science or math, and the need to value and utilize the knowledge, culture and language that the child brings to the classroom. Prahlad, in his paper, discusses various issues relevant to English language curriculum renewal at the tertiary level in the context of globalization. Mohanty explains that in spite of being motivated, it is hard for learners to acquire English because the text books do not adhere to the major criteria of learnability in terms of vocabulary. He asserts that it is important to adhere to these criteria when learners are exposed to English for the

first time; otherwise it leads to poor learning. Aslam's essay is about the 'Communicative Language Teaching' (CLT) method of language teaching and its implementation in large class sizes. CLT draws on many language teaching methods where the teacher is a facilitator of uninterrupted and un-interfered use of language through games, role play, cue cards, activities, etc.

All in all, *Problematizing Language Studies* is a very interesting assemblage of ideas about language and pedagogy. The pluralistic and multidimensional nature of language in society is reflected in the various themes of this book. It represents most of the current themes in Indian linguistics, and is a reflection of the rapid social change, diversity, multilingualism and plural cultural ethos that India embodies.

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Real Writing

by Graham Palmer,
Roger Gower and
Simon Haines (2008)

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Reviewed by: *Saloni Jain*

Real writing is multi-level course in writing for young or adult learners to learn day-to-day writing one would need to do when visiting or living in an English-speaking country. It

integrates reading, writing and listening in a way that learner's autonomy while learning to write remains a prime focus. The purpose of the book is to enhance the confidence of the learners and help them embrace different styles of writing.

The volume consists of four books ranging from elementary level to advanced level. Each book has sixteen units and is divided into two sections catering to formal and informal form of writing. Units 1-5 focus on social and travel situations whereas units 6-16 focus on work and study situations. Book 1 is an elementary level book of writing with simple gap filling writing or shortened messages. Book 2 is pre-intermediate level, a level for those who already have some knowledge of writing and takes them to the next level by introducing them to higher level tasks such as making presentations and process description. Book 3 is for upper intermediate level learners and book 4 is for advanced level learners; for those who want to have enough proficiency to interact in a competitive work environment.

From many books available, this shines a different light by providing a sorted layout which is not simplistic. Every unit, first introduces the topic, gives all the relevant information that a learner needs to work on along with practice questions and self-assessment checklist. The book also introduces the learner to new cultures while simultaneously increasing his/ her knowledge.

The variety of exercises given presents different ways of writing through brain storming exercises to practice exercises. Exercises in each unit are helpful for the learner to develop useful skills such as planning, organizing and checking the work. Every unit begins with 'Get ready to write', a pre-writing exercise which introduces the reader to the theme of the unit. This is followed by simple exercises to render scope of learning the conventions of writing and basic

