V. Ramanathan (ed): Language Policies and (Dis)Citizenship: Rights, Access, Pedagogies
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Núria Garcia

The volume, edited by Vaidehi Ramanathan, investigates the relationship between language policies and citizenship in the context of globalization. While previous scholarship theorized citizenship in a restrictive or minimalist way, as referring to an official status in terms of visa or immigration, Ramanathan and her—almost exclusively female—contributors adopt a more substantive view of this concept. Citizenship is hence, analyzed in terms of agency and individuals’ capacity for ‘being able to participate fully’ (p. 1) in the different social, political and cultural institutions of society. Conversely, the notion of ‘dis-citizenship’ (Pothier and Devlin 2006) borrowed from disability studies, is used to describe how different types of language policies or pedagogical practices may impede full participation and the exercise of certain dimensions of citizenship for particular social groups or individuals. The case studies described in the chapters of the book cover a large array of geographical settings and topics within language policy, thus offering ‘situated and ethnographic accounts of very localized contexts of (dis)citizenship’ (p. 10). The issues raised by the different authors in this volume are all the more relevant in today’s context, marked by the increased saliency of processes of globalization challenging the traditional boundaries of social membership.

The great strength of the book resides in its rich empirical grounding and the diversity and scope of the case studies. Focus on the micro-level shows how global dynamics linked to the hegemony of English play out in very different local contexts, an approach that is not without reminding of (Sonntag 2003) work on the ‘local politics of global English’. In the majority of the contributions, it is indeed the position of English, be it as exclusionary hegemonic language, or as means of access...
to global citizenship, that plays a crucial role in creating processes of (dis)citizenship.

The case studies set in the United States reveal the predominance of a monolingual ideology tying citizenship to English only. The limited recognition of Indigenous, migrant and foreign languages in American language and education policies in general is analyzed critically as being prejudicial, not only to the different language minority speakers, but also to native English speakers themselves. Aya Matsuda and Chatwara Suwannamai Duran (Chapter 3) analyze how discourses conflating the terms ‘multilingual’ and ‘English-as-a-second-language learners’ contribute to the construct of US Americans as monolingual English speakers, and result in the restriction of foreign language education for the latter, thus excluding them from global citizenship. Teresa L. McCarty (Chapter 7) investigates the link between educational and linguistic sovereignty of Native Americans. She shows how language education policies emphasizing academic achievement in English and restricting the preservation of Indigenous languages constrain Navajos’ access to language and education, thus consequently, their ability to participate fully as citizens. In a similar vein, Kate Menken (Chapter 11) shows how English-only language education policies enacted in New York City, under pressures for accountability, deny equal educational opportunity for emergent bilingual students. As bilingual education programs are being pitted against English acquisition in schools and integration into US society, emergent bilinguals are framed as deficient dis-citizens. This representation is also visible in the ‘minimalist’ view of citizenship that prevails among teachers of school citizenship classes preparing adults to pass the naturalization test in Sacramento, California, analyzed by Ariel Loring (Chapter 10).

In other parts of the world, learning English as second or foreign language is equated with access to economic benefits, English-language culture and inclusion into a community of global citizens. This dominant discourse on global English is however, at odds with the local realities in certain rural areas. Rosemary Henze and Fabio Oliveira Coelho (Chapter 12) show how national language education policies following the rhetoric of English as part of globalization do not fit the local realities of the rural communities in the North of Nicaragua. The international push towards English as global language does not take into account rural students’ authentic needs and uses of English, but contributes, on the contrary, to sharpening the inequalities between urban, middle-class students and students in poor, rural areas. The situation is more ambiguous in Northern Chile, where Julia Menard-Warwick (Chapter 5) shows the existence of competing language ideologies among English teachers, between hegemonic discourses connecting English to economic success and representations envisioning English as language giving access to global citizenship. While teachers’ discourses associate English to the global economy, upper classes, social mobility and ‘the future’, in their personal experiences, the teachers themselves remain excluded from these very same processes.

In the other chapters, the question of (global) English plays a less central role. Busi Makoni’s contribution (Chapter 2) raises the question of the intersectionality between language and gender inequalities through the use of isihlonipho sabafazi (women’s language of respect) in Zimbabwe. The author shows that although the
Zimbabwean constitution recognizes the right to use one’s language (here Ndebele) as cultural right, a de facto exclusion of women using the isihlonipho language variation takes place in various court settings. This covert language policy leads to assigning women the status of ‘dis-citizens’ and denying them substantive citizenship. While the concept of dis-citizenship ‘flows thickly as a subtext through each piece’ (p. 254), its link to language policies may be elusive or perhaps absent in contributions focusing on processes of inclusion and exclusion indirectly related to language (Chapters 4, 6, 8).

By investigating the link between (dis)citizenship, globalization and language policies, the volume edited by Ramanathan raises the more general question of the inadequacy of traditional definitions of citizenship to grasp contemporary social reality. It calls to go beyond classical typologies, such as T.H. Marshall’s distinction between civil, social and political citizenship (Marshall 1950) in order to look whether it is actually possible for individuals to exercise citizenship through participation. While the answers given to this question by the different contributors of the volume are primarily empirical, they open nevertheless, a promising new research track for future theoretical investigation.

References

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Núria Garcia holds a PhD in political science and is an associate researcher at the Center for European Studies at Sciences Po Paris. Her research interest focuses on the link between language policies and citizenship regimes. She is currently a board member of the research committee RC50 ‘The politics of language’ of the International Political Science Association.