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SINFREE MAKONI & ALASTAIR PENNYCOOK (eds.), *Disinventing and reconstituting languages*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2007. Pp. xv, 249. Pb \$37.95.

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This volume builds on Hobsbawm & Ranger's (1983) exploration of the "invention of tradition" to argue that the concepts of "language" and discrete "languages" are historically situated Western inventions rather than natural objects. This project will be of interest not only to socioculturally oriented language scholars but also to formalists, because it shows that in important ways there is no "it" there. Furthermore, the volume has practical applicability in language education, planning, and activism, because it demonstrates that mistaken understandings of language can doom even well-intentioned interventions.

In the first chapter, the editors argue that "languages" are products of the Western imagination, frequently imposed on colonial subjects. Furthermore, scholarly metalanguage reifies languages, inventing what it claims to study. Despite the illusory nature of languages, the invention process has real-world, often devastating effects. Beyond demonstrating that languages are inventions, the authors also hope to "reconstitute" language in ways that will be accurate and empowering to speakers. The remaining chapters of the book fall under three broad themes: the invention of specific languages and/or the idea of "language" in historical perspective (Ariel Heryanto, Makoni & Pedzisai Mashiri, Pennycook), the often negative effects of faulty conceptualizations of language (Jan Branson & Don Miller, Lynn Mario T. Menezes de Souza, Steven L. Thorne & James P. Lantolf, Elaine Richardson), and new models for language teaching based on the volume's "reconstituted" view of language (Brigitta Busch & Jürgen Schick, Suresh Canagarajah).

Chaps. 2 through 4 are studies of the invention of "language" and of particular languages in different colonial and neocolonial contexts. In chap. 2, Heryanto shows that the notion of "language" did not exist in precolonial Indonesia. While the term *bahasa*, now roughly equivalent to "language", existed in precolonial Malay and Javanese, its meaning was radically different. It referred to the appropriate use of hierarchically arranged linguistic forms, rather than to a universal human faculty. The assimilation of *bahasa* to European conceptions of "language" paralleled a change in local conceptions of personhood from relational to independent, thus "liberating" the individual to sell his or her labor as a free agent in the globalized market economy. Makoni & Mashiri (chap. 3) problematize attempts at language planning in Africa, noting that they are beholden to the inventions of colonial regimes, such as counting and naming languages, draw-

ing linguistic boundaries, defining “indigenous” languages, and assembling dictionaries. Unlike in traditional models, the goal of language planning should be primarily “to promote people” and only secondarily “to enhance communication between them” (63). Rather than drawing on reified colonial constructions, planning efforts should concentrate on urban vernaculars, which are inherently mixed. The authors argue for language planning that validates people’s heteroglossic verbal repertoires. In chap. 4, Pennycook attacks the notion that there is such a thing as “English.” He argues that the extreme differences between things labeled “English” across the globe call into question its existence as a distinct, identifiable code. Despite English’s dubious ontological status, it is surrounded by the notion that it can improve quality of life for people around the world. This promise is also a myth, for English “keeps out far more than it lets in” (103). Pennycook recommends thinking about these and other “language effects” of the invention of English, including the investment in it of language industries, such as linguistics, teaching, publishing, and policy.

The next four chapters take up Pennycook’s suggestion to consider language effects. In chap. 5, Branson & Miller argue that linguistics is a Western cultural construct, which creates the objects that it purports to study and often participates in the oppression of speakers. Scholars’ attempts to demonstrate that sign languages meet the Saussurean criteria for classification as “languages” have in fact reinforced the inferiority of sign languages and their users. These authors suggest that instead of proving that sign languages meet the definition of “language” established by linguists, we should examine sign languages to undermine orthodoxies in the field of linguistics. An analysis of the Balinese sign language Kata Kolok leads the authors to question the tenets of grammaticality and arbitrariness. In chap. 6, Menezes de Souza traces the language effects of Boasian linguistics as it has been adapted and introduced to indigenous education efforts in Brazil via the Christian missionary organization Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Although Boas’s work was explicitly anti-racist, Menezes de Souza reveals that some of its underlying ideology differed little from colonial ideology dating to the 16th century. His privileging of the analyst’s knowledge over indigenous knowledge, adopted by SIL and later by today’s Brazilian educators, amounts to “the perpetuation of the colonial difference” (150). The result is that indigenous education relies on Western concepts of speech and writing and does little to empower students or promote indigenous languages. Thorne & Lantolf’s chap. 7 argues that the focus in linguistics on “structure” reifies language and artificially extracts it from history: “[T]heoretical frameworks have shown a tendency to become treated as co-equivalent with the phenomena they attempt to document and explain” (172). The authors propose as an alternative a “linguistics of communicative activity” (LCA), which will understand language as an activity rather than a thing. LCA views language as an emergent system of skills that speakers employ in goal-oriented ways and with sensitivity to communicative context. Richardson’s contribution (chap. 8) is an odd fit for this section

(and even for the volume as a whole). She aims to show how performers from the rap group OutKast balance their subordination as performers with resistance to domination, through strategies that destabilize African American “language,” “identity,” and the link between them. Laudably, Richardson attempts to apply the “disinvention” model proposed in the volume to the analysis of empirical data, in this case one of the group’s music videos. However, she draws her analysis directly from the video’s images and lyrics, paying no attention to the interpretations of the performers or their audiences. Furthermore, the article seems to reify rather than question scholarly constructs such as “African American Vernacular English” and “African American Music.” This approach does not seem to fulfill the goal of disinvention.

The last section of the book is the most applied in focus. In chap. 9, Busch & Schick report on a primary school teaching manual designed for use throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. It displaces linguistic polarization between competing Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian standards by drawing on unedited original literary, media, advertising, and government texts from a range of time periods and locations. The goal is to allow students to see their language practices reflected while simultaneously demonstrating to them that diversity crosscuts national-linguistic lines and that linguistic difference does not necessarily undermine communication. In chap. 10, Canagarajah suggests that the project of disinvention look to precolonial contexts for better models of language. The fuzziness of boundaries between languages and communities reported for many societies before the arrival of Western colonizers provides a good model for understanding language and identity practices in today’s conditions of globalization. With this in mind, Canagarajah goes on to explore implications for the teaching of English internationally. He concludes that educators must shift their focus from correctness to communication and from “target language” to linguistic repertoire.

Taken as a whole, the volume meets its goal of disinventing and reconstituting language. Many of the authors successfully cast doubt on the idea that “languages” as distinct entities exist in nature. The reader must ask, however, how new this insight is. Several of the authors draw on the work of Hopper 1998, 2002 to argue that grammars are emergent systems rather than structural givens. I am also reminded of Dell Hymes’s (1968) foundational paper (not cited in the volume), which outlines numerous problems with positing the existence of distinct linguistic codes. Similarly, the invention of languages by missionaries, colonizers, and scholars has been well documented by authors such as Blommaert, Gal, Irvine, and Schieffelin (Blommaert 1999; Gal & Irvine 1995; Gal 2001; Irvine & Gal 2000; Irvine 2001a, 2001b; Schieffelin 2000). Taken in the context of this previous research, the current volume’s greatest potential is in the reconstitution of language, in terms of both scholarly models and applied work. The articles suggest defining “language” as a heteroglossic activity rather than a norm-based object and applying this insight in language activism, planning, and education. The volume consists primarily of critical review essays. Given the authors’

interest in examining local knowledge and displacing the privilege of the scholar, the logical next step in the reconstitution process will be to apply the insights from this volume to the analysis of primary linguistic and especially ethnographic data.

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RACHAEL GILMOUR, *Grammars of colonialism: Representing languages in colonial South Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Pp. x, 231. Hb \$80.00.

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In the 1990s, the historiography of the dialectics between language delineation, description, and prescription, on one hand, and colonial power and missionary action, on the other, became a field of study in its own right. As far as Africa is concerned, the ground for this “missionary and colonial linguistics” was pre-

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