The English-Vernacular Divide
Postcolonial Language Politics and Practice

Vaidehi Ramanathan

Clevedon: Multilingual Matters

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Summary:
This book offers a critical exploration of the role of English in postcolonial communities such as India. Specifically, it focuses on some local ways in which the language falls along the lines of a class-based divide (with ancillary ones of gender and caste as well). The book argues that issues of inequality, subordination and unequal value seem to revolve directly around the general positioning of English in relation to vernacular languages. The author was raised and schooled in the Indian educational system.

Review:
This book should appeal to anyone with a serious interest in English as a world language. Drawing on her own educational experience in India as well as on her recent research there, Vai Ramanathan offers a clear, engaging but scholarly discussion of how the use of English or an indigenous language as the prime medium of education impacts on the lives of students. Her careful analysis reveals ways that the linguistic medium of education carries the messages of cultural difference.
Neil Mercer, Professor of Language and Communications, The Open University, UK

This carefully written and researched book helps us understand in great complexity the divisive role of English in postcolonial contexts. Ramanathan's study shows how we always need to pay attention to the full range of local contingencies of class, caste, ideology and practice. And we need to be aware not only of the role of English as an international language but also of English as a divisive language.
Alastair Pennycook, Professor of Language in Education, Faculty of Education, University of Technology, Sydney

Ramanathan's perceptive study raises compelling questions about language and society. Highly recommended.
R.B. Shuman, CHOICE Vol. 42, No 10

Author Biography:
Vaidehi Ramanathan is an Associate Professor in the Linguistics department at the University of California, Davis. She was raised and schooled in the educational system she writes about and she has been involved in issues related vernacular and English language teaching for several years in a variety of contexts, including teacher-education. Her publications include: The Politics of TESOL education (RoutledgeFalmer) and Alzheimer's discourse: some sociolinguistic dimensions (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates).