

# Book review: The anti-racism linguist: A book of readings

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Multilingual Matters  
Bristol, UK and Jackson, USA  
2023  
339 pp.  
\$31.2 (pbk)  
ISBN: 978-1800412842 (pbk)  
**Review DOI** [10.1108/JHASS-02-2025-214](https://doi.org/10.1108/JHASS-02-2025-214)

The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places.

- Ernest Hemingway

## Introduction

Evidence that our world is becoming increasingly connected has mounted. While celebrating the wide-ranging benefits and merits of a connected world, global-minded citizens also show their reckonings on the accelerated tensions in the conventionally challenging terrain of race, ethnicity, gender and related presumptions and biases that hinder our human endeavours progressing towards a more equitable world. In sociology, sociolinguistics and race relations, much has been explored about the power imbalance embedded in the institutional discourse. However, little has been understood about the means to promote social justice through race-informed and linguistically equitable education. To bridge the gap in knowledge, this interdisciplinary book follows an integrative approach to draw concepts and theoretical insights from neighbouring disciplines in humanities and social sciences. Grounded in the intersection of race studies, applied linguistics and language education, this book brings together collective wisdom from scholars in the Global South and co-creates emerging knowledge that provides meaningful recommendations for effective policymaking in building linguistic awareness through language teaching and learning activities.

### (1) Topics and themes

With respect to its intellectual enquiries, the cooperative volume revolves around race-related concepts and themes. These concepts and themes include (1) diversity, equity, belonging and inclusion; (2) decolonization, disability and self-fulfilment; (3) the role of language technologies in language education; (4) World Englishes; (5) gender, teaching gendered language and the use of proper nouns; (6) language as an institution; (7) linguistic justice as “inter-community cooperative justice” (van Parijs, 2002) and asymmetrical bilingualism, as represented by the imbalanced distribution of foreign language learners among English native



speakers and native speakers of languages other than English, and (8) “minoritized” individuals (Gunaratnam, 2003). Conceptually, the volume regards institutional racism as “policies, practices, beliefs, and systems at the societal or institutional level which tend to affect particular racial or ethnic groups disproportionately” (p. 19). Everyday examples of institutional racism relate to schooling, voting, housing, employment opportunities and related allocation of resources.

### (2) Book summary

With a strong focus on the Global South, the interdisciplinary book provides a unique collection of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) scholars from Latin America. As part of this study, the author investigates language at the intersection of race and ethnicity, as well as the institutional practices that continue to impede equal access to education, resources and a sense of belonging. The way in which the author examines issues of language and power, linguistic prejudice and attitudes toward language and linguistic varieties reflects an evident anti-racist stance. These chapters cover the authors’ experiences in their professional and personal lives, combining traditional academic text with genres that emphasize the self, such as auto-ethnography and the reflective essay, and providing teachers with narrated resources. In this volume, authors engage openly and critically with one of the most pressing and relevant questions of our time: how to instigate institutional changes that will lead to a departure from racism. Throughout the book, teachers and scholars reflect on how they can incorporate anti-racism pedagogy and thinking into their teaching and research.

### (3) Structure

In terms of its structure, the book comprises 12 chapters. Chapter 1 contextualizes the volume by conceptualizing race-related terms and outlining the scholarly discussions. Chapter 2 provides a coherent entry point for the foregoing chapters from a pedagogical perspective. Drawing on her personal and professional English language teaching experiences, Matsuda advocated for a “moving away” from colonial and race-based assumptions in assessment and teacher qualification practices that predominantly operate by native English speakers as assessors (p. 31). Continuing the discussion of race and ethnicity, in Chapter 3, Nascimento posits the language as a “zone of non-being” for Black scholars (p. 48). Furthering this line of inquiry, in Chapter 4, Duran puts the privileged stance of Standard American English under scrutiny among other variations of English. Through an autoethnographic account of her professional experiences, she shed light on empowerment through linguistic awareness. Shifting our attention from teaching to academic practices, in Chapter 5, Jordão *et al.* reflect on the invisibility of non-European-American voices in Brazil by providing their unique perspective of race and ethnicity, as stated below.

We experience race (and racism) in convoluted, often confusing ways, since our bodies, ways of speaking and gesturing, and the manners in which we relate to people as a whole index very different identities and ways of knowing and being to those with whom we relate and to ourselves. (p. 84)

Speaking of differences and diversity, Chapter 6 continues the discussion by providing critically reflective accounts of linguistic prejudice through the lens of positionality and creativity. Taking the other’s perspective, the author reviews how assigned race and ethnicity based on residence and work locations contribute to preconceived assumptions of individual linguistic ability, variety and performance. In the same vein, Chapter 7 touches on how linguistic prejudice was preserved in classroom language teaching practices. Drawing on a reflective account of American classrooms, McHenry analysed the shared concern over the reluctance to use “difficulties to pronounce” names and recommended effective ways to incorporate linguistically aware activities into pedagogical scenarios. From language to the history curriculum, Chapter 8 provides context-specific advice on applying the race-minded framework to history teaching. In Chapter 9, the final chapter, the editor concludes the insights

from contributors to the book and elucidates pathways to race-informed and linguistically equitable education.

(4) Evaluation and reflection

Centred on the dynamic process of human interactions and interlingual communication, this fascinating book has two main contributions. The first is its emphasis on knowledge co-creation contributed by less-heard groups of scholars. In the scholarly community, the European-American-centric approach continues to dominate discourses and narratives on race-critical matters, particularly influenced by colonialism centuries ago. First-account narratives of BIPOC scholars in the book are real page-turners, inviting readers to walk a mile in their shoes and reflect on the lived experiences with a balanced view of the self in the face of the otherness based on our rational yet empathetic thinking. The second is its holistic approach to resolving highly complex issues. The book offers a comprehensive overview of race, gender, disability, ethnicity and related concepts from institutional and individual perspectives that serve to enlighten reasonable policy changes. For instance, a shared voice among all contributors to the book calls for more institutional openness to re-imagine language, communication and interaction delivered through a diversity of media formats (e.g. visual arts, movies, fiction and non-fictions and theatre plays) in pedagogical settings.

Overall, the collective volume offers us a refreshing look at these crucial issues of race and language education through the symbiotic relationship of sociology and linguistics that shape and reshape our world today. The book is written in a highly readable style and intended for language learners, scholars, researchers, policymakers and interested readers in race studies, language education, applied linguistics and beyond. It is thus recommended to inform practices in social justice and inclusion through linguistically equitable education.

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