

career Darwin himself had the assistance of pigeons, finches and worms, as well as the biosemiotic “folk wisdom” of various animal keepers from all walks of life (“‘An Experiment on a Gigantic Scale’: Darwin and the Domestication of Pigeons,” Gillian Feeley-Harnik, in *Where the Wild Things Are Now: Domestication Reconsidered*. R. Cassidy and M. Mullin, eds, Berg 2007: 147–182). Is it merely the power of a Cartesian and capitalist modernity to which we owe the scientific predominance of the Darwinian Synthesis at this point in history, or do their entangled histories owe something to the contributions of companion species and their distinct communicative competencies?

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Social Dimensions of Modern Tamil. E. Annamalai. Chennai, India: Cre-A, 2011. 196 pp.

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Social Dimensions of Modern Tamil compiles thirteen essays published by E. Annamalai between 1975 and 2009. In under 200 pages, the book covers a wide range of topics concerning the Tamil language and language community in post-colonial India: the linguistic purism movement of the 19th and 20th centuries (ch. 1); the emblematicization of Tamil as a political marker of Dravidian ethnic identity (ch. 12); sociolinguistic variation by class, caste, region, and education (ch. 4–5, 7); the standardization of written (ch. 2) and oral Tamil (ch. 6); Tamil diglossia (ch. 2–3); language contact with English and resultant forms of Anglicization and code-mixing (ch. 7, 9, 10–11, Epilogue); and the development of various registers of Tamil (e.g., scientific registers; literary prose) (ch. 8).

While covering a seemingly disparate set of topics, a common concern across the chapters is how the Tamil language and language community has developed through, and in response to, on the one hand, contact with English and the institutional and ideological structures of colonialism and, on the other, contact with Hindi (and Sanskrit) and the institutional and ideological structures of the Indian nation-state. By locating the various avatars of modern Tamil with respect to these other languages, one of the major contributions of the book is to demonstrate that any study of modern Tamil has to locate it with respect to multiple linguistic regimes, paramount of which has been English and its associated language ideologies. This inter-lingual (and inter-discursive) focus is particularly elucidating in contextualizing the region's language politics of the 19th and 20th centuries, a topic that has been much discussed in recent academic work on the region (e.g., *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic*, Bernard Bate, Columbia University Press, 2009; *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India*, Lisa Mitchell, Indiana University Press, 2009; *Languages and Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras*, Thomas Trautmann, University of California Press, 2006; “Language, Primordialism, and Sentiment,” Harold Schiffman, in *Languages of Sentiment*, Gary Palmer and Debra Occhi, eds., John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999:25–38; *Passions of the Tongue*, Sumathi Ramaswamy, University of California Press, 1997). It is particularly helpful in situating the so-called Dravidian movement, a nexus of civil society and political interests that emerged in the 20th century and whose legacy which has resolutely shaped the linguistic landscape of Tamil Nadu. A “primordialist” politics that advocated the linguistic and the ethnic independence of Tamils/Dravidians from north Indian, Aryan interlopers (Brahmins being the personae non gratae which this politics fixated upon), the Dravidian movement has traditionally been understood vis-à-vis the Tamil language community's imagined and real contact with Sanskrit and Hindi: its vehement anti-Hindi rhetoric, its stigmatization of Sanskritized Tamil, and its reformulation of regional politics around linguistic ethnicity and allegiance to “pure” Tamil. By situating this politics as dialogically engaged with English, however, Annamalai's discussion complements and enriches this narrative, adding a much-needed angle to our understanding of the linguistic ecology of South India.

In particular, the book makes sense of a foundational irony: the flourishing of English as a prestige code in Tamil Nadu despite a widely supported and institutionally entrenched politics of Tamil purism. Often taken as revealing the internal contradictions, failures, and disingenuousness of this language politics, the materials and analysis of the various chapters point in another way—that the contradictions and tensions that inhere in the linguistic practices of this region are neither additional nor incidental, but primary and constitutive. This is shown at the levels of linguistic structure, social indexicality and ideology. For example, Annamalai (ch. 8) brilliantly demonstrates how attempts to make (pure) Tamil iso-functional in domains typically dominated by English (e.g., in science, technology, and media) succeeds at maintaining etymological purity only through coinages that make, through their “purism,” the semantic structure of Tamil semantically and grammatical isomorphic with English.¹ Important here is that ideologically motivated forms of lexical divergence entail semantic, or conceptual, convergence with English, a fact which cannot be recovered by attending solely to the explicit rhetorics justifying of such practice. To take another example of such dialogism, purist discourse has always required (and entailed) prestige forms of anglicized Tamil (ch. 7, 9) and English as ways for (elite) Tamils to access the nation and (global) economic mobility, precisely because such discourse formulated Hindi as inimical to Tamils’ interests. Indeed, the anti-Hindi agitations of the 1960s were prompted not simply by Dravidianist political parties hoping to gain mileage out of Tamil nationalism but by the threat of the central government changing the language of civil service exams from English to Hindi. Central here is the implicit division of labor between (registers of) English and Tamil vis-à-vis public/private, exterior/interior, and economy/culture as structuring principles on where, when, and who uses these registers/codes. Again, here Tamil’s dialogic relationship to English is oblique, mediated by political concerns about state-center relations and the feared hegemony of Hindi as the language of governance and commerce. As Annamalai notes, this mutual constitution between (literary) Tamil as heritage language and English as language of economic mobility is historically non-coincidental: it is precisely under conditions of language contact and colonialism that ancient Tamil texts were rediscovered, anthologized, studied, and widely circulated through print (and thus were usable emblems of political identity) and that English was institutionalized as a language of business and social mobility, governance, education, and elite sociability.

As noted in the book’s Prologue, the chapters of the book were written to address sociolinguistic theories of the 1960s and 1970s (particularly regarding language planning and modernization), using Tamil as a test case. One result, however, is that subsequent changes in the field of sociolinguistics and in the language politics of Tamil Nadu are not addressed in the book. The reader is left wondering about the current day legacy of this politics, how it has affected the Tamil language and language community, and how this more recent history might speak to linguistic theory then and now. What is the politics of language in an era that we might call, with some hesitancy, the twilight of the Dravidian movement? And what is its sociolinguistics? These questions are especially pressing given the large scale changes that have occurred in South India in the last twenty years; in particular, India’s economic liberalization, the expansion of (privatized) English-medium education, increased literacy in Tamil and English, and the expansion of vernacular publishing, satellite television and digital media technology (cell phones, internet, VCD and DVD home entertainment).

Finally, while the book pays close attention to dialectical relations between language structure and ideology, there is much less focus on interactional data, on actual moments of discourse and how these articulate to and instantiate both language structure and language ideology. Much of the focus is limited to the semantic organization of Tamil, a reflection of the lexical focus of the language ideologies of modernization and purism that the book concerns itself with. Yet how do these word-focal reanalyses of linguistic structure play into actual language use in events of discourse, and how might we expand the focus of analysis beyond the word and the clause?

An especially wonderful resource for Tamil scholars, *Social Dimensions of Modern Tamil* will also interest those who study language planning and modernization, purism movements, standardization and social variation, multilingualism, diglossia, code-mixing, language change, and language ideology and its interface with language structure. While the treatment of the wide range of topics is often fragmentary (each chapter requires a book-length treatment of its

1. Similarly, in chapter 2 “Simplification” Annamalai shows how this dynamic is at play in the convergences between literary and colloquial varieties of Tamil at the grammatical and syntactic level, even as they diverge at the level of lexical form/etyma.

own), the breadth of material and types of analysis brought into articulation and dialogue with each other is impressive and should provide much stimulation for future research.

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Dying Words. *Nicholas Evans.* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. xxii + 287pp.

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Dying Words presents a compelling portrait of the planet's linguistic diversity and illustrates what will be lost if predictions of language endangerment are borne out. Author Nicholas Evans has published several grammars and dictionaries of Papuan and Australian languages and is a recognized authority on language documentation. His style is eminently readable, and he shows a remarkable talent for explaining complex ideas and linking wide-ranging topics. Evans' penchant for narration, including personal anecdotes from his own impressive field work experience, makes this work a pleasure to read for both specialist and nonspecialist alike.

Dying Words is a powerful plea for documenting the world's rapidly vanishing linguistic diversity. Evans takes the usual question, "Why do some parts of the world have so many languages?" and transforms it into the more provocative, "Why do some parts of the world have so few languages?" His starting point—that linguistic diversity is the norm rather than the exception—sets the tone for the rest of the book. The first part of the book, "The library of Babel," opens with an overview of differing cultural perspectives towards linguistic diversity. Evans contrasts the dominant Western ideal of "universal knowledge," represented by the Tower of Babel myth, with a perspective that values the "strength and richness that comes from distinct traditions that can never be straightforwardly mapped onto a single value system speaking a single language" (p.19). The spread of agricultural societies and the rise of the modern nation-state have created a historically unprecedented situation in which large swaths of territory are dominated by written languages with millions of speakers. Areas of "unusual" linguistic diversity thus provide us a look into what was, for most of human history, the norm: small, ecologically-adapted societies with languages containing thousands of years of trial-and-error knowledge regarding their environment. Evans also gives a brief but effective sketch of the development of the alphabet, concluding with the useful observation that the alphabet came about precisely because it was passed around among structurally dissimilar languages: "a good illustration of how diversity favors certain types of innovation" (p. 26).

In part 2, "A great feast of languages," Evans links the understanding of language universals to the description of underdocumented languages by showing the variety of sound inventories, counting systems, and semantic principles found in the world's languages. Additionally, this section looks at how different languages solve the "mapping problem" for distinguishing subject and object with a discussion of the animacy hierarchy in Navajo. He explores the surprising variety of grammatical categories found in different languages; particularly fascinating are his descriptions of forms found in some Australian languages that require the speaker to meticulously index the social relationships of the participants. Evans' goal here is to demonstrate that underdocumented languages contain structures that often challenge conventional ideas of what a "possible" language is.

Part 3 looks at the information endangered languages can offer in terms of discovering distant relationships between language families, as well as providing clues to unlocking previously undeciphered scripts. Evans deftly leads the reader through reconstructions of both Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Algonquian; in each case he shows how linguistic data combines with archaeological evidence to establish a genetic relationship. An important point is how a language on the brink of extinction can provide the essential link connecting two languages previously thought to be unrelated. For example, documentation of the now-extinct Eyak language provided the link between Athabaskan and Tlingit to establish the larger Na-Dene family. The most intriguing part of this section of the book is the description of how Ket, a language of Central Siberia, has provided strong evidence for a link between the