

Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology. Laura Ahearn. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. xviii + 348 pp.

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The task of introducing a field of study to a broad audience is an inherently political act, for it involves taking an intellectual stance toward numerous, and at times divergent, schools of thought, as well as toward the distinctive analytical and methodological approaches with which those schools are associated. As an entry in this precarious genre, Laura Ahearn's *Living Language* stands out for its deft integration of disparate approaches to linguistic anthropology, highlighting the field's rich range of intellectual genealogies and contemporary innovations. In this second volume in the series "Blackwell Primers in Anthropology," Ahearn forcefully argues that language should be understood and analyzed as a form of *social action*. This represents a quintessentially linguistic anthropological view of language *in* culture, which is exemplified by the four key concepts that are outlined in the book's introduction and invoked throughout each chapter: multifunctionality, language ideologies, practice, and indexicality. This selection of key terms is refreshing in that it represents Ahearn's unique point of view on the field (i.e., no other introductory linguistic anthropology text foregrounds these particular concepts), as well as her commitment to making the nuances of linguistic anthropology legible for non-initiates. Thus, from its outset, it is clear that this book seeks to stake a claim to conceptual tools developed and deployed by linguistic anthropologists, and to demonstrate their relationship with theories that are recognizable to students of cultural anthropology and social analysis more broadly. This reflects Ahearn's productive "'all of the above' approach to the study of linguistic practices in real-life social contexts" (xiii; "All of the Above: New Coalitions in Sociocultural Linguistics," Bucholtz, M. and Hall, K., *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12(4), 2008:401–431). Importantly, this approach departs from decontextualized analyses of language that are widely embraced in formal linguistics. Rather than downplaying this significant disciplinary difference or avoiding the debate altogether, Ahearn makes a sustained argument throughout the book for the importance of studying linguistic and sociocultural structures, processes, and practices as co-constitutive phenomena.

The book comprises three parts, each consisting of four chapters. Part I, "Language: Some Basic Questions," contains the aforementioned introductory chapter, an overview of research methods in linguistic anthropology, a presentation of linguistic anthropologists' approaches to processes of language learning, and an exploration of the interplay between language, culture, and cognition. Ahearn emphasizes the linguistic anthropological perspective "that (1) language must not be studied in isolation from social practices or cultural meanings, and (2) questions about social relations and cultural meaning can best be answered by paying close attention to language" (17). This perspective is powerfully illustrated in chapters on language socialization and language and cognition. These chapters draw clear distinctions between linguistic anthropological and Chomskyan formal linguistic approaches to the analysis of language learning and linguistic relativity. Part II, "Communities of Speakers, Hearers, Readers, and Writers," includes chapters on linguistic communities, multilingualism and globalization, literacy, and performance/performativity. These chapters focus on the dialectic relationship between language use and social collectivities, thereby offering a robust linguistic anthropological reconceptualization of "community." Part III, "Language, Power, and Social Differentiation," concludes the book with chapters on gender, race and ethnicity, language shift, and power and agency. These chapters emphasize that language does not simply reflect the nature of social differentiation, but plays a central role in mediating the power relations through which social categories are (re)produced and transformed. Cumulatively, the book's chapters persuasively demonstrate "the benefits of treating language use as a form of social action that is embedded in relations of power" (290).

The book's chapters do not follow a formulaic structure. Some open with iconic ethnographic vignettes (e.g., Schieffelin on language socialization in Papua New Guinea, Basso on language and place-making among the Western Apache, Duranti on political rhetoric in Western Samoa, Hill on codeswitching between Mexicano and Spanish, etc.), while others begin by posing provocative questions that structure the subsequent subsections (e.g., What do you need to know in order to "know" a language? How does the innate human capacity to

learn a language intersect with the culturally and linguistically specific factors in each child's upbringing? Must members of a speech community be aware that they are members of such a community?). Each chapter provides a rich overview of central topics in linguistic anthropology by devoting considerable attention to an expansive range of ethnographic case studies. Ahearn's own research on the emergence of love letter-writing and gender transformations in Nepal is highlighted throughout the text. Additionally, Ahearn draws on examples from her teaching, everyday life, and popular debates to enrich the discussion of abstract concepts. The book's most distinguishing characteristic is the balance it strikes between presenting key terms in the field, tracing the intellectual development of these concepts, and, most importantly, foregrounding the research of contemporary linguistic anthropologists. The result is a book that will resonate widely with linguistic anthropologists associated with differing intellectual traditions and students who are interested in learning about them.

Tables and figures are often used to illustrate more quantitative or technical linguistic issues (e.g., honorifics, noun classes, etc.). The book also includes multiple syndicated cartoons featuring metalinguistic discourse throughout the chapters, as well as images from Ahearn's fieldwork. These graphic representations contribute to the engaging nature of the text, which successfully avoids the overly didactic tendencies of some of its counterparts. Notably, the book does not devote separate chapters to topics in structural linguistics; instead, it incorporates discussions, analyses, and examples of syntax, semantics, phonology, and morphology into each chapter's focus on a specific sociocultural domain. This approach illustrates linguistic anthropologists' commitment to the joint analysis of sociocultural and linguistic structures.

For the past three years I have used *Living Language* as the central text in a large undergraduate lecture that serves as an introduction to linguistic anthropology. My students have remarked that the book is highly accessible, instructive, and appealing. My graduate teaching assistants for this course have also noted the book's clarity and the comprehensiveness of its contemporary overview of the field. I pair the book with Blum's *Making Sense of Language: Readings in Culture and Communication*, which nicely complements *Living Language* by providing longer versions of many of the classic pieces that Ahearn presents in an abbreviated form (e.g., Labov's "The Social Stratification of (r) in New York City Department Stores," Heath's "What No Bedtime Story Means," Whorf's "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language," etc.). *Living Language* is a rich pedagogical tool and point of reference for instructors and students.

Within four-field approaches to the discipline of anthropology, linguistic anthropology is often viewed as a highly technical, micro-socially oriented subfield whose theories and methods are accessible and relevant only to those who are specifically interested in analyzing linguistic form. Outside of anthropology and language-oriented disciplines (e.g., (socio)linguistics, communication, etc.), linguistic anthropology is largely unnoticed; this invisibility or unintelligibility is unfortunate and, at times, ironic. Ahearn's *Living Language* engages these multiple audiences by making a compelling case for the conceptual, analytical, and methodological power of linguistic anthropology. This book is deserving of high praise for managing to capture the field's nuance and complexity, while doing so in a way that is accessible, timely, and of interest both to specialists and nonspecialists alike.

Articulate while Black: Barack Obama, Language, and Race in the U.S. H. Samy Alim and Geneva Smitherman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. xviii+205 pp.

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This book is quite remarkable for its range and depth. Though it is conspicuously about Obama, it is serviceable as an introduction to African American English (AAE), suffused with discussions of language, race, grammar, and education. It is in every sense, with respect to content, an academic volume, full of information appropriate for linguists (not specializing in AAE) while at the same time admirably readable for nonspecialists, notably beginning students in the appropriate anthropology and linguistics courses. In regard to its suitability as an introduction to AAE, it is worth observing that it presents a snapshot of AAE genesis and