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Kranich S, Knewitz S, Pirazzini D, and Bruns H (eds.) (2026) The Language of Democratization; Roles, Social Positions and Discourse. New York: Routledge

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Edited by Svenja Kranich, Simone Knewitz, Daniela Pirazzini, and Hanna Bruns, this volume brings together 11 contributions from various authors, organized into 3 main sections: Language and discourse variation and change as reflections of social roles and positions; Discourse, roles and language(s) in language politics and education; and Roles and social positions in discourse on (de-)marginalization. The chapters are designed to explore processes of democratization and de-democratization in various ways and contexts in relation to language processes and discourse. A comprehensive and clear introduction links the contributions and summarizes the volume's overall objective, as well as those of the different sections and individual chapters; yet this does not detract from the richness found in the details—of individual discourses, historical trajectories, or the various personalities and organizations described—that emerge in the case studies, thereby capturing the specificities and perspectives within which broader and sometimes interconnected processes are embedded.

An important theme that runs throughout the volume is the consideration of an expanded concept of democracy. Democracy is understood not only in its formal principles—such as elections, party systems, institutions, etc. criteria—but also as a historical phenomenon practiced at the micro-political level and in everyday life. This concept is discussed theoretically in the introduction and the opening sections of various chapters and is also demonstrated in practice through the case studies presented, using approaches that combine linguistic, literary, cultural, and historical studies. While liberal democracies have managed to reduce social structures of exclusion and discrimination through concepts of pluralism, equality and protection of minority rights, structures of power and inequality continue to be reproduced, leading to phenomena of "simulated egalitarianism" and instrumental uses of democratization rhetorics.

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This volume has the merit of revealing these dynamics, which may not be immediately apparent when discussing democratization.

The contributions stand out thematically and offer a rich variety of methodologies, languages, contexts, and experiences, effectively capturing the complexity and multifaceted nature of societies. Covering Italy, France, and other European countries, the United States, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, and examining diaspora, native, LGBT and racialized communities, *The Language of Democratization; Roles, Social Positions and Discourse* demonstrates the interplay between various themes and discourses, their implications at the political, cultural, social, institutional, and legal levels, and ultimately the impact that language and discourses have on people's lives through the processes of inclusion and exclusion they generate. This multidisciplinary research is grounded in a discourse analysis approach that unifies the contributions; and the data range from linguistic corpora, questionnaires, and literary analyses to social media posts and videos, and political speeches, often employing comparative approaches.

As part of the *Routledge Studies in Applied Linguistics* series, this volume explores a fundamental aspect of democracy: language and discourse. It highlights something constitutive yet sometimes overlooked, namely how language and discourse are foundational to democracy, as they shape public opinion, power and political decisions. Through language and discourse, democracy can be developed or limited, generating practices of inclusion and exclusion, constructing identities, and shaping policies and rights. At the same time, discourses and linguistic practices are linked to broader movements of democratization and de-democratization, both national and transnational, which are connected to the very use of language(s) and explored in the various contributions to the volume. By tracing historical vicissitudes, the book also demonstrates how language is closely linked to historical and political dynamics. A striking example is presented in Chapter 2, which describes the history of the Tamil diaspora—a history deeply intertwined with its linguistic recognition—and analyzes new practices for expressing Tamil-ness in a different language—that of English—among the second and third generations. Language is thus shown in all its potential: it can

be a cause of war and exclusion, but also a means of recognition and emancipation for minority groups.

Moreover, language is considered as closely linked to power, as it can influence what is excluded or included, as well as thoughts and behaviors. The contributions examine this interplay across multiple dimensions, from interpersonal, to cultural and institutional. A clear example of linguistic phenomena used to display prestige and cultural capital is found in Chapter 4 which describes the use of *français cultivé* and analyzes the speeches of Emmanuel Macron, Marine Le Pen, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, thereby exposing the links between political and discursive democratization. Furthermore, power relations and processes of democratization and de-democratization are evident in different ways of relating and interacting, for example through the use of more or less direct strategies, with cultural and generational differences in the conception of hierarchies and social roles, as shown in Chapter 1 on recent variations in American English. Democracy changes the way people interact and speak to each other. Power relations are therefore analyzed, connecting democracy to workplace role conceptualizations, dialogues in restaurants or shops, and even casting choices within the theater industry, as highlighted in the final chapter (Chapter 11), which explores the staging of three Shakespeare plays to shed light on contemporary processes of transformation in hierarchies and power structures.

The contributions in the central section particularly highlight the role of education, institutions, and collaborative practices in processes of inclusion and exclusion. Furthermore, the political nature of certain linguistic choices and policies is emphasized, including through the analysis of European and national legislative acts. For example, Chapter 5 links processes of democratization and de-democratization to policies and instruments for the inclusion of newcomers, analyzing language policies and admission criteria as gatekeeping measures for inclusion and participation, while Chapter 6 examines the differing implementation in Spain and Germany of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), highlighting the relationship between the protection and promotion of democracy and the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity.

Another merit of the contributions in this volume is their ability to capture the richness of the debates surrounding these issues, successfully conveying the complexity and diverse positions for or against practices of inclusion and exclusion without trivializing them. As seen, for example, in Chapters 3, 7, 8, 9, and 10. These chapters address, respectively: the use of the feminine form of titles, offices, and professional names in Italian; the discourse on *integrazione scolastica* in Italy in the mid-1970s; Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the opposing rhetoric of the right in the United States; the discursive strategies and practices of Freedman equality and inclusion in the Cherokee Nation; and anti-LGBT discourse in Indonesia.

Especially in the final chapters, the role of identity and emotions in shaping discourse, communities, reactions, and perceptions, as well as highly polarized discourses, emerge. The capacity of political discourses to influence and transform societies is evident, including through the activities of various associations that mobilize and advance political discourses, as in the case of the parental rights organization Mom's for Liberty intervening in the debate on CRT described in Chapter 8. Finally, the book demonstrates how democratic mechanisms can be exploited for anti-democratic purposes, as in the case of non-normative gender identities and LGBT groups in Indonesia described in Chapter 10. This chapter highlights the significant role of national identity discourses in the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups, as well as the use of anti-Western stances and oppositions to international discourses perceived as foreign.

The book thus demonstrates how practices of inclusion/exclusion, representation, and (de)marginalization are present and enacted in various spheres of daily life, contributing to the shaping of democratization or de-democratization processes. At the same time, these processes of (de-)democratization influence discursive practices and role conceptualization, showing that power and politics are deeply connected to language and part of everyday human interaction and activity. In discussing inclusion and exclusion dynamics, this same volume also helps to make marginalized groups more visible. The full richness of diversity is revealed, as different cultures, countries, communities, languages and experiences are studied and interconnected, and history and contemporary practices are intersected. Finally, after reading this book, it becomes even more

difficult to ignore language and discursive practices when discussing the preservation and enactment of democracy. Language is not only linked to power relations and structures; by acting upon them, processes of linguistic democratization can also be implemented.

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