of more than one million Guatemalans but also boasts one of the largest colonial manuscript corpora in the Maya area, including famous texts such as the *Popol Vuh*, the *Título de Totonicapán*, and the *Theologia Indorum*, three of the most important indigenous sources of Mesoamerica. In thirty-eight short, readable lessons, Mondloch presents an excellent outline of K'ichee' grammar as spoken in the townships of Nahualá and Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán in southwestern Guatemala. Emphasizing sound structure and word composition, the textbook avoids technical terms while also providing conversation drills and translation exercises.

The book begins with a presentation of the K'ichee' phonemic inventory, followed by a step-by-step description of morphology with an emphasis on verb forms. Syntax is implicitly described but few sections address it beyond basic phrase structure. As an experienced instructor of K'ichee' as a second language, the author leads English-speaking readers into the complexities of K'ichee' through analogies and accessible examples. Aiming to develop readers' conversation skills, every lesson includes useful idiomatic expressions. Some of these deserve a more detailed treatment, however, as they entail aspects of the grammar not explicitly developed elsewhere in the textbook. Although it does not pretend to be a reference grammar, *Basic K'ichee' grammar* is fairly thorough in content, including excellent descriptions of certain elements of verbal morphology, for example, that I have not seen so clearly presented in the standard reference grammars. Mondloch's prose is concise and clear, delivering an outstanding pedagogical tool for students without any background in Mayan languages or linguistics.

Some readers may disagree with certain well-meaning decisions aiming to simplify K'ichee' grammar for the average English-speaker. For example, following classic descriptive grammars of K'ichee', Mondloch presents a set of focus constructions as an idiosyncratic 'voice', along with active and passive verb forms. Concentrating on their verbal morphology, he categorizes them as 'instrumental voice'. More recently, however, scholars have come to regard them as focus constructions with specific pragmatic and discourse roles and describe them as such (see Leah Velleman's Ph.D., 'Focus and movement in a variety of K'ichee'', 2014). He also replaces well-known labels such as 'incompletive' and 'completive', used to refer to particular aspect markers in the specialized literature, with 'incomplete' and 'completed', which seems an unnecessary creation of new terms.

I also would have liked to have seen a basic treatment of ideophones and sound symbolic roots, which are some of the most fascinating syntactic classes in K'ichee'. A more serious issue is the rather scant treatment of dialectal variation. K'ichee', like many highland Mayan languages, shows substantial regional difference in sound, vocabulary, and grammar, which native speakers use as cues to index a host of cultural categories and discourse functions, as I have noted elsewhere (S. Romeo, *Language and ethnicity among the K'ichee' Maya*, 2017). Educating prospective K'ichee' students about the sociolinguistic aspects of a language that differs starkly from those of standard average European languages is necessary for a realistic immersion into the rich and diverse world of contemporary K'ichee'. These minor observations aside, *Basic K'ichee' grammar* is a highly recommend introduction to the study of K'ichee' Mayan, and a great resource for linguists and Mesoamericanist scholars alike.

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Shulman, David. *Tamil: a biography*. xii, 402 pp., bibliogr. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2016. £28.95 (cloth)

David Shulman's *Tamil* is a tour de force. It is a must-read for South Asianists and has much to interest linguistic anthropologists, linguists, historians, and literary scholars more generally. The book presents an engagingly written, fresh telling of the 'biography' of a speech community that has travelled under the name of a language (Tamil). Of course, as Shulman notes (p. x), a book whose ambition is a biography of a language and literary culture over 2,000 years old cannot do everything for everyone; yet despite any shortcomings, there is no underestimating the virtuosity, depth of scholarship, and loving care that has gone into this book.

The volume begins with the different ways that Tamil has been historically conceptualized – as denotational code; mode of civilized being; community of linguistic practice; qualia (coolness, sweetness, etc.); and living goddess – as well as its various origin myths. From there, it analyses a number of periods and communities of literary practice: the Sangam poetry of the first half of the first millennium CE (chap. 2); devotional *bhakti* poetry in the mid-to-late first millennium (chap. 3); the 'imperial' expansion of Tamil language and canon during the height of the Cholas (ninth to thirteenth centuries; chap. 4); the massively multilingual 'republic of syllables' during the

breakdown of the Chola kingdom (chap. 5); and, finally, the endogenous emergence of a Tamil modernity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (chap. 6) and its transformation in the colonial and postcolonial periods, bringing forth, among other things, Tamil nationalism (chap. 7).

There is something (un)timely about a book that would personify Tamil – give it a biography, describe its genius and personal qualities – in a mode familiar to us from nineteenth-century philology while also enjoining us not to reify the language as an 'it' (p. ix) and arguing, as Boas did in his critiques of that very philology, against any notion of pure languages, peoples, or origins. Both channelling Indology and articulating a critique of its uptake in Tamil nationalist discourse while weaving disciplinary linguistics with indigenous theories of language, *Tamil* explicates and reproduces many of the ambivalent dynamics and problematics that it discusses. This ambivalence produces an *image* of history and language that, as I take it, is central to Shulman's larger argument.

One of the work's strengths is how it vividly brings the reader into the complex and dynamic cultural phenomenologies of South Indian linguistic expression. Alongside close linguistic and textual analysis (though interlinear glosses often would have helped), Shulman brilliantly brings out the deeply continuous but continually changing aesthetic theories and metaphysical philosophies (language ideologies, as linguistic anthropologists call them) – such as the 'in-ness' of Sangam poetry (chap. 2), or the Tantric metaphysics of world-making sound (chaps 4-7) – that animated (and continue to animate) the texts he analyses as sensuous, meaningful, and powerful objects. Shulman deftly tacks between explicating such phenomenologies and ideologies and demonstrating how they manifest in textual poetic form and historical pragmatic effect (and vice versa), showing us how Tamil language and literature – but also political history – come alive once we understand the centrality of such ideologies to Tamil worlds.

Of particular interest in this regard is the origin mytheme Shulman identifies as threading the history of Tamil literature: a (divine) unique source of textual authority whose transmission is broken and knowledge lost only, across the chasm, to be rediscovered and reconstituted in a (second) founding act of textual authority. This appears in the stories about Agastya (the mythic first grammarian of Tamil), Tolkappiyanar (the first historical grammarian of Tamil), the formation of the (second) Tamil Sangam, the nineteenth-century 'rediscovery' of Sangam poetry, and even, perhaps especially, in Shulman's own critique of twentieth-century Tamil nationalism's effacement of the continuities of medieval Tamil traditions that he recovers for the reader. (Even the sympathetic reader, however, will find Shulman's treatment of Dravidianism disappointing and perfunctory, if symptomatic, for, as history catches up to his own work – and the origin mytheme that envelops it – this otherwise charitable text breaks down in a short section written in an uncharacteristically critical tone. This is a lost opportunity, for what Shulman critiques is itself an instance of what he describes: a history rife with reimaginings and forgettings, discontinuities and continuities, language politics and love. It is telling that Shulman gives no analysis of the literary texture associated with the Dravidian movement, only listing its ideological follies.) In his review of this mytheme lies one of Shulman's major lessons: the necessity of an ecumenical approach to literary history that is attentive to continuity *and* transformation as two sides of the same linguistic coin (*plus ça change* . . .).

This lesson is key to the book's larger polemic: the demonstration of the intrinsically polyglottal and heteroglossic nature of Tamil worlds. This pushes back on modern, monoglot ideologies that would purify Tamil out from the larger communicative matrix of which it has always been a part. The radical suggestion – not fully pursued in the book (though see pp. 183-4) – is that *a* language is always a function of a contrast set that constitutes it within its seeming autonomy. From this point of view, the myth(eme) of an autonomous, pure Tamil is produced by precisely that which at the same time undermines that autonomy. While some would see the history of Tamil contestations of Sanskrit as evidence of its *sui generis* autonomy (for how could they be opposed if Tamil wasn't separate?), Shulman argues that this has it backwards: apartness is a response to intimate mingling, to an extimacy of language at every scale: from Pan-Indic multilingual communities to polyglottal individuals and their multilingual texts and heteroglossic utterances (wonderfully exemplified in the 'mixed' register of Manipravalam [chap. 5]; the paranomastic gymnastics of early modern poetry [chap. 6]; and the modernist style of Nu. Muthuswamy [chap. 7]). Showing us this in all its complexity as it has existed from the earliest records to the modern present forces us to revisit our own biases (and Shulman's), in evaluating both the political presents and pasts of South India (and elsewhere)

and the capacity of our own analytic languages to describe them.

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Tomlinson, Matt & Julian Millie (eds). *The monologic imagination*. xi, 272 pp., figs, tables, illus., bibliogrs. Oxford: Univ. Press, 2017. £31.49 (paper)

Mikhail Bakhtin, the anti-Stalinist, Russian literary critic and linguistic philosopher, argued that language and speech should always be viewed as motivated and never be reduced to a single comprehensive, finalized voice. In his view, language and speech combine two opposing value-orientations. One was centripetal, sovereign, and centralizing, and was spoken by church and state, or any authority. The other was centrifugal, unofficial, and decentralizing, and was expressed in the marketplace or on the street among 'the folk'. Bakhtin referred to the former as 'monologic' and the latter as 'dialogic'. And he was particularly concerned to draw out the cross-cutting relationship of the one with the other in parody, comedy, and the modern novel.

Bakhtin's influence in sociocultural and linguistic anthropology has been widespread during the past thirty or so years, to say the least. Generally, his concept of dialogism has been used to think of culture as comprised of multiple voices; so that word and voice are understood as a conjunction rather than an autonomous expression of meaning. Matt Tomlinson and Julian Millie's new collection of essays, *The monologic imagination*, is thus a welcome addition to Bakhtinian anthropology because of its focus on the side of language and culture which he disdained, given his political circumstances and theoretical premises.

Tomlinson's helpful introduction draws from his own research in Fiji, and argues that monologue requires the 'erasure' of the audience and other voices, in order to privilege the speaker. The book is then neatly organized into three sections, each of which includes three ethnographic chapters and a brief assessment. But the book nevertheless struggles with how monologic speech coexists and interacts with polyphonic dialogue.

In the first chapter, Urban focuses on how processes of repetition or copying, as in early childhood learning and oath taking, co-occur with what he calls a 'metaculture of newness and difference' (p. 38). In chapter 2, Bialecki discusses the monologic nature of prophecy among Christian evangelicals in Southern California as generic in form but also contested. Rumsey's chapter 3 compares the performance of songs among the three Highlands peoples in Papua New Guinea during which audiences are either mute, inhibited, or given to commentary. Kulick's 'Discussion' then arrives at the conclusion that these chapters illustrate how the two processes of monologue and dialogue are inseparable.

Insofar as it acknowledges the dangers to independent discourse created by the moral/political authority of church and state, the second part of the book is more closely attuned to Bakhtin's life and theory than the first. It opens with Wirtz's compelling discussion of the failed attempts in revolutionary Cuba to make inner subjectivity coincide with state ideology. Instead of successfully silencing defiant voices, Cubans went on privately laughing and struggling against Castro. Chapter 5 is located in a provincial capital in Central Java. Goebel offers detailed, verbatim data illustrating how monologic voices lead discussions during ward meetings about proper neighbourhood conduct. Barry's chapter 6 then consists of fine-grained, verbatim ethnography of Islamic clerics in Iran who espouse state ideology and sixth-century Islamic law but who are nevertheless greeted in various contexts by opposition. Additionally, Barry adds a brief discussion of Armenian Christians, who speak their own language, and distance themselves from the official Iranian nation-state, although they acknowledge belonging to it. This section is summarized by Van Vleet, who confesses that she has a 'difficult time thinking in terms of monologism' (p. 165).

In the third section's opening chapter, Goodman traces how reformist theatrical groups in colonial Algeria in the 1930s arrived at what she calls 'unanimism'. Fountain (chap. 8) discusses disputed creeds among Mennonites in Pennsylvania and Indonesia. Millie examines the intersection of constrained and multivocal oratorical practices among Islamic preachers in Western Java in chapter 9. Lastly, in her discussion of these chapters, Handman reflects on her own research on the speech of Japanese schoolgirls and Tokpisin in colonial Papua New Guinea and comes to the conclusion that monologues do not necessarily oppress while dialogues do not always permit voices to be heard.

The monologic imagination is fascinating yet peculiar. It is ethnographically rich while being, as I have tried to indicate in this review, opposed to, or critical of, its constitutive concept, Bakhtinian monologue. It certainly fills a gap in Bakhtinian anthropology. In the process of so doing, it denies or rejects its major claim, which is that unilateral