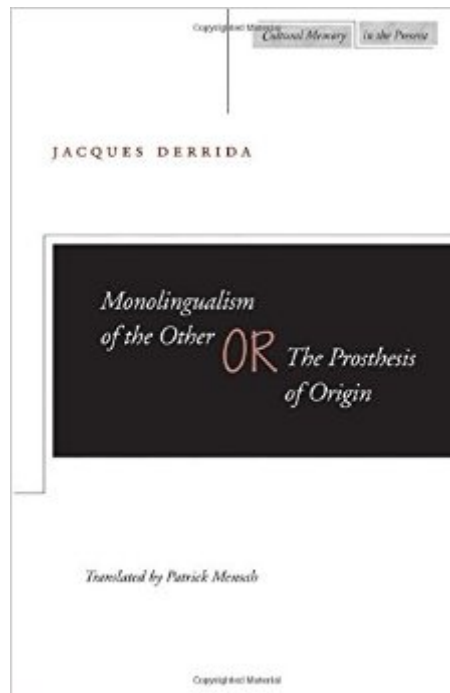


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Monolingualism Of The Other: Or, The Prosthesis Of Origin (Cultural Memory In The Present)



Synopsis

‘I have but one language; yet that language is not mine.’ This book intertwines theoretical reflection with historical and cultural particularity to enunciate, then analyze this conundrum in terms of the author’s own relationship to the French language. The book operates on three levels. At the first level, a theoretical inquiry investigates the relation between individuals and their ‘own’ language. It also explores the structural limits, desires, and interdictions inherent in such ‘possession,’ as well as the corporeal aspect of language (its accents, tones, and rhythms) and the question of the ‘countability’ of languages (that is, their discreteness or factual givenness). At the second level, the author testifies to aspects of his acculturation as an Algerian Jew with respect to language acquisition, schooling, citizenship, and the dynamics of cultural-political exclusion and inclusion. At the third level, the book is comparative, drawing on statements from a wide range of figures, from the Moroccan Abdelkebir Khatibi to Franz Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem, Hannah Arendt, and Emmanuel Levinas. Since one of the book’s central themes is the question of linguistic and cultural identity, its argument touches on several issues relevant to the current debates on multiculturalism. These issues include the implementation of colonialism in the schools, the tacit or explicit censorship that excludes other (indigenous) languages from serious critical consideration, the investment in an ideal of linguistic purity, and the problematics of translation. The author also reveals the complex interplay of psychological factors that invests the subject of identity with the desire to recover a ‘lost’ language of origin and with the ambition to master the language of the colonizer.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin," by Jacques Derrida, is a compelling blend of autobiographical material and cultural criticism. Originally published in French in 1996, the text has been translated into English by Patrick Mensah. According to a note at the beginning of the book, a shorter, different version of the text was delivered orally at a colloquium at the Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, in 1992. In the book, Derrida reflects on his past as an Algerian Jew living under French colonialism. He raises questions about language politics, personal identity, cultural domination, the notion of a "mother tongue," and the idea of "metalanguage." He reflects on the practical mechanics of French colonial administration in Algeria, and on Algeria's Jewish population: "a disintegrated 'community,' cut up and cut off." He also discusses his own problematic relationship with the French language. I found "Monolingualism of the Other" absolutely gripping. Although Derrida's prose (as translated by Mensah) sometimes strikes me as convoluted to the point of obscurity, I often found Derrida's style to be elegant, even poetic, and very accessible. But be warned: if you're intimidated by phrases like "ontico-ontological re-mark," "a pre-egological ipseity," or "the hegemony of the homogeneous," the book may be a bit much to take. But many will, I believe, tear into this challenging text with gusto. I believe that the issues raised by Derrida in this book are relevant to many other cultural phenomena: the debate over Black English, the political and literary recognition of creole and pidgin languages, the ongoing efforts to preserve the Celtic languages, etc. If you have a serious interest in these and related issues, I strongly recommend this book.

This book goes a long way to connect Derrida's intellectual/philosophical concerns with his life. Reading this book might provide the personal matter that is absent from his more famous (and more frequently cited) books and might bring to light the reasons for his interventions into philosophy. A must read for anyone thinking about the relationship between autobiography and language.

Jacques Derrida, as well as in his other oeuvres, builds up a negative or reflective meditation upon language. Hereby, he bears a family resemblance to Michel Foucault. The book is elaborating a polyvocal phenomenon, involving the problematic of language, identity, psychic identification, cultural hegemony (a target of verbal attack in his discourse). Besides, it sketches out the ideology

behind the scene, that is, the agony of in-between identification in the Algerian Jew. It is a rich and illuminating work that can be applied to censor the phenomena of "diaspora," "citizenship," migration and so forth in our contemporary epoch.

The book, inheriting and deviating the previous ones of Jacques Derrida. It contains multi-layer of signification or 'inter-textuality' as Kristeva suggests in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. In the first stance, French is a materialistic of identification. In the second, it's a point of resistance and rebellion. For, the linguistic characteristic of French as to Derrida possesses the significance of racial discrimination, cultural hegemony and 'grand narrative' covertly. The aforesaid is mainstream of his discourse within this book. Of course, hereby some ideologies and the problematic of migration and agony of in-between identification are left behind.

after wading through *_writing and difference_*, this nice little book was a most pleasant surprise. In comparison to *W & D*, *_The Monolingualism of the Other_* is a very readable book and there are plenty of ideas presented in this text that can be grasped without fully understanding Derrida's project. In conjunction with this, many of the ideas that Derrida discusses can be accepted and implemented into one's own thought without necessarily agreeing with Derrida's project. An enjoyable and thought-provoking read.

This small, but fascinating, book opens with a semi-autobiographical note: "I am monolingual. My monolingualism dwells, and I call it my dwelling." But it quickly launches into Derrida's signature philosophical moves. The book asks to examine our assumption that in an age of globalization, claims to multilingualism are always superior to the acknowledged state of being monolingual.

The description of singular experience but so much can be drawn and extended beyond the personal from these insights about language, the question of a mother tongue, and issues of translation.

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