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**Book Review: Duran, C. (2017). Language and Literacy in Refugee Families. United Kingdom, UK: Palgrave MacMillan. 226 pp. ISBN: 978-1-137-58754-1**

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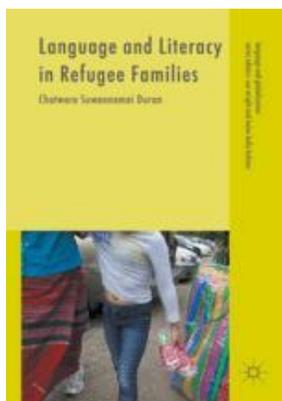
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Central to Duran's *Language and Literacy in Refugee Families* is the focus on language and literacy practices among three Karenni refugee families in the Southwestern United States. Under the theoretical framework of language socialization and transnationalism, Duran aims to shed light on the so-called "refugee crisis" that involves contradictory language ideologies and matters of power at play through longitudinal and vibrant ethnographic data on the refugees' multilingual repertoires, multimodal literacy practices, and lived experiences during their early resettlement years. This book is comprised of eight chapters, each of which provides a comprehensive documentation on distinct life aspects of the participant families.

The first two chapters: *Introduction: Refugee, Language, and Literacy (Chapter 1)*, and *"But, We Are Karenni. We Are Not Burmese." Historical Contexts and Lived Experiences of Karenni Refugees from Burma (Chapter 2)* give insights into growing issues of an increasing influx of refugees and a discussion on the background of the Karenni participants regarding their historical, linguistic, and cultural contexts behind their migration. Using the paradigm of transnationalism and a socio-cultural-historical approach towards literacy development, Duran moves beyond the formal school settings, where refugees are oftentimes given deficit labels, to capture their multiple movements and to interpret dynamic "practices in action" (p. 6) in informal sites to indicate that: (a) refugees are transnational agents; (b) refugees are resourceful; and (c) refugees are repetitively marginalized and minoritized. She then brings into light the conflicts between the Burmese and the Karenni in Burma, which forced the Karenni to migrate. Throughout their war-torn life trajectories, the Karenni refugees have constantly been marginalized since they lived in Burma, where Burmese is the official language, and since they arrived in the United States, where English plays a hegemonic role. As they "look back and move forward" (p. 64), the newcomers have undergone numerous struggles to become self-sustaining, enter the job market, and get continuing education. Parallel to their enduring process of resettlement, as Duran argues, is the questionable role of the state, local organizations, and community support network.



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In Chapter 3, *The Three Families*, Duran describes her multiple roles as a teacher, a family mentor, and a friend on the research site, and how she approached the refugee participants and established their mutual relationships. This chapter also lays out how the author collected the ethnographic data in two years via multiple qualitative methods, for example, multi-sited ethnography, participant observation, collection of artifacts, formal and informal interviews, and using interpreters. She also gives an overview of the three families' backgrounds, immigration stories, and circumstances during the study. The participants' biographic and demographic profile reveals a wide range of language and literacy foundations by each individual, each family, each age group, and place of birth, which altogether serve as significant data resources for the following chapters.

In *Life, Liberty, and (the Pursuit of) English (Chapter 4)*, the author examines the ideology of English as the language of access, confidence, privileged status, and happiness in the host country. In portraying each participant's points of view and attitudes toward the language, in which limited English literacy and proficiency oftentimes led to frustration and difficulties in every aspect of the refugees' daily lives. In particular, the "Limited English Proficiency" label has belittled the immigrants and "minoritized" their own languages; such beliefs, according to Duran, have become the social benchmark and indirectly "shaped the way the refugees are positioned and pressured by others" (p. 109). The data also points out how adults and children view English differently due to their exposure to situated practices, ideological forces, and hierarchical constructs of language. For instance, the younger children perceive that "Karenni women don't speak English" (p. 126), while the older ones keep correcting and making fun of their parents' "non-standard" variations of English. Such perceptions contribute to multifaceted dimensions of power relations and at the same time question the pursuit of "true liberty" among the recently-arrived refugees.

Chapter 5, *Karenni Youth, Multilingual Practices, and Transnational Literacy*, shows Duran's efforts to deconstruct the ideological forces that shape the language hierarchy by describing the participants' transnational multilingual repertoires and how they employ those accumulated literacies and recently-learned languages in a variety of contexts. In doing so, she yields insights into how the Karenni younger children develop their numerical literacy in their second language, which results in the phenomenon of translanguaging, in which both the first and second language serve the ultimate purpose of communication and making meaning of new knowledge. The older children, on the other hand, utilize their multilingualism to decode texts from schoolwork, interpretation, personal and professional interests, to pass on traditions to younger ones, and for religious purposes. The Karenni youth's learning trajectories underscores the fact that a refugee's funds of linguistic resources and the privileged language English co-exist in harmony, or even compete with each other, in the language continuum, which should not be neglected, especially within pedagogical contexts.

Chapter 6, *Digital Literacy in the Karenni Families*, and Chapter 7, *Revisiting Transnationalism and Key Resources*, highlight how technology and local community resources promote literacy development among the Karenni refugees. In particular, despite their limited ability to read and write English print texts, young Karenni learners manage to integrate a variety of communicative modes, for example, a diverse semiotic system found in video games, to navigate the "meaning of objects in immediate contexts" (p. 178). Meanwhile, Karenni teenagers, through their practices of using social network and media, online chat rooms, and texting are able to meet their sociocultural needs, maintain transnational affiliations, and construct fluid identities while making use of their multilingual toolkit and learning English in a meaningful way. In the same vein, ethnic-based support network such as elected representatives, experienced immigrants,

e-mail exchange at work, and digital forums have proved to be helpful resources to the adult refugees. Finally, the newcomers' language ideologies are reflected in their interpretation practices (from Karenni to Burmese to English), choice of languages for community events, for example, Burmese and Karenni, and creation of electronic print texts as maintenance of the Karenni language.

In the final chapter, *Conclusions and Implications*, Duran revisits some key terms discussed in the previous chapters and draws a conclusion on the Karenni refugees' accumulating, existing, and emerging language and literacy skills as part of their transnational lived experiences. She particularly emphasizes that the refugees, in their later phase of resettlement, view English as one of many useful languages in a continuum of languages. The author finally proposes some implications for pedagogy, especially with regard to public recognition of translanguaging phenomenon and an integration of digital literacy in curriculum. Duran also calls for action from service providers, and practitioners and resettlement agencies, namely, promoting English instruction for specific purposes, learning refugees' needs and backgrounds, and expanding their self-established support networks.

All things considered, in challenging the mainstream ideologies and encouraging critical thoughts on the increasing influx of refugees and immigrants globally, Duran has insightfully delineated an illuminating case study of the underrepresented Karenni refugee community, thereby offering unique insights into how the diasporic Karenni communities develop their multiple literacies and how the families struggle to negotiate and reconstruct transnational cultural models and contradictory multilingual repertoires to successfully enculturate themselves into the mainstream discourse. The book is also an exemplary work that involves longitudinal study and multi-sited ethnography. It is, therefore, a considerable contribution to the literature involving New Literacy Studies, especially with regard to its lens of language socialization, multimodal approach on literacy, and transnationalism.

In terms of limitations, in her efforts to provide vivid ethnographic accounts on the lived language experiences of the Karenni, Duran, despite her strong agentive urge, falls short of implications for pedagogy, which should have been further elaborated considering an emerging body of applied linguistic research on instructional models for English language learners (e.g. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol, or SIOP), teacher language and culture awareness, and teacher identity in language teaching. Those new turns in language education studies which tackle in-school issues could have been brought into focus to subvert the power at play, indoctrinated by the monolingual-monocultural ideology, which is still at large and rooted from within the school walls. Another limitation is that although Duran mentions the education support for adult refugees that comes from different local service providers and organizations in the second chapter (p. 64), she does not further discuss its role in shaping the refugees' ideology and practices. For instance, what is their approach to curriculum development that would fit in this setting? To what extent would their state-funded (re-)education, or "naturalization," policies project the view of assimilation and producing perpetual cheap labor in the process of resettlement?

Despite these minor drawbacks, this book would be particularly valuable for all social agents including resettlement agencies, sociolinguists, applied linguists, and educators who seek to follow immigrants and refugees' life trajectories through different contexts and to understand how they adapt their mobility with regard to the interplay of power, social ideologies, and multiple movements to guarantee successful acculturation in similar transnational settings.

## **About the Author**



**Nguyen Dao** is a Ph.D. student in Culture, Literacy, and Language at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Before moving to San Antonio, Nguyen used to work as an ESL teacher in Vietnam. Then he earned his M.Ed. in Curriculum & Instruction from the University of Houston and worked in Houston for two years as an academic program coordinator. His research interests include language learning, literacy practices, and identity among Vietnamese and Asian Americans. He is now working as a teaching assistant and as

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