

Book Review of Duran, C. S. (2017). *Language and literacy in refugee families.* Palgrave MacMillan.

Simranjeet Kaur, Brock University, CA

More and more refugees are fleeing life-threatening situations and seeking settlement in Western Countries, including Canada, Finland, and the USA (UNHCR, 2021). The movement from native lands to a foreign country is not just geographical but also challenges livelihood and employability. To further aggravate the situation, cultural and linguistic unfamiliarity acts as a barrier to settlement in the host country (Measham et al., 2014). The isolation from the dominant language and mainstream cultural practices leaves the refugees unvoiced and disadvantaged, pushing them toward the margins. Research shows that refugee students from distressed countries have limited English proficiency, which acts as a gatekeeper preventing students from interacting with their peers and teachers and as a barrier to achieving success in North American classrooms (Ayoub & Zohu, 2016). Hence, when it comes to refugees of wars, the dominant discourse surrounding them assumes a lack of skills in the English language and deprivation that blames them for their circumstances and strips them of their autonomy and identity. This focus on what Tuck (2009) terms a deficit model often masks people's and communities' cultural, collective, and linguistic strengths. These deficit accounts portray refugees as a homogenized group dependent on the host country for survival. Sadly, educational research rarely counters this narrative nor documents how refugees act as a resource and add value to their host country.

In her book titled *Language and Literacy in Refugee Families*, Duran presents an ethnographic account of the home literacy of practices Karenni families who arrived in 2009 from Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) in Phoenix, Arizona. Her research carried out over two years, documents her participants' literacy journey as they settled in a new country, the United States. Situated within studies of literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1984), Duran illustrates the hybridized ways her participants use their multilingualism, i.e., their heritage language, to maintain ties with people in their homeland and find solutions to their daily problems in the host country, such as finding schools for their children and buying second-hand cars. Through these rich accounts of everyday literacy practices, Duran documents the families' *accumulated literacy*, comprising the social, cultural, and historical traditions that pile up, get modified and used over their lives, such as the use of Karen over English in everyday lives of the people. She illustrates how Karenni refugees accumulate entertainment, economics, and religious practices. These accumulated literacies extend beyond school-based texts and occur in households, for example, when reading the Bible, doing homework and at various social gatherings. By documenting these examples from the everyday lives of her participants, Duran moves away from a deficit approach and highlights her participants' skillfulness, adaptability, and resilience during settlement as they embark on a journey to acquire a new language, English, while maintaining and negotiating their heritage language.

Duran uses this model of accumulated literacy and juxtaposes it with the language ideologies that suggest that people acquire the English language by settling in an English-speaking community to highlight how power and privilege associated with the language impact formal institutions compared to home environments. After describing the reasons for tensions between different ethnic groups in Burma that forced people to seek refuge in a foreign country in Chapter 1, Duran introduces the readers to her participants in the second chapter. In Chapter 3, Duran provides information about the linguistic richness in all three Karenni families accumulated due to their movement in different countries and educational experiences. She notes that the children and adults had oral and sometimes written knowledge of languages such as Thai, Burmese, Karen, and Shan. However, these funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), which are a collection of culturally and historically accumulated skills and knowledge, had little or no place in their new English-dominant world. Duran talks about her participants' frustrations, anxieties, struggles, and hopes as they grappled with the dominant ideology of English in Chapter 4. She demonstrates that the hegemonic nature of English surpasses

the accumulated literacies of adults, leaving them dependent on their children or other experienced refugees for everyday activities such as filling out forms, doing groceries, getting a driver's license, or filing for permanent citizenship. The tensions between the accumulated literacies and their clashes with the dominant language (English) ideologies emerge as barriers for families to settle and participate in American society fully. This mismatch of heritage and dominant language is the overarching theme.

In the following two chapters, Duran focuses on children's literacy practices. She draws parallels and documents their oscillating position within the home and school contexts. At home, children take up the role of language brokers and correct their parents' pronunciation of English. When at school, the children had to abandon their multilingual practices, and this loss resulted in a shift in their positions from experts to beginning learners. Even though the English schoolwork did not acknowledge the children's home language, Duran illustrates how they employed *translanguaging*, defined as expansive bilingual practices that go beyond code-switching strategies and involve using languages with their grammatical structures and in sociocultural contexts (García, 2008). This practice enabled them to pick up science concepts and solve mathematical problems by using their native language as an alternative means to communicate in situations that mandate the use of English. Duran dedicates a chapter to explaining children's multimodal and techno literacy practices and children's multimodal and techno literacy practices as families invested in buying gaming consoles. While the older children used social media platforms to connect with other Karenni teenagers, the young children played video games together after school. Duran suggests that different verbal, visual, and audio modalities provide an implicit medium for children to learn English and be entertained simultaneously. Her findings are consistent with those of Perry (2009, 2014), which documents technology's role in the lives of Sudanese refugee children and urges researchers to explore this phenomenon among other refugee and immigrant groups.

The richness in Duran's work and her ability to produce thick descriptions result from her unique position in the Karenni community. As a volunteer, she donned different hats of a friend, mentor, tutor, guide, and English teacher to her participants. Her ability to speak Thai and English and her familiarity with the American context gave Duran an advantage. Being a speaker of Thai, she could enter the homes of her participants, conduct formal interviews, do participant observations, have informal conversations with her participants, and collect artifacts for her research. Being somewhat familiar with her participants' struggles of settlement enabled her to form a rapport with them, giving her access to intimate details of her participant's home literacy practices and situating them in the broader social, cultural, and historical context. This is the biggest strength of Duran's work, and as a reader, one certainly cannot miss it.

Duran's final chapter concludes with a discussion on multilingualism as a resource that helps her participants navigate everyday challenges. She also provides implications of her study, which supports translanguaging and offers provisions like incorporating multiple media modes and adopting a student-centred approach for extra support for refugees in American schools. Considering the complicated situation and reality of her participants, the solutions proposed by Duran need to be more developed. Even though I agreed with her suggestions, as a reader, I was left with many unanswered questions: How can teachers support and utilize the multilingual and accumulated literacy of students in the classroom? Is there a role that technology can play in translanguaging and enabling students to understand scientific concepts? What curriculum reforms are needed to address the increasing diversity in the classroom? With these questions, it is important for this book's reader to be mindful that this book does not provide solutions to accommodating the issues of diversity in the mainstream classroom. These issues may be taken up and addressed by sociocultural researchers in the future.

Language and Literacy in Refugee Families contributes a rich account of the literacy practices of three Karenni families in Phoenix. The study adds to the pool of sociocultural research in refugee literacies. Duran illustrates the wealth of linguistic resources Karenni refugee families possess. Although the study is based in the US, it has implications for educators, curriculum developers and researchers in Canada, with its growing immigrant population (Government of Canada, 2023). The study's findings can help stakeholders understand the literacy practices of refugees who may struggle with limited numeracy and literacy skills in English (Ayoub & Zhou, 2016) and find ways to accommodate them in the Canadian educational contexts fully. Such recognition and accommodation are not only practical but also valuable and essential for these people who have already struggled enough to sustain their identity.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simranjeet Kaur is a Ph.D. student at Brock University in the Social, Cultural and Political Contexts of Education Studies stream. Her research interests include multilingualism, tech literacies and new media literacies. Simran's doctoral research focuses on the tech literacy practices of children residing in an urban slum in New Delhi.