

# NEELK BOOK OF THE MONTH

## *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows*

by Alastair Pennycook

Review by Nadia Butt – June 2008

This remarkable book explores the transnational spread of hip-hop to bring out the connections between global Englishes and transcultural flows and their implications for applied linguistic research. The term 'flows' in the title of the book, in fact, alludes to global phenomena of mass movement and migration in our increasingly transcultural age. Pennycook employs the term transcultural flows to address ways in which cultural forms move, change and are reused to fashion new identities in diverse contexts. The author is mainly interested in the cultural implications of globalization, the ways in which cultural forms spread and change. Transcultural flows, therefore, refer not merely to the proliferation of particular forms of culture across boundaries but rather to "processes of borrowing, blending, remaking and returning, to processes of alternative cultural production" (p. 6).

According to Pennycook, hip-hop functions as a global code which simultaneously demonstrates a sense of locality and thus constitutes a fascinating artifice of cultural and linguistic transformations. The strength of this study lies in the fact that it discusses Englishes and hip-hop in many contexts, from Australia to Japan, and from Malaysia to Senegal, and that it addresses the ways English is embedded in other linguistic contexts, including those of East Asia, Australia, West Africa and the Pacific Islands.

It is noteworthy that Pennycook's study, divided into eight separate chapters, is not a mere analysis of hip-hop per se, but a treatise that takes into account the 'global,' post-industrial signifying practice of hip-hop in order to shed light on globalization, global Englishes, performance and performativity in relation to identity and culture. Drawing on the example of hip-hop in Australia and East Asia (particularly Japan, Korea and Malaysia) the author infers that this transcultural use of English raises many new questions about how we understand language, identity, culture and location. His coinage 'transcultural flows' directs us to make sense of contemporary cultural reconfigurations across national and social boundaries in an era of constant cultural encounter and interaction.

Pennycook proposes a form of transgressive theory that seeks both to account for the transgressions of hip-hop and to disrupt standard concepts of contemporary cultural patterns, arguing that "the spatiality of the 'trans,' may be more useful than the temporality of the 'post'" (p. 13). He adds that 'trans' is used not only to cross over and to transcend the bounded norms of social and cultural dictates but also to question fixed standards on which definitions of sex, gender and sexuality rest. Nevertheless, Pennycook seems to be overtly carried away with the 'trans' in his title. Although he develops an exciting concept of transcultural flows, he begins to discuss every relevant theory in terms of 'trans' such as 'transdisciplinary,' 'transidiomatic,' 'transmodality,' 'transduction,' 'transtextuality,' 'transsignificance,' 'translation' and 'translingualism,' to name a few, leaving the reader reeling with the ramifications of transgressive theories throughout the chapter. Furthermore, despite his new approach to global Englishes and popular culture, Pennycook lays all his emphasis on Hip Hop without actually giving ample space to other popular cultural forms, which narrows the horizon of his study.

Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows is indeed not only an innovative and valuable contribution for students and scholars of transcultural and transnational studies, but also a readable textbook for those interested in questions of popular culture and the role of English in a globalized age. Thought-provoking and entertaining, the book is written in a lucid and candid style. It is a must read for those who are open to look and think beyond the confines of intercultural and multicultural debates. Last but not least, the book is food for thought for all those scholars who are interested in new interpretations of the 'transcultural' both in terms of theory and practice, and especially for those who are ready to think beyond (post)colonial approaches to globalization and modernity.

**Alastair Pennycook (2007), *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, 189 pp., €88,99, ISBN, 978-0-415-37497-2**