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discourse rather than practice. The official efforts
appear futile as they do not account for the
widespread practice whereby real Patwa users
remain marginalized and constrained by a
political economy that enforces the use of
dominant English. Paugh argues that revival
activities that valorize a previously oppressed
language will inevitably fail if the
socio-economic status of its speakers stays the
same. She documents that ‘revitalization efforts
often clash with the daily experiences of those
they claim to help – paradoxically strengthening
existing power structures’ (p. 30). In the same
vein, the attempt to create literacy supposedly
aimed at language preservation ‘seems to
further validate social hierarchy, which used to
be more clearly dichotomous – English for elite,
Patwa for lower classes’.

In the midst of her masterful portrayal of
complex and conflicting language context in
Dominica, the author draws readers to a truly
captivating ethnography of language use and
child socialization in the remote village of
Penville. She meticulously guides us through
fine-grained case studies of six local families in
order to show that all the parents, regardless of
socio-economic status, education, or family
background, require their children to speak
English at the expense of Patwa. But the
poignancy of her account lies not in the latter
but in vivid ethnographic observation of the
social paradox that, despite parents’, caregivers’,
and teachers’ attempts to forbid use of Patwa,
the children create their own space in which the
language is maintained and retains its emotive
and affective salience. The space that provides
such an opportunity is children’s play. Paugh
shows that while playing outside of the confines
of the adult-dominated home space, children
actively reproduce adult everyday use of Patwa;
specifically, the ways the adults strategically
switch between English and Patwa. Such
‘code-switching’ is characterized by Paugh as ‘a
potent resource for expressing affective stance’
and ‘evoking the intimacy and solidarity of the
home or community’. What follows is that the
play becomes the most fruitful arena in which
children can independently explore the range of
linguistic repertoires in the absence of a vigilant
adult. ‘As a forbidden language, Patwa takes on
subversive power for children in constructing
their own cultures and identities’ (p. 145). While
children creatively draw from themes of adult
lives and older siblings, they operationalize
locally and socially available resources such as
physical space, affective speech aimed at verbal
control and social manipulation, and artefacts

Children, socialization,
and language

PAUGH, AMY L. Playing with languages: children
and change in a Caribbean village. xii, 250 pp., maps, tables, illus., bibliogr. Oxford,
New York: Berghahn Books, 2012. £56.00 (cloth)

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closely associated with the use of Patwa. Paugh’s sophisticated and detailed ethnography of children’s play illustrates how children serve as agents actively engaged in the maintenance of affective and pragmatic functions of Patwa, which in its turn fosters the creation of their own peer group identities.

The space of children’s play, created and protected by their peers, functions as a critical site of language socialization and a key resource for language maintenance that is largely overlooked in official revival efforts, which focus mainly on school and formal performance. Paugh addresses core empirical issues that revolve around pragmatic constraints of language revitalization efforts, which I find relevant not only for the context of cultural/linguistic preservation in Dominica, but also for other parts of the world where similar efforts and policies are being undertaken (e.g. Siberia and Alaska). Specifically, she posits that in most approaches, language preservation is perceived as resting in the hands of community elders, educated intellectuals, and policy-makers, whereas children’s role is completely underestimated. Nationalist movements that promote an endangered language do not recognize the significance of links between ideology and practice, and it is these links that should be taken into account when developing and implementing programmes aimed at language preservation. Moreover, careful attention to children’s own language ideologies through ethnographic research of unspoken and subversive socialization practices shows that children’s peer interactions offer a critical context for language maintenance in which they can try their native language without evaluation from adults.

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