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The Fall Of Language In The Age Of English



Book Information

File Size: 8485 KB

Print Length: 238 pages

Publisher: Columbia University Press; Tra edition (January 6, 2015)

Publication Date: January 6, 2015

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00R3KLG0S

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #294,133 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #38

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Customer Reviews

4.5 starsAll my life I have been drawn to books about books, about language. From refusing to relinquish a grammar textbook at my first public book sale (I think I was 8) to my recent enjoyment of Alena Graedon's *The Word Exchange* (which still gives me chills), I have been interested in how language develops and the role of great literature in a human life. Thus, I was very excited to read Minae Mizumura's nonfiction work, *The Fall of Language in the Age of English*. Mizumura's thesis is a simple one: through an accident of history, English has become the world's "universal language," i.e., an external language, read or written by someone who speaks another language, through which knowledge is best pursued. This ubiquity, Mizumura argues, threatens the very existence of literature written in other languages, particularly non-Western languages like Japanese. Her first two chapters introduce the issue through her own personal experiences and, not surprisingly, were the most enjoyable to read, but the academic tone of the remainder of the book was still easy to understand and follow. I particularly appreciated the way in which she builds upon the "imagined communities" described by Benedict Anderson, perhaps because his work played a significant role in another book I recently enjoyed (Alessandro Perissinotto's novel *For They Have Sown the Wind*; I

love such unexpected congruences). Mizumura also manages to offer cogent observations on two literary phenomena, polar opposites, which have puzzled me in the last few months: the global success of 50 Shades of Grey and the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Patrick Modiano, a French author not well-known in the United States even among voracious readers of literary fiction.

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