The authors of the eight chapters in this edited volume are concerned with revealing the ideological base of current language testing polices for citizenship and immigrant integration in Europe. The opening chapters set the stage for the book, outlining key issues (Hogan-Brun, Molinero, and Stevenson), providing an overview of European immigration and integration policies (Van Overmaet), and presenting a critical ideological analysis of key notions that define the debate, namely ‘language’, ‘test’, and ‘citizenship’ (Shohamy). The next chapters explore these policies in the Netherlands (Guus Extra and Massimiliano Spotti), Britain (Adrian Blackledge), and Luxembourg (Kristine Horner). The chapter by Brigitta Busch uses the case of a public library in Vienna to illustrate the importance of considering local policies and practices. Tim McNamara’s commentary concludes this timely and important volume.

The different authors identify quite similar trends across these diverse settings. First, the studies document the increased emphasis on language (and in some cases cultural knowledge) testing as a prerequisite for citizenship over time. Van Overmaet’s presentation of the results of an Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) survey of 19 countries is particularly useful in this regard. The survey findings show the emergence of stricter conditions and sanctions for obtaining residence permits or citizenship. In particular, language tests have become a requirement for entry or residency/citizenship in many of the surveyed countries. Interestingly, knowledge of culture tests are primarily required more in the former ‘Eastern Bloc’ countries, a reflection of the differences in immigration histories.

Another common theme is the dominance, or hegemony, of the ‘dogma of homogeneism’ in current testing regimes for citizenship. The language and knowledge of culture tests assume monolingualism and monoculturalism, and value
only proficiency in the standard variety of the official language. Shohamy’s analysis, among others, points to the conflict between the diverse nature of the daily realities of immigrants and the multilingual skills they need within and across language codes to truly become an integral part of the various communities that they and their families are participating in. Blackledge’s analysis illustrates how the homogeneous discourse is being framed in the United Kingdom as taken-for-granted values of the duty to integrate, the importance of embracing a common, shared language, the failure of multiculturalism, and the need to break down the language barrier. The call for stringent language testing is presented as naturally aligned with these ‘common-sense’ understandings of linguistically and culturally diverse settings.

At the same time, multiple discourses operate at different policy levels. Horner begins with the observation that ‘integration’ does not have a singular meaning nor does it reflect homogeneous practices. She highlights the ambiguities and contradictions of the official ‘integration’ discourse that positions proficiency in Luxembourgish as a necessary tool for integration, while at the same time stressing Luxembourg’s cosmopolitanism and openness towards foreigners. Similarly, formal discourses focusing on diversity, multiplicity and multilingualism at the United Nations and European level differ markedly from the linear, one-to-one link between language, identity, and culture communicated at the nation-state level (Extra and Spotti).

The chapter by Brigitta Bush stands out for its focus on an institution, the public library in Vienna. Bush analyses the linguistic landscape in the library’s physical as well as virtual space (online access), with a focus on how the community’s languages of the two migrant groups, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and Turkish, are presented. She notes how the central library has responded to heteroglossic realities by expanding access to popular genres, by not distinguishing between foreign and immigrant language acquisition, and by having an open access policy. Bushes’ example of bottom-up policies and decision-making provides an insightful contrast to the top-down analyses in the other chapters. It provides excellent ideas for other institutions (including, for example, schools or social agencies) interested in and willing to engage with the notion of integration in a pluralistic fashion at the local level.

The volume distinguishes itself by the diversity in research methods and analyses to make the common trends visible. In addition to more conceptual chapters (e.g., Shohamy, McNamara), data sources for analysis vary. For instance, whereas the chapters by Van Avermaet and Extra and Spotti rely on survey data, Blackledge and Horner present detailed textual discourse analyses of government policy documents and formal statements. Busch uses an ethnographic approach to space and linguistic landscapes. By doing this, the volume points to important areas for continued, future scholarship and raises the question of how scholars can systematically reveal not only the language ideologies and assimilationist discourses that are reflected in these policies but also the visible socioeconomic, political, cultural, and educational consequences for groups and individuals in a particular community and society.

The chapters are rich in critical analysis of the ideological discourses of integration and language testing regimes. However, they do not consider implications for policy and practice with equal depth. As also noted by Tim McNamara in