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Editorial

In our complex global ecology of language flows, semiotic shifts and cultural exchanges, the internationalisation of education has led not only to large movements of students living for a considerable length of time in different national cultures, but also to language teachers travelling to other countries in order to share their ‘native’ language(s) and culture(s) with the learners they encounter. Meanwhile, systems of signs and symbols converge and compete dynamically with the intermingling of different ethnic and institutional groups in the schools and cityscapes of our modern urban spaces. In order to investigate these phenomena, it is often necessary to translate cultural meanings from one symbol system to another. However, as we all know, exact equivalence between languages often eludes us. This creates a moment of tension in translation which we often see as a problem or a challenge. But could it also be possible that such a moment of ‘untranslatability’ could also provide us with an opportunity? This rich set of themes is addressed by our contributors to this, the final issue of the sixteenth volume of LAIC.

Young people traverse cultures due to education, not least with the oft-heralded goal of enhancing their cultural capital within the global marketplace. Most studies of intercultural communication within higher education tend to focus upon the more formal aspects of higher education. Adopting a broadly ethnographic approach informed by Wenger’s (1998) framework of ‘community of practice’, Kevin Yung undertakes a ‘rich’ study of a single case – a student born in Hong Kong, raised in Australia, and now returning home - as he struggles to make sense of his identity inside and outside his hall of residence in the diversity of cultural meanings and languages he finds in Hong Kong. Yung draws on multiple, longitudinal data sources for this paper including interviews, Facebook entries and field notes, which yield considerable insight into how his subject changes over time. One strategy that his subject undertook was – rather than speaking English to converse with his hall-mates

– he chose to speak Cantonese to reduce his 'self-uncertainty' about his identity and achieve 'self-categorisation' within his local hall community of native Hong Kong students. Not only does this paper problematize the role of English within 'internationalised' groups of students, it also gives a powerful insight into the struggles of a 'local-non-local' hybrid as he seeks to fit into a community to which he wants to return, but to which he feels he can never fully belong. However, there are other non-official locations where international students engage with local communities in order to try and discover a sense of belonging during their period of (inter)cultural transition for the duration of their studies. For many of them, attending a place of worship – be it a church, mosque or temple - can provide both a spiritual and social anchor which offers them stability throughout their period of transition. As in Yung's paper, Kung Fan-Wei also utilises a community of practice framework in order to situate his analysis of the relationships which were built up between 12 Chinese speaking international scholars and their families as they attended a local church. To carry out his research, Kung added actual observations to the ethnographic techniques of interview and field notes. It emerged that the church community – located in the now culturally diverse city of Belfast, UK - provided not just spiritual succour but also served to maintain Mandarin, the first language of the scholars and their children, and to keep alive heritage customs such as the celebration of Chinese New Year. Furthermore, community members appeared keen to engage with the other languages spoken in their community - here English, Malaysian and other dialects of Chinese. In this way, engaging in a religious community of practice appears to provide a positive experience for the participants in the development not only of their own multicultural and multilingual identities, but also those of their families.

If several of the papers in this volume (and elsewhere) have focused on the role of language and culture in creating and maintaining the identities of different types of student/learner as they transition from and language ecology to another, we have perhaps paid less attention to

those who actually teach these languages, many of whom are also subject to the same sorts of transition within their professional development. Ortactepe and Mutlu also adopt a case study approach in order to consider what happens to five English language teachers from Turkey on an international educational exchange programme, as they spend a year in the USA teaching Turkish. During this period, not only do they undergo a transition from living in their native land to residing in a foreign county, but they also change their roles from being non-native English speaking teachers (referred to in this literature as ‘NNESTs’) to being native speaking teachers of Turkish. Through carrying out interviews with the respondents, shifts emerged with regard to three aspects of the participants’ identities as teachers: self-image, self-efficacy and their beliefs about themselves as teachers (after Williams and Burden, 1997). In this respect, the change in the social situation of the young teachers’ professional practice led to a complex oscillation between their identities as non-native speaking English language teachers and native-speaking teachers of Turkish. However all in all, their being able to call upon the resources of their native language enabled the teachers to feel more confident, creative and competent than they had hitherto. Interestingly, despite the anxieties and tensions that have often been expressed in these pages with respect to those undertaking further study in a foreign country, this paper speaks to the positive experience of these itinerant language instructors.

Although the idea of mobility implies transitions that are perhaps of a relatively short duration, the forces of migration, colonialism and conflict also make for spaces where the intermingling of populations becomes sedimented over time. By the end of the 20th century these forces had created the cultural foundations for many cities around the world; and with this intermingling of populations came also the cross-fertilisation of languages. Tannanbaum and Yitzhaki refer to such urban spaces as ‘mixed cities’. Within Israel, as is well known, such urban spaces are co-habited by both Arab and Israeli populations. Due to perceptions of

the enhanced power of the language of Hebrew within Israeli society, Arab residents are increasingly inclined to send their children to educational settings in which Hebrew is the language of instruction. Exercising this choice over the language(s) one's children are able to speak represents an 'asset', or 'investment' in contemporary Israeli society. However, from interviews with parents, the authors note that while there is a mechanical investment in the acquisition of the Hebrew language, resistance remains to bringing aspects of Arab language and culture into early years institutions in order to create an authentically 'hybrid' intermingling of cultures. Furthermore, this investment would appear to have a downside – inasmuch as it can lead to a dislocation in Arab parents' understanding of their children's expression of their emotion, which may well increasingly be realised in Hebrew rather than Arabic. Another urban space where languages and cultures cross-fertilise is the densely populated city-state of Macau, an autonomous region within the Republic of China. This intensity makes for a proliferation of new modalities of semiotic encoding of the complexity of these language situations. Just such a complexity is reported by Zhang in her investigation of the plurilingual posters which illuminate the semiotics of the cityscape. Posters constitute a relatively under-researched type of text through which, in this cultural environment, not only do different languages combine to create messages with highly specific nuances of linguistic code, but also incorporate visual images. Zhang identifies three different kinds of poster – those advertising casinos, government policy and associations. Within these, a mix of traditional Chinese characters, simplified Chinese characters, Portuguese, English, and written Cantonese creates a nexus in which relations of power are asymmetrically distributed amongst different types of reader. This is achieved not least by the different social status of the different languages which are included in the posters, and the ways in which these are used to position their readers differentially.

As has been well rehearsed in these pages and elsewhere, the process of translation is no longer seen as the simple substitution of equivalent words and phrases from one language to another. In whatever context, translation entails accounting for issues of context and the extent to which any one word can in fact be seen as being able to convey a precisely similar meaning across different languages. However to the best of my knowledge, this matter has hardly ever been addressed with specific reference to intercultural research. In their intriguing paper which concludes this issue, Ruitenberg, Knowlton and Li address the issue of translation while conducting intercultural research. By its very nature, research into culture, cultures and communication between them often entails undertaking research in one language, and then reporting it in another. This is one of the challenges which I, as editor, am keenly and - I hope - sympathetically aware of as I engage with your papers. In this respect, words that do not have a distinct equivalence in different languages are often seen as creating a 'problem' in the research process. However, Ruitenberg and her colleagues challenge this notion and argue that these 'untranslatables' can be seen as being potentially productive within the research process. This perspective is supported by an account of two pieces of intercultural research which have been carried out by the authorial team in various combinations and are fascinating in themselves: research with Mandarin-speaking participants on the topic of democracy and democratic subjectivity, and research with Q'eqchi'-speaking participants on the topic of civic engagement and political participation. The authors argue that the moments of 'untranslatability' which they encountered in these projects actually provided an opportunity for the researchers to engage with the 'cultural assumptions' contained within the words and concepts of the two languages involved. This, they maintain, is the essence of 'thick translation' (after Appiah, 1993). They conclude with an invocation to critical qualitative researchers not to engage in the 'illusion of transparency and neutrality' with regard to the relationship between languages, but to 'slow down' and

offer an honest and considered account of translational moments that give rise to reflection or self- doubt.

At the end of this volume we welcome our new Reviews Editor, Maria Dasli; and thank our two book reviewers Michele Saraiva Carilo and Karin Zotzmann. Maria is always on the look-out for book reviews, so if you are reading a recent publication in the field that you think would interest our readers, do get in touch with Maria at mdasli@exseed.ed.ac.uk, or – if you want to write a review – email her and ask if she has any books that she needs reviewing. I also want to thank our Editorial Assistant, Jennifer Tunstall, who has once more unflaggingly propelled all the papers for this volume (and many others) from author to editor, to referee and back. Our Production Editor, Katie Williams, has also once more ensured that each issue is in fine shape, and produced in an orderly fashion.

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