

Original citation:

MacDonald, Malcolm. (2015) Editorial. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 15 (2). pp. 187-190.

Permanent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/78430>

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Publisher's statement:

"This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Language and Intercultural Communication* on 2 March 2015, available online:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2015.1008270> "

A note on versions:

The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRAP url' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

Editorial

The practice of communication within and between cultures is fuelled by the great waves of populations who transit across countries and continents – whether to seek political sanctuary and corporeal safety, to pursue improved material conditions for themselves and their family to live, or to acquire the knowledge and skills that will enable them to better themselves in the global marketplace. Most of the contributors to this issue engage with just this intercultural dynamic. The issue opens with three papers which consider the educational and communicative practices engaged in by economic migrants: Ortiz on Mexican workers seeking to engage with the aspirational culture of the USA; Sime and Pietka-Nykaza on migrants from Poland settled in Scotland; and Kim and Kim on ‘Damunwha’ students (students from multicultural backgrounds) from international marriages or immigrant families in South Korea. This journal particularly welcomes these perspectives, as the authors are engaging with the communication practices of three – albeit very different - *non-elite* social groups, which in our view still go under-represented within empirical investigations in our field. The American context is further elaborated on in the context of US universities by Choi, who describes how Korean students position themselves vis-à-vis the English language and American culture and. In a delicious reversal of continental positioning, Pang, Sterling and Long then offer us qualitative data which explores how members of a multinational student group studying in China – including some from the US - deal with the vicissitudes of a shopping expedition in the Silk market in Beijing. Finally, Don Snow offers us some refreshing insights into how to employ a particular type of critical incident exercise to enhance intercultural competence in the language classroom.

There are 12.7 million Mexican immigrants in the United States. Although they account for over half the undocumented residents in the country, they play a dominant role in several of the key economic sectors in the country. For example, slightly over half the

workers in the US construction industry come from Mexico. Particularly given the hidden nature of much of this employment and also due to the often liminal position which Mexican workers occupy within the USA, Ortiz's exploratory study which considers the nature of communication in the workplace of Mexican workers, is a timely contribution to this economic and demographic phenomenon. As is preferred within these pages, Ortiz employs a linguistic ethnographic approach with a particular focus on the context-sensitive analysis of language to engage with rich qualitative data from a small cohort of seven participants from different sectors of employment. Her findings suggest that even after many years of employment in the USA, Spanish remains the dominant language for the participants. Possibly as a consequence of this, literacy is underdeveloped and the use of writing at work is infrequent. Despite this lack of specialised forms of literacy, the everyday experience of these migrant workers remains complex as the participants navigate their way between both the Hispanic and the Anglo culture of their work and family life. Moreover, despite feelings of powerlessness and often having to endure moments of real victimization, the participants maintain their belief in 'el sueño dorado' and hopes of financial betterment.

Back in Scotland, Sime and Pietka-Nykaza report an investigation into 18 Polish families with children who have recently moved to the country. Their findings reconfirm longstanding observations that increasing competence of migrant children in the English language leads to their performing a more influential role within the family, as they often engage as interpreters or educators of at least one of the parents. However, they also discover that their children's orientation towards the new language is not always unambivalent, as their evidence suggests that there is also a drive within the intercultural dynamic of the family to the simultaneous maintenance of competence in the mother tongue. For Sime and Pietka-Nykaza, these children also develop a facility in switching between different sites of cultural engagement, ranging from a day-to-day reorientation from home to school and back again,

regular vacation transitions from Scotland back to the family's point of origin in Poland during holiday visits, and also for some families, regular virtual communication between the home in Scotland and other family members still resident in Poland. This all makes for a complexity through which the children are engaged as agents in the construction and maintenance of their identities through the moment by moment social practice of 'linguaging'. Their paper ends by calling upon practitioners working with younger migrants to be aware of these complexities and to develop strategies in helping these children navigate potential discontinuities between school and family life.

Kim and Kim also undertake an investigation into the language identities of young language learners, but in a very different cultural and linguistic environment and using a rather different theoretical approach. The authors synthesise community of practice and critical pedagogy frameworks in order to carry out a case study of four young, migrant language learners who attended welfare centres in South Korea (referred to in their paper as Korea). Here, students from multicultural family backgrounds are referred to as *Damunwha*. While in Sime and Pietka-Nykaza's study, the participants all come from one originating national cultural, in this paper the four participants come from three diverse national cultures - Uzbekistan, China and the Phillipines. This gives rise to their being positioned differently in the social and pedagogical contexts in which they find themselves, depending on their resources, cultural capital and others' perceptions of their identities – influenced as much as anything by the outward appearance of their ethnicity. Furthermore, contra Sime's UK study the four participants in Korea appeared to lose touch with the use of the mother tongue in their home context. Yet again, we find very different outcomes from the language practices which are pursued in different social and political contexts. Kim and Kim conclude with a plea for a discrimination-free educational environment for these *Damunwha* students, an increase in education for international understanding as well as meaningful interventions to

enable them to maintain an engagement the mother tongue, as well as with the culture of their parents.

Identity formation over different generations is also foregrounded in Choi's mixed methods study of a cohort of 181 Korean migrants to the United States. The United States hosts the largest Korean population outside Korea itself, and their experience is set over against what she argues – perhaps controversially - is still a largely monolingual, assimilationist policy which has been pursued by the US government through the twentieth century into the twenty first. Again, while Sime and Pietka-Nykaza's study suggests a greater degree of first language maintenance across generations, Choi suggests that there is a rapid adoption of American English, even within a single generation, with a trend towards monolingualism in the 1.5 and second generations. She also finds a correlation between the degree of 'hyphenation' of identity and the extent to which the English language is adopted. Further studies need to be carried out into the reasons behind these differences. These papers give rise to a number of questions. For example, is the greater degree of first language maintenance by the Polish community within Scotland down to a more enlightened multilingual language policy, or due to the greater linguistic synergy permitted by members of a shared European community? Or could the greater level of rejection of the mother tongue be down to some strong cultural drive towards education in the dominant global language – as Choi suggests – or perhaps due to the more assimilationist language policy pursued within the United States? Language policy within the United States will be explored more broadly in our next special issue (LAIC 15.3), guest edited by Robert Valdeon, which also considers the contemporary positioning of the Spanish language and its speakers in the United States.

In comparison with Choi, Pang et al. adopt a highly situated view of cultural and intercultural communication, in the specific context of the Silk Market (*xiushuijie*) in Beijing.

On Pang et al.'s description, the Silk Market used to be the dubious haunt of black-market currency traders, but over the past thirty years it has rapidly developed into something which resembles a top range shopping mall, while still retaining a bit more flexibility and lack of constraint than the usual top-notch department store. Pang et al. carried out interviews with a cohort of forty international students, viewing the semiotization of the marketplace from a 'flexi multilingual' perspective (after Blommaert et al. 2005). In this respect, each shopper brings to the context his or her personal view of what might this cultural and communicative practice, enabling it to be understood as at once 'performance and performativity' (after Gregson and Rose, 2000). In this respect, different cultural groupings of students tended to view the shopping experience from the standpoint of the different prior linguistic experience and expectations of what might take place. However, knowledge of language(s) itself was not enough in order to engage in a positive experience of the form of transaction that took place in this particular context; rather it was also necessary to develop an understanding and capability in the specific semiotized and ritualistic behaviours that underpin this particular form of communicative event.

If the international students in the Silk Market had engaged with some intercultural encounter exercises, they would doubtless have been (even) better equipped to deal with the vicissitudes of bargaining in this particular communication situation. To conclude this issue, Don Snow offers us some refreshing insights from his language and writing classes in Jiangsu, China into the potential of critical incident exercises (CIEs). He reminds us that we cannot hope to cover the entire gamut of intercultural competence within the language classroom, but CIEs can help our students engage with the cultural element of language learning. In particular, encounter exercises help learners become more aware of the practice of interpretation in intercultural communication situations and be able to not just tolerate, but actually to embrace the uncertainty and ambiguity which is ever present communicating with

the stranger. Snow advocates the use of situated, open-ended vignettes where learners can explore a range of possible responses to a particular situation. He draws on his own experience of the language classroom to suggest four ways in which the repeated use of encounter exercises builds intercultural competence: awareness of problematic situations and the habit of switching to more conscious thinking modes, consideration of multiple interpretations, awareness of factors which may negatively impact the interpretation process, and awareness of the benefit-of-the-doubt choice.

Two overarching themes seem to emerge from this issue, as all our empirical studies in their different ways appear to engage with the groundedness of intercultural communication in the material conditions of global mobility. First – highlighted by Sime and Pietka-Nykaza – the idea of space appears to run through these studies. Ortiz’s Mexican labourers and the children from Sime and Pietka-Nykaza’s Polish families appear able to navigate between the different communicative and languaging demands of work-and-family and school-and family. However, this appears more challenging for Kim and Kim’s *Damunwha*, and Choi’s second generation Koreans living in the USA. Then Pang et al. focus on a form of intercultural communicative practice that is particularized to one, spatially located, communicative situation – market trading in Beijing. And secondly, our empirical studies go some way to capturing aspects of the often challenging economic realities confronted by non-elite and elite groups of sojourners alike. Ortiz’s Mexican labourers need to avail themselves of sets of communication strategies in order to eke out a living wage for them and their families, while Sime and Pietka-Nykaza’s parents presumably aspire for an economically more affluent life for their English-speaking children. Likewise, the Uzbekistani, Chinese and Filipino participants in Kim and Kim's study are motivated by the same economic necessities to master Korean, as are Choi’s 2G Koreans now resident in the USA. And finally, something of the adversarial positioning of the more elite student

travellers in Pang et al's study vis-à-vis the traders in the Silk Market is in part a realization of the economic gap that persists between them. In this respect, the empirical studies in this issue demonstrate the dialectic that takes place between the brute material conditions of human existence and the potentiality of language and languages, not only navigate these conditions - but also to change them.

References

- Blommaert, J., Slembrouck, S., & Collins, J. (2005). *Spaces of multilingualism*. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 25(3), 33–35. doi:10.1016/j.langcom.2005.05.002.
- Gregson, N., & Rose, G. (2000). Taking Butler elsewhere: Performativities, spatialities, and subjectivities. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18, 433–452. doi:10.1068/d232.

Malcolm N. MacDonald
University of Warwick
Tuesday, 13 January 2015