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Editorial

In this third issue of LAIC 19 we are able to bring to you another themed ‘open’ issue, in which we present five papers, each exploring the ways in which language(s) are used under conditions of migration and multiculturalism in different parts of the world. From London, Patiño-Santos and Márquez Reiter investigate the ways in which members of the Latin American community position themselves in relation to nationals who come from other countries in the region. Muhammad Amara surveys the different languages used on shop signs in certain Arab areas in the State of Israel. Abdulai, Alhassan & Sanus investigate the communication issues in health provision which arise from variations in the languages spoken in a particular area of Ghana. Piacentini, O’Donnell, Phipps, Jackson & Stack investigate the ways in which interpreters in health clinic in Glasgow go beyond the straightforward recoding of interactions in a health care setting to also engaging with aspects of their patients’ precarious immigration status. And finally, drawing on narrative accounts collected in Indonesia, Ladegaard continues his investigation of the lived and ‘language(d)’ experiences of domestic migrant workers, this time to explore their narrative accounts of returning home after lengthy periods of time working abroad.

Many countries in the Global South have historically been home to a diverse mix of languages, ethnicities and religions. The recent elections which have been held in Nigeria have reminded us that, as the most populous country in Africa, it has historically been home to more than 250 ethnic groups, 521 different languages, and the Christian and Islamic religions. However, within the current context of South-North flows of migration, multiculturalism – and multilingualism - is perhaps a more recent, and therefore potentially more troubling, experience for some countries in the Global North. In the paper which opens this issue, Adriana Patiño-Santos and Rosina Márquez Reiter explore the ways in which the resources of language and discourse are used to constitute the identities of members of the Latin American community in London. While this research trajectory is most typically carried out to investigate the relations between either the minority ethnic group and the majority - or between the majority and the minority, here Patiño-Santos and Márquez Reiter notably investigate the ways in which nationals from different Latin American countries who have emigrated to the UK constitute their identities in relation to *each other*, while working in shops in Elephant and Castle. This area of London is located bang-slap in the middle of the City just south of the Thames, becoming well-known in recent times as popular with Latin American traders. As Holliday has previously proposed in this journal (2010), the authors confirm that national identity - and

indeed certain discursively constituted forms of ‘essentialism’ - emerge as a relevant category in the sense of self expressed by the two particular cases which they report. One subject from Uruguay positions herself by talking disparagingly about other Spanish-speaking Latin Americans (SsLAs); another subject from Columbia positions herself by talking disparagingly about other ‘Latinos’ in general. The authors go on to posit what I think is the important construct of *banal interculturalism* (after Billig, 1995). This is defined in their paper as ‘a form of knowledge that emerges in the discourses that circulate among (SsLA) migrants about other (SsLA) migrants’. Thus, while this journal continues to resist any form of essentialism as a theoretical category – particularly when it is posited *a priori* in a research design - we believe it is entirely appropriate, and indeed necessary, to acknowledge nationality as an category when it emerges from empirical data.

While having people of different ethnicities and languages rubbing up against each other is not altogether new to London, this is experienced with particular intensity by the different ethnic, religious and cultural groups who co-habit in the State of Israel. And this intensity is reflected, as much as anywhere, in the status and usage of the different languages spoken in the country. While Hebrew is the official civic language of the state, Arabic is the language which reflects the identity of members of the Arab community, and English – as a major international language – is seen increasingly as the language of globalisation. Thus in Israel, each of these different languages serve not only as particularly powerful signifiers of personal identity, but also as vehicles of intercultural communication both within and beyond the state. Across the different, distinctive localities in Israel, nowhere is this more apparent than in the presence of shop signs in the public space. In our second paper in this issue, Muhammad Amara extends the novel but exciting strand of research into ‘linguistic landscapes’, which was first reported in this journal by Zhang and Chan (2017) in Macau. In his paper, Amara carries out a survey of the languages displayed in shop signs within predominately Arab areas of Israel, and enquires from some shop owners as to their purpose. Findings indicate that within these Arab communities who reside in Israel, Arabic is by far and away the most prominent language used on shop signs; and this reflects the assertion of Arab identity on the part of shop-owners and customers alike. However, depending on the orientation of specific areas, English and Hebrew are also displayed in shops signs to varying degrees. Overall, Amara’s paper confronts us with indications that – even with something as apparently mundane as a shop sign – language is rarely neutral. And within the State of Israel language is perhaps tied up even more powerfully than other places with issues of politics, religion and identity.

Emerging from a conglomerate of powerful medieval kingdoms of West Africa located on the Gulf of Guinea, Ghana is a country which has also historically comprised diverse ethnic groups, which speak a range of languages and dialects. While English has become its official language, other indigenous languages are widely spoken across the country, including Akan, Dagbani, Dagaari, Ewe and Sissala. Thus in public sector areas, such as education and the health services, professionals often have to either draw on a combination of these languages in order to be understood by their clients, or rely on an interpreter. In a welcome paper drawing on data which reflects the multicultural and multilingual nature of this country, Abdulai, Alhassan and Sanus investigate issues around health communication issues which arise from variations in the languages spoken in the Sissala region of the country, and the need to mediate between the range of cultural meanings which are signified by the different languages and dialects. Drawing on a theoretical framework informed by polysemy and a research design based on ethnomethodology, the authors conclude that the dialects which are used by healthcare providers and their patients could often be mutually unintelligible, leading at best to difficulties in understanding, and at worst to lack of comprehension. Furthermore, interpreters employed to mediate between health professionals and their patients appeared to be lacking in some of the more nuanced understandings of the cultural background of the patients involved, leading to misinterpretations, misunderstanding and miscommunication. The writers argue that these arise from a mismatch between the cultural meanings which interlocutors from one cultural background attribute to the sign symbols used by their interlocutors from a different cultural background. The paper concludes by suggesting that both healthcare providers and interpreters could usefully be made more aware of the arbitrary relationship between the symbols used in communication, and the socially conventional meanings which can be attributed to those symbols by interlocutors from different cultures.

Our next study, carried out by a team of experienced multidisciplinary researchers from the fields of sociology, psychology, medicine and languages, is nicely paired with that of Abdulai et al. above. Piacentini, O'Donnell, Phipps, Jackson and Stack investigate the experience of health communication on the part of refugees and asylum seekers in my own home town of Glasgow, Scotland. If the country of Ghana is emblematic of long-standing historical complexity of languages and cultures within the nation state within in African countries, the city of Glasgow, which hosts a particularly large population of refugees and asylum seekers as a result of UK government policy, is arguably emblematic of both the intensity and complexity of the movement of populations from South to North over recent years. While Piacentini et al.

do not completely discount the importance of language in health communication, they apply the wider-angle lens of intersectionality to the under-researched medical context of the ‘home’ and ‘community’, in order to consider how aspects of culture, ethnicity and migrant status can coalesce to create potential barriers to fruitful health communication. Like Adulai et al., Piacentini and her colleagues also focus on the experiences of interpreters in a health care setting. Yet in the current UK political climate, refugees and asylum seekers can often find themselves in a problematic situation. Thus, interpreters find that in addition to the conventional challenges of mediating through different languages, they are called upon to provide basic information about the health care system, and also to engage with wider issues of power and inequality arising from the migrant status of their patients.

However, migrants working in certain sectors also return home after working abroad for a number of years. Nowhere is this more true than for the armies of women recruited from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and the Philippines as domestic workers for affluent homes across the Gulf States, and in Asian countries such as Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. Often travelling out of necessity in order to send back remittances to their families back home, these workers can experience the downside of globalisation: low wages, precarity of employment, arbitrariness of contracts, and poor standards of living. In his resonant paper which concludes this issue, Hans Ladegaard reports from a larger study based on the narratives of domestic migrant workers (who he refers to as ‘DMWs’) when they return home after periods of time spent abroad. This continues his thematically linked work which began as an enquiry into the conditions of domestic workers in Hong Kong, as reported previously in this journal (Ladegaard 2013), and elsewhere (e.g. Ladegaard, 2017; reviewed in Chan, 2018). Incorporating an innovative research approach from anthropology and sociolinguistics, Ladegaard uses ‘sharing sessions’ to reveal that for these women what was once regarded as ‘home’ can often appear strange, or even alien, on their return. Paradoxically, the families which the participants sought to support through their long-term overseas contracts often disintegrated when they got back home. Some women were abandoned by their spouses or rejected by their children; while others went on to establish strong emotional attachments in their destination countries. Crucially, these women for the most part returned as different people to the ones they had been when they left - either shunned or shamed in the villages in which they were brought up or continuing to bear the trauma of enduring long periods of humiliation and surveillance when in servitude.

Ladegaard brings this issue to a close by challenging one of the theoretical cornerstones of much intercultural research, where we so often link language and discourse to the 'performance' of identity. In this, it is often assumed that individuals can select autonomously from a range of alternative positions as to how their identities are constructed through talk and text. While it might just about be tenable to imagine that 'professional' expatriates, students and travellers can indeed exercise some degree of choice over the subject positions which they occupy, Ladegaard's evidence forcefully supports the argument that many (domestic) migrant workers are positioned through discourses which for the most part evacuate any power which they might be able to exercise over the construction of their selves. Here, Ladegaard's most recent paper illustrates not only how these discourses of powerlessness ineluctably arise from the economic and material constraints which these women endure when working abroad, but also from the social conditions which they encounter once they arrive back home. This journal welcomes further research which gives a voice to these, and other social and economic groups, who have so far been relatively silent in our field.

Our two book reviews in this issue are redolent of the themes which we are engaging with this year in IALIC. Andy Hancock's review of Macalister and Mirvahedi's book, on family language policy in multilingual societies nicely accompanies the themes of multiculturalism in this issue. While Linxin Liang & Mingwu Xu's review of Sara Maitland's book on cultural translation anticipates our 2019 conference on this theme in Valencia. As ever, we thank our book reviewers for keeping us up to speed with recent publications in the field. And, as we go to press, the call for abstracts for IALIC 2019 has just been extended until 24th March (<http://ialic2019.uv.es/>). Finally, we welcome to the editorial team Vivien Xiaowei Zhou, based at Edinburgh Napier University, as our incoming Reviews and Criticism Editor. If you want to write a book review, please now get in touch with Vivien at V.Zhou@napier.ac.uk. You can either suggest a book to review, or Vivien can arrange to have one sent out to you, free of charge.

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