

# John Benjamins Publishing Company



This is a contribution from *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 24:2  
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## INTRODUCTION

# Anxiety, insecurity, and border crossing

## Language contact in a globalizing world

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The modern conception of the self is grounded in stability and identity. Under this perspective, anxiety and insecurity of the border are only characteristic of peripheral communities. However, anxiety and insecurity are much more fundamental to linguistic life; heterogeneity of linguistic practice and our constant movement across communities, positions, categories, and identities mean that uncertainty and indeterminacy are just as salient in the way we use language. This special issue builds upon this insight to explore the subjectivities of border crossing in contexts of language contact under globalization. By bringing together studies that explore cases of language and cultural contact across the Asia-Pacific region from the perspective of anxiety and insecurity, it aims to highlight the importance of considering subjectivity in our analysis of language in globalization, and considers the new insights we may gain through an emphasis on the subjective dimensions of contact situations. Together, the contributions to the special issue identify three key issues for further research on the sociolinguistics of globalization: (1) the role of language ideologies in mediating experiences of transnationalism, (2) consequences of globally circulated semiotic resources on local articulations of subjectivities, and (3) the impact of neoliberal projects of social transformation upon our sense of self.

### Introduction

Language always exists in the contact zone (Pratt 1987); and this is even more so in the context of globalization, which gives rise to new situations and experiences of cultural and linguistic contact every moment. Contact no longer takes place solely at the edges of community, but permeates every aspect of our modern life. For this reason, language contact challenges us to rethink and reconceptualize the way we understand language and social practice. This special issue responds to this challenge by attending to the subjective dimension of contact situations, particularly that of anxiety and insecurity, as a key to approaching contact phenomena, in

which mobility and transnationalism bring together multiple languages, cultures, and social positions. In doing so, it aims to highlight subjectivity as a keyword for our analysis of language in globalization.

The modern conception of the self is grounded in stability and identity; under this perspective, anxiety and insecurity of the border is only characteristic of peripheral communities. However, anxiety and insecurity are much more fundamental to linguistic life; heterogeneity of linguistic practice (Bakhtin 1981) and our constant movement across communities, positions, categories, and identities (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) mean that uncertainty and indeterminacy are just as salient in the way we use language. Linguistic anthropology (Hill and Hill 1986) and sociolinguistics (Labov 1966) have indeed long recognized anxiety and insecurity as a key language ideological force that constitutes speakers' subjectivity and shapes their social relations, rather than a mere psychological reaction inconsequential for social organization and practice (Ahmed 2004, Besnier 1990, 2011, Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990, McElhinny 2010, Ortner 2005, Wilce 2009). Contributions in this special issue aim to reinvigorate this insight by bringing together studies that explore the subjectivities of border crossing in contexts of language contact. Each paper seeks new ways in which we can understand the changing conditions of life in globalization through a focus on anxiety and insecurity caused by a language contact situation in the Asia-Pacific region. The special issue as a whole thus aims to demonstrate the importance of considering the perspective of subjectivity as a central element for the emerging field of sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert 2010, Coupland 2010).

### **Globalization as border crossing**

Sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological research of the past decade has seen a boom in studies of globalization and culture contact, with a focus on wide-ranging issues such as language commodification (Heller 2007, 2010), discursive construction of space and place (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005; Blommaert 2010), performance in linguistic contact situations (Bauman and Briggs 1990), linguistic landscaping (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010), and reconfigurations of ethnicity and identity (Maher 2005, 2010). These approaches, which jointly constitute the new field of sociolinguistics of globalization, introduce important methodological shifts in the way we approach and analyze language contact and change. Studies of linguistic change have conventionally focused on fixed linguistic identity markers associated with specific social or regional dialectal spaces. That is, linguistic varieties were principally viewed as a local, stable complex of traits attached to an equally local, stable community of speakers. The sociolinguistics of globalization,

however, offers a methodological shift from language-in-place to language-in-motion, acknowledging the various spatio-temporal frames that interact with one another in any given context of language use (Pennycook 2012).

This changing perspective thus reframes language and cultural contact as border crossing — that is, not as interaction between distinct, abstract systems that results in objectively describable structural transformations, but as a process rooted in the experiences of subjects who must negotiate between multiple regimes of spatio-temporality and frequently fraught with tension and uncertainty. When speakers of different linguistic varieties come into contact, it is not only the speakers' words, but their very cultural values, language ideologies, and entire social formations that must be negotiated. Particularly in the age of globalization, the perspective of border crossing becomes all the more relevant, as mobility, migration and transnationalism serve as basic frames for subjects' daily lives. In this context, it becomes essential to focus on the experiences of speakers who traverse borders of languages, nations, and cultures as they engage in the work of fluid, transient, and liminal self-positioning — in other words, we need to look at the more subjective dimensions of affect, emotion, desire, fears, insecurities, and anxieties that reflect the instabilities of border crossing. Based on this perspective, this special issue looks at specific cases of language and cultural contact across the Asia-Pacific — a region with particularly dense transnational connections driven by active modernization — to explore the new insights we may gain through an emphasis on the subjective dimensions of contact situations.

### **Key themes of the contributions**

All the contributions to the special issue share a common focus on the subjective dimension of language and culture contact at research sites that highlight the growing interconnectivity and transnationalism of the Asia-Pacific region. But more importantly, the contributions also form a coherent whole by the common themes that they identify for future research on border-crossing phenomena. These larger themes represent key areas that are made salient through globalization in the region, and also serve as important junctures which the sociolinguistics of globalization may profitably engage to further establish its grounding on the analysis of subjectivity. The three major themes that emerge through the contributions are the following:

#### *Anxieties of mobility and hierarchies of language*

The contribution by Sohee Bae explores the mechanisms by which anxieties of transmigrants come to be mediated by language ideologies that impose a

hierarchical order on language varieties. Transnational subjects must navigate a space indexed by language ideologies which attribute distinctions in value to different language varieties (Park and Bae 2009). The resulting linguistic market (Bourdieu 1991) — here existing on a global scale — thus serves as a topographic space that facilitates subjects' movement in some directions but constrains mobility in others. Bae's paper, which follows South Koreans families moving across the transnational space of Asia for better educational opportunities of the children, traces how such ideological conditions of transnational space can serve as a source of anxiety and insecurity. Parents of these families use short-term migration to help the children more easily acquire valuable linguistic capital, most notably the global language of English, particularly in a standard form that can be recognized as legitimate across multiple markets. This project does not always go smoothly, however, as Bae highlights the uncertainties the families experience about how the child's linguistic capital may be evaluated in other locales, which leads them to constantly recalibrate their strategies of transnational migration and linguistic investment. This remind us that language ideologies (such as beliefs about which linguistic variety will be valued more) play an important role in mediating our experiences of transnationalism, not only conditioning relations of power that constrain paths of mobility, but also shaping our very sense of (in)security about our place in the world.

### *Circulation of semiotic resources in local identity construction*

The constant circulation of languages and other types of semiotic resources is a key aspect of globalization, and the contributions by Mie Hiramoto and Gavin Furukawa each highlight how such flow of signs has consequences for the work of local identity construction, even for communities of speakers who may remain relatively immobile. One important aspect of globalization is the enhanced reflexivity and greater awareness of linguistic and cultural difference, and this process is importantly mediated by the global circulation of semiotic resources which are in turn inserted into local processes of identity construction (Kroon, Dong, and Blommaert 2011, Pennycook 2010). The ensuing linguistic and cultural contact often reveals how such semiotic processes can be a site of tension. For instance, Hiramoto's study of Hawai'i locals' evaluation of the use of visual motifs in tattoos illustrates how the appropriation of such forms routinely invoke debates about authenticity and competing claims about who may legitimately wear such heavily indexical signs on their bodies. Furukawa looks at Japanese television entertainment shows in which the global language of English becomes a key resource for constructing different character types, demonstrating a recurrent practice in which anxieties about English are linked with semiotic interpretations of character

traits like high vs. low intelligence. These studies illustrate how globally circulating semiotic resources may result in highly complex meanings with consequences for subjectivity, as the local meaning of such resources must be seen as always on the move, constantly being renegotiated, thus opening up possibilities for local appropriation, but at the same time becoming a key locus for tension and insecurity.

### *Precarious place of neoliberal subjects*

The neoliberal transformation of society that is sweeping the Asia-Pacific region serves as a backdrop for Yurni Said-Sirhan's and Joseph Sung-Yul Park's contribution. The current mode of economic globalization is inseparable from the ideology of neoliberalism, in which individual responsibility, accountability, and entrepreneurship are valorized (Harvey 2005). The ideal neoliberal subject is expected to constantly engage in projects of self-development and to flexibly adapt oneself to rapidly evolving conditions of work, instead of relying on structures of solidarity and community. This also leads to the commodification of language and identity, where speakers are encouraged to actively take up valued forms of linguistic capital for economic benefits (Heller 2010), as we can see, for instance, in the promotion of English as a global language in many national contexts (Piller and Cho 2013). Neoliberal subjects, then, live a life of border crossing, constantly pushed into new social and linguistic spaces in the name of self-branding and human capital development. For this reason, a focus on anxiety and insecurity can be a powerful vantage point for our critique of neoliberalism. Said-Sirhan's research of a training program for micro-business entrepreneurs, for instance, reveals the linguistic insecurity experienced by Malay Singaporeans who are commonly positioned as 'failures' within Singapore's political economy. Park also explores the tension between ideologies that posit a flexible connection between language and identity (foregrounded by neoliberalism) and ideologies that view language as inherently linked to a speaker's enduring identity that takes place in the context of transnational work. These contributions, through their focus on anxiety and insecurity, provide a grounding for a critique of idealized neoliberal subjecthood; not only do they reveal the socioeconomic inequalities that are reproduced by projects of neoliberalism, but also expose the problematic consequences they introduce for our deepest sense of being.

In short, the contributions to the special issue all work together to paint a map for future research that may lead us to a more serious engagement with the sites and mechanisms that intensify the insecurity and precarity of mobile lives. Through their common focus on subjective experiences of anxiety and insecurity under globalization, they open up a rich, new direction for the sociolinguistics of globalization.

## Overview of the special issue

The contributions in this issue bring the lens of anxiety and insecurity concerning language and communication to five different institutional and cultural contexts of language and culture contact in the Asia-Pacific region.

Sohee Bae's paper hinges on a phenomenon known as *jogi yuhak* 'early study abroad', in which Korean families move abroad for the purpose of the child's education (Park and Bae 2009). For transnational migrants, language is one of the most crucial factors which influence social experiences and relations. Moreover, crossing borders becomes an important strategy for acquiring valuable linguistic resources in the globalized neoliberal economy. Anxiety and insecurity is inherent in such transnational movement in the sense that relocation necessarily implies adjustment to new conditions of life. Successful adjustments can involve time-consuming processes of learning about new environments and neighbors, culture-specific practices, communities, languages/dialects, etc. Based on her ethnographic study, Bae discusses the *jogi yuhak* families' awareness of the complex and indeterminate relationship between language and space, which often leads the parents to worry about whether the linguistic skills their children acquired at one location will remain valuable when they move to another. Bae analyzes such anxiety and insecurity by situating the families' apprehensive feelings towards their uncertain future within the rapidly transforming global society. Due to the polycentric nature of educational migration (Blommaert 2010), Korean *jogi yuhak* families are destined to continuously readjust to different resources, systems, experiences, and expectations embedded in each location along their migratory trajectories. Bae's contribution is thus a clear illustration of how the complexity and multiplicity of sociolinguistic conditions brought about through globalization can lead to consequences of anxiety and insecurity for people on the move.

The next article by Mie Hiramoto moves the analytic focus to globally circulating semiotic resources in the context of globalization, through a study of how tattooing practices that index local identity are evaluated by Hawai'i locals. Tattoos have become global fashion trends for many individuals regardless of age, gender, place, or race, and traditional Polynesian tattoos have come to be used as an important symbolic resource for indicating a Hawai'i local identity in multiethnic/multilingual Honolulu. In this case, the specific local meaning of such historically Polynesian signs derives from the historical event of plantation immigration to Hawai'i from different parts of the world which expanded after the mid-1800s. As Hawai'i became a host to a multiethnic and multicultural community, the visual signs that denote particular ethnic cultures became an index of a pan-ethnic identity that represents local Hawai'i culture. But such shifts in indexical meaning also implies that those local meanings must always be subject to constant negotiation,

leading to contesting claims about who can legitimately wear such tattoos and who is a true “local” that authentically represents the meanings of those signs. Hiramoto’s study looks at how local tattoo wearers problematize the Polynesian tattoos used by outsiders (mainly identified as *haoles* from the mainland US) in discourse, referring to other co-occurring signs (such as the use of Hawai’i Creole, see Hiramoto 2011 for negotiation of localness through Hawai’i Creole in media) as necessary evidence of the authenticity of such tattoo practices. These claims of authenticity are also emotionally invested and affectively charged, closely connected with senses of belonging and entitlement, which points out how dimensions of subjectivity become crucial components in the negotiation of authenticity of globally circulating semiotic resources.

In his analysis of Japanese television entertainment shows, Gavin Furukawa examines the interpretive process of identity construction that takes place through the use of English in Japanese media, which lies at the intersection between the mediascape, ideoscape, and ethnoscape (as per Appadurai 1996). Even though Japan is largely a monolingual nation, English communication skills are highly esteemed and almost all Japanese learn English as a second language. However, the majority of Japanese do not end up acquiring proficient English communication skills from school education, and in Furukawa’s examples, anxieties about incompetence in English become an important ideological condition for identity construction. Much research on language, identity, and globalization has shown how second language users often construct new identities by drawing upon elements of popular culture (Higgins 2011). Such research typically focuses on how phenomena such as hip hop, circulated across cultural and national boundaries, serve as resources for the reconstruction of identities (Pennycook 2005, 2007). What is often overlooked in such studies, however, is how anxieties about (in) competence in English can also be used to construct selves and others. Furukawa’s analysis shows how Japanese variety shows frame peoples’ uses of English as reflecting their “intelligence” and “stupidity”, building upon the sense of anxiety about English widely shared by the Japanese audience. His case is thus a powerful example of how dimensions of subjectivity can be an important element of the mediascape, relating ideologies about the importance of global languages like English and the way Japanese viewers imagine their position within the world.

The next article by Said-Sirhan discusses the peripheral yet significant position of the Malay community in Singapore, who are often perceived to be socioeconomically underachieving in relation to other ethnic groups, and thus have been encouraged to pursue entrepreneurial skills in the name of attaining upward social mobility. In her ethnographic study of a micro-business programme organized by a Malay-Muslim self-help organization, Said-Sirhan explores how the participants negotiate their positions between being aspiring entrepreneurs and their

socioeconomic peripherality. As part of an argument against the welfare state, private self-help organizations that provide training in business skills have been positioned by the state as offering accessible avenues for all who aspire to participate in Singapore's globalized economy that emphasizes productivity and efficiency. Training programs offered by such organizations implicitly underline the ability to communicate in English and competence in certain genres for business communication as necessary cultural capital for social mobility. But whether such cultural capital is truly made accessible to the Malay Singaporean community remains uncertain. Said-Sirhan's analysis of interaction among the program participants shows that linguistic insecurity becomes a key for the participants' negotiation between the Malay identity and their desire to present themselves as budding entrepreneurs. Through a close analysis of the program participants' attempts to speak more English despite their lack of the appropriate genre-based competence and how this may backfire by making them appear lacking relevant skills for business, Said-Sirhan points out the contradictions and false promises of neoliberal competition.

The issue's final article, by Joseph Sung-Yul Park, continues Said-Sirhan's critique of neoliberalism by focusing on how regimes of work under neoliberalism foreground conflicting ideologies about language and identity. On the one hand, the link between language and identity is seen as flexible and malleable under neoliberalism, as language comes to be seen as a commodity that can easily be picked up and appropriated for economic gain. On the other hand, the older ideology that posits an essentialist link between language and identity still persists, as relations of nationality and ethnicity remain powerful points of reference in global capitalism (Heller 2010). The tension between these two ideologies can be particularly prominent in transnational work, as participation in the global workplace often requires competence in commodified global languages such as English, yet cultural difference in terms of nationality and ethnicity becomes highly salient in intercultural communication (also see Park 2010). Park suggests that it is important to understand this tension not simply as an abstract conflict of principles underlying neoliberalism, but in terms of its consequences for subjectivity. He re-frames the notion of linguistic insecurity, originally developed by William Labov, as a way of conceptualizing the anxieties speakers may experience in positioning themselves between such contesting ideologies. Through an analysis of how the tension between the two ideologies may work to rationalize inequalities in a narrative of transnational work produced by a Korean mid-level manager working at a multinational corporation in Singapore, Park manages to show how close attention to such aspects of insecurity can help us better understand the effects that neoliberalism has on our own sense of subjecthood.

The special issue concludes with a commentary on the contributions by Kira Hall. Through a critical evaluation of the cases discussed in the special issue, she

elaborates on the strategic importance of looking at anxieties that take place at the borderlands of global movement, and then suggests further questions we must ask and future directions we should explore in order to more appropriately understand the complex and multiple dimensions of subjectivity that underlie the experiences of language and culture contact in the context of globalization.

## Acknowledgments

We sincerely thank the journal's editors, reviewers, and Kira Hall for their invaluable assistance for the special issue. Hiramoto gratefully acknowledges the financial and institutional support given to her project by the National University of Singapore FRC Research Grant (AY 2012-15).

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