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Tourism tensions and sociolinguistic change

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Abstract: The articles in the present special issue, *Tourism spaces at the nexus of language and materiality*, are commented on through the lens of "sociolinguistic change" (Coupland 2014), and four pairs of relations: *modernity and tradition*; *de- and re-centering of languages*; *elite and mass tourism*; *profit and prejudice*. Brief concluding remarks touch on the relationship between the symbolic and material aspects of language.

Keywords: language, tourism, sociolinguistic change

1 Opening remarks

It has been a great pleasure and privilege to read and comment on the fine papers in this special issue of *Applied Linguistics Review*. I thank the guest editors and contributors for entrusting me with this task, and for allowing me to put their work in dialogue with mine. As it happens, I have recently written two other pieces in the same genre for two collections involving similar themes and data (Jaworski 2017a, 2019a). In response to the material in each of the collections, the title of one of my commentaries included metaphors of transformation and complexity ('entanglement', 'moiré') and the other a reference to the liminal communicative states 'between silence and noise'. There is something irresistibly persistent for sociolinguists, broadly speaking, about studying variation and change (cf. Tagliamonte 2016). And this collection seems to be no exception.

As indicated by my choice of title, I see the shared concern of the five contributions in this special issue as one of tension (or tensions) effected by different, if related, forms of *sociolinguistic change* (Coupland 2014). At its simplest, sociolinguistic change is a concept that combines language change and social change, in contrast to studying language change from a strictly structural viewpoint, with little or no consideration of its social meaning or value. In other words, this approach allows for the examination of changing

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language-society relations even in the absence of marked structural linguistic changes, for example in view of shifts in language ideologies; and it 'is sensitive to historical and epochal conditions' (Coupland 2014: 282), as seems relevant to this collection's emphasis on what it means to be a speaker of an imagined community of tourists, or hosts, in a globalizing world. Coupland also links sociolinguistic change to metacultural awareness (Urban 2001), which is evident in overt comments on and evaluations of cultural forms and practices, including linguistic practices. One source of evidence of sociolinguistic change, then, is metalinguistic discourse, including performative displays of languages, which constitutes an important part of the data examined across all of the papers in this special issue.

The rest of my contribution will attempt to synthesize some of the tensions that seem to be common across different articles, and some that are not. I will do so predominantly to highlight the need to attend to the intricacies of language as an important component in the study of the political economy of tourism, and to suggest that tourism continues to be a fertile ground for the study of sociolinguistic change under the conditions of global mobility.

2 Modernity and traditionalism

The papers by Grey (2019) and Lesh (2019) are concerned with dynamic relations between 'local' or 'minority' languages vs. 'national' and 'global' languages. Grey examines 'linguistic landscape' data that she collected on the newly opened high-speed trains and stations in the south-west province of Guangxi, China. There is a clear hierarchy of visible and audible languages in these contexts, with Mandarin as the dominant and most privileged language predominantly targeting tourists from mainland China, with English trailing behind, appearing mostly as the transliteration rather than translation of the former, seemingly intended to add a whiff of internationalism to the high tech infrastructure. The local language, Zhuang, seems largely absent from view, except when deployed emblematically, predominantly in sites positioned as natural and cultural heritage. Put differently, due to the highly modern image accorded to Guangxi speed rail, its infrastructure is devoid of Zhuang, which is relegated to indexing 'tradition'. Such connotations of premodernity are exploited and emphasized in the Guangxi Tourism Authority and China Rail Corporation advertising videos played on the train (in 2015), including highly exoticizing imagery of Guangxi's traditional landscapes and lifestyles (e. g. costumed tea-pickers), as well as stylized singers and dancers

implausibly performing on a platform beside a high-speed train. The erasure of Zhuang as a language of information and its association with the visually foregrounded traditionalism is consistent with the division of labour between the verbal and visual tracks in print and broadcast media, where the visual track veers towards the humorous, the fantastical or the extravagant, while the verbal track, in Grey's paper dominated by Mandarin, is predominantly responsible for delivering the 'serious', denotative part of the message (Jaworski 2017b; Machin 2004).

The push and pull of modern and traditional imagery (including linguistic imagery) in depicting the high-speed train as rooted in or connected to local heritage, yet also connecting Guangxi with the rest of the world (or, at least, with the rest of China), is not unique to this particular context. The Shinkansen, Japan's 'bullet train' that connected Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto and Osaka in 1964, the year of the first Tokyo Summer Olympics, became a symbol of modernity for the country, alongside its electronics, cars and a more 'traditional' image of Mt. Fuji (Hood 2007).

In Lesh's paper, the balancing of tradition and modernity is illustrated with reference to the Basque Country's newfound fame as a culinary capital of the world. As the author points out, the repeated use of English on the 'Welcome to the culinary nation' sign displayed repeatedly throughout Bilbao, with no presence of Euskara (the Basque language), seems to emphasize the Basque Country's self-positioning as global and modern. Again, as in the speed-link rail videos in Grey's paper, the localness or the Basqueness of the home-grown food industry is spectacularized visually on the welcome signs through the inclusion of images of regionally sourced seafood and traditional dishes.

The papers by Grey and Lesh then demonstrate a typical dilemma faced by tourism operators, who need to package destinations as conveniently modern and accommodating to global tourists while relying on their heritage and traditions as unique selling points. Greater visibility of 'tourist' languages and the erasure or limited emblematic display of 'local' languages are both examples of sociolinguistic changes effected by tourism around the globe. Thus, as suggested by Grey, in politics, economy and education Zhuang has been marginalized, sustaining close associations with the countryside, traditionalism and poverty, and giving way to the centring of Mandarin and English as the languages of modernity. However, under these conditions, Zhuang may yet be revalued as a prized resource, on a par with the imagery of pre-modern landscape, architecture, and cuisine in the development of the region's tourist infrastructure. By the same token, while Lesh reports relative invisibility of Euskara in tourist signage, it is commercially exploited in promoting Basque cider. These are useful examples of continued transformation of 'minority' languages into

cultural assets with economic value (cf. Heller 2003; Järlehed and Moriarty 2018; Pietikäinen et al. 2016).

3 De- and re-centering of languages

The metaphors of centering and marginalization have proven useful in capturing shifting values between languages (Guinto 2019; Jaworski and Thurlow 2013; Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2013). Grey's and Lesh's papers demonstrate such tensions between 'minority' and 'global' languages. Papers by Sharma (2019) and Higgins and Ikeda (2019) focus on users' shifting priorities around 'super-central' languages (de Swaan 2001), Chinese and Japanese, in each case vying to replace the hegemony of English, designated by de Swaan some twenty years ago as 'hyper-central'.

Sharma's research site is Thamel, a commercial neighbourhood in Kathmandu aimed at souvenir-hunting budget travellers, now predominantly tourists from China, the second largest group of visitors (after India). Orienting to the growing numbers of Chinese-speaking clientele from the People's Republic of China (Bell 1984), to the point of invoking the PRC's jingoism, local store and restaurant owners learn Chinese and put up Chinese-language notices, increasingly de-centering English-speaking Western tourists. Thus, the influx of Chinese tourists to Nepal has led to changes in the uses and ideologies of Chinese 'from a language of China to a language of the global economy, tourism, and mobility' (Sharma 2019). This is in line with Grey's point about Mandarin as the most prominent language in the linguistic landscape of high-speed trains in Guangxi, with English seemingly a symbolic add-on as an internationalizing resource for the railways and tourists alike.

The signs made by Nepali vendors to sell hand-woven woollen scarves to Chinese tourists are not only written in Chinese but involve intertextual links to traditional characters in Chinese folktales and other popular media, Chinese poetry, and to other signifiers of Chineseness (e. g. the PRC flag, Chinese architecture), alongside pictograms, roman letters and online symbols (e. g. '@'), all of which have parallels in the contemporary Chinese online youth register. Vendors create a sense of expressive intimacy with their target (tourist) audience through the conflation of humour, poetic language (e. g. rhyme) and multimodality, using words in both Chinese and English; pictorial elements, such as hearts and smiley faces; and the striking use of punctuation marks, such as multiple exclamation marks. I am tempted to interpret the formal elements of such intertextual creative play across linguistic and visual semiotic resources –

drawing on locally, transnationally, and globally sourced symbols, codes, orthographies (e. g. mixing of traditional and simplified Chinese characters), and visuals – as *globalese*, a visual-verbal, commercial register indexing spaces and the people occupying them as 'global' (Jaworski 2015, 2019b). Sharma's data illustrate nicely how globalese, a register blurring neat boundaries of standard ethnonational languages, is never a uniform, homogeneous and bounded 'code', but is always locally inflected, building on constellations of locally sourced and interpretable resources. This leads Sharma to acknowledge another tension typical of tourism discourse generally – ensuring a safe balance between the familiar and the exotic, allowing tourists to navigate unknown terrain without becoming disoriented.

Higgins and Ikeda examine ongoing changes in the spatial repertoires (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015) of two relatively new tourist hotspots, both predominantly residential towns: Kailua on the island of O'ahu, Hawai'i, and Izumisano, a neighbourhood in Osaka. Kailua has become an unexpected target of mass Japanese tourism through an elaborate chain of online mediatisation and the celebrity endorsement of a local shop serving pancakes with white macadamia nut sauce (also found in other locations on the island). Izumisano is a suburb of Osaka close to Kansai International Airport, making it a convenient spot for mass shopping tourism from China. The increase in popularity of both places with Chinese and Japanese tourists has led to the increased use and visibility of Japanese and Chinese in both destinations. The authors see these processes as instances of language change, although in light of my discussion above, I would be inclined to interpret them as sociolinguistic change. Slight terminological issues aside, however, the paper offers a fascinating insight into the trajectories of semiotically mobile resources across online and offline spaces. Higgins and Ikeda demonstrate how the emergence of Japanese and Chinese signage and a degree of Japanese and Chinese proficiency in Kailua and Izumisano as emergent tourism sites are effected by an interplay of human and non-human agents and activities in a complex network of mediatised and face-to-face interactions (they rely on Latour's 2005 Actor Network Theory for their analytic framework; see also Sharma 2019).

4 Elite and mass tourism

Lamb (2019) takes us to Laniākea Beach, or sea turtle beach, an intense site of sea turtle, or wildlife, 'ecotourism' in Hawai'i. In the context of a profit-based industry, the paper explores a whole tangle of tensions, for example between

the discourses of sustainability and educational value of ecotourism, and the discourses of exploitation and human mastery over the natural world. Lamb does not claim to resolve these debates, although he refers to Milstein's (2016) ethnographic work on orca tourism, suggesting that the discourse of exploitation trumps the discourse of edutainment and interconnectivity between humans and the ecosystems we inhabit. However, Lamb seems to leave this question open to a degree when he draws on Appleby and Pennycook (2017; see also Pennycook 2018), indicating that tourism discourse studies may well engage with posthumanist applied linguistics to 'offer insight into how humans become ethically entangled with wildlife through our embodied, material, digital and locally situated performances in tourist settings' (Lamb 2019). Exactly how this ethical entanglement between the tourists and the sea turtles on Laniākea is meant to take shape remains somewhat unclear. Lamb documents a dramatic chasm between the promotional imagery of ecotourism on Laniākea and the on-the-ground policing of a safe (for the sea turtles) distance between tourists and animals. The tourists crowd around the animals on the beach or in shallow water, and they are palpably disappointed when on some days no turtles show up on the beach at all. The marketing literature, on the other hand, is dominated by images of individual tourists 'interacting' with the turtles in close proximity and with no other tourists visible in the frame, giving a clear, if false, impression of the privileged nature of encountering sea turtles at Laniākea.

Intriguingly, Alastair Pennycook gives us a personal account of his experience scuba diving as a 'volunteer for an organization working to save reefs in the Philippines' (Pennycook 2018: 74), and of his recreational 'swimming with sharks [and other fishes]' off Shelly Beach on the New South Wales coast (Appleby and Pennycook 2017). How do Pennycook's experiences and performances align, or not, with those of the tourists at Laniākea Beach? His and theirs are clearly completely different genres of ecotourism. The former is an elite, high skill, typically solo activity, while the latter involves a group experience on an overcrowded beach. However, they do include common elements and desires, one of which is to touch the wildlife, which is prohibited, or at least discouraged, at Laniākea. Pennycook describes his desire to touch the fish as follows: 'When I meet a massive school of yellowtail I reach out in the vain attempt to touch their shiny bodies with mine. I know I never will, they dart away so quickly' (Appleby and Pennycook, 2017: 239). On the other hand, Lamb's key descriptive episode of tourists' encounters with the sea turtles is as follows: '[the] moments of pointing, identifying and even touching sea turtles are visceral and emotional experiences for tourists that are often punctuated by staccato

outbursts of verbal response that attempt to capture the excitement of the moment or make visual sense of sea turtles'.

While Pennycook's account of 'swimming with sharks' invokes the imagery of silence and solitude in the depth of an ocean associated with high end, privileged, luxury leisure pursuits (Thurlow and Jaworski 2010), the idea of 'staccato outbursts' brings to mind slightly incoherent and confused voices, or in van Leeuwen's (1999: 110) terms, sounds that may be associated with 'anything that includes the idea of a lively and energetic approach, or a bold and forceful attack'. We have a contrast here between the idea of serene and subtle *vs*. animated and noisy tourist performances, signifying an opposition between elite *vs*. mass. Yet there seems to be no difference between the wish to touch the animals in both contexts, and in the final stages of the remediation of human–animal encounters, Pennycook's academic prose and the tourists' selfies with sea turtles end up end up equally re-centring humans and their desires, actions and experiences. This is what Lamb refers to, alongside Thurlow and Jaworski (2014), as *spectacular self-locations* of tourists – in what the tourist gaze turns into the spectacles of nature.

Grey's account of the free in-train magazine Journey 旅途 draws fascinating parallels to our study on inflight magazines (Thurlow and Jaworski 2003). It is quite revealing how new means of transport, aiming to mimic the speed and reach of air travel, appropriate textual genres that seem to be going out of fashion in the transport companies that are beginning to see their 'product' as part of an overpriced, outmoded and environmentally catastrophic mode of travel, needing to take any cost-cutting measures to survive the rising prices of fossil fuel and competition from other, more sustainable modes of travel like rail. Grey concludes this part of her paper by asserting that '[t]he in-train magazine is, thus, a combination of linguistic and material semiotic resources for constructing train travel as a version of global and elite mobility' (Grey 2019). This is a great observation suggesting that being 'elite' and 'global' is a subject position largely achieved discursively by styling oneself, or one's environment, through the deployment of linguistic and other semiotic resources, regardless of the geographical reach of one's mobility.

5 Profit and prejudice

Despite all the economic profit that tourists bring to local economies, they, or at least certain demographics of tourists, are generally despised by local people and, ironically, by other tourists. Some of the divisions run across ethnonational

boundaries, others across different genres of tourism, such as the genres of elite *vs*. mass tourism alluded to above (Jaworski and Thurlow 2009). For example, Lesh reports the frustration of her Basque flatmates in San Sebastian (Donostia) with the large influx of (foreign) tourists who are unable even to order ice cream in Euskra, or simply cannot be bothered to. (Which is consistent with Patrick Goethals' finding concerning self-reports of (Spanish) tourists abroad who consider 'foreign languages as obstacles rather than as opportunities' (Goethals 2015: 368)). Higgins and Ikeda report a number of instances of resentment towards Japanese and Chinese tourists in Kailua and Izumisano, respectively. For example, they report some of Izumisano's residents' resentment towards bilingual regulatory and commercial announcements targeted at the tourists predominantly from China, and some regulatory multilingual signage punitively aimed at tourists rather than the local residents (cf. Angermeyer 2017; Guinto 2019). Finally, Sharma notes how the dominance of Chinese in the tourist semiotic landscape of Thamel excludes other ethnonational groups, such as the Japanese, while the 'patriotic' references in the Chinese-language signs aimed at PRC tourists exclude Chinese tourists from Singapore and Malaysia. What we are witnessing here is the tension between tourist *profit* and *prejudice*, or the stances of hospitality and hostility premised on specific language ideologies and made manifest through (meta-)discursive comments.

On the other hand, Sharma gives a compelling account of tourism operators (vendors) in Kathmandu accommodating the rising numbers of Chinese tourists visiting their stores, in particular looking to buy hand-woven woollen scarves. Sharma reports how Chinese-language signs and inscriptions, not atypical of any marketing situation, are meant to build rapport or even intimacy between the hosts and tourists, no doubt characteristic of synthetic personalization (Fairclough 1992) found in most other forms of marketing and advertising, nevertheless capable of creating fleeting moments of rapport and conviviality. Other papers offer examples of various discursive resources, including snippets of languages local to tourist destinations affording tourists opportunities to enjoy, however playfully and fleetingly, authentic experiences of the local ethnolinguistic scenery, for example by learning to use the Euskera word *txotx*, a kind of a toast, that tourists are invited to say each time they take a sip of cider on their visits to *sagardotegiak* (Basque cider houses) (Lesh), or by reading a code-switched request on a sign, 'show turtles *Aloha*', 'a Hawaiian term, here indexing a notion of respect or care for sea turtles' (Lamb 2019). In an oddly inverse logic, Chinese tourists visiting Nepal are afforded glimpses of Chinese authenticity displayed on signs targeted at them (Sharma). Likewise, Higgins and Ikeda demonstrate elaborate mechanisms and material connections

that shape tourists' and (predominantly) hosts' second language learning by aiming to accommodate the (paying) visitors.

6 Closing remarks

Urban (2001) discusses the pathways by which first-order cultural objects (e. g. Hollywood films) move to particular places. Before they do, film reviews are disseminated in advance, and they constitute a second-order, metacultural discourse on films to draw people's interest. Pancakes (Higgins and Ikeda), sea turtles (Lamb), woollen scarves (Sharma), Basque dishes (Lesh), and high-speed trains and their infrastructure (Grey) are first-order cultural objects that are part of the cultural movements of goods and services in tourism. Rather than actually travelling around the world, they are typically travelled to, although – as in the case of woollen scarves – they can be purchased and brought home by tourists as souvenirs. Drawing tourists' attention to these objects by what Lamb refers to as *circuits of remediation*, that is, second-order discourses, turns them to second-order objects of signification, whereby they become enregistered emblems (Agha 2003) of people and places – Hawaiʻi (pancakes; sea turtles), Kathmandu (scarves), the Basque Country (food dishes), and Guangxi (trains). These objects can also be linguistic, as in the case of the Basque word *txotx* (Lesh), or the Hawaiian expression *Aloha* (Lamb).

Sharma cites 'Budach et al. (2015) and others [who] remind us [that], material objects are invested with aesthetic and affective dimensions, which can be experienced somatically rather than linguistically, through haptics and senses'. Perhaps rather than keep these two elements as 'separate', we need to bring them together, considering the symbolic and material dialectic of our view of language as two sides of the same coin, rather than two different coins? Surely our linguistic experiences are also somatic. We see and hear language as writing and speech. We can touch language, cradle it in our hands and climb over it, for example when it is turned into three-dimensional sculptures, such as place names displayed in gentrified and touristified areas of many cities (Jaworski 2019c; Jaworski and Lee forthcoming). We can wear it (Jaworski and Lou forthcoming), and we can eat it (Busch 2013 and Figure 1). The question is not when is language material and when it is not. It always is, and it always interacts with other elements of the material world, which is also consistently demonstrated throughout all the papers in this special issue, all of which orient to the affordances of multimodal resources, including their materiality. The question,

Figure 1: *LOVE* cake, after Robert Indiana, Birkbeck College University of London, June 7, 2018.

then, is how and when does the materiality of language and other semiotic resources matter, and how and when do we pay attention to it?

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