

## **Widening Horizons: Cross-cultural approaches to linguistic variation**

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Despite great advances in variationist sociolinguistics in the last decades, a major limitation is the fact that the great majority of studies are done on relatively few languages; existing work in our discipline also leaves non-Western societies massively underrepresented. Hence the accepted wisdom and prevailing theories and models in sociolinguistics actually rest on a culturally narrow base. The field needs more studies of other languages and societies, but more than that, it needs a framework to compare different languages and different societies. Such a framework would enable comparative studies of sociolinguistic behaviour across societies. In a world of increasing mobility and migration, it would allow us to better address cultural and linguistic contact in the highly diverse metropolises around the world, like New York, Cologne, Mumbai, Hong Kong and Toronto.

An essential question is how we can disentangle general principles of sociolinguistic variation from community-specific ones. Do the by-now conventional treatments and findings concerning social stratification, class, age and gender generalize to non-Western societies (and do they generalize to all Western societies)? How do different languages and communities construct 'stylistic' variation? How do the specific structures and properties of a language affect what variables are available for social indexation? How do the specifics of social structure in a community affect variation and the mechanisms of language change?

*Challenges from two sides: Bringing together cross-cultural studies and language comparison*

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Cross-cultural sociolinguistics comes with major challenges that require genuine interdisciplinary efforts. First, one needs to work with a framework that offers the concepts and methods for comparing communities that belong to different cultural spheres. This requires external factors, i.e. social constructs, that can be applied in at least two different cultural contexts. Second, we need to define a linguistic variable as well as at least a few possible internal factors that are valid across several varieties of the same language or even across languages. It is probably due to these methodological challenges that cross-cultural sociolinguistics has still to develop its potential in the field.

We discuss these challenges presenting data from our Tehran-Paris-Barcelona study on Persian, French, and Spanish. A total of 255 interviews have been conducted in these three metropolises using the same elicitation technique and a similar sampling plan in terms of age, gender and level of education. Furthermore, we work with a similar social questionnaire that aims at capturing comparable social constructs (lifestyle in the sense of Bourdieu 1979, socio-professional category, level of education and various demographic variables). Cultural specifics are reflected in partly different operationalizations of the constructs.

On the linguistic side, we analyze various variables at the level of morpho-syntax, namely word order variation (optional yes/no question particles in Persian and French, preverbal vs. postverbal subject in Persian, French, and Spanish), and optional realization of pronominal forms. We will show that the envelope of variation and the linguistic constraints that underlie these variables differ from language to language. We argue that sociolinguistic studies across languages have to work with variables that are comparable but not identical. In this regard, sociolinguistics can benefit from advances in typology such as the criteria for comparable concepts (Haspelmath 2010).

Towards a cross-cultural and cross-linguistic sociolinguistics: Insights from the  
multilingual courtroom  
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This paper aims to contribute to the workshop's goal of developing a framework for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparison by presenting findings from a comparative study of language contact in the US and by relating their theoretical and methodological implications to research in both variationist sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology.

As noted in the workshop proposal, research on language variation and change tends to focus on variation in a relatively small number of languages, typically in monolingual contexts in Western societies (see also Nagy & Meyerhoff 2008). Research in linguistic anthropology does often focus on non-Western societies and multilingual contexts, yet it is not easily compatible with variationist research due to differences in methodology and research goals. Nonetheless, variationists stand to benefit from considering findings in this field. As noted by Duranti (2011), linguistic anthropology is committed to the study of language "as a form of social organization" and "as a system of differentiation," both of which rely on close attention to language variation and to the ways in which it becomes socially meaningful. While studies in linguistic anthropology tend to emphasize the local specificity of the linguistic phenomena under investigation (often based on a qualitative analysis of spontaneous interaction), some scholars do address questions of cross-cultural comparability and typology (e.g. Irvine 1992; Duranti 1997; Sidnell 2008).

Drawing on such approaches, this paper presents the findings of ethnographic research in US courts that was designed to facilitate cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison: speakers of four different languages (Haitian Creole, Polish, Russian and Spanish) were observed and recorded in parallel contexts (interpreter-mediated arbitration hearings) and speaking about parallel topics (disputes related to work, housing, or car accidents). Comparative analyses were conducted with regard to variation in overall language choice, in patterns of code-mixing and lexical borrowing, and also in the interpreters' translation style (specifically variation between direct translation and reported speech). In addition, the data also facilitate a comparison of cultural practices and ideologies, for example with regard to the litigants' legal consciousness and their approaches to dispute resolution (cf. Merry 1990; Conley & O'Barr 1990).

The interpreters and the litigants for whom they translate are members of the same speech communities, with the respective minority language as their shared L1. At the same time, their relationship is influenced by systematic social differences, especially in class and education, and in their respective social status in the court. Consequently, the interaction between them is characterized by both convergence and divergence (cf. Coupland 2007) along the dimensions of the investigated linguistic variables. This plays out differently in the four languages, revealing different ways of marking social difference, as well as different language ideologies, particularly with regard to language contact.

*Submission for workshop on issues of cross-cultural and cross-language sociolinguistics  
(Adli, Guy et al.)*

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**Between the home and the host:  
Capturing variation and change in the Indian diaspora in Australia  
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Variationist sociolinguistics has made substantial contributions to our understanding of language variation and change, but the focus has persisted on mainstream speech communities. Despite the growing body of research on migrant communities in English-speaking contexts (e.g. Hoffman & Walker, 2010; Meyerhoff & Schlee, 2013; Sharma, 2014), we have yet to establish guidelines on how to accurately capture contextual information to aid sociolinguistic analysis.

India is responsible for the second largest group of English speakers in the world (Parshad et. al) and, with over 16 million persons of Indian origin residing outside India, the Indian diaspora is the world's largest and features prominently in Inner Circle (Kachru, 1985) countries such as the UK (Sharma, 2014) and Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Sharma's (2011; 2014) research on the Punjabi community in London and Mesthrie's (2013) study of South African Indian English have drawn attention to documenting variation and change in the Indian diaspora. However, the Australian diaspora remains untapped. What are the dynamics of language variation and change for the fourth largest and fastest growing group of migrants to Australia?

In this paper, I draw on my emerging corpus of English in the Indian diaspora to explore methodological issues I have encountered in my PhD research thus far. These include: (1) the delimitation of the speech community (accounting for substrate effects by ensuring homogeneity of speakers' L1); (2) capturing the complex range of sociolinguistic factors specific to multilingual migrant communities and (3) positioning the diasporic English variety against the 'home' variety and the mainstream 'host' variety.

The typological diversity of the Indian subcontinent means that the term 'Indian English' encompasses an array of Englishes spoken across the sub-continent (Sharma 2012). Correspondingly, I adopt a bottom-up approach by investigating language variation and change in each linguistic community before generalizing about the sub-continental variety, by focusing on migrants from the Marathi community of Perth, Western Australia. Central to the migrant experience is the construction of ethnic identity and, based on current research (e.g. Hoffman & Walker, 2010), I argue that to understand the complex interaction between language and ethnicity in multilingual migrant communities, we need to account for language contact in the homeland as well as the range of social factors in the migrant community, including age at migration, maintenance of heritage languages and strength of transnational ties. I suggest the use of a modified Ethnic Orientation Questionnaire (Hoffman & Walker, 2010) as a reliable tool to capture this information. Finally, while Hundt and Sharma (2014) call for more comparative studies of English in the Indian diaspora, I propose that there is also a need for comparative studies that position diasporic varieties against 'home' and 'host' varieties (i.e. sub-continental Indian English versus Anglo-Celtic Australian English) to better understand the direction and nature of language variation in migrant communities.

While this paper focuses on the Indian diaspora, these issues can be extended more generally to sociolinguistic inquiry into migrant communities elsewhere, enhancing our approach to cross-cultural linguistics.

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## Language contact at the dateline: Exploring the linguistic landscapes of the Marshall Islands

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While research on linguistic landscapes is fast becoming a mainstay of social science research, little of this inquiry has been conducted in non-Western societies. In particular the small island states of the Pacific region have been severely under-represented. The South Pacific offers a particularly revealing arena for such research since many states and territories are currently embroiled in an ongoing struggle for their linguistic “rights to the city” (Lefebvre 1968). In this paper we present research into the linguistic landscapes of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). The indigenous language, Marshallese, has long been denied visibility in the public domain due to a history of language imposition by the colonial power, the USA. The struggle for semiotic appropriation of the public sphere was brought into the fore in the course of a parliamentary debate in August 2015, when a bill was introduced which requires all signs in the public domain to be bilingual. The public language bill is not only a political battlefield of code choice; it also presents the legislation with a dilemma, since, to date, public spaces in the RMI are heavily biased towards the English language. Our research investigates the use of different languages in the written landscapes of the Marshall Islands at the cusp of this new legislation. Our analysis is explicitly scale-sensitive (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011), considering all visible representations of language use, such as the naming of governmental and commercial buildings, advertisements on shop windows, flyers, graffiti and private as well as formal announcements (from government and various organisations).

Over the course of two months we took more than 2000 geotagged photographs along the main traffic artery of the urban center of the RMI, as well as smaller secondary streets. These photographs were classified by the language(s) represented and the relative salience of the language on the sign. In addition, they were spatially matched with a range of geo-demographical factors, including the source and the footing of the message (Goffman 1981). Geographical visualisation and regression analyses allow us to model the factors that determine code choices in the Majuro linguistic landscape. Our preliminary analyses suggest that a number of factors conspire to give the Marshallese language relatively scant exposure and thus make the introduced bill acutely challenging: Signs are imported from the United States; most Majuro shop-keepers are Chinese and speak no or very little Marshallese; the Marshallese language lacks words for concepts such as vending machines, disposal sites or vendor licenses. However, our geographically sensitive analysis pinpoints a number of glottotopes in which Marshallese islanders stylistically claim ownership of their islands - in the face of hegemonic pressures from the occupier - via the use of Marshallese signage.

Overall, thus, our analysis gives us the opportunity to map the struggle for linguistic visibility during the ongoing semiotic reappropriation of the RMI public realm. It also allows us

to pinpoint the geographical, social and ideological arenas where linguistic agents assert their right to the linguistic “appropriation of space” (Jabareen 2015: 174).

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Are sociolinguistic processes systematic? A cross-cultural comparative approach.  
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A half-century of research on language variation and change has produced findings systematic enough to suggest we are discovering general principles about linguistic and social processes; e.g., the linguistic correlates of class and age, the social spread of language change, the linguistic construction of social identity and meaning. But the studies on which these generalizations are based mostly focus on Western societies speaking western European languages, and the field lacks a comparative tradition testing for systematic similarity across languages and cultures. This raises many questions: Are leaders of change cross-culturally similar? Are social stratification and gender differentiation universal phenomena? Do linguistic ideologies about norms, prestige, etc. work similarly in cultures that lack literacy or institutionalized education, in post-colonial settings, or communities with strong liturgical traditions? How culturally specific is style and styling? Do linguistic constraints on variation work similarly across typologically different languages? Can interview techniques be comparable across cultures?

## **Cross-cultural approaches: Comparing heritage languages in Toronto** **Naomi Nagy, University of Toronto**

Comparable documentation across language varieties can contribute to linguistic knowledge, e.g., what types of structures and patterns are cross-linguistically possible? common? Such analyses also provide a proving ground on which to test which theoretical principles of sociolinguistics are universal. To begin to tackle the complex issue of how we might develop a framework for cross-cultural sociolinguistics, I will share some insights from comparative analysis of several languages that are spoken in one city but that have not been subjected to much sociolinguistic analysis. The languages in question (Cantonese, Faetar, Korean, Italian, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian) are heritage languages spoken in Toronto for 50-100+ years and subjected to variationist scrutiny since 2009 (Nagy 2011). I will focus on methodological issues that must be overcome to allow for cross-linguistic or cross-cultural comparison.

While many of these heritage languages have been described (cf. Chumak-Horbatsch 1987, Danesi 1985, del Torto 2008, 2010, Fortier 1991, Guardado 2002, Vizmuller-Zocco 1993), descriptions are not generalisable: most of these scholars specialize in one language and few present quantified data or examine conditioning contexts. Comparative analyses of homeland and heritage patterns across several heritage languages will be compared to better understand the processes of language variation and change in this set of lesser-studied varieties. I will highlight trends observed in seven years of study of Toronto's heritage languages that may help us understand contact-induced change in this context: (1) cross-generational differences and (2) effects of ethnic orientation and language use practices. Cross-generational differences are sought using variationist sociolinguistic methods: multivariate analysis of factors influencing the selection of competing variants in naturalistic speech. Ethnic orientation and language use practices are examined by quantifying responses to open-ended questions in a survey adapted from Keefe & Padilla's (1987) ethnicity questionnaire. I compare ethnic orientation scores and cross-generational linguistic differences among speakers of the various languages, showing both surprising discrepancies between reports of linguistic attitudes and language use and different correspondences of these to evidence of ongoing change in the heritage varieties. The most surprising trend is the lack of correlation between usage patterns and attitudes (Nagy et al. 2014, Nagy 2016). This provides insight about what differences matter, that is, what changes when we simultaneously consider several languages? Such issues must be understood if we are to develop a framework for cross-cultural comparisons. Time permitting, I will also provide a summary of relevant findings from a panel comparing heritage language research on the effects of attitude and prestige from *Sociolinguistics Symposium 21*.

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## **Widening Horizons: Cross-cultural approaches to linguistic variation**

### **"Culturally appropriate analysis of situation and style"– Malcah Yaeger-Dror**

This paper addresses the workshop goal of developing a framework for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparison by presenting findings from comparative studies of the **pragmatics** of language use, demonstrating the importance of appropriate triage of social situation, and the difficulties which arise when attempting to compare interactional/pragmatic variables in different communities.

It is often acknowledged that there are social skills which vary as radically as ‘t/d deletion’ in different communities (D’hondt et al 2009, Aijmer 2011). For example, community norms for appropriate disagreement strategies vary widely even within the United States where Schiffrin (1984) and Tannen (1981) claimed that Philadelphians and New Yorkers of Ashkenazi Jewish descent are less concerned with ‘preference for agreement’ (Schegloff et al 1977) than the Californians who have generally formed the basis for studies of conversational rules. In Yaeger-Dror et al (2010) we compared disagreement strategies of 3 different groups of speakers from the CallFriend phone call series at LDC. That analysis showed that even with the social situation limited to intimate friendly phone calls, speakers from the three language groups studied (American, Japanese, Spanish) differed considerably in their disagreement strategies. Some of the differences were clearly related to the relative appropriateness of culturally specific strategies for disagreement, while language specific placement of an overt negative also influenced prosody and was language dependent. Such comparisons include not just manner of presenting a ‘disagreement’, but include the necessity [or lack thereof] of pre-disagreements before dispreferred segments like overt disagreement: pre-disagreement tokens include pre-disagreement hesitation pauses (Schegloff et al 1977), clicks (Rickford&Rickford 1978; Gil 2013; Ogden 2013, 2016), ‘oh’, ‘well’ (Thompson et al 2015), or ‘I dunno’ (Polak-Yitzhaki & Maschler 2016). Thus, even without leaving the realm of ‘disagreement’ strategies, there is ample evidence for both linguistic and cultural variation in interactive strategies analyzable from parallel corpora like those at LDC. Added perspective is available from bilingual corpora like the new ‘Call Grandma’ corpus (Carvalho et al 2016) which has been developed to permit us to not only compare the strategies used by younger and older speakers in asymmetric conversations, but to determine whether balanced bilinguals use similar strategies in both languages, or whether they limit dispreferred options like disagreements to one language or the other, and how different their conversational routines are from those of monolinguals.

Not surprisingly, situational variation is critical for studies of pragmatic variables, but ‘appropriate’ linguistic choices for one community may need to be carefully reevaluated when carrying out research in another, even in the narrow situation defined as ‘friendly phone calls’. In fact, we may have difficulty comparing ‘situational’ [or ‘style’ (Coupland 2007)] coding in different subcommunities even within a given language community: As Brown and Gilman (1960) have shown, even appropriate pronoun choice differs widely, and has changed considerably since the 1950’s when they carried out their initial study. The methodological implications of these findings for cross-cultural comparison of disagreement and other interactive ‘routines’ will be explored.

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