‘LIKE THE FISH NOT IN WATER’: HOW LANGUAGE AND RACE MEDIATE THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INCLUSION OF WOMEN MIGRANTS TO AUSTRALIA

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Learning English is an important aspect of post-migration settlement in Australia, and new migrants with beginner to intermediate proficiency are strongly encouraged to attend government-subsidised English language classes. Underpinning the framing and delivery of these classes is a commitment to the discursive construction of Australia as an English-monolingual nation state, in which increased English proficiency will lead to new migrants gaining employment, thereby achieving an important benchmark of successful inclusion in Australian society. The assumption that English language acquisition leads to social and economic inclusion is not challenged within the settlement English program, and the language learner is seen as linguistically deficient in English, rather than as an emerging bi- or multilingual. Moreover, the ways that race, as well as gender, mediate both language learning and social inclusion are never problematised.

This paper is based on data from a longitudinal ethnography that examines subjectivity in three interactional domains – family, society and work – in order to explore how language, race and gender impact on the post-migration settlement trajectories and sense of social inclusion of women migrants to Australia.

KEY WORDS: language learning, identity, gender, migration, language ideology

INTRODUCTION

Many new migrants to Australia attend settlement English programs in the belief that developing greater proficiency in English will lead to better social and economic affordances in Australian society. However, even after achieving what the government terms ‘functional’ proficiency in English, many migrants may still find themselves socially and economically marginalised within the dominant culture of Australia due to factors that impact on language learning but which are largely unexplored within the language learning context. This paper seeks to address the situation by problematising post-migration language learning as a mediator of social inclusion. After a brief look at social inclusion in communities of practice, I will examine some specific research findings that bring into play intersections between language and race in the pursuit of labour market entry and inclusion in social communities.
of practice. I will also touch on the implications of this for the framing of settlement English language provision in Australia.

**SOCIAL INCLUSION AND MARGINALITY**

‘Social inclusion’ is a term that dates to European policy objectives in the 1990s towards achieving full participation of the economically marginalised in society through employment (Piller & Takahashi, 2011). It is also associated with the inclusion of people from diverse cultures in the mainstream; indeed, Otsuji and Pennycook (2011) refer to social inclusion as the ‘new multiculturalism’ (p. 423). The social inclusion of newcomers to a community of practice occurs when they become more integrated in that community through a process of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). If we consider dominant society as a community of practice, recently arrived migrant language learners may take on ‘inbound trajectories’ of identity that are at first peripheral, but ‘invested in their future participation’ (Wenger, 1998, p. 154) in that community of practice once target language proficiency is developed.

One of the benefits of the federally funded Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) in Australia is that it provides a venue for such legitimate peripheral participation, along with the potential for not only curricular knowledge of English but also mentoring relationships for newcomers to develop as participants in the community of practice. However, societal attitudes to multilingualism as well as the effects of systemic racism can work against the assumption that broader social and economic inclusion will result from participation in settlement English language programs such as the AMEP (Piller, 2012). Some migrants, either through difficulty with linguistic acculturation or as a result of persistent marginalisation due to racial, cultural or gender discrimination, always remain on ‘peripheral trajectories’, where full participation never occurs but identity is still influenced by the community of practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 154). This is what Gilroy (1987, p. 66) refers to as ‘the concept of “fixity” in the ideological construction of otherness’, which operates according to inequalities of power between the migrant and the post-migration society.

**COERCIVE NORMS**

The pressure to conform to dominant societal norms lies at the heart of identity construction and the individual’s sense of alienation or belonging, and is of particular relevance to the settlement trajectories of transnational migrants. Dominant culture language ideologies work to coerce normative goals for identity and belonging among transnational migrants, and such ideologies are often the location of images of ‘self/other’ or ‘us/them’, which are enacted in the pressure that the post-migration society places on migrants to learn to express themselves in the dominant language (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 251). However, the language learned is not neutral (Edge, 2003; Kubota, 2000; Pennycook, 1994; Shohamy, 2000), and
the language learner is not only developing linguistic proficiency but also learning a culture (Agar, 1994; Fanon, 1967).

Moreover, while a nation can be seen as ‘an imagined political community’, projected as an ideologically mobilising entity from the minds of those who imagine it (Anderson, 2006, p. 6), it may ultimately contain conflicting linguistic representations (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001). On the one hand, the dominant official view might be of a linguistically homogeneous, monolingual nation state – for example, Australia as an English speaking country – while on the other hand, its residents and citizens might imagine themselves as members of a multiethnic, multilingual community. ‘This tension between a dominant ideology of national homogeneity and actual heterogeneity has important implications for multilingual identities and social justice in liberal democratic states’ (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 250). In multicultural Australia, which has long relied on migration to support its economic development aspirations, language ideologies that privilege English monolingualism coercively position non-English speaking migrants as excluded from the imagined nation state, in spite of the fact that the actual people who make up the nation state speak at least 240 different languages (Clyne, 2005, p. 5). In the words of a former senior government immigration spokesperson: ‘[…] it is a self-evident truth that a shared language is one of the foundations of national cohesion’ (Robb, 2006). Heller (1995) refers to this kind of belief as the ‘symbolic domination’ of one group over others, which occurs because ‘language norms are a key aspect of institutional norms, and reveal ideologies which legitimate (or contest) institutional relations of power’ (p. 373). The way that language learning and language learners are constructed within the ideology of the nation state has a significant impact not only on how language learning progresses but also on whether language proficiency confers symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) and social inclusion, as I explain below.

LABOUR MARKET PLANNING AND MIGRATION POLICY

It may be problematic to assume that English has a culturally defining role within the imagined nation state; however, English competency can still be seen to play an important economic role for new migrants to Australia. The Australian Government has a long tradition of support for the provision of a comprehensive migrant settlement program, one that is predicated on the notion of making an investment in the present for the future wellbeing of new migrants and their successful integration in Australian society. While remaining committed to its basic premise, successive Australian governments have looked for ways of developing and aligning the program to social, political and economic goals. For example, in recent years, labour market priorities have had a direct impact on the shaping of the AMEP, which has taken an increasingly vocational focus that aligns it with a plan for migrants to fill shortages in the service sector labour supply. This approach is consistent across both major
political parties: former Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, Andrew Robb (Liberal, considered new migrants who have come from difficult circumstances ‘very marketable in the workplace soon after their arrival’, due in part to ‘a willingness to do jobs many Australians reject’ (Robb, 2006), while a more recent minister for Immigration, Chris Evans (Labor), declared that:

Increasingly, immigration’s role is as a job matching agency for the nation. [...] As Australians take up the skilled work opportunities available, shortages of labour in the service and regionally based industries will become more and more acute. (Evans, 2008)

Such clearly articulated policy goals, while reflecting labour supply planning priorities, do not take account of systemic barriers involving language and race that face migrants to modern multicultural states where migration is a key feature of economic development.

**SETTLEMENT LANGUAGE LEARNING**

The AMEP sees itself as delivering a settlement language service that is aimed not only at providing language tuition but also at helping migrants decide on future study and employment goals (Australian Government, 2008, 2012). As part of this, it is standard practice for AMEP students, on entering the program, to meet with a vocational guidance officer to plan and articulate future study and work goals. These are recorded in an individual learning plan, which is updated by teachers and vocational guidance officers over the course of the student’s time in the AMEP. Students usually meet with a vocational guidance officer before leaving the program, and in this meeting advice is given about the best course of action towards achieving study and/or work goals. In all of this process, including the teaching of English, I would suggest that English is seen as a commodity or tool that the migrant must attain in achieving their settlement goals. This is language acquisition directed at ‘an idealized, abstract learner devoid of social positioning and, thus, removed from the social environment in which learning takes place’ (Ehrlich, 1997, p. 440). What is not considered is the impact of factors related to race, as well as to gender, which have a significant influence on post-migration settlement aspirations.

The study outlined below provides a multifaceted examination of the impact of settlement language learning on identity, and contributes to a growing body of research that problematises the social inclusion agenda in multicultural, multilingual societies by critically examining language learning in the context of transnational migration. This includes Creese and Wiebe (2009), which found reduced linguistic capital and racial discrimination in the labour market for African migrants in Canada; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2006, 2007), which linked racial stereotyping and the downgrading of qualifications to Australian labour market segmentation that assigns low-status service sector work to migrants from African and Middle Eastern countries; Piller (2012), which provided a case study of the way that...
language proficiency in English is used as a blind for racial discrimination in the Australian labour market; and Warriner (2007), which showed that ‘proficiency in English does not necessarily confer the social, cultural, economic, or political capital necessary to achieve “substantial citizenship”’ for Sudanese migrants to America (p. 355).

THE STUDY

Ethnographic data for this paper is derived from a longitudinal doctoral study (Butorac, 2011) that followed the settlement trajectories of nine women who had recently migrated to Australia and were studying English in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). At the beginning of this qualitative narrative inquiry, the participants were in the Certificate III class, an intermediate level of English language proficiency. Seven of the nine women had been in paid employment immediately prior to moving to Australia, and all nine expressed a desire to achieve paid employment at some point in Australia, with four actively seeking employment during the study and a fifth becoming self-employed soon after the study commenced. Coming from a range of origin countries, four of the women were Asian, four were European and one was Middle Eastern. These divisions became important insofar as they aligned with significant differences in the women’s expectations and experience of social inclusion and a sense of belonging in Australia.

Broadly, the study found that the effect of language and race ideologies in Australia, as well as the ways in which migration is a gendered process, are deeply involved in the impact that learning English has on aspiration and selfhood in this context. Of particular relevance to this paper are findings on the ways that language and race mediate identities of belonging and exclusion across social and workplace interactional domains. For example, the persistence of a monolingual mindset (Clyne, 2005) in the wider Australian labour market results in significant language capital of new migrants being denied, whereas the importance and economic value of English competence has reduced significance in the rare instances where a migrant’s full language capital is desired. In addition, the study found evidence of a conflation of language and race in the perception and experience of labour market success for new migrants. In the social domain, exclusionary language practices serve to render some migrants invisible in the dominant culture, an experience that implicates not only language but also race.

RACE AND BELONGING

In relation to the migrant experience of social inclusion, the data reveal a clear divide, along racial lines, over how the participants experienced settlement in Australian society, and how they were able to imagine their place within the nation state. This is most apparent in the data from discussion-group exchanges, where the women’s divergent experience of race-based social exclusion became evident. The European participants all expressed a sense of legitimacy...
in, and also identification with, the dominant post-migration society, as the following extract shows. Michiko is from Japan, while Vesna, Lena and Anna are from Eastern European countries. All names are pseudonyms, and comments in parentheses provide additional information about the speech act, such as tone of voice or background sounds.

**Vesna:** But locals is sometime being like you, or like…

**Lena:** Yes, local people just come from another country.

They were even able to place themselves linguistically among the mainstream:

**Anna:** You have to realise…because I, er, talked with my sister-in-law and I…we talking about TAFE and learning and everything, and she said, ‘Your English is very good!’ and I said, ‘No, it’s not!’ and she said, ‘Yes, it is!’ and I said, ‘No, it’s not!’ (WOMEN LAUGH)...so we just…

**Michiko:** Is she Australian?

**Anna:** Yeah, she is Australian. And I wrote something and she said, ‘Oh, I didn’t know…I didn’t know…what’s this words mean, you know…she asked me about…I wrote something, and I said, “I met him”…you know, and she said, “You should say ‘I meet him’…” No! Yeah, she is Australian, and she…she work in the…in the… (SHE IS LAUGHING NOW)

[. . .]

**Anna:** (LAUGHING STILL) And she work in office, you know, and she supposed to know that, you know, and I look at her, you know, and I say: ‘Oh, my English [is] really good!’ (WOMEN LAUGH). Australian people, they doesn’t know some things, you know, and it’s not…it’s not…

**Vesna:** Like everywhere. People…sometime they not very confident with his own grammar.

**Anna:** Yeah, yeah! That’s true. We have to realise that, you know.

**Vesna:** Just gone to school and that’s all, and they can make mistake even his own language.

(both excerpts from data recorded in November 2008)

The European women’s sense of identification was expressed as an awareness of the fact that most Australians they met were themselves migrants, many of whom had not learned English as a first language. It allowed the European women to see themselves as being on an inbound trajectory of participation (Wenger, 1998), both culturally and linguistically, towards full inclusion in Australian society. Such a perspective is reified in the history of post-war
European migration to Australia, which is now an accepted part of the storying of modern Australia (see Jupp, 2002, for a historical overview).

In contrast to this, the Asian women spoke of experiencing racial abuse and exclusion, and did not express a sense of belonging in the imagined nation state.

Yeah, because for you, it’s might be diff…you know, quite similar appearance, you know…but for us, Australian people or other people think we can’t speak English, they try to speak slowly, or something, but I said…when I speak…[they] start to speak, ‘Oh, you can speak English! You can understand!’ ‘Yes, I can understand. I can do mostly by myself’…you know?

(excerpt from data recorded in November 2008)

In this excerpt, the speaker, Michiko, establishes the grounds for contrastive experiences of social inclusion, based on appearance, with her distinction between ‘you’ (migrants from Europe) and ‘us’ (migrants from Asia). She also reveals the way more established members of society might make assumptions about English language competence, based on race.

These contrasting positions are also revealed below, where Lena’s (Russian) sense of belonging in an essentially migrant society meets Tina’s (Chinese) uncertainty about whether she will be able to achieve meaningful inclusion.

Tina: Um, you know, just I decide, before I come here, I didn’t decide if I will stay here forever. I just want to find out if I can fit in this society…fit in the Australia and find a decent job.

Donna: So, you’d give it a try.

Tina: Yeah. If I can’t, I just take the two years or three years for studying…for improve my English, and, you know, if my English is good enough, and with my law background, I can…I can be very successful [in China].

Roxanna: Yes, but…

Lena: What I am surprised about it, because I think in Australia, a lot of people…maybe everybody…comes from somewhere. Maybe many years ago, but a lot of them are successful, so…

Tina: Yes.

Lena: …I don’t know why you feel so hopeless about your career.

(excerpt from data recorded in October 2008)
In spite of the lifestyle attractions of settling in Australia, none of the Asian participants expressed a sense of identification of their own position – as a recent migrant who is learning English – with the normalised history of migration to Australia. This was because of the way race impacts on discourses of acceptance and belonging in Australian society, constructing Asian people as the racial and linguistic ‘other’ and European migrants as on track to being part of the mainstream. All of the Asian women reported the experience of race-based discrimination, either first-hand or from within their family and friendship circles, and the person who reported the most acts of racism was Tina, who described how passers-by and even other motorists would sometimes shout racist abuse at her and her husband while they were doing ordinary things like filling their car with petrol, or driving in traffic.

Tina: Um, it happened three times…yes. One time is when I…how to say…give the petrol to my car…how to say?

Donna: You filled your car up with petrol…you went to a service station.

Tina: Yes, when I doing that…um, three boys…um, just [unclear…changed?] by the road and they…they…they call my husband and I ‘stupid Chinese pig!’ Even if we didn’t look at them and we didn’t talk with them…we do nothing with them!

Tina: And other two times is when we are riding the bicycle along the road, the passing car…there is a car just passing by us, and they rode [wound] down the window and say something like that to us! Can you imagine that?!

[…]

(excerpt from data recorded in September 2008)

Tina suggested that such racist behaviour was not unusual in the experience of other Chinese-Australians, referring to a friend who has lived in Australia since his teens and who has experienced this kind of abuse so often as to consider it ‘normal’. In fact, systemic racism towards non-European migrants has a long history in Australia, dating back to one of the first pieces of legislation passed after Federation, the 1901 Migration Act, which made official the discouragement of non-European migration to Australia (Jupp, 2002). Although this Act, which came to be associated with the White Australia Policy, was eventually overturned in 1958, its legacy persisted in the practices of immigration officials until 1973, when the Whitlam Labor government moved to legislate for a multicultural Australia (Jupp, 2002).

**ECONOMIC EXCLUSION**

The Asian women in the study expressed an expectation that issues related to race would affect their employment or social advancement, and two women, Kumiko and Michiko (both
from Japan), appeared to conflate language with race when they spoke of their ideas about, or experience of, trying to enter the Australian labour market. This conflation took the form of discussing what was perhaps evidence of exclusion based on race as a question of exclusion due to English language proficiency, as in the following excerpt.

Donna: Before, in June, when I spoke to you, you said, ‘Oh I don’t think my English is good enough to get a job’.

Michiko: That’s…yeah, my friends told me ‘cos my English not enough’, they can’t get a job, so…that’s I thought, oh, it could be my English too, it’s not enough to get a job.

[...]

Donna: But your English is good, I bet there’s lots of jobs you could do with your level of English.

Michiko: Yeah, but…yeah but…ah, my world…yeah, no-one got job with Australian company, like...

(excerpt from data recorded in November 2009)

During a group discussion on their experience of racism, in which three of the Asian women contributed personal examples, Kumiko’s main contribution was about exclusion from the labour market, in which she hinted at a link between language, ethnicity, and employment success.

Kumiko: I’ve never had bad experience in Australia, but maybe because I’ve been here only six month, but I just realised people are nice and I’ve always feel…always felt…um…accepted to live here. But, when it’s come to finding a job, it’s not. I’ve been feeling rejected. I’ve got more than ten…I sent more than ten resumes to companies, but only two replies, but replies which says, ‘Sorry, we have a better candidate’. One company…no, it’s not company…college, replied me…said, ‘Sorry, unfortunately, you are not successful candidate, successful one is this guy Brendan something-something’. I thought, it’s obvious someone with English background, so I thought oh maybe because my English is not good.

(excerpt from data recorded in September 2008)

Kumiko’s married name is Chinese and her experience is consistent with findings from an extensive discrimination audit of the Australian labour market (Booth, Leigh, & Varganova, 2009), which found that people with Chinese last names needed to apply for twice as many jobs as people with Anglo-Celtic last names before getting an interview call-back. In spite of the likelihood of new migrants from a number of countries encountering such labour market discrimination, this issue is not addressed in the framing of employment-focused AMEP
curricular and vocational advice, where the focus of assistance towards labour market readiness centres on the assumption of an English language ‘deficit’. This includes a minor focus on the pragmatics of English workplace interactions, as well as job preparation skills such as writing a resume and participating in an interview; however, these activities all position the migrant learner as English-deficient rather than an emergent bilingual. What is not discussed are the deficiencies of the Australian labour market – racial discrimination, a monolingual mindset, and unwillingness to recognise qualifications and relevant experience attained outside Australia, all of which were problems encountered by participants in the study. Since they are not discussed, this also means that strategies for addressing such labour market deficiencies are not offered, and the migrant English learner is left to assume that, with English language competency will come social inclusion and labour market success. In this context, it is not surprising that migrant English learners might then discuss difficulties with finding meaningful work in relation to English language competence. They have, after all, been led to believe that this is the main barrier to successful settlement.

LANGUAGE AND INVISIBILITY

Invisibility to members of the established community is one of the ways that newcomers experience social exclusion, and language is an important mechanism for performing this. Asian participants in the study experienced being rendered invisible during group or individual interactions with English speaking Australians, and by this process became non-persons in that interactive domain. For example, Maria, who is Brazilian-born Chinese, talked about being invisible to Anglo-Australian members of the church choir and to people at the local community centre.

Maria: Australian people don’t want to be your friend. They...you...you like invisible to them...you very invisible! If you coming to them and speak, they will speak very friendly with you, but if you pass, they look at you like [unclear]...

Lena: Speak with you.

Maria: Yeah, yeah...um, I am soprano in Brazil. I enjoy it eight years before married in chorus, in...and I want to enjoy a choir again, and this church no have choir but have a band, and the band [unclear] (LAUGHS)...put me in the band. The band like twenty years people [young people], and um eighty percent of the time I don’t understand, because always say like this slanguage [sic]...

Vesna: Still they not admit you like the same.

[...]

Maria: Yeah, the same group. They speak with each other but not speak with me.
Language-based exclusion and invisibility were also reported separately by Tina and Kumiko when they took post-secondary courses with young students, predominantly Australian nationals, who not only ignored them, but spoke English quickly and used a lot of idiomatic expressions that made their speech impenetrable to a linguistic outsider.

This kind of experience was not reported by the European women, although they did express a sense of helplessness during the immediate post-migration settlement period, when they struggled to understand what was being said to and around them in English. However, by the end of the study, one of the European women, Lena, was able to acknowledge her white privilege. Reflecting on what she had learned from listening to the Asian women in the group and also on observing the experience of Asian members of her tennis club, Lena concluded: ‘It’s nice to be beautiful white woman’:

Donna: Yeah, you’re an outsider.

Maria: Yeah. If I…my time or the music is flat, they don’t say to me. They said with each other and you invisible again. I think as we are foreigners, we are invisible for Australian people. They not…not…knows, or the older one, I don’t know…or very scared about us.

(excerpt from data recorded in October 2008)

Donna: […] Do you feel like you’re…um, accepted by Australians? Do you feel comfortable being here?

Lena: Yes, yes.

Donna: Yeah? You don’t have problems then?

Lena: No, I don’t have. Ah, actually, I did not have it from the start. I don’t know why, but I was thinking yesterday…I was playing tennis. I am very good with some woman there…she is Malaysian, but she is living here since she was four…something. And, um, she is very careful woman, because some people maybe just keep distance when you first arrive. Actually, I did not feel it a lot, but she just came to me and start communicate and I think now she is the same with some man…he is Chinese. And I was playing yesterday with them. I just…I just arrived from Russia [from holiday] and I said [thought]: ‘Oh, it could be nice’…I played Sunday, but I wanted improve more and more…ah, I did not play a long time, and I said her, ‘Oh, what about if we organise something during the week?’ and she called me and said, ‘Let’s play tomorrow, just you and me’ and then she said, ‘Oh, Hong is coming’, ah…so and I thought, oh, maybe it’s…do you remember this conversation when Asian girls said it’s…
Donna: Yeah.

Lena: They’re invisible, and I was thinking yes, because everybody was playing white people (SMALL LAUGH)...white...everybody...yes, and I was thinking, yes, maybe this guy...[...] Yes, so I...I didn’t have this problem. I just was thinking yesterday, ‘Oh, it’s nice to be beautiful white woman’, because everybody...when I just started play tennis, they: ‘Oh, do you...can you play Thursdays, or Tuesdays?’

(excerpt from data recorded in February 2009)

The experience of being made to feel invisible, recounted above by Maria – who employed the metaphor of a fish out of water quoted in the title of this article – and corroborated elsewhere by Tina and Kumiko, shows how social inclusion is mediated by exclusionary language use. However, as Lena discovered, it also speaks to the way race intersects with language to create different experiences of participation and belonging.

**LANGUAGE CAPITAL AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**

The experience of racism in the community encouraged the Asian women to forefront race, alongside language, as a factor that would determine their level of social and economic inclusion. This was a problem created by the sociocultural environment they had moved into, so it was not one they could easily resolve. For the European women, social and economic inclusion centred on developing English language competency. Within their identity as new Australians it was not difficult for these women to imagine an inward trajectory of participation and belonging, beginning with the settlement English program. For the Asian women, even after they had achieved higher than functional competency in English (as defined in the AMEP), they still had to contend with the reality that, when race is a barrier to social inclusion, one’s race becomes a defining aspect of the expression of selfhood, albeit an imposed one. This meant that most remained on ‘peripheral’ trajectories of participation (Wenger, 1998, p. 154).

In the case of Tina, this situation changed when she was able to utilise her symbolic capital as a bilingual, bicultural legal professional to establish legitimacy within the legal profession in Australia, although only in a reduced professional capacity and only in a situation where her specific bilingualism was desired for business reasons – the company was trying to expand its client base in China. Interestingly, during her lengthy hiring process, no reference was ever made to Tina’s English language proficiency, while another participant, Kumiko, who had a similar level of English proficiency and was looking for work as an IT professional during a time when this was on the Department of Immigration And Citizenship Skilled Occupations List for Australia, could not even get an interview, and was told she
needed to ‘brush up’ on her English. As she commented at the time, she would be better off returning to Japan, because ‘In Australia I am just a Japanese with a little English but in Japan I am a fantastic bilingual’. These divergent experiences are evidence of the way consideration of language capital can mediate inclusion in the Australian labour market: for Tina, acknowledgement of her full language capital resulted in meaningful employment, while for Kumiko, acknowledgement of only her English language capital meant she struggled to gain employment in Australia and eventually took a job in Singapore, where her English/Japanese bilingualism was valued.

CONCLUSION

The experience of the Asian participants in the study indicates that race and language may be conflated in the experience of gaining entry to the Australian labour market, with assumptions about exclusion due to race embedded in statements about English language competence. It also shows that the influence of language ideologies and attitudes to race in Australia are deeply involved in the impact that learning English has on social inclusion and the settlement trajectories of migrant women. The social context of language learning is just as important as the language itself, in terms of both identity construction and a sense of belonging. However, there is an assumption inherent in AMEP course design that language learning involves the development of a bounded lexico-grammatical system, the achievement of which will confer social and economic inclusion. Even when the Asian participants in the study had completed their AMEP entitlement and achieved high levels of lexico-grammatical fluency, they still doubted their ability to succeed in key employment-related domains of English-medium interaction, because of the way race impacted on labour market outcomes.

In addition, English language competence was differently assessed as symbolic capital in monolingual and bilingual workplaces, and the migrant experience of broader social inclusion was mediated by race.

In spite of the fact that sociocultural influences such as these impact on the settlement aspirations and trajectories of new migrants, the explicit consideration of such aspects of new language socialisation continue to be absent from the framing and delivery of Australia’s national settlement language program. While English language competence is justifiably seen as an important vehicle for social inclusion in Australia, to view the two in a causal relationship based simply on the development of a bounded lexico-grammatical system is to misunderstand the process of language socialisation and to deny the lived experience of new migrant language learners. It also means that no effort is made to explore strategies for addressing issues of social justice that impact language learning in multilingual societies.
REFERENCES


