Diaspora

Multilingual and intercultural communication across time and space

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The nature of diaspora is changing in the 21st century. Yet many of the communication issues remain the same. At the heart of it is multilingual and intercultural communication across time and space. There is much that applied linguists can contribute to the understanding of diaspora in the era of globalization. This article discusses some of the core issues of communication between the diaspora and the homeland, the past and the present, the individual and the community, and the sense of belonging and the ascribed category with a detailed analysis of empirical data collected through linguistic ethnography in the Chinese diaspora in Britain and elsewhere. It also highlights the significance of dynamic multilingualism in everyday communication.

Introduction

Applied linguistics, of which multilingualism is a central research topic, has long been interested in human mobility, particularly migration, and its effect on linguistic practices and ideologies. Amongst the issues that have been addressed in some depth by applied linguists are: i) how migrants learn 'new' languages (e.g. Burns & Roberts 2010; Warriner 2008); ii) how migrants maintain their 'old' languages (see García 2003 for a review), and iii) how migrant individuals and groups communicate in institutional settings such as schools, health and medical services, legal, social and public service encounters, etc. (e.g. studies in House & Rehbein 2004) and how they develop and negotiate languages (including lingua franca communication), social relationships, identities, and ideologies in the family, the community, and the workplace (e.g. Hornberger 1998; Knapp & Meierkord 2002; Gal 2006; Lanza 2007; Roberts 2007; Sharifian, Farzad & Palmer 2007). Comparisons across different migrant groups in terms of their migratory experiences and multilingual practices are occasionally made. Yet until recently, relatively little attention has been given to the diversity *within* a specific migrant group and how such diversity impacts on their everyday communicative practices. In this article, we take the notion of *diaspora* as our point of departure, and focus on the issue of diversity in diasporic communication. We believe that applied linguistics has much to offer to the understanding of language and communication issues which have hitherto received little attention in diaspora studies. And we will illustrate what applied linguists can do through a detailed analysis of empirical data collected through linguistic ethnography within the Chinese community in Britain, focusing on examples of language and identity negotiations.

In dealing with diversity in diasporic communication, we take the changing nature of diaspora in the era of globalization as our point of departure. Bilingualism and multilingualism can

mean different things to different generations and individuals in the same diasporic community. Managing linguistic and cultural diversity in everyday communication is a challenge to the diasporic communities. And understanding the complex nexus of contacts and communication channels that contemporary transnational dynamics afford and sustain is crucial to the advancement of multilingualism research in particular and applied linguistics more generally.

The article is structured as follows: We begin by highlighting the key characteristics of diaspora and diasporic community in the 21st century, emphasizing the connectivity of transnational individuals and groups. We then outline the diversity and polyglossic situation of the British Chinese diaspora, which provides the backdrop of the empirical analysis later. We focus in particular on the recent and on-going changes within the community. We then illustrate some of the communication issues facing the Chinese diaspora in Britain. We deliberately choose not to approach the examples from any single theoretical or analytic perspective. Instead, we focus on three broad, emerging themes of negotiating language, negotiating tradition and negotiating identity. These themes are common in all diasporas and diasporic communication, and they invite applied linguists to approach them from interdisciplinary perspectives. We will, however, give indications of the issues that can be explored further from specific theoretical standpoints. We conclude with a brief summary of the key points we make and a call for applied linguistics research into diaspora and diasporic communition.

Diaspora and diasporic communication in the 21st century

Diaspora is a very old concept, originally meaning the scattering of people between, through, and across different geographic location. Its main reference was, for many centuries, the historical mass dispersions of the Jews, African slaves and the Chinese coolies. The emphasis on the involuntary nature of the displacement and dispersal in the historical references was easy to see. Studies of transnational human migration in the 20th century tended to use terms such as immigrants, guest workers, asylum seekers, ethnic minorities, displaced populations, etc., to refer to the different groups of migrants in contemporary society. As the world moved into the new millennium, there has been a renewed interest in the notion of 'diaspora', researchers increasingly find terms such as 'immigrants', and 'minorities' unsatisfactory. As Clifford (1997) suggests, 'diasporic language seems to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse. Transnational connections break the binary relation of "minority" communities within "majority" societies' (p. 255). Scholars see a close link between the contemporary diasporic conditions and globalization (Cohen & Vertovec 1999).

Diaspora in the 21st century is, to use a popular phrase, a 'superdiverse' phenomenon (Vertovec 2007). Individuals with different migration motivations and experiences, of different educational and socio-economic backgrounds and statuses come together; recent migrants are intermingled with long-term settlers; speakers of different languages, dialects and accents are interacting with each other, often in a mixed mode. Yet they find sufficient common ground to identify themselves with each other as part of a diaspora, creating an 'imagined' community. This diasporic imagination often involves suppressing or neutralising past differences and establishing commonality and connectivity through which new identities can be negotiated (Sofos 1996).

The rediscovered term of diaspora indicates a shift of interest from mobility to connectivity and of emphasis from the victimization, uprooting and displacement of the individuals and groups concerned, to their capacity of constructing new transnational spaces of experience that are complexly interfacing with the experiential frameworks that both places of settlement and purported places of origin represent (Morley 2000). Tsagarousianou (2004), for example, talks about the 'potentialities' of diasporas, i.e. 'the various creative possibilities opened by the activities of diasporas in both local and transnational contexts' (p. 58). She further argues that it is important to focus on 'the ability of

diasporas to construct and negotiate their identities, everyday life and transnational activities in ways that often overcome the ethnic identity versus assimilation dilemma' (ibid), rather than the experiences of loss and displacement or the nostalgic fixation to a 'homeland'. For Tsagarousianou, the diasporic communities' readiness and willingness to engage themselves with the building of a transnational imagination and connections differentiate them from 'ethnic minorities'. In Brah's terms, 'diasporas are ……the sites of hope and new beginnings' (1996: 193); rather than looking back in a nostalgic effort of recovering or maintaining their identity, they discover or construct notions of who they are and what home is by essentially looking forward.

Such a shift in interest and emphasis in diaspora studies is echoed in applied linguistics research through the work of scholars such as David Block (2008), who challenges the appropriateness of the metaphor of 'loss' in studying multilingual, transnational individuals and communities and calls for a move away from the excessively emotive and romanticized stances towards language maintenance and language shift. For many such individuals and communities, it is not what they have lost that occupies their minds in their everyday life, but what they seek to develop and construct for themselves. The estrangement of an individual or a community in diaspora, to use Mandaville's words (2001), 'often leads to a particularly intense search for and negotiation of identity' (p. 172). It is therefore important to recognise the opportunity structures that the diasporic condition entails, which must include both the restrictive consequences of deterritorialization and reterritorialization and the creative potential of the multiplicity of connectivity. The multiplicity of connectivity creates an 'imagined' rather than given community, continuously reinvented and reconstructed through the lengthy process of forging links amongst their members in both local and transnational contexts.

In an attempt to provide a theoretical framework for studying new communication media in diasporas, Tsagarousianou (2004) argues that migration movements in late modernity should not be framed in terms of isolation and solitude, but rather in terms of intense and constant interaction at a transnational level. Globalization, in her view, means not simply rapid mobility over long distances but also increased proximity and connectivity. Diasporas can be seen as situated at the centre of sets of intersecting transnational flows and linkages that bring together geographically remote locations. In turn, they contribute to the generation of transnational flows and, as a result, are considered to be in the vanguard of the forces that deepen and intensify globalization' (Tsagarousianou 2004: 60–61).

There has been a great deal of discussion about 'cultural flow' in applied linguistics (e.g. Pennycook 2007). But as yet, it does not address language and communication issues in diaspora studies. For us, diasporic communication means communicating between, through and across time and space. The research questions to be addressed by applied linguists regarding diasporas and diasporic communication include:

–   What are the communication channels that contemporary transnational dynamics afford and sustain?
–   What are the communicative strategies of individuals and groups to create social space in and across physical locations?
–   How are different languages, dialects, accents, writing systems and other semiotic resources intertwined to produce new codes of communication?
–   How do individuals and groups manage diversity of age, gender, socio-economic status, etc. through communicative and symbolic resources to create a complex nexus of relationships?
–   What do integration and belonging mean to different individuals and groups linguistically and socially?
–   How are the broader socio-political processes of globalization impacting on the socio-cultural dynamics within the diaspora and vice versa?

In the rest of this article, we will illustrate some of these questions with an empirical analysis of multilingual communication in the Chinese diaspora in the UK. The next section outlines the sociolinguistic background of the community in question, highlighting the superdiversity within the Chinese diaspora. We will end the section with a brief description of the research methods we have used in working with the Chinese diaspora in Britain.

The Chinese diaspora and its polyglossia

Cohen's (1997) typology of diasporas included the categories of victim, labour, trade, imperial and cultural. Looking at the long history of Chinese migration, the Chinese diaspora could fit into any of these categories. Whilst the earliest Chinese migration to Southeast Asia was predominately due to trading opportunities, victimization and imperialist expansion were also possible causes for some migrant movements. In the meantime, coolie labour was the main reason of Chinese migration to the Americas and Australasia. Many of the coolies worked in gold mines, plantations and railway constructions. The 19th century saw the height of Chinese migration when the European colonies were desperate for large pools of laborers. The Qing Empire was forced to allow its subjects to work overseas under colonial treaties. And poverty impelled many people, especially those from the coastal provinces of China, to seek a better living overseas. After the second world war, many people from the Hong Kong emigrated to the UK (Benton & Pieke 1998; Pan 1999; Tan 2012).

Since the 20th century, Chinese migration has been directed primarily to Western countries such as the nations of Western Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Many of these migrants were themselves overseas Chinese from South East Asia and other parts of the world, or had family connections in the Western countries. Some of them were professionals and students. Diversification of Chinese migration to Eastern European and Central Asian countries, and to Africa, is a relatively recent phenomenon, though there have been small numbers of Chinese immigrants in many of these places. Reliable statistics are difficult to come by, as local conditions regarding the Chinese diaspora vary considerably. But an estimate of 50 million worldwide is generally accepted.

Like most other diasporas in the 21st century, the Chinese diaspora is superdiverse. Different migration histories exist in different countries. The Chinese in Southeast Asia, for example, can trace back six or more generations, whereas those in Africa are only of the last 20 years or so. Their places of origin cover the whole of China, with the provinces on the southeast coast being the main source of migrants. All eight groups of Chinese regional languages, or *fangyan*, are represented in the Chinese diaspora, with Cantonese, Hokkien and Hakka the major varieties. The whole social spectrum is also represented, ranging from politicians, entrepreneurs, and professionals, to refugees, laborers, and small criminals. The Chinese usually identify a person by ethnic origin instead of nationality. As long as the person is of Chinese descent, that person is considered Chinese, and if that person lives outside of China, that person is overseas Chinese. The Chinese language has several different terms for overseas Chinese: Huáqiáo (华侨) refers to residents of countries other than China who still hold Chinese passports, and Huárén (华人) refers to ethnic Chinese residing outside of China. Guīqiáo (归侨) or Hǎiguī (海归) refers to returned overseas Chinese in China and the relatives of overseas are referred to as *Qiáojuàn* (侨眷). Amongst the Cantonese, Hokkien and Hakka speakers, the term 唐人, pronounced tángrén in Mandarin/Putonghua, *tòhng yàn* in Cantonese, *tn̂g-lâng* in Hokkien, and *tong nyin* in Hakka, is used, which literally means Tang people, a reference to the Tang Dynasty of China (618–907 AD), widely regarded as a golden era in Chinese history. Chinatown, for example, is usually known as 唐人街 tángrénjiē, or street of the Tang people, amongst the Chinese.

The Chinese diaspora in Britain dates back to the 17th century. The first sizeable settlement of Chinese people in Britain was in the early 19th century, mostly of seamen, in port cities such as Liverpool and London. The current British Chinese diaspora consists of post second world war migrants from Hong Kong and southeastern provinces of mainland China, their children and grandchildren, and new immigrants from various parts of China and other parts of the world since the 1980s. Figures from the UK's Office for National Statistics suggest around 250,000 Chinese are living in Britain, excluding those of partial Chinese descent. That is approximately 0.5% of the total UK population and around 5% of the non-white population. 29% were born in Hong Kong, 28.4% were born in the UK, 19% in mainland China, 15% in Southeast Asia, and 2% in Taiwan. There are estimated 60,000 mainland Chinese students in British universities (Li Wei 2007).

In terms of languages, nearly 90% of the British Chinese in Britain speak Cantonese as their first or home language, about 5% speak Putonghua/Mandarin, and 2% Hakka. Like other immigrant communities in the country, the Chinese in Britain face the sociolinguistic dilemma of maintaining their ethnic language on the one hand and developing proficiency in English on the other. In terms of the status of the various languages involved, a complex pattern of polyglossia has emerged, with English as the socioeconomically High variety, Cantonese the community High variety, Putonghua or Mandarin the politically High variety within the community context, and all the other Chinese *fangyan* (regional languages) and some regional forms of English Low varieties.

Polyglossia of the Chinese communities in Britain

	Within the community	Beyond the community
High	Cantonese	English
	(for everyday communication)	(for socioeconomic/educational purposes)
	Putonghua/Mandarin	Putonghua/Mandarin*
	(for political, symbolic purposes)	(for political, symbolic purposes)
Low	Chinese fangyan	Regional varieties of English

*Strictly speaking, Putonghua is the Standard Modern Chinese, whose pronunciation and grammar are based on those of Mandarin. Mandarin is the northern variety of Chinese dialects. In this article, the two terms are used interchangeably.

Although the number of Putonghua/Mandarin speakers from mainland China living in the UK is relatively small, their interaction with the other Chinese immigrants is increasing. Many of them are occupying important business, academic and professional positions. Putonghua/Mandarin, has a relatively high socio-political and symbolic status in the Chinese communities in Britain. This is partly due to the fact that it is the official national language of mainland China. After the transition of sovereignty of Hong Kong from Britain to China in 1997, more and more Chinese people in the UK feel they should learn Putonghua/Mandarin. Putonghua/Mandarin is also being promoted by the British educational system, through formal examinations (GCSE and A level), as well as the Confucius Institutes and Classrooms. There are secondary schools in England that offer Putonghua/Mandarin as a modern language subject alongside the usual European languages.

The Chinese language has one of the longest continuously used writing system in the world, making it an important symbol of the Chinese cultural heritage. Thus, in the Chinese diaspora, a reduction or loss of ability to read and write their heritage language, perceived or actual, may take on particular social significance for its members. The Chinese communities in Britain have set up weekend language schools — some 200 of them across the country — specifically for the purpose of

teaching the British-born children to read and write Chinese. Yet research evidence seems to suggest that there is little improvement in the literacy level of the Chinese children (Li & Wu 2010). In the meantime, there are some elderly Chinese who do not read or write Chinese very well. The majority of the Chinese adults read and write in full characters as opposed to the simplified version used in mainland China and Singapore. Nevertheless, for the Chinese adults the literacy problem is with English not Chinese.

The Chinese in Britain tend to live in geographically diverse parts of the country. They are usually surrounded by English speakers, although their interaction with them may be limited. The Chinese children are brought up in an English-dominant environment. The English language they are exposed to varies from highly localised vernacular forms, such as Geordie and Glaswegian, to standard British English through the media. There is no evidence of a Chinese English variety emerging from the community. Some of the adults speak English non-fluently and with distinct accents, similar to the Hong Kong Chinese speakers of English. But these are features of developing skills of the language rather than a new language variety.

As the majority of the Chinese in Britain can trace their origins to Hong Kong, the Hong Kong influence can been seen in every aspect of their social life including their language use. In the 1980s, a small number of words and phrases could be observed amongst the Cantonese speakers in the UK which seemed to suggest a emerging local variety of Cantonese. Most of them were obviously influenced by contact with English, for example, *bafong* (derived from ba(th) + fong 'room') as opposed to the Hong Kong Cantonese *saisanfong* 'bathroom', or *toijau* (literally 'tablewine') as opposed to *jau* 'wine'. Yet, in the late 1990s, such words and phrases seemed to have given way to the Hong Kong version. The Cantonese spoken by the majority of the Chinese in Britain is largely indistinguishable from that spoken in Hong Kong today.

One of the reasons for the diminution of a British variety of Chinese, or indeed a variety of English spoken by the Chinese in Britain, is the rapid expansion of information and communication technology (ICT). Communication with East Asia, especially China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, has never been easier and faster. Ownership of satellite television and home computers is widespread in the Chinese families in Britain. Whatever happens in East Asia is immediately known by the Chinese over here. New words and phrases, and special ways of speaking, which appear in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan soon become popularly used amongst the Chinese in Britain. Newspapers and magazines from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan are widely available in shops in Chinatowns, alongside the popular European Chinese newspaper *Sing Tao Daily*. Chinese language television can be received via satellite or cable. Public libraries in major cities have stocks of Chinese language books published in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The last two decades have seen a gradual change of hierarchies amongst the varieties of the Chinese language used by the Chinese diaspora in Britain. The traditional community lingua franca, Cantonese, has been replaced by Putonghua/Mandarin. As mentioned above, Putonghua/Mandarin is now widely taught not only in mainstream schools, with strong institutional support, but also in the community based, complementary, heritage language schools. In the Chinatowns in large urban centres, Putonghua/Mandarin is also widely used alongside Cantonese. The change is clearly linked to the geopolitics that comes with the growing economic power of mainland China. It is backed up by the huge investment from the Chinese government via its Confucius Institutes programme, as well as the rhetoric of an Asian era in the public discourse.

Given the diversity and potentials for connectivity of the Chinese diaspora, it seems to us that understanding how Chinese transnationals communicate with each other across space and time provides important insights into multilingual and intercultural communication, hence applied linguistics, more generally. In the meantime, applied linguistics can throw new light on the dynamics

of diasporas by analysing how transnationals negotiate language, culture and identity in everyday social interaction. With these in mind, we have adopted a sociolinguistic ethnography approach, working through participant observations in key social networks sites such as the family and the so-called three pillars of the diaspora: townsmen associations, community schools, and community media (Zhu 2008; Li & Zhu 2010, 2011, 2013). In what follows, we examine examples of how language, tradition and identity are negotiated. We choose examples that show how the Chinese in Britain are connected with the Chinese elsewhere in the world as well as the local communities and other non-Chinese diasporas. The focus is on diversity and on-going changes within the Chinese diaspora and transnational connections.

Data analysis

Negotiating language

The following example is taken from an online discussion forum for Cantonese learners. It illustrates the various attitudes towards the changing sociolinguistic landscape of the Chinese diaspora in Britain. It also served as a topic of further discussion in our fieldwork interviews.

▪ hey, ive been learning canto for about 3 months now, im having one to one tutoring with a chinese lady, she was telling me about Phoenix set fire (fong wong wai si) or some chinese sky channel shown in the uk. she actually was a reporter on the channel for quite some time! she was given the job 4 work experience! …..

  Bradley

Here's a reply:

▪ I'd like to say that I wouldn't get Phoenix for learning cantonese, as far as I know, it's all in mandarin now…It used to be CNE, which was all Cantonese, and had one or two reasonable programmes, but it gradually became worse…. It was slowly taken over by mandarin programmes and made the full transition to become Phoenix.

  My parents enjoy watching the other channel… can't remember what it's called, but they get ppl to record the programmes for them. I think my dad likes one of the comedies, I've not watched it, but it seems to be a period set, etc, etc. and there are ppl with lots of wives… and the one that was being watched last night was with two wives realising that they'd swapped their children… Anyway, this channel seems to have a wide range of popular programmes, though I think it has to be good quality since people pay for the pleasure of viewing it…

  Nanimo

Another reply follows:

▪ why do you want to learn canto? You can order your take away in english, can't you? Mandarin, or is it putonghua, is more useful now, unless you are chinese and didn't bother to learn cantonese when you were little. Me neither. But I won't both now. My granddad died last year. no need to speak canto anymore. I'd learn shanghainese if I want to earn a lot of money in shanghai.

  Tony

The Phoenix TV that Bradley is asking for is in fact a Hong Kong-based broadcasting company that produces programmes in both Cantonese and Mandarin. In 1999, it launched the Phoenix Chinese News and Entertainment Channel, also known as Phoenix CNE Channel or PCNE, based

in London, now broadcasting 24 hours via satellite across Europe. Initially PCNE largely transmitted programmes made in Hong Kong. Therefore a considerable number of them were in Cantonese. But as the channel expands and the audience of the channel changes, more and more programmes are in Mandarin. Indeed the majority of the entertainment programmes now seem to be soap operas and costume dramas made in mainland China. The main Phoenix TV channels, and other television channels from Hong Kong, mainland China and Taiwan, can be received with special subscription, or via the internet. The fact that all these different channels are available to the Chinese diaspora in Britain and in Europe is a good example of the connectivity globalization has provided. Although communities are physically scattered in different places across the globe, they are connected virtually and the information and cultural flow is both instant and constant in all directions. The Chinese in Britain can know immediately what is happening in China and Hong Kong, or elsewhere in other Chinese communities if they wish to do so.

What we are interested in here, however, are the responses by Namino and Tony, which may well represent the attitudes of many overseas Chinese towards the changing hierarchies of the Chinese languages and the increasing hegemony of Mandarin. Namino makes a link between the quality of the programmes on PCNE, which is said to have gone 'worse', to the change of language from Cantonese to Mandarin. The change seems to have affected the family, as the parents have to switch channels to receive 'good quality' 'popular programmes' in Cantonese. But there is also a little resentment that they have to pay extra 'for the pleasure of viewing' the channel. While Namino's reply may be seen as nostalgic, grieving the loss of prestige of Cantonese, Tony's response seems on surface to be much more upbeat. Yet the loss of Cantonese is more personal to him, as it was what connected him and his grandfather. In many immigrant families, the grandparent factor is crucial in the maintenance of the heritage language. Younger generations feel obliged to learn and use the language to communicate with the grandparents. When they pass away, the language goes with them. Yet, it appears that different languages have rather different fortunes in the diasporic environment. National languages seem to have a much better chance of survival across the generations, as in the case of Mandarin/Putonghua. Tony's remark on learning Shanghainese further shows his awareness of the socio-economic changes that are happening elsewhere in the world and within China itself.

When we showed these extracts from the online forum to the participants of our study during our fieldwork interviews, many shared the same sentiments that are expressed in Namino's and Tony's responses. One interviewee in his 60s said (English translation),

- Things have changed so much in the last twenty years. All the signs in Chinatown are in Mandarin now. I have to guess what they mean. The other day I went to the travel agent, the girl spoke to me in Mandarin. I said I don't speak Mandarin, only Cantonese. She said she didn't know Cantonese. So we had to speak English to each other. I've been here for nearly 40 years. Now I have to learn Mandarin like my grandchildren.

When he said 'all the signs in Chinatown are in Mandarin', he meant that they are in simplified characters that are predominantly used in mainland China. Cantonese is still represented in writing largely with traditional complex characters. As mentioned above, the maintenance of literacy in Chinese — the reading and writing of Chinese characters — especially amongst the British-born generations is by far the biggest challenge to the Chinese diaspora worldwide. Many of the British Chinese can speak and understand but cannot read or write Chinese. The complementary schools the community has set up are for the teaching of Chinese literacy. But there is a debate as to whether the schools should teach the complex or the simplified characters. There has been considerable media discussion in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan over the issue of meaning as represented in the complex versus simplified characters. Traditionalists often argue that the complex characters

contain more information or are better representations of the original meaning of the logographs. Some commentators from Taiwan and Hong Kong where the complex characters are still being taught, have gone so far as to suggest that simplified version as practised in mainland China makes young people appreciate less of the Chinese cultural heritage, ignorant of their cultural roots, and even disrespectful of Chinese cultural values. This is an ideological position which may in part be motivated by a desire for political and cultural autonomy and resistance to the geopolitical hegemony of China and linguistic hegemony of Putonghua (see also Zhu Hua & Li Wei 2014, and Li Wei & Zhu Hua 2010, 2011, 2013). The debate has wider repercussions, as the overseas Chinese diasporas feel that they are caught in the middle and have to choose between the two. One of the teachers at a Chinese complementary school in Manchester told us,

▪   If there was time, we would teach the children both the complex and the simplified characters. But they are already very busy. And it is hard enough to learn any character. We teach a mixture — if the complex character is too complicated, then we teach the simplified. Of course some parents are not happy about it. They want us to teach the complex characters that they know. But let's face it: the children are not going to be reading a lot of things in complex characters in the future, if they can read at all.

At the heart of the matter is a debate over traditions and identities. Should the overseas Chinese keep the same traditions and identities as those in China and Hong Kong, or Taiwan, or should they develop their own? How should they deal with the fact that their so-called places of origin are going through immense socio-cultural changes themselves?

Negotiating tradition
The next example we want to consider is an extract of an interaction recorded in a Chinese family in Newcastle, between a 17-year-old British-born Chinese boy and his immigrant parents in their 40s. The recording was made as part of an earlier project on multilingual intergenerational conflict talk (Zhu Hua 2008). The son and the mother are having a disagreement over what the family should eat on Christmas day.

Father: 怎么回事，你们？
           'What's the matter, you two?'
Son: 爸, do you want turkey for Christmas Day?
           'Dad, do you want turkey for Christmas Day?'
Mother: 他非要吃turkey。
           'He insists on having turkey.'
S: How can you have Christmas without turkey?
M: Turkey多难吃啊。
           'Turkey is so unpalatable.'
F: 你想吃什么？
           'What do you want to have?'
M: 我说吃鱼，他非不。吃什么都行。包饺子、烤鸭。
           'I said fish, but he says no. Anything will do. Dumplings, roast duck.'
S: 哎呀，it's not Chinese New Year, you know!
           'Ai ya, it's not Chinese New Year, you know!'
M: So what?
S: 吃turkey是tradition, 你不是最讲tradition吗？
           'Eating turkey is tradition. Are you always talking about traditions?
F: 什么tradition呀？那是因为人多，turkey大，可以feed好多口人。
           'What tradition? It's because too many people. Turkey is big and it can feed lots of people.'

M: 就是。咱家这俩半人，吃什么turkey呀，一点味都没有。
    'That's right. We only have two and a half people. Why do we eat turkey? It's tasteless.'
S: 没味是做的不好，不是的turkey的事。
    'Tasteless is because of bad cooking. Nothing to do with the turkey.'
M: 我做的不好，你来呀！你也孝顺我们俩一次。
    'If my cooking is bad, why don't you cook? You can have a chance to show us your filial piety.'
S: 哎呀，我不是说您做的不好。
    'Ai ya, I didn't say your cooking was bad.'
F: 行了啊，你妈做什么你就吃什么吧，少多嘴。
    'That's enough. You eat whatever your mum cooks. Don't say too much.'
S: Shall I go to Chris' then?
F: Why?
S: If you are not having Christmas, I'll go somewhere else.
M: No, we are a family. You stay with us.
S: But you are not having Christmas.
F: Of course we are having Christmas.
S: Shall we have turkey then?
F: We are not Christians. We are Chinese.
S: Turkey isn't Christian food. It's Christmas food.
F: But you are Chinese, aren't you?
S: I'm British Chinese.
F: So are we. British Chinese is still Chinese.
S: Whatever.
M: 过节你不跟家人过，你去别人家干嘛？
    'How can you not stay with the family on a festive day and go to other people's house?'
S: Is that one of your traditions?
M: Yes!
S: Well, why can't we have turkey then?
M: Turkey不好吃。
    'Turkey is not palatable.'
S: There we go again.
F: 行了行了行了。Talk about it later.
    'Enough, enough, enough. Talk about it later.'

Space limit does not allow us to unpick all the details of the exchange. What seems clear in the extract is that the 17-year-old thinks eating turkey is a tradition for Christmas in Britain, whereas the parents, especially the mother, regard Christmas as just another festive day, and on festive days, the Chinese would eat fish, roast duck and dumplings. Indeed, turkey is hardly ever eaten in China. The son challenges the mother by suggesting that if she is really keen on maintaining traditions, as she apparently talks about, then turkey is a must. The parents, on the other hand, do not accept having turkey on Christmas day as part of their tradition. What they do insist on, however, is the son's staying in the family on festive days. Such discrepancies across generations in what tradition is about are not at all uncommon amongst diasporic families. The parents often use such occasions to try to socialize the children into what they believe are the traditional Chinese ways of life (see an analysis of similar examples from a language socialization perspective in Zhu 2008). But the children often insist on what they see as the right way in contemporary British society. The disagreement between the generations, as illustrated in the example, also raises the issue of who they perceived themselves to be. It seems that they all agree that they are Chinese, but the emphasis is rather different. The son appears to stress the Britishness in his identity, in contrast to his parents' 'British Chinese is still Chinese' position.

The identity question is one that faces all diasporas, to which we now turn.

Negotiating identity

One incident that occurred during our fieldwork observation in a family in London. The family was watching 英国华人达人秀 (*Yingguo Huaren Daren Xiu*), a talent show of British Chinese people on satellite television. The son Chris, who is in his early 20s, is a university student. He had some friends from the university, also watching the show together with Chris's parents. The term 英国华人 (*Yingguo Huaren*) in the title could mean British nationals of Chinese ethnic origin or Chinese in Britain. The young men present seemed to have taken the first meaning and assumed that contestants would be either British-born or permanently based in Britain. When they discovered that some of the contestants were from China and were students like themselves, they made comments such as 'She shouldn't be in the show. She's not British.' Chris' mother questioned them about their comments and argued that the show was meant for any Chinese in Britain. But the young men felt that the show should restrict the contestants to British nationals of Chinese origin. With their comments, the young men are performing acts of differentiation. We see ideology at work here: Who is a British Chinese? What is British Chinese? — questions also raised by the family in the exchange we saw above over turkey. When one contestant appeared on the screen, one of Chris's friends commented that she was half Korean. Chris' mother asked how he knew that. Chris joked, '*Cos her flat face.*' Chris' mother, a fan of Korean TV soap operas, told him off. It turned out that the contestant that they were talking about was in fact Chinese of Korean ethnic origin. When Chris' mother later said that another friend of Chris's, not present at the gathering, looked 'very Korean', Chris retaliated, '*That's so rude, mom. Are you saying he has a flat face?*'. These remarks demonstrate the ever shifting boundaries these young people maintain in their identity presentation. It is never simply Chinese versus non-Chinese or them versus us. They have a sense of belonging to a broad category of Chinese people, but they want to accentuate their individual identity and maintain the diversity amongst the group.

When we talked to Chris and his friends afterwards about their views on identity. All of them expressed a strong desire to emphasize individual identities rather than group identity as Chinese students. One of them, Stephen, who was born in China, but lived with his parents in New Zealand and Singapore before settling in Britain, said,

▪   It's kind of complicated. You can't tell people the whole history, your life story, all the time. Anyway, it's kind of past. I'm here in London. So I'm a Londoner.

When further probed whether he would identify himself as Chinese, he said,

▪   With non-Chinese people, I do. But they think I'm Chinese Chinese, like, I'm from China. Well I was. But I'm also from New Zealand and Singapore. I'm not from China Chinese.

Stephen's resistance to being taken as Chinese in generic terms is echoed by another friend, Roland. Here's an extract from a conversation between Roland and the first author,

Roland: People who know us know what we are. But you do get 'Here's that bunch of Chinese guys' sometimes.

LW: Do you mind that?

Roland: Uhm… yeah. Well I don't care, really. But I don't say here's a bunch of English guys or Indian guys. It's not very nice.

LW: Racist?

Roland: No, not racist. It's kind of…lazy.

LW: Or ignorant?

Roland: Yes, ignorant, and a bit rude. I wouldn't say because they are all British, they are all the same.

LW: But it's simpler, 对不对 (*dui bu dui* 'isn't it'), to just say you are Chinese, and you don't give all the details.

Roland: 可是 (*keshi* 'but') they don't know that. Sometimes they just think we are Chinese because we look Chinese. Or they hear us speaking something they don't understand. Well, 有时候自己也不懂 (*you shihou ziji ye budong* 'Sometimes we ourselves don't understand.'). (Laugh) So what? And they think my Japanese friend is Chinese. That's pretty annoying.

LW: 对你日本朋友 (*dui ni riben pengyou* 'To your Japanese friend?')

Roland: Well, me too. I don't want to be called Japanese. I know they are not calling me Japanese. But they think we are all the same. That's pretty annoying. We are not. We are Chinese Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese, American Chinese, British Chinese.

LW: So you want to be different. Is that important for you?

Roland: Not so much different from the Brits. We are different anyway. But we are also different between us.

Similarly, Chris has talked about the significance to him of being recognised and accepted as British Chinese, rather than simply Chinese.

Chris: I don't mind called Chinese. I am. But I'm British Chinese, not China Chinese or whatever you call it. When I'm with my friends, we are all 中国人啦 (*zhongguo ren la* 'Chinese people' + PA), happy happy. Friendly and all that. Cool. But we are also different.

When he was asked when he would emphasize the difference and when the similarity, here's what Chris said,

Chris: It's like people think we are all students, right? OK, we are. But we are not in the same uni, and we are not doing the same subject. So I can say I'm a student. But then I couldn't be bothered. If you want to be my friend, then you need to know a bit more. Make a bit of effort, and understand that I'm not just 中国人 (*zhongguo ren* 'Chinese person'). …… With my friends, we definitely know the difference. We don't mind the differences, cos everybody's different. But we know we are from different countries. We have different habits. Speak different languages, well some times. Some are pretty loud. Kind of embarrassing. But we are mates. We kind of know each other well. And it's good that we are different. Kind of boring if we are all the same, right?

One can see in these examples that the young men are struggling to describe themselves in ready-made categories. They recognise the complexity in one's identity choices; they realise the need to present themselves differently to different people in different contexts; and they are also aware of the value of having different people in their social networks. They do not want to fit in any prescribed identity boxes (Fanshawe & Sriskandarajah 2010).

The young men also expressed their annoyance that they get asked by other Chinese people, usually short-term visitors from China, where they were from. Here's what Chris said,

Chris: We are all different. Chinese are different. If 老外 (*lao wai* 'foreigners') ask you where you are from, it's OK. Cos they kind of don't know anything about us. Chinese should know we are from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Guangdong, or America. ABC (American-born Chinese), BBC (British-born Chinese), CBC (Canadian-born Chinese). There is no point asking. If you are Chinese, you could be from anywhere.

The last remark by Chris — *If you are Chinese, you could be from anywhere.* — epitomizes the transnational Chinese people's awareness of the superdiversity in the Chinese diaspora and their sense of belonging.

Summary and conclusion

The examples we have analysed in this article are chosen to show that diaspora is one of the best sites for the examination of the impact of globalization on the cultural dynamics and values of communities and their individual members. In particular, diasporas are heterogeneous in many aspects, not the least because of differences in social-political history, languages, allegiance and identity within each diasporic community. Diasporic communication is therefore multilingual and intercultural and crosses time and space. It is a real life issue facing a large number of the world's population today. The examples have shown how language, tradition and identity are negotiated within the British Chinese diasporic context. Whilst we have not attempted to present the data analysis from any specific theoretical approach, the examples are clearly open to examination from the perspectives of language socialization, linguistic ideology, multicompetence, translanguaging and linguistic creativity, as we have done in our publications elsewhere (Zhu 2008; Li, 2011; Li & Zhu 2010, 2011, 2013). Our main objective here is to emphasize both the connectivity that global diasporas such as the Chinese has, the information and cultural flows that go with that connectivity, and the individualities that members of the diaspora feel obliged to accentuate in specific conditions. New linguistic practices, new cultural traditions and new identities can emerge from tensions between global and the local, the connectivity and the individuality, and the past and the present. They invite applied linguists to pay more attention to this area of research. In turn, applied linguistics can contribute to diaspora studies by offering detailed analysis of the linguistic, cultural and identity negotiations in everyday interaction of members of diasporas.

Increased transnational movement in the 21st century can only mean that diasporas will be expanding and becoming even more diverse. Dynamic multilingual and intercultural communication in the diaspora will be an important topic for applied linguistics research. From the exampled that have been examined in the present article it seems clear that not everyone benefits in the same way from the opportunities of linguistic and cultural contacts that diasporas offer. Moreover, there will be competing ideologies and values that demand a careful distribution of resources by the individual and their communities. While anchoring in the here and now, diaspora's inevitable links with the past, and across locales, are crucial dimensions in their imagination and everyday practice. In analysing the details of everyday multilingual and transnational interaction, applied linguists make a significant contribution to diaspora studies generally.

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