At the intersection of gender, language and transnationalism

Ingrid Piller and Kimie Takahashi, Macquarie University

Introduction

In this chapter we explore the ways in which issues of language and transnationalism play out on the terrain of gender and sexuality. We are particularly concerned with the gendered nature of transnational migration and the unequal distribution of access to linguistic capital. Contemporary gender theory is informed by the idea that gender *intersects* with other aspects of a person's identity, such as class, race or nationality (Burman, 2003; Staunæs, 2003; Valentine, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2007). It has long been recognized that gender discrimination may be compounded by race, class or age discrimination. However, rather than considering these as add-ons where one compounds the other, *intersectionality* describes a fusion of subjectivities:

> […] gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different
> historical contexts, and […] gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and
> regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes
> impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in
> which it is invariably produced and maintained. (Butler, 1990: 3)

Thus, our concern is with the ways in which gendered identities are produced and maintained in transnational contexts and how they are intersected by linguistic ideologies and practices. It is the aim of our enquiry to establish how social exclusion or inclusion is achieved

at the intersections of gender, language and migration. We believe that the merit of a focus on intersectionality lies in its ability to illuminate power effects, as Brah (1996: 248) points out:

> What is of interest is how these fields of power collide, enmesh and configure; and with *what effects*. What kinds of inclusions or exclusions does a *specific articulation of power* produce? That is, what patterns of equity or inequality are inscribed; what modes of domination or subordination are facilitated; what forms of pleasure are produced; what fantasies, desires, ambivalence and contradictions are sanctioned; or what types of political subject positions are generated by the operations of given configurations of power? (italics in the original).

Such an approach is particularly suitable to an inquiry into intersectionality in transnational contexts, which themselves can be characterized as consisting of "multidirectional flows of desires, people, ideas, and objects across, between and beyond national boundaries" (Constable, 2003: 215f; following Appadurai, 1990). Our view of language is similar in that we also see it a circulating resource, or, as Heller (2007: 2) explains: "a set of resources which circulate in unequal ways in social networks and discursive spaces, and whose meaning and value are socially constructed within the constraints of social organizational processes, under specific historical conditions."

Our paper is structured around two spaces which we identify as key transnational spaces that are simultaneously highly gendered and where language and migrant status serve to inscribe social exclusion. These are reproductive work and the commodification of sexuality. Our reasons for choosing these particular spaces and structuring our paper around them are two-fold: to begin with, we recognize that there are significant linguistic challenges involved in each of these spaces but, at the same time, while there is some existing work to draw on,

these spaces have nowhere near received the attention of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics research that their importance warrants. Second, although a key space where gender, globalization and language intersect, we have chosen not to concentrate on language and language education per se because a fair number of overviews have been produced in recent years (e.g., Pavlenko & Piller, 2001, 2007; Piller & Pavlenko, 2004).

From "women's work" to "migrant women's work"

Recent years have seen a significant expansion of the care and service sectors. Reproductive work – that is traditional women's work – has undergone significant transformations in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Qualitatively, reproductive work such as child care, aged care, cooking or cleaning used to be predominantly domestic work. However, in many developed countries there has been a significant shift to outsource such work outside the home to childcare centers, aged care facilities, catering businesses or cleaning chains. Quantitatively, the need for reproductive workers has increased substantially as women have taken on paid work outside the home and thus have less time to spend on unpaid reproductive work. Furthermore, the expansion of the leisure and tourism industries has resulted in the creation of new types of reproductive work or at least has resulted in a substantial expansion of work such as hotel cleaning. As a consequence of the transformation and expansion of reproductive work, it is no longer only women's work but more typically migrant women's work - "a structural relationship of inequality based on class, race, gender and (nation-based) citizenship" (Parreñas 2001, p. 73). In developed countries, migrant women have taken on a substantial share of reproductive work, often to the extent of dominating certain sectors. Migrant women may undertake reproductive work in domestic environments as maids or nannies (e.g., Anderson 2000; Chang 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Parreñas 2001, 2005) or in institutional environments as childcare workers, aged care workers or nurses

(e.g., Francis, 2008; Isaksen, 2007; No author, 2008; Pulvers 2008) or hotel cleaners (e.g., Adib & Guerrier 2003; Adkins 1995).

The experiences of migrant reproductive workers are profoundly embedded in linguistic and communicative inequalities. Anderson (1997) points out that migrant women, who join the global care chain as domestics, are neither likely nor expected to speak the language of the people they are serving. As Piller and Pavlenko (2007; in press) suggest, limited or non-existent proficiency in the majority language may even work to the advantage of employers by creating "the pretence of distance", rationalizing reproductive workers' inferiority and maintaining their unequal status as in the case of a Filipina domestic worker in Toronto, who described her Canadian employers as follows: "They think you're as stupid as your English is!" (England & Stiell, 1997). Inability to communicate with the person that the workers care for may also add psychological stress to an already strenuous domestic situation (Raijman et al. 2003).

At the same time, migrant women's linguistic backgrounds or even a lack of proficiency in the local language can be an asset in some contexts. For instance, Filipina reproductive workers are more in demand than their counterparts from other countries of origin because of their ability to speak English, a highly privileged form of linguistic capital internationally (Piller & Pavlenko, 2007; in press). For instance, Lan's (2003) ethnographic study of foreign domestic workers in Taiwan demonstrates fascinating negotiations of power and identity between Filipina domestic workers and their newly-rich Taiwanese employers on the terrain of English language proficiency. Lan (2003) shows that it became trendy to hire Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan as the English learning boom there intensified (Chang, 2004). Thus, the ability to hire a Filipina domestic worker, who can speak English and teach it to the employer's family, boosts the social and class status of newly-rich Taiwanese. Many of the Filipinas Lan (2003) interviewed, and who had not been maids back home but often were college-educated and even had professional work experience, felt humiliated and conflicted

about their position. However, they also capitalized on their English proficiency as a means of resistance against the positions in which they found themselves. One maid said of her employers: "They have more money, but I can speak better English than most of them." (Lan, 2003, p. 150). Lack of English proficiency on the part of the employers on the other hand clearly undermined their authority – they found it difficult to make requests of their employees in English, so much so that one employer ended up doing the work herself while another had to invest time in improving her English in order to express dissatisfaction with her maid. The domestic workers also gained a sense of superiority over their Taiwanese employers by either correcting their English or joking about their employers' poor English with their friends, as in this example:

> My employer called from the office and said, "Luisa, twelve hours, don't forget to EAT my children!" She actually meant, "twelve o'clock, don't forget to FEED my children!" [laugh]. [oh my God. Did you correct her?] No. Some employers don't like that. So I just answered, "Don't worry! I already EAT your children!" (Lan, 2003, p. 154)

While jokes may provide some temporary release (Constable, 2003), they act as a "hidden transcript" (Parreñas, 2001, p. 194) to be performed amongst their fellow country women. In interactions with their employers, they mostly follow the expected script of deferential performance and engage in linguistic resistance "with disguise and caution" (Lan, 2003, p. 154) for fear of losing their job. In fact, Filipina domestic workers in Taiwan are rapidly being replaced by supposedly more "docile" Indonesian workers, who are less capable of making demands due to their limited ability to speak English (or Chinese). As Lan (2003, p. 156) points out, this provides an aspect of the harsh reality where "language becomes a means of symbolic domination to consolidate the employer's authority and silence the migrant workers".

Because of its unregulated nature which often leaves migrant women at the mercy of their employers, many transnational migrants in the global "care chains" aspire to institutional rather than domestic reproductive work. Lack of linguistic proficiency often becomes a key obstacle to such aspirations – despite the fact that not all institutional reproductive work calls for substantial linguistic skills. This is particularly true of cleaning work. In hotels, for instance, migrant women of color are often assigned the "invisible" – and hence also unheard – positions of chambermaids (Adib & Guerrier 2003; Adkins 1995). Adib & Guerrier (2003: 420) describe how women's work in hotels is stratified along ethnicity and national background: while receptionists' work – which also has an element of caring and is heavily feminized – is "White women's work" in British hotels,

> […] ethnic minority and migrant workers are clustered in the lowest graded work in the hospitality industry […] and it is common to find that all the chambermaids in a hotel are drawn from the same ethnic minority or migrant group. While reception work is 'respectable' women's work, therefore, chambermaiding is not constructed merely as women's work, but as work to be undertaken only by certain groups of women.

Access to "respectable women's work" in such contexts is ostensibly a matter of skills, qualifications and experience. However, as Adib & Guerrier (2003) point out, "front-line" reproductive work – in their case study receptionist work - is often also framed as "White women's work" and women of color face substantial barriers. In a context where racism has largely become invisible and a majority of White people consider themselves and their societies to be non-racist or post-racist (Hill, 2008), linguistic proficiency can sometimes substitute for racial or national discrimination. Racial and/or national discrimination are often illegal and individual employers may genuinely feel themselves to be non-racists. Linguistic discrimination, however, is often a common-sense proposition, and it "just so happens" that

non-standard speakers – people "whose English isn't good enough" – usually happen to be minority members, and, even more importantly for our discussion, transnational migrants (see Lippi-Green 1997 for an excellent overview of linguistic discrimination in the USA).

As a result of their lack of linguistic proficiency, skilled migrants frequently experience downward occupational mobility (for a recent overview in the Australian context, see Berman, 2008). In sectors such as nursing – another profession that is no longer just women's work but migrant women's work – the very nature of the transnational workplace – full of migrant workers – may even mitigate against language learning. The story of Nadia, a Latvian immigrant nurse in Norway, exemplifies this well:

> Last Friday I suddenly realised why my Norwegian still is so limited. Taking a look
> around the table I saw women from Poland, Ukraine, Bosnia and Africa. Only two
> ethnic Norwegians work in my unit. Even if I am a trained nurse I have to work as a
> nurse's aide until I can speak Norwegian more fluently. (Isaksen, 2007, p. 54).

Language testing is the sub-discipline of applied linguistics that to date has responded most consistently to the linguistic challenges posed by labor migration. The development and implementation of tests such as the Occupational English Test (see http://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/), a language test for overseas qualified health professionals necessary to practice in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, or more generic language tests such as IELTS and TOEFL, is motivated by a duty of care vis-à-vis citizens and employers of receiving countries, and particularly clients in (health) care contexts. These are obviously the constituency of the nation states and registrations boards who assign a gate-keeping function to language tests such as these by making them mandatory requirements. At the same time, one of the main features of contemporary transnational migration is that the care workers themselves and their rights and needs often fall through the cracks as they are

neither backed by the developing, or even failed, states from which they originate nor the receiving countries for which they are often little more than a human resource in their market place and disposable non-citizens.

Despite a long tradition of language training for employment in many immigrant-receiving countries (e.g., Lo Bianco, 2008 or Martin, 1998 for an Australian program; Goldstein, 1996 for a Canadian program; Holmes et al., 2008 or Newton, 2007 for a New Zealand program), most of this work focuses on the production sector or business contexts. There is a distinct lacuna of programs and materials that offer language learning support to migrants doing reproductive work. An excellent material is a multimedia language teaching resource produced for aged care workers in Australia (Springall, 2007), which is based on intercultural pragmatics (particularly Wigglesworth & Yates, 2007; Yates, 2008) and ethnographic work conducted by the author in the aged care industry. During the fieldwork, it was particularly four language and communication issues that emerged where targeted training was needed. First, there was an apparent lack of small talk: while many of the Australian residents appreciated their African and Asian carers because they were very respectful towards the elderly, they complained that they never "chatted" with them. Second, there were significant occupational health and safety concerns. The resource therefore has units that focus on how to be proactive about following safe workplace practices such as manual handling and back care; units that suggest strategies how do deal with practices in the aged-care industry that aged care workers may encounter and that may not always be "best practice"; and units that include scenarios where students need to question instructions if they have concerns (rather than the usual workplace language training fare of "following instructions"). A third communication challenge can be posed by the fact that in the aged care industry high levels of duty of care may be placed on workers in entry level jobs or workers who are new to the country and society and thus may not

necessarily be able to distinguish between normal practice in a new culture and malpractice. Finally, the resource also provides pronunciation and intelligibility training.

The sexualization of the world and the commercialization of sex

A form of reproductive work we haven't covered in the previous section is sex work. Like other forms of reproductive work it is typically "women's work". We are devoting a separate section to it not only because its lack of regulation, frequent criminalization and stigmatization raise a range of linguistic issues different from the ones discussed above but also because we want to change tack slightly and approach sex work not primarily from the perspective of applied linguistics but that of discourse analysis, too. We start by briefly providing evidence for the dramatic expansion of the sex industry in the context of globalization. We will then discuss some of the language issues raised by the high incidence of migrant women in the sex industry before we move on to explore how the expansion of the sex industry goes hand in hand with a persistent sexualization of public life: we will focus specifically on the sexualisation of language teaching and learning.

The phenomenal expansion of the sex industry has become a central – even if often ignored – aspect of globalization. Some of the people flows of globalization occur with the express aim to procure sexual services, as is the case with so-called sex tourism (O'Connell Davidson 1995, 1996, 2001, 2004; O'Connell Davidson & Sánchez Taylor 2005). However, more often, the flourishing sex industry is incidental to other forms of movements: for instance, the expansion of prostitution in South-East Asia, particularly the Philippines and Thailand, in the 1950s and 1960s is a direct result of the Korean and Vietnam Wars (Enloe, 1989; Seabrook, 2007); another example comes from the "upper end" of prostitution: Swiss cities with "high-

class" escort services are considered more competitive in attracting business travelers, trade shows and conventions than cities that lack such services (Piller, in press).

Language issues faced by sex workers in transnational contexts bear both similarities and differences with those faced by other reproductive workers. In terms of differences, it is obvious that it is not necessarily the sex workers who are transnational migrants. It is just as likely that it is their clients who travel. As Blake Willies and Murphy-Shigematsu (2008) rightly point out, globalization is happening to individuals even if they are not themselves on the move. While the language of the punter is likely to prevail in the encounter no matter where it takes place, there is a substantial difference in whether the language of wider communication is one in which the sex worker is proficient in, particularly as sex workers are more likely than the general population to face encounters with the police, the legal system, health care providers and providers of social services generally. Migrant sex workers often also have a precarious legal status and lack of proficiency in the dominant language may make them even more vulnerable to exploitation, as described in a study of migrant sex workers in Switzerland (Le Breton & Fiechter, 2005).

In terms of similarities, linguistic proficiency is crucially tied in with the type of sex work that may be available. Sex workers with low levels of proficiency in the language of the punter may find it more difficult to negotiate rates of pay, to insist on safe sex or to negotiate the type of services to be performed. Consequently, non-governmental organizations working with sex workers offer language training focused on these scenarios, as is the case in an English and Japanese language teaching program aimed at sex workers in Bangkok (Seabrook 2001).

At the same time, access to more highly remunerated and less exploitative types of sex work, such as escort services or the provision of telephone sex is dependent on advanced linguistic and communicative proficiency. This is fairly obvious in the case of telephone sex

where an exclusively linguistic service is provided (Hall, 1995). Less obviously, it is also true of physical sex work. First, the most desirable forms of sex work – in terms of working conditions, remuneration, safety, societal stigma, and personal satisfaction – involve a fairly high level of communication services as punters are increasingly seeking a "girl-friend experience" when procuring sexual services (Bernstein, 2005). Having sex almost seems to become incidental in the "girl-friend experience", where the focus is on being pampered, spending time, a meal or a drink together, and, most importantly, talking (Holt & Blevins 2007). As Lucas (2005) shows, US sex workers who can provide a "girl-friend experience" or companionship more generally are likely to be self-employed and express high levels of satisfaction with their working conditions, remuneration, and their work generally. As it so happened, all the interviewees in Lucas' (2005) study were also White, native-born, and middle class, with many of them having college degrees.

Second, personal safety is a major concern for all sex workers, and many of them report that in addition to practical precautions such as not accepting anonymous clients or always having a mobile phone within easy reach, their main way of "handling clients" – i.e. ensuring their personal safety – is through talking their way out of difficult situations (Davies & Evans, 2007). Talking your way out of a violent situation surely requires a complex set of linguistic skills and cultural knowledge – skills and knowledge which migrant workers are less likely to have available to them and which are likely to make sex work more dangerous for them. In sum, the linguistic identities of transnational sex workers intersect with their gender and nationality in such a way as to cluster them in more dangerous, more poorly remunerated and more heavily stigmatized types of sex work. A good example of this process is provided by Filipina women in Japan. Filipinas come to Japan for various types of reproductive work, including sex work and also marriage (see Piller 2007 for an overview of the relationship between sex work and mail-order marriages in transnational contexts). Suzuki (2008) describes

how, since the mid-1980s, Filipinas have come to be seen as problem migrants who are prone to exploit their Japanese partners and who are of shady morals. Another discourse that circulates about them denies them all agencies and sees them exclusively as victims; as victims of their circumstances who are sexually (as well as socioeconomically) subjugated and exploited. In Japan, the term "Filipina" has thus come to refer to an identity where a stigmatized gender, sexual, national and class identity intersect. In an attempt to rewrite their stigmatized identity, Filipinas in Japan are increasingly re-training as English instructors (Suzuki 2008). By becoming community and home based English instructors, Filipinas are partially re-inventing themselves in the Japanese context, where English is typically associated with the powerful West. At the same time, the fact that the teaching course qualifies them as "community and home based instructors" rather than fully-fledged language teachers points to the confined space in which they operate.

The expansion of the sex industry in the context of globalization can be seen as one aspect of a pervasive sexualization of public life in global consumer culture, a phenomenon that has been described as "raunch culture" (Levy, 2005). One aspect of the sexualization of public life is the high visibility of the sex industry itself as, for instance, described by Piller (in press) for Swiss cities. However, sexualization has become a much more pervasive phenomenon at the intersection of globalization, language, and gender, as we will demonstrate with the following two examples of English language teaching programs and materials in Japan.

In Japan's multimillion dollar English language teaching industry, Whiteness and native speaker status are heavily romanticized and sexualized. However, the process works differently for males and females. Male White English teachers are eroticized as sensitive Prince Charmings in marketing aimed at Japanese women (Bailey 2006, 2007; Kelsky 2001, 2008; Piller & Takahashi, 2006; Takahashi, forthcoming). Female White English teachers, on the other hand, tend to be sexualized as exotic sex objects. A good example comes from the

recent introduction of an online English learning service named "*Gaigo TV*" (Jeffs, 2008). Targeting Japanese males, *Gaigo TV* is a form of edutainment that provides multimedia English learning materials which are led by "beautiful, sexy" White women. The job title of these characters, who are allegedly Hollywood models and actors, is "hostess" rather than the more traditional "teacher". In the free sample lesson provided on their website (http://www.gaigo.tv; last accessed on 23/10/2008), the viewer sees a "hostess" in a stylized classroom stripping her clothes off while enunciating the sentences "As an English teacher I do not speak too quickly", "As an English speaker I do not speak too quietly", "As an English teacher I do not take my clothes off too fast" in audiolingual exercise fashion. In our judgment as applied linguists, the language learning value of these materials is close to zero. Consequently, the main reasons for perusing such materials other than curiosity must lie in the cheap sexual thrill they can provide. Their overall effect, however, is to contribute to a pervasive sexualization of White women and English language learning.

The eroticization of English and language learning is also achieved by teaching materials that serve a more clearly defined purpose – the establishment and conduct of an intimate relationship in English. English for Relationship Purposes (ERP) materials are probably the latest addition to the ever-increasing spectrum of English of Specific Purposes (Kubota, 2008; Piller & Takahashi, 2006; Takahashi, forthcoming; Webb, 2007). ERP materials are mostly targeting Japanese women and offer vocabulary, phrases and communicative routines deemed useful for the purpose of conducting romantic and sexual relationships with foreign men. ERP materials are widely available today in various media forms, be it in women's magazines, on websites, as phrase books or multimedia resources. The discourse enabling ERP materials suggests that romantic and sexual relationships with foreign men are a key to success in English language learning and vice versa. The script of intercultural relationships as espoused in these materials is "Meet – Fall-in-love – Have sex – Fight – Marriage or Break-up" and places

the heaviest emphasis on the third step, i.e. "have sex". For instance, 45 out of 117 pages of the English language learning manga *Roppongi English* (Johnson, 2006) are dedicated to sexual interactions. We will now describe *Roppongi English* as it pertains to our discussion of intersectionality (for a detailed analysis see Takahashi, forthcoming).

Roppongi English derives its name from Roppongi, a popular section of Tokyo which is famous for its nightlife entertainment and high number of international visitors. *Roppongi English* is a comic style ERP phrase book with four main characters, who form two heterosexual couples, Tomoko and Kevin, and Naomi and Tony. Tomoko is a "typical Japanese" middle-class university student whose English improves through her relationship with Kevin, a well-educated White American who teaches English in Japan. By contrast, Naomi is a cool bilingual woman of Japanese parentage who grew up in California, and partners with Tony, a divorced African-American DJ and former marine. Kevin emerges as a handsome, considerate and caring gentleman, who uses romantic phrases such as "I fell in love with you as soon as I saw you" (Johnson, 2006, p. 63)" or "I was born to meet you here" (Johnson, 2006, p. 66). Tony, by contrast, is presented as an unsophisticated and insensitive "asshole" (Johnson, 2006, p. 124). Both men take the lead in their sexual relationships but where Kevin is romantic and accommodating to Tomoko's sexual needs, Tony is aggressive, egoistical, and portrayed as a sexual pervert. The two Japanese women's characters are also dichotomised with Tomoko being appropriately feminine and demur where Naomi is sexually demanding: during intercourse she tells Tony "Harder, faster, deeper!" (Johnson, 2006, p. 87).

Despite its setting in the transnational and hypermodern space of Roppongi, *Roppongi English* presents an essentially national and pre-modern version of intercultural relationships: Tomoko and Kevin, the archetypal representatives of Japanese femininity and White American masculinity, enjoy a sexually satisfying and romantic relationship. Tony and Naomi, on the other hand, who as African- and Asian-Americans in Japan embody minority and post-national

identities, are portrayed as sexual perverts who are unable to form a meaningful relationship. As with *Gaigo TV*, the actual language learning value of *Roppongi English* is doubtful. Many of our colleagues with whom we have discussed these materials are appalled by their racism, sexism and/or pornographic nature. Again, like *Gaigo TV*, they may provide a cheap thrill to readers but their overall effect is to sexualize language learning and intercultural relationships in ways that also racialize them and attribute high levels of morality to mainstream characters and low levels of morality to minority characters.

Conclusion

Our focus in this chapter has been on the circulation of both gendered people and gendered discourses. These do not circulate in isolation from each other, nor in isolation from language ideologies and other aspects of identity. The people we focused on are migrant women and the employment they have access to. The employment they have access to is circumscribed by globalized beliefs as to what constitutes women's work. Such beliefs limit both the aspirations of actual people as well as the employment situations in which they are being channeled. Their employment options are further constrained by their linguistic identities, national background and citizenship status. Migration continues to be deeply embedded in gender inequalities both in the countries of origin and in the destination countries. Millions of women, who depart their impoverished homes in South-East Asia, Latin America and Africa, to work in the homes, factories, and sex and entertainment industries of more affluent countries, engage in low-waged women's work (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003) - women's work that is no longer just women's work but has become migrant women's work. The international community has only recently begun to address the needs, challenges, opportunities and rights of migrants at the intersections of gender, race, class and nationality (Farah, 2006; Piper, 2006). The linguistic factor has increasingly been acknowledged as one of the most crippling obstacles to the social inclusion of migrants, leading to various forms of

exploitation and discrimination in the host countries (UNFPA & IOM, 2006a, 2006b); or, to

phrase it differently, "[t]he language barrier seems to be the single most important reason: the

'original obstacle' that hampers all aspects of social inclusion." (Colic-Peisker, 2005, p. 632).

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