

Why (Not) Race? Expanding the Conversation about Language, Race and Power

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This panel engages with the increasing interest in the intersection of language and race that has been central to multiple sociolinguistic traditions, in particular in the ways language serves the racialization of subjects (cfr. Alim, Rickford & Ball 2016; Rosa 2019). It will take stock of this body of knowledge and contribute to the on-going conversation about the ways scholars in sociolinguistics have used race together or in competition with other concepts, such as ethnicity, class or caste as well as gender, sexuality and religion.

Inspired by the groundbreaking work of scholars from North America, this panel presents a variety of perspectives from other parts of the world in a varied set of contexts (security, interpreting, SLA, ESL, media, business, etc.), where 'race' as a concept may historically have different connotations. The focus of this panel is to ask critical questions about the relations between language, race and power (cf. Alim, Rickford & Ball 2016), such as: How is a concept like 'race' reproducing or challenging power relations? Why do social scientists disagree on the use of the concept of 'race'? What is the political meaning of 'race'? How is 'race' contingent on whiteness?

These questions will be addressed in contributions from different sub-disciplines of sociolinguistics, ranging from contemporary, ethnographic and discourse analytically oriented work to more historiographical work on language and race.

References

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Keywords: race, ethnicity, raciolinguistics, intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, discourse

1. The White racial contract, capitalism, language and power.

*Prof. Christina Schoux Casey
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This paper considers how Mills' (1997) concept of the White Racial Contract, together with the capitalist process of simulation (Baudrillard 1994), underpins the contemporary intersection of language, race, and power. Mills writes that the hegemonic Western social order centers on acceptance of the status quo of "color-coded configurations of wealth, poverty, property, and opportunities" and "the pretence that formal, juridical equality is sufficient to remedy inequities created on a foundation of several hundred years of racial privilege" (1997: 73). Overt racism has largely become taboo, so "the Racial Contract has written itself out of formal existence" (73). On the one hand, overt racism has nominally gone underground, while on the other, a separate process detaches cultural objects from their contexts. Baudrillard (1994) suggests that in late Western capitalism, we live in an era of simulation, in which objects, including language, are decontextualized from their history. This allows them to be commodified and circulated. But language that is presented as a commodified simulation can be attached to living speakers, which results in linguistic appropriation. Capitalism decontextualizes living cultural forms, attempting to erase the link with the people who made them. This dismemberment can only be partial because people thwart the efforts to fully commodify their language. But the attempted erasure is still damaging, since hegemonic culture sees the linguistic forms as transparent and consumable. In the West, as a result, through capitalist commodification, we live under a double process that erases White supremacy and erases linguistic context. Using examples from European and American traditional and social media, this paper shows how this double erasure works in practice.

References

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Mills, Charles W. (1997). *The Racial Contract*. Cornell University Press.

Keywords: *racial contract, Baudrillard, capitalism, commodification*

2. (De)coupling race and language: The state listening subject, rearticulation, and antiracist discourse in Singapore

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Harmonious multiracialism is upheld as one of Singapore's national values, yet race relations are almost always in a precarious position. Earlier in 2019, race was again centred in public debate when a government-sanctioned advertisement featured a Chinese-Singaporean actor 'brownfacing' an Indian-Singaporean man, incurring public outcry. An Indian-Singaporean YouTuber, Preetipls, along with her rapper brother, responded with a parody of a hit song Fuck It Up. They criticised the advertisement, claiming that "Chinese people always out here fucking it up", which drew flak from the government and Chinese community.

Following Rosa and Flores's (2017) troubling of the co-naturalisation of language and race, this paper demonstrates the multiplicity of meanings in the phrase "fuck it up". The original song uses it to mean 'having a good time', whereas the parody uses it to mean 'mess things up' in the context of race relations. Lastly, the government construes the phrase as an insult against the Chinese-Singaporeans and the state's multiracial policy. In locating the deemed racial offence by the state, this paper considers the state's response to the antiracist practices of the Nair siblings, and the subsequent labelling of their behaviour as racist. Central to the argument is the introduction of a state listening subject and the semiotic process of rearticulation, where both concepts elucidate the selective (de)coupling of race and language in Singapore that maintains the national racial order.

References

Rosa, Jonathan, and Nelson Flores. 2017. "Unsettling Race and Language: Toward a Raciolinguistic Perspective." *Language in Society* 46 (5): 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404517000562>.

Keywords: *raciolinguistics, metapragmatics, race, Singapore, rearticulation, state listening subject*

3. Constructing ethnicities in racialized structures: the problem of ethnic inequalities in UK Universities.

Mr. Steve Dixon-Smith

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Based on a linguistic ethnography among undergraduate architecture students this paper analyses discursive constructions of identity. Following Bucholtz & Hall (2005), the analysis documents the indexical processes at play as first-year students take up, resist and rework positionings relating to class, race and ethnicity in the course of interactions within the architecture studio and in narrative interview accounts. These processes point to 'orders of indexicality' that are locally valid and recognisable to participants and 'connect microscopic instances of communicative practice to larger-scale political and sociological patterns and structures' (Blommaert, 2007:127).

The analysis takes place in the context of persistent inequalities revealed by ethnic monitoring in UK Higher Education. Whilst this monitoring has raised awareness of racial injustices in education, the problematic and essentialising nature of such framings of ethnicity have long been noted in the social theory of race in Britain (Hall 1996; Gilroy 1992).

Therefore, following Harris & Rampton (2009) in producing contextually-situated linguistic analysis of moments of racialisation/ethnification, this paper aims at providing empirical support for the 'situationally contingent' and 'discursively constituted' understandings of identity advanced by Hall and Gilroy.

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Harris, R & Rampton, B. (2009) 'Ethnicities Without Guarantees: An Empirical Approach' in M. Wetherell (ed.) *Identity in the 21st Century*'. Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

Keywords: *race, ethnicity, linguistic ethnography, indexicality, identity*

4. Tracing race in the West. A genealogy of race and ethnicity beyond a biology/culture dichotomy.

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In most Western European countries, after World War II race has become a taboo subject in public debate, and 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group' are the preferred terms to address differences that are informed by culture, language, religion or other symbolic affiliations. Despite recent efforts to theorize race and ethnicity (cf. Alim, Rickford & Ball 2016), the difference between the concepts of race and ethnicity remains unclear. Therefore, this paper seeks to bring transparency about what we talk about when we use race and ethnicity. In order to do so, it seems necessary to trace the 'North Atlantic' history of modernity, imperialism, colonialism and capitalism (Trouillot 1995) and how these processes shaped 'regimes of truth' (Hall 1992: 225) that have forged the unequal relations between 'the West' and 'the Rest' (Hall 1992). In doing so, this paper seeks to address the dissimilar analytical value of race and ethnicity, beyond a dichotomy between supposedly biological and cultural differences. This is necessary in order to address power and to gain a better understanding of processes of inequality that are historically and at present informed by ideas of language, next to religion, biology, class, gender, sexuality, and illegality.

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Keywords: *race, ethnicity, history, critique*

5. The Chinese interpreter's race in Anglo-Franco Canada.

Ms. Julie Tay
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This paper draws on an ongoing ethnographic study of Chinese interpreters in Toronto to illustrate how *race* continues to hold sway in the context of what is an emergent, neoliberal linguistic market of a fast globalizing Canadian society. Based on in-person interviews and participant observation, the study examines how language workers, self-identified as *Chinese* and working variously as medical, community, and court interpreters vie for legitimacy and work opportunities in the day-to-day of language services. Here, intersecting with *culture* and *authenticity*, the concept *race*, and specifically raciolinguistic and racialized values, determine who gets hired to serve whom, what languages (or dialects) get translated, and ultimately, who controls the criteria by which interpreters are tested and assessed, certified, doubted, or dismissed. For Chinese interpreters, *race* is both ascribed and achieved: *race* is stretched and morphed from moment to moment, veiled or exaggerated — when the interpreter juggles inherent attributes of voice, skin tone, hair, and the smell of one's lunch in the constant battle for acceptance, or when the manager pre-screens language workers according to the spelling of their surnames; or when the judge mistakes the defense lawyer for the interpreter who in turn slips away to take another assignment. Then again, as an ascribed (often imagined) attribute of heritage and legacy, *race* hovers over interpreters in the all-enveloping persona of the *native speaker* of English, and here we find a fraught, ideological resurgence of nativism *and* white supremacy that appears to uphold Anglo-Franco Canada in spite of the official rhetoric of a 'multicultural' society. In this climate the Chinese interpreter-worker must both embrace and decry *race* and the *nativespeaker*.

Keywords: *race, interpreter, native speaker, Chinese, English*

6. The whiteness of English: Racialization and English language policy in South Korea.

Dr. Andrienne Lo
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Dr. Lee Jin Choi
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This paper examines several sites of racialization in English language policy in South Korea. It examines state run programs (e.g. EPik, TaLK) which place English language teachers in primary and secondary schools (Jeon 2012; Shin and Lee 2019); proposals floated by politicians to drastically limit the importation of foreign English teachers; and visa restrictions and guidelines that formulate the racialized figure of the *neitibeu seupikeo* ('native speaker') English instructor who operates in both the private sector and in state-sponsored educational settings (Wagner and Van Volkenburg 2012). Through a review of English language policies under the past two decades of *seggyehwa* ('globalization'), we examine how the racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed figure of the *neitibeu seupikeo* has been seen both as a disease ridden moral menace and a necessary tool in the achievement of the modernist globalization project. By tracing the sedimentation of links between whiteness and English, this paper examines how racialization has become naturalized in discourses of globalization in South Korea, and how figures of English, including the international student, the GI, and the returnee are all permeated by racializing colonialist discourses.

Keywords: *racialization, language policy, globalization, South Korea*