ETHNIC IDENTITIES AND LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS:

LANGUAGES, LITERATURES AND CULTURAL INTERACTION IN AN AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

民族认同和语言表述

主编 林精华
Ken Henshall
Xiao Hong

人民文学出版社

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——全球化时代的语言、文学和文化认同

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In late August 2005, the Faculty of Arts at Capital Normal University in Beijing and the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand, coorganized an international conference "Cultural Interaction and Nationalism: International forum on Languages and Literatures in the Age of Globalization". More than forty participants abroad as well as over thirty domestic participants attended this conference and delivered papers. This collection of papers is the result of that conference, which are selected from the conference presentations for their representations of the themes on globalization, national identity, nationalism, and national cultural interaction.

The success of the conference and the publication of this collection owe much to the financial support from the Project 211 of the Faculty of Literature at Capital Normal University and the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Canterbury, the cooperation between colleagues of the Department of Comparative Literature in the Faculty of Arts at Capital Normal University and of the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Canterbury, and the support from the many domestic and overseas scholars, including Zhang Zhongzai, Guo Hongan, Liu Yiqing, Liu shusen, Yang Huilin, Wang Keping, Yang Hengda, Chung Ling, Kwok-

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Lin Jinghua
Ken Henshall
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Language and Identity in an Age of Globalization

RONALD WARDHAUGH
(University of Toronto)

【Abstract】 After two centuries in which ideas about "nationalism" have tended to dominate the world's political landscape, we are now confronted with another major idea, "globalization". This idea is not necessarily a new one because another earlier form of it, "imperialism", has long been influential. However, the globalization we are currently experiencing raises an interesting set of issues having to do with the concept of "identity", that is, how we shape and experience our lives individually and collectively. How do we create identities in a "global village" rather than in a village in China, a town in Africa, a city in the USA, or a country such as Canada? If language has been and still continues to be one of the key components of identity formation, how can individuals and groups create identities if the language one speaks is either endangered, as are most languages today, or subject to the encroachment of certain major languages such as English? Does the "death", that is, the loss, of many languages and the spread of a few privileged ones threaten identity formation? Does the current language situation in the world threaten the way humans have always experienced life or is it just another ex-

ample of evolution at work, with the concept of "fittedness" this time applying to language? Is the variety of human identity-formation we find currently so heavily dependent on the existence of a wide variety of languages that language death as a corollary of globalization could fatally restrict socio-cultural and human variation?

Recently I spent a considerable amount of time thinking about issues having to do with language and society as I worked on the fifth edition of my *Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (2006). More than in previous editions I became concerned with issues of identity and power. I saw identity as a major unifying theme in the book, previously implicit now to be made explicit, and power—some may even want to use that current fashionable word *empowerment*—as the motivating force. I realized that together they united a set of topics that appeared to be otherwise somewhat unrelated. While working on this project, I was also very conscious of the fact that I was living in an era rather different from that in which I wrote the very first draft of the book more than 20 years ago. The new era is a much more global one. The world seems to shrink with each passing day. Marshall Mcluhan's "global village" (Mcluhan and Powers 1988) has arrived and I am living in it. Events in one part of the world now affect people everywhere: 9/11 in 2001; SARS in 2003; the tsunami in 2004, to cite the most memorable ones. What does this mean for language in general and for specific languages? How will it affect the formation of human identities? What might become of languages and identities in the new global village, a phrase that gave me 23 million hits when I typed it into a Google search?

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Language, is, of course, humankind's most defining and enabling characteristic. It elevated us above every other species, and it has enabled us to construct much of the world we have come to know, a world of different states, organizations, cultures, beliefs, hopes, loves, hates, and so on. It is a world, too, of many languages, although fewer at this time than even in the fairly recent past. There are perhaps 6,000 different languages in existence. Estimates vary going as high as 6,500 and as low as 5,000, for no one really knows since there is no simple metric that allows you to say where one language begins and another ends. However, as David Crystal has indicated in *The Language Revolution* (2004), perhaps as many as half of these languages are not expected to survive the 21st century. He himself refers to the phenomenon as "language death" in a book with that title (2000). Crystal deplores language loss as do many of those who actually speak the languages, but most feel powerless to do anything about it. However many languages there are and no matter what condition they are in, they are spread among the 191 states in the world, "nations" itself being a misnomer for the United Nations is an organization of states not nations. Within these states there is an enormous diversity of languages and identities, a diversity sometimes viewed as parallel to the biodiversity we find in the world, with the concomitant claim than any reduction in the world's language diversity would be a tragic loss to humankind and its possibilities. A number of prominent linguists hold such a view, among them Peter Muhlhausler in *Linguistic Ecology* (1996), Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine in *Vanishing Voices*

(2000), and David Crystal (2004). As I was writing these words, I happened to come across the lead article in my local newspaper, the (*Victoria*) *Times-Colonist*, on 29/05/2005 entitled "*The Last Man on Earth to Speak Nuchatlaht*" Alban Michael speaks this Wakashan language on Vancouver Island but, unfortunately, he has no one left to speak it with. The point of the article is that not only is the language about to be lost but also the special world view that this language provides. I will return to this point later.

In contrast to such decline and loss we must note that a few languages have thrived in recent decades with English the most successful, the result of a series of historical events not all of which were actually benign: 19th century colonial expansion; the development of economic and military power; the language's association with science, technology, and communications; and a certain "accidental" universality of distribution. David Crystal (2004) estimates that today a quarter of the world's population has some reasonable knowledge of English with more than half of these not being native speakers of the language, which is a remarkable fact indeed. Of no other language can this be said nor could it ever have been said! English is a global language today like no other. Some commentators, for example, Robert Phillipson in *Linguistic Imperialism* (1992), regard it as a kind of "killer" language, an imperial force dominating and subjugating every other language with which it comes into contact. Does the global spread of English in an era when so many other languages lack the resources to grow or even to survive threaten identity-formation? Will such language globalization ultimately limit human possibilities? Are we all going to end up as

clones in some kind of Orwellian future-world gone global?

Now I do not subscribe to what has been called the Whorfian view of the relationship between language and culture, that is, the view that the language we speak structures reality for us and that each language therefore produces a special world view in those who speak it. (Rigid adherence to such a view would seem to require you to believe that bilinguals are schizophrenic!) While I deplore the loss of language diversity just as I deplore the reduction in biodiversity that we are witnessing, losing languages does not mean losing language! As I have said, language is humankind's most defining characteristic. So long as there is at least one language—and I suggest there will always be at least one language—I cannot see such language loss as a threat to identity-formation and cultural diversity or how it would seriously reduce the choices we have. I do not think that speaking English or Chinese or Japanese or any other language either uniquely privileges or strongly determines how a speaker views the world. I would suggest that if indeed there is an English or Chinese or Japanese way of viewing the world, this is a cultural matter not a linguistic one. I know that others do not share this view; however, I have never seen any solid evidence to support their claims.

Identity is a cultural matter. We get our identities from the "imaginary communities" in which we exist, from a need to belong and to form relationships with others, for, after all, humans are social beings. Phillip Wegner's *Imaginary Communities* (2002) is a very interesting discussion of the nature of identity in the modern world, particularly its formation in relation to views of nationalism.

One lesson to be learned is that history shows that identities must be constantly remade. In his brilliant history of Paris, Colin Jones (2004) makes that point explicit. He says that for centuries people have fashioned and refashioned a Parisian identity: it is always distinctive but never the same, changing as it does from era to era

There are identities of all kinds and numerous factors go into their formation. Identities are constantly shaped and reshaped every which way and sometimes completely changed because a person's identity is hardly ever fixed; individuals are extraordinarily complex and quite adept at modifying and reconstructing not only their bodies but also their minds. Language can be, of course, an important component of identity; it can certainly act as an overt marker that cuts off speakers of one language from those of other languages thereby creating an easy us-versus-them identification. However, other factors are often just as potent in identity-formation: religion, caste, tribe, clan, or social class; and physical appearance such as physique, skin or hair color, eye shape, that is, the so-called race—ethnicity parameter. Then, too, gender, occupation, geographic location, that is, the exact place where you live, as local as whether you live in town or in the surrounding countryside, may also be important.

Most of the factors that I have just mentioned operate on a large scale to create identities for large groups: Japanese, Catholics, Blacks, Cockneys, etc. Sociolinguists also look at how identities are created and maintained in small groups through network connections, as in the work Lesley Milroy describes in various books (particularly Milroy and Gordon 2003), or in "communities of prac-

tice", as described in Pierre Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) and Penelope Eckert's *Language Variation as Social Practice* (2000). Individuals participate on a daily basis with others in activities that bring them into contact, either loosely or closely, in activities that have various goals that must be realized in well-defined ways. Our identities are largely constructed through the day-to-day, hour-to-hour, minute-to-minute requirements of living with others.

Ideology is important too: how you are brought up to view some factor X as being more important and self-defining than factors Y or Z, that is, of being American not Chinese or Japanese, of being a Christian not a Muslim, or of being a Protestant not a Catholic. In a very interesting book entitled *Who are We?* (2004) Samuel Huntington points out the ideological nature of the United States. He enumerates the key elements of American ideology as the English language; Christianity; religious commitment; English concepts of the rule of law, the responsibility of rulers, and the rights of individuals; and the dissenting Protestant values of individualism, the work ethic, and the belief that humans have the ability and the duty to create a heaven on earth. He regards the growth of multiculturalism, the failure of assimilationist policies, the spread of other languages than English, and the interest of elites in international pursuits as factors that are currently undermining this ideology. To a citizen from a neighboring country which encourages and prizes all of the latter in what little ideology it has this does not seem to be a wise prescription for existence in a world that has too much ideology rather than too little.

Identities can also be strong or weak, strong enough in many

parts of the world to lead people to kill each other on a regular basis. And, as Jonathan Swift showed so cleverly in *Gulliver's Travels*, fratricidal inter-group conflicts can arise over the most trivial issues—however, they are always called "matters of principle"—in his case whether one should crack open an egg at the big end or the small end. Identities can also be fairly weak, non-ideological, accommodating, and tolerant, but no less important for that. A peaceful global village would seem to require its inhabitants to have weaker rather than stronger identities.

It is power that shapes and determines identity: the attractions and compulsions of one set of factors over all others: of an ideology; of a political or social system; of the accumulation of goods; of a particular calling or career; of a belief in some cause or in some kind of after-life; and so on. An identity empowers you in that it enables you to find your place in the world—and perhaps even in the next one. However, I would suggest that power itself is best understood in Darwinian / Spencerian terms: the "fittest" survive in such an evolutionary view, the "fittest" in terms of adaptation and not the "best" in terms of any kind of "moral" values. Indeed, such values may be counter-productive. Those who adapt survive; those who do not fall by the wayside. In this view we have the identities we have because they have survived all the possible other identities we might have had. However, that does not guarantee that these identities will survive through the next phase of social evolution. Identities must continue to evolve. They are a basic necessity of the human condition. Globalization merely offers us a new stage on which they must develop.

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