

Chinese in a superdiverse world

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1. Introduction

This paper attempts to address the changing status of Chinese language(s) as well as its relations with other languages and language varieties in China and its diaspora. Contemporary globalization brings, among other things, new patterns of sociolinguistics, characterized by ‘superdiversity’ (Vertovec 2006, 2007; Blommaert & Rampton 2011; Creese & Blackledge 2010). The notion of superdiversity is forged to describe the increasingly complex flows of world migration as well as the impacts of such phenomena on the urban environments of the host societies (Vertovec 2006). We observe, on the one hand, the emergence of English as a global super-language (de Swaan 2001); and on the other hand, smaller languages being repositioned in relation to English, and new linguistic hierarchies being formed and formulated (Calvet 2006). Most of the literature on such reshuffling phenomena is devoted to English. Less attention is given to the ways in which languages other than English are gradually gaining worldwide currency. The Chinese language is a remarkable case in point. China is at the heart of current globalization processes, and its increasing global involvement causes new linguistic patterns both internally in China and externally in the rest of the world. Inside China, we observe a general process of Putonghua (standard Chinese based on Mandarin Chinese) becoming a dominant language in both urban centers and peripheral areas; and in Chinese diaspora Mandarin emerges as a lingua franca and gradually pushes Cantonese to the margins (Dong & Dong 2011; Li & Juffermans 2011; Li Wei 2010). This paper aims to bring together examples that empirically document some of these processes and to shed light on the changing mutual relations between Chinese and other languages as an effect of superdiversity in a rapidly globalized world.

Our empirical data come from a diverse range of social contexts and appear in a variety of modes. These diverse examples, however, share important similarity in that they all point to the emergence and enregisterment of Mandarin Chinese as a legitimate language inside China as well as in the Chinese diaspora. Moreover, all examples demonstrate the superdiverse linguistic reality in urban spaces, within and outside of China, as an immediate consequence of mass migration and globalization (cf. Dong 2011). Before presenting and analyzing our data, an outline of the paper is in order.

Our first case (Section 2) focuses on the transnational migration of Chinese in the Netherlands. We look at the changing conditions and contexts of Chinese in the diaspora, in particular to Chinese as a language of complementary education in the Netherlands. Our discussion here draws on data of ongoing ethnographic fieldwork in and around a Chinese school in Eindhoven as part of a larger European project investigating discourses of inheritance and identity in the context of globalization and superdiversity in Europe.

In the second case (Section 3), we turn our attention to the mass internal rural-urban migration of China. As a result of economic and social transition, China has undergone phenomenal population movements within the country’s national borders in the last three decades (Dong 2011). Such population movements give rise to a rapid increase in linguistic and cultural exchanges in urban China, and result in more complex sociolinguistic

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environments in which regional accents and dialects become salient markers of identity, projecting prestige and opportunity, or stigma and inequality.

Case 3 (Section 4) demonstrates such linguistic and cultural complexity in rural China. It describes the rise of consumerism in Enshi, a small town in rural Central China. We show some interesting sociolinguistic phenomena as evidence for the early stage of the globally expanding consumer culture that caters for both individual needs and spatial reconfiguration for an urban imaginary in Enshi, driven by the ideology of consumerism in a globalizing era. It focuses on how English, or a certain image or idea of ‘English’ (cf. Seargeant 2009), is applied in relation to Chinese, the language of the local consumers.

Our final case (Section 5) is an instance of online communication to illustrate the complex semiotic processes taking place on the Internet for means of identity-making and communication. It looks at ‘Martian language’ -- a type of newly emerged Internet language mainly adopted by Chinese adolescents born in the 1990s (the ‘after-90’ generation, or Digital Natives – children and young people who have grown up with Internet as part of their lives). It is clear that shared understandings emerge in different different linguistic and other semiotic means of meaning-making that conform to the expectations of other users and successfully communicate to desired ends. Let us look at our cases more closely.

2. Chinese at large: the changing Chinese in the Netherlands

The Chinese are one of the oldest established immigrant communities in the Netherlands. Their current number is estimated to be between 77,000 and 150,000. The first Chinese in the Netherlands arrived as seamen around the turn of the century and gradually settled in the harbor districts around Amsterdam and Rotterdam. A second wave of Chinese migrating to the Netherlands, in the postwar period (1950-1970), settled in the Amsterdam and Rotterdam Chinatowns as well as in other Dutch cities, towns and villages throughout the country, typically finding employment in the Chinese (take-away) restaurant business. They often had complex (family) migration trajectories migrating via Hong Kong, Vietnam, Java, Sumatra, Suriname and other regions, which are reflected in their equally diverse linguistic repertoires. Due to the fact that migration from and to Mainland China was rare between 1949 and 1976, Mandarin played only a marginal role in the diaspora. The Hong Kong (and Guangdong) Chinese represented 70 percent of the Dutch Chinese until the 1990s (CBS 2010: 6). Until the 1990s, therefore, Cantonese, the language of Guangdong and Hong Kong, was the dominant language and lingua franca of the Dutch Chinese diaspora. It was this language that was taught and learned in Chinese schools until the 1990s. After 1978 and increasingly noticeable in the 1990s and 2000s, the composition of the Chinese community in the Netherlands begins to change due to the political and economic changes in Mainland China. More and more Mainland Chinese (mainly students and knowledge migrants) find their way into the Netherlands. Although most of them are only temporarily residing in the Netherlands, they make an important economic, cultural and sociolinguistic impact on the entire Chinese community in the Netherlands. They now come from all over China (literally from any province) and bring with them a variety of home languages (‘fangyan’ or dialects), but more importantly also a common Chinese language (Putonghua) that has been ‘enregistered’ as the normative spoken standard in Mainland China in the last decades (see Dong 2010). As a result, from the 2000s onwards it is no longer Cantonese that is the language of the Chinese in the Netherlands, but increasingly Mandarin (Putonghua) that is recognized as ‘the Chinese language’ in the Netherlands diaspora. As part of this development, Chinese schools in the Netherlands today have almost entirely shifted to teaching Mandarin (Putonghua) and

simplified characters, where this was Cantonese and traditional characters when most schools were founded in the 1970s.

These changes in what counts as Chinese in diaspora schools bring along increasingly diverse and complex relations in the classroom, e.g. in the interaction between first generation migrant teachers and 1.5th², 2nd and 3rd generation migrant or post-migrant students, as well as in the relation between the curricular material and the linguistic knowledge of the teacher. In the context of our research, we grew to see the teachers as a highly heterogeneous, ‘unstable’ group of people. Teachers often had complex sociolinguistic biographies, involving sometimes dramatic and traumatizing language shifts during certain phases of their lives, and were often, as teachers, in actual fact, language learners.

Consider the following fragment from an interview conducted in the summer of 2011 with first generation migrant Jessie, who is a logistic manager for a local company and was a voluntary teacher at the Chinese school of Eindhoven from 1999 to 2003.

Table 1 Transcript of Jessie’s interview

Jessie	我大概是7岁的时候因为父母工作的调动和父母一起搬到到广州的。	I moved to Guangzhou with my parents at the age of 7 because of my parents’ job.
JLi	然后7岁的时候随父母工作调动到广州的。你那时到了广州上小学，学校上课是用普通话还是广东话？	Ok, so you started your primary school in Guangzhou. Did the teachers use Putonghua or Cantonese at school?
Jessie	我们的小学是这样子，上课是用国语，但同学们之间的交流都是广东话。我刚去的时候听不懂。那时候广东人都是看港台，都不看大陆台。但是上课老师虽然普通话很蹩脚，但还是讲普通话的，除了像体育呀。这样的课。她那普通话我刚去的时候听不懂。所以我可以说是外来移民。	In our primary school, the teaching was in Mandarin, but pupils communicated among each other in Cantonese. I couldn’t understand when I just arrived there. Guangdong people also watched Hong Kong TV channels, they didn’t watch mainland channels. But in the class, even though the teacher’s Putonghua wasn’t that fluent, but they did use Putonghua, except for subjects like gymnastics. I could barely understand the teacher’s Cantonese style Putonghua.
JLi	后来就要学广东话？	I was a migrant in Guangdong. So you had to learn Cantonese?
Jessie	我刚到广东的时候可害怕了，街上全是讲广东话，我去读小学的时候，就是说除了学校和家里的环境可以讲讲普通话之外，你要走在街上你不会讲广东话，你要丢了，家都找不到，特别是小孩。所以非常害怕，要努力学，努力学习。看电视，那时候还不好意思开口讲，因为你一讲，有口音嘛，给人笑。我读小学的时候呢我一般不敢开口讲，很自闭的。我读初中后，因为没人认识我，不知道我是外来的，我就是以一个完全会讲广东话的人出现。没人质疑我是外来的。但是发现到了初中很多人都不说广东话了。	It was very scary when I just moved to Guangdong. You could only hear Cantonese on the street. School and home were the only two places where you could speak some Putonghua. If you got lost on the street and couldn’t speak Cantonese, then you were not able to find your way home. So it was very scary if you were just a little kid. So I had to learn Cantonese very fast, by watching TV as well. At that time, I was also very shy to speak, because once you opened your mouth, you had an accent in your Cantonese, so people laughed at you, so I dared not to speak and had autism until I went to secondary school, because there no one knew that I was a migrant. And I found in the secondary school not so many people spoke Cantonese anymore.
Jessie	后来我中学考的比较好到了重点中学，到了重点中学就更没人说广东话了，交流都不讲广东话。大家交流都是讲普通话。这是我的	I went to a key secondary school and people didn’t speak Cantonese at these schools, even among each other. I had a feeling, if people couldn’t speak

² Coined by Ruben Rumbaut in the 1970s, the term 1.5 generation refers to persons who immigrate to a new country before or during their early adolescents. They earn the label the “1.5 generation” because they bring with them characteristics from their home country but continue their assimilation and socialization in the new country.

- 心理：一个普通话讲不好的人，一定没受过什么好的教育，特别是你要考过高考的话，没有一个好的语言教育，你是考不过那些试的，所以从语言上可以判断一个人的教育程度。到了大学反而又换过来了，到了大学呢，大家因为没什么压力了，又开始讲广东话了。
- JLi 好，我们现在回到荷兰。你以前在安多分的中文学校教过书。
- Jessie 教过，教粤语，教过4年从99年开始。
- JLi 那时中文学校粤语班多吗？
- Jessie 有好几个，学校都是以说粤语为主。
- JLi 现在中文学校都没有粤语班了，都是普通话班。
- Jessie 就是，早就该没粤语了。
- JLi Hmm
- Jessie 知道吗，我那时候教得很痛苦。书是繁体字，教简体字。
- JLi 怎么有这种？
- Jessie 因为当时也可以教繁体字，但有些班里学生家长的意见，他们觉得简体字比繁体字有用。当时我们的课本都是台湾提供的，没有简体字的课本。
- JLi 所以当时中文学校的课本都是台湾提供的。
- Jessie 是，以前我们都是10月10号台湾的国庆节，我们都是去台湾的大使馆吃饭。有很多这样的活动。
- JLi 这些年的变化很大。
- Jessie 是，我们以前教的都是广东，香港移民的孩子。现在都是大陆那边的。我以前没有接触香港那边的教材，其实台湾那边的教材用广东话教是教不出来的。有些国语的音用广东话教是教不出来的。所以教得很痛苦，用的是台湾的教材，教的是粤语的发音，写得是简体字。
- Putonghua well, then they didn't have much education, especially for those who had experience with school exams. It's my thoughts: If your Putonghua is not very good, you won't be able to pass all the exams. So you can judge one's educational level from their language use. Later, when I got into the university, things changed again, because we didn't have so much pressure, so we started to speak Cantonese again.
- Ok, now let's go back to the Chinese in the Netherlands. You had been teaching Chinese in the Chinese school in Eindhoven?
- Yes, I taught Cantonese for 4 years since 1999.
- Were there many Cantonese classes?
- Quite a few. Cantonese was the dominant language.
- There is no Cantonese class anymore in the Chinese school.
- Yes, should have done that earlier.
- Hmmm
- You know, it was very painful for me to teach at that time, because the textbooks were in traditional characters but you had to teach the children simplified character writing.
- How come?
- Because some parents requested simplified character teaching; they thought it was more useful. But our textbooks were provided by the Taiwanese government, so they had no simplified characters.
- So the teaching materials were provided by Taiwan.
- Yes, We also celebrated the Taiwanese national day on the 10th of October by going to the Taiwanese embassy to have a meal there.
- Things have changed in the last decade.
- Yes, my students were all of Guangdong and Hong Kong origin. But now the students are from all over China. I didn't have experience with the textbooks provided by Hong Kong. What I experienced is that the teaching material provided by Taiwan couldn't be used to teach Cantonese, because some pronunciations in these textbooks couldn't be pronounced in Cantonese. For instance, rhymes in the Mandarin poetry don't have the same effect in Cantonese. So it was very painful for me to teach Cantonese pronunciation while using the Taiwanese textbooks and teaching simplified character writing at that time.

Jessie underwent traumatic language change in her own lifetime: the forced transition towards Cantonese in her childhood left her intimidated and scared (“it was very scary when I just moved to Guangdong”; “I dared not to speak and had autism”). Community pressure marginalized her as a speaker of Putonghua and accented Cantonese. Yet, the school exam system pushed her peers towards intense efforts in Putonghua, because “if your Putonghua is not very good, you won’t be able to pass all the exams”. And then, when she started teaching after migrating to the Netherlands as a graduate student, she saw herself confronted with the strong polycentricity of Chinese: Cantonese had to be taught using Taiwanese textbooks, raising linguistic and literacy issues that she found hard to maneuver, the more since the parents demanded the teaching of simplified script to their children. Her teaching experience dated to a decade ago, probably the very early stage of the process of language shift we currently see in full force. Right now, she observes a conflict between old and new styles of teaching, due to the fact that China sends teachers and teacher trainers to the West to streamline and/or ‘improve’ Chinese teaching.

In the school, differences between ‘old’ teachers and newer ones directly from China were striking. While the older generation of teachers tended to have a rather relaxed and tolerant attitude during teaching sessions (and were themselves sometimes struggling with Putonghua), new arrivals displayed an outspokenly ‘native’ teaching style, with emphasis on rigor, discipline, and monological teaching. The point of these observations is that the ‘input’ provided by teachers during the Chinese classes is in itself a conflict-ridden and polycentric feature: not always without contradictions and contestation, and not always unambiguous in terms of learning. The teachers themselves bring along a baggage of complex sociolinguistic biographies themselves, matching the complexity of those of their students.

This brief discussion of teaching Chinese in the Netherlands points at a series of fundamental aspects about language teaching and language in general in “the Global Now” (Appadurai 1996: 2). Chinese, or any language for that matter, is not a fixed object or entity that people can simply learn to use but is dynamic, changing, contested, in transformation. Languages are moving targets. Chinese as a language has a long history of export and mobility, of being exported “to the world” by Chinese migrants from the late 19th Century until today. This has resulted in divergent configurations of language diversity overseas and at home, that are converging in the current wave of globalization characterized as superdiversity. If we understand current globalization as the compression of time and space through increased flows of people, goods, images and money as facilitated by technologies, then we can understand how developments in the diaspora are reflecting in intricate ways developments in China. The analogy with Appadurai’s *Modernity at Large* is the following: like modernity, standard Chinese (Putonghua) also “declares and desires universal applicability” (p. 1) for itself (within an imagined Chineseness), but like modernity, Chinese at large is “irregularly self-conscious and unevenly experienced” (p. 3). Studying Chinese sociolinguistics helps us look at “the world as one large, interactive system, composed of many complex subsystems” (p. 41) and at processes that are of a larger scale than nations and states. This leads us to the second point.

Chinese, when seen (cf. Pujolar 2007; Heller 2007) at large, is fundamentally polycentric. This holds true for other languages as well (see e.g. the chapters in Clyne 1992), but Chinese presents an extreme case. To say that a language is polycentric means that it has multiple centers that exercise varying degrees of influence on what constitutes Chinese. Old centers are replaced by new ones. Where Guangdong, Hong Kong and Taipei were the centers from where books were imported in the diaspora until a few decades ago, it is now increasingly Beijing that determines the destination of Chinese. This, however, is unfinished business, an ongoing process.

Finally, in superdiversity, language teachers have to deal with increasingly diverse audiences in their classrooms who have increasingly diverse motivations and purposes to learn a language. If Chinese can be called a heritage language for second and third generation Chinese children in the Netherlands, then that is only a part of the picture. Chinese is globalizing. Chinese schools are increasingly attracting non-Chinese learners that are interested in learning the language as a foreign language because of its value on the job market. This is true also for many Chinese heritage children who are native speakers of Dutch and are learning Chinese not only as a language of their cultural heritage but also as a foreign language that is beneficial for their careers.

3. Chinese internal migrants and their discursive identity construction

Our second case comes from one of the ‘central’ space in China, where public discourses are produced by peripheral people in an urban center (cf. Dong 2011 for Chinese mass internal migration). Public sphere discourses are traditionally found in newspapers, magazines, radio broadcastings, TV programs, and so forth. The invention and popularization of the Internet, a remarkable phenomenon of globalization, increasingly provide people with an electronically mediated platform of information exchange and communication. In addition, the Internet has restructured the public space, notably through new genres such as the web forum, the ‘Facebook’ phenomenon and the blog. In all these cases private voices become publicly available, and we get new genres of public information exchange that defy traditional definitions of ‘mass media’.

The following example is an online news report about an incident between eight migrant workers and a bus driver that occurred in a city of the Pearl Delta Region, one of the leading economic regions and a manufacturing centre of China. Migrant workers across the country are gravitated into this region by its booming manufactory industries. The reported incident attracted much public attention and was soon cited by various websites, mainly Internet forums for discussions and debates. We shall first present the translated news story, and then focus on one telling debate entry which argues against the migrant workers. However, it is important to bear in mind that many debate entries support the migrant workers and argue for their rights and equality.

On 11 January 2009, in a city of the Pearl Delta Region, migrant construction worker Mr Cai and seven of his co-workers took a bus. The bus driver and some passengers required Mr Cai and his colleagues to change clothes, because their clothes – the overalls for construction work – were covered with wet paint and dust. The two sides had an argument, and Mr Cai rang the bus operation company to complain. He was informed via phone about the service regulation that people who wore besmearing clothes should not get on a bus. Mr Cai indicated that he and his co-workers initially felt sorry that they had to wear stained overalls on the bus; but they felt that the way the bus driver and the passengers spoke was discriminating and insulting, which led to an argument. The bus driver said that he did not discriminate against Mr Cai and his co-workers; the bus was very crowded and he had to act for the sake of other passengers. He believed that the construction workers misunderstood him and that this had led to the row. (Translated news report)

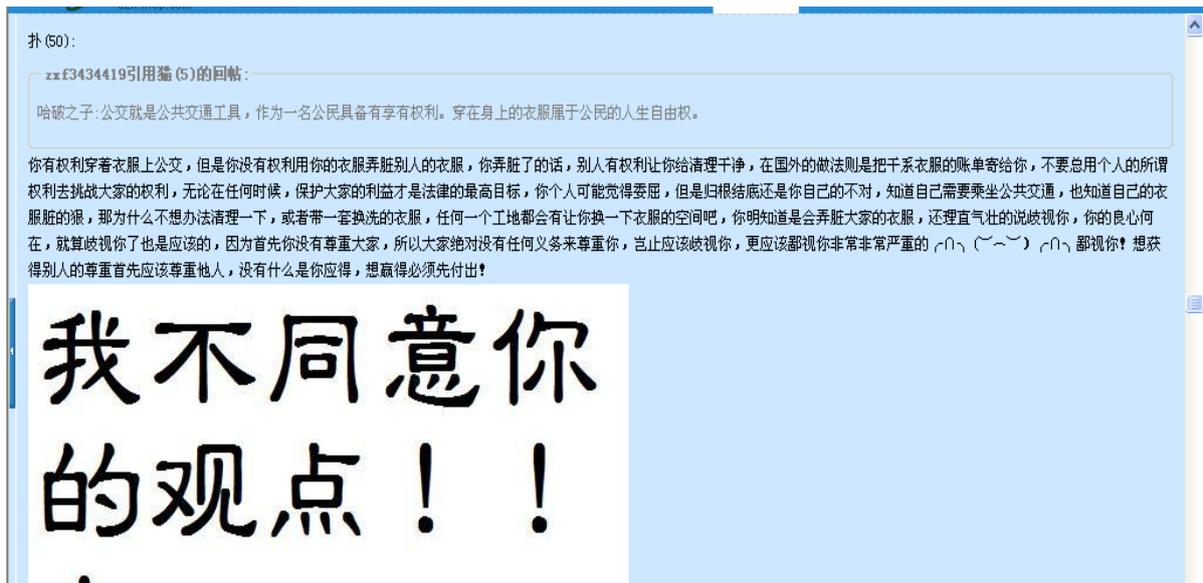


Figure 1 An online forum response to the news report
(The sentence in smaller font on top of the response entry is a citation of an earlier response)

Translation:
 You have the right to wear (any) kind of clothes and to take a bus, but you don't have the right to make others' clothes dirty. If you do, others have the right to require you to clean (their clothes). In other countries they would send you their dry cleaning bills. Don't challenge the rights of the public with your own so called right. Whenever it is, the ultimate aim of the law is to protect the rights of the public. You may feel unfairly treated, but after all it was your own fault, you knew that you had to take a bus, and you knew that your clothes were dirty. Why didn't you try to clean them, or to bring other clothes with you for change. You knew clearly that you would make others' clothes dirty (in such a crowded bus), and you still asserted that you were discriminated. What your moral standard was? You didn't respect others in the first place, and therefore others didn't have the obligation to respect you... There is nothing you deserve. Win respect with your own effort! (In the prefinal line there is an inverted smiley with signs of contempt. The sentence with a bigger font in the white space says "I don't agree with you!!")

The news story describes a conflict between eight migrant workers and a bus driver. The incident might seem accidental; however, the fact that it attracted much public attention and debates (thanks to the Internet which makes private voices public), whether arguing for or against the migrant workers, suggests that it was hardly an isolated accident, but rather an expression of the increasingly tense relationships between urban citizens and migrant workers.

Did the bus driver and the passengers discriminate against the migrant workers? Was it essentially a moral problem of the migrant workers? Was the bus company's regulation discriminating? People's opinion on this topic vary. The selected debate entry for data analysis argues against an earlier response, which says "A bus is a public transportation tool; every citizen has the right to use it. Every citizen has the freedom to wear (what he wants to)". The sentence in the white space of the later response reads "I don't agree with you!!" Being put in a much bigger size and a different font, and against a white space to contrast with the shallow grey background of the rest; it is an image rather than a text. The reader has to combine both visual and textual techniques in decoding this image. This multimodal sign implies a strong feeling of the author against the earlier response. The use of a double exclamation mark underscores this interpretation. These visual characteristics can be seen as the declaration that attracts the reader's attention to its textual part.

The textual part is in the same size and font as that of other responses. It uses the second person pronoun 'you' throughout the text referring to the migrant workers. The use of the second person pronoun, instead of the commonly used third person pronoun, makes the statement a direct address to the migrant workers and adds to the message a flavor of reproach. What is striking here is the way that 'you' – the migrant workers – and 'others' – people in the urban space – are formulated as two distinctive and contrasting groups: 'your' right of taking a bus, 'your' duty of not making 'others' clothes dirty, and 'others' rights of requiring 'you' to clean their clothes. In this specific case the 'you' and 'others' distinction is a distinction between the migrant workers on the one hand and the bus driver with his passengers on the other, and both identity categories are rigidly defined.

Further in the text, an imperative/prohibitive expression "don't challenge the rights of the public with your own so called right" is used to signal a command or a prohibition. When interfering with the 'public right', the migrant workers' right to use public transport is reduced to the 'so called' right, not a 'real' right. The 'public right', the right of the passengers not to have their clothes stained in an orderly modern world, is not an issue in question. It is guarded by the law, as argued by the response writer, norms, and other tools of institutional control and surveillance, such as the bus company's regulation. It is the migrant workers' fault, the response writer argues, that they were being told off, for their behavior is a deviation from the normal patterns of conduct. The migrant identity is thus abnormalized, or at least the deviant behavior of the migrant workers is abnormalized, and the abnormalization, here, is articulated around the migrant workers' physical appearance (cf. Foucault 2003 for 'abnormalization'). The abnormality lies not in the 'strangeness' or the 'unusualness' of migrant workers present in cities; they are many in number and they enter into encounters with urban citizens on a daily basis. Rather, the abnormality lies in their transgression of the social norms and their introduction of disorder into the modern social world.

Our analysis of this case is not about who was right and who was wrong; it is not even relevant to make a judgment on whether the bus driver was discriminating or the migrant workers were ill-mannered in the public space. What we want to show is the abnormalization of the migrant identity articulated in the discourse, and the emphasis of the Internet messages on the social order and norms that sustain the modern urban world. The debate entry cited here illustrates the rigidity and inflexibility of identity categorization in the public sphere, where people invoke general social rules of normal and abnormal, and invoke such categorical notions as social class, ethnicity, and place of origin. In this example we also want to show that, although people are free to choose what to wear, how to speak, what identity to claim, there is always a limit to this freedom of choice; what people choose is constrained by the unequal resources available to them. It is probably more revealing to consider why such resources are not available to them – the migrant workers could have opted for a clean outfit before taking the bus, but that tacit norm was not available to them, and their – as well as the bus driver's – choice of discursive and non-discursive activities are determined by the general patterns of social inequality on a macro level

4. Look-a-like language

Our third case is taken from Enshi, a small town in the Central China, to show how language is affected by globalization and consumerism in the peripheral space. Consumerism is one of the global ideoscapes (Appadurai 1996): a set of images, symbols and meanings that have acquired global currency over the past number of decades. In modern China, consumerism is a relatively recent phenomenon, and consequently, consumerism in China offers us a privileged view of the early stages of globalization. This example explores consumerism in

Enshi in central China. Until only a few years ago, Enshi had been perceived to be a poverty-stricken place in need of steady subsidies from the central and provincial government. With China's successful economic reformation and participation in the globalization processes, Enshi is also striving to shake off the old image of poverty, isolation and backwardness and actively engaging with the 'flows' and 'scapes' of people, money, goods, ideas and images in globalization (ibid). One such flows and scapes that has taken a peculiar sociolinguistic presence in Enshi is consumerism, an increasing desire to purchase and consume materialistic and service products as a way of fashioning self and group identities that is reinforced and spread from the capitalist west through globalization.

In commercial environments, especially in low-tiered places in the global system such as China, shops and goods labeled with English (and 'Englishness' conveyed in other semiotic modes) are often strongly associated with an imagined western lifestyle and cosmopolitanism, hence appear to be more prestigious and appealing to (certain) buyers (e.g. Tian & Dong 2011; Wu 2010). What is consumed in choosing goods represented in English, therefore, is not only the material item per se, but also the semiotic-symbolic resources that can offer more upward mobility potential for individual consumers and the space where such consumption takes place. In such processes, an economic act, i.e. buying or selling commodities (especially those that are mediated by English, the code of globalization) is simultaneously an identity act, i.e. "I am what I buy".

However, like other resources and elsewhere, the distribution of English is rather uneven in Chinese society, with highly educated and internationalized groups of elites concentrated in cities and those who are barely literate with minimum access to English at two ends of the continuum. In Enshi, where globalization processes started only very recently, English is still a scarce and expensive type of resource. For the majority of the local people, school education is admittedly the most egalitarian if not the only way to obtain basic levels of English. And in public spaces, the sight of English is not always easy to find, except for specific spaces of urban clusters such as the Enshi City.

Already we can see that English, with the social prestige it carries, has indexically demarcated this small city, be it authority, knowledge or wealth. Outwardly, the increased display of English and creation of socially meaningful spaces by its emplacement may help contribute to the projection of an image of Enshi being an upcoming, 'real' urban space; but inwardly, this picture is more complicated and, on this point, we refer mainly to the type of English use that are found in the inner city shopping streets.

For Chinese products to take on an English look, the signage designers make use of a range of semiotic modes of communication, including the sound, the meaning and the shape of English which are backed up by other relevant visuals and symbols that may culturally or socially index a degree of 'Englishness'. Such practices are adopted by large corporative companies, all the way down to small local shop owners, with some imitating the 'original' and others inventing from scratch. We present one example, 'Dohia', by way of illustration.

Dohia is a home textile brand specializing in modern (i.e. western) style bedding and soft furnishing textiles. In Enshi, it is mostly known as '多喜爱' (*duoxiai*, literally 'much, happy, love') by the locals, and is priced in the top range of the local market. With living standards improved, the city home living style in Enshi is becoming much closer to that of the bigger cities and urban centers. The last five years have seen the introduction of the western-styled sofa unit, the built-in kitchen and seated toilets into wealthier family homes. The bedroom is also an important living area where more and more young couples and families with good income would opt for a modern stand-alone mattress-bed and matching products (from shops like 多喜爱) to decorate it with elaborately-packaged bedding sets in finely-woven cotton and fashionable prints. Just like 'to choose a house means to choose a lifestyle' (Fleischer 2007), to choose the design of the inside of one's house and to choose which

products will be used for that design are also powerful indexicals of one's lifestyle and social identity. 多喜爱 (the 'Chinese' name known by the consumers), or Dohia (the 'English' name the company represents itself in), as we will see below, has given careful considerations to how a particular image of itself that is associated with 'English' or 'Englishness' is projected, through its semiotic production of signage.

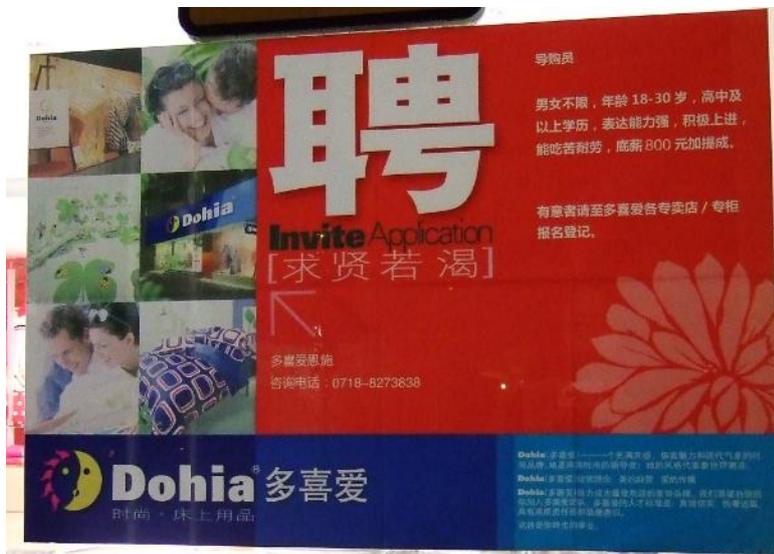


Figure 2. Dohia

This eye-catching poster of a job advertisement was found in the window of a major branch of 多喜爱 at the north end of the shopping district in Enshi. The poster is advertising for shop assistants to work in its, presumably local and expanding, chain stores, as indicated in the contact details it provides: the Enshi branch office and telephone number. The advertisement is divided into two color blocks, with a red block featuring a large area that occupies most of the top right, and two panels along the left and bottom of the poster that are dominated by (different shades of) deep blue. In the top-center of the poster, there is a large, heavily emboldened, white-colored Chinese word '聘' (employment), below which are printed in smaller sizes one line of English, 'Invite Application', in black ink with 'Invite' emboldened, and one line of (again white-colored) Chinese, '求贤若渴', a Chinese idiom meaning 'eagerly seeking talented people'. Underneath these words, the branch name and contact number are provided (in Chinese and in white). To the right of the topic word 聘, against the red background, we see the details of the job – the job title and three lines of the job description printed also in white Chinese characters – which reads: 'sales assistant: male or female, 18-30 years old, high school qualification and above, good communication skills, motivated, hardworking, basic salary of 800 yuan plus commission'. This is followed by a standard instruction to apply within one of the chain stores or counters.

The blue-colored panel at bottom of the poster can be divided into two sections. The left section features the store's logo and trademark. The logo is in the shape of a circle that is made up of half of the sun in the left, filled in with the theme deep blue color with five pink flames coming out it, and half of a full moon in yellow in the right. The circle is also designed to look like two faces kissing one another, with the moon representing woman and the sun man, implying the relevance and importance of bedroom and bed. Next to it, we see the brand name of the shop, first in the bold, alphabetic form 'Dohia', followed by the Chinese characters '多喜爱', below which there is a small line explaining 'fashion/bed clothes' in

Chinese. As our eyes move to the right section of the panel, the background blue color of the panel gradually fades into a lighter color, but is still in contrast with the white prints. The words in the right-hand section of the panel describe the company's business philosophy, which is 'the leader of the home decoration fashion' that is 'full of inspirations, charms and modern breath', 'representing the trend of the world', and its employment requirements, which includes 'confidence', 'sincerity', 'good motivation and a strong sense of responsibility'. It ends with a promising sounding line which says 'this will be a lifetime career for you'.

To the left of the poster, the vertical panel is made up of six pictures which can be grouped into three sets. The first set presents two photos of the product framed in the deep blue theme color. One of them shows a well-lit, modern looking 多喜爱 shop front with nice window dressings and its visible logo and brand name 'Dohia'. The other one shows the image of a beautiful bedroom furnished with inviting looking beddings in the striking blue-and-white colored patterns. The second set contains two photos featuring a young white couple who are huddling in bed sharing a happy, relaxing moment. The third set depicts two artistic impressions of Dohia. One is the image of a modern, chic looking advertisement of the product, with the recognizable brand name 'Dohia' in front of it. The other is a gentle-colored painting of nature: tender leaves and ladybirds.

We suggest that 'Dohia' is a prime example of look-alike language informed by the above descriptions of its poster and some ethnographic observations surrounding it. First of all, we start with the name 'Dohia' itself, which is widely perceived to be an English name. According to the company's description on its own official websites, 'Dohia' has multiple origins and meanings (<http://www.dohia.com> and <http://www.expo88.com/1160>). It allegedly comes from a *Greek* letter which represents 'transcendence and perfection'. It is also claimed to be the abbreviation of *English* words 'Do' (做, i.e. do), 'height' (高, i.e. high or height) and 'a' (最好, i.e. the best, curiously). Together they apparently bespeak the company's ethos of 'perfectionism, strong will, courage and pioneering spirit'. In the local business field of interior furnishing, 'Dohia' is believed to represent the 'symbol of excellence', that is, its 'stylish design and exquisite quality'. The name 多喜爱, as declared by the company, is but a Chinese homonym or transliteration of 'Dohia' as 'each of the three characters are well-liked by Chinese people', and 'the new combination' of them gives the word 'a new meaning' imbued with 'fashion, luck and enthusiasm'.

What these metadiscourses spell out is the epistemological myths about the origin of 'Dohia', which, one may rightly argue, has not even remote linguistic relations with either Greek or English. Rather, it appears to have everything to do with 'Chinese'. It is the specific Chinese commercial context and branding identity needs that have triggered the vivid Chinese imagination about Greek and English languages. This imagination has created the English-looking word 'Dohia' which is, as far as we can see, a Chinese word that speaks from the local scale about the embracement of a set of concepts and ideas that are global. In fact, it may even make sense to see the birth of the word in a reversed sequence of its genesis in the company's description: it may have started off as a Chinese word 多喜爱 with locally meaningful sounds and shapes, before it may have found its English transliteration 'Do-high-a', which may then have traced its way to a vague resemblance with the Greek word (rather than letter) 'δόξα' (doksá) that sounds like 'Dohia' and means 'glory'. Even though English and Greek are more often than not regarded as resources of the west and, therefore, of a much higher status in the linguistic hierarchy in China, they are clearly repositioned and improvised in the case of 'Dohia', even if very loosely, to represent and serve the purposes of a Chinese idea, mission and identity.

Secondly, many semiotic features in the poster concerned here provide further evidence for the claim that 'Dohia' is look-alike language, especially because it is Chinese that intends

to (re)cast itself as another kind of symbol that has more to do with what is widely enregistered as English or ‘Englishness’ in commercial discourses. Recall that the job advertisement in the poster is predominantly written in Chinese with the exception of the phrase ‘Invite Application’ (and also ‘Dohia’ for many readers of the poster). It specifically targets the local labor market for potential job applicants. The job advertised is in fact a junior position with minimum requirements (i.e. a basic level of education) and with a very modest salary. In contrast to this, a high profile commercial identity of Dohia is asserted via the English phrase ‘Invite Application’ which is printed in bold black font and stands out from the white Chinese texts surrounding it (interestingly, the word ‘Dohia’ is color-coded as part of the Chinese texts). What is sending out from Dohia through this phrase, in fact, is an ‘English’ invitation. This idea of ‘Englishness’ is also explicitly expressed in the three sets of pictures in the left side of the poster which depict Dohia’s quality, chicness, expensiveness and foreignness. All these can translate into a convincing flavor or accent of English for ‘Dohia’ which, as we have seen, is a carefully invented ‘western’ (Greek and English) word.

Meanwhile, the poster described above bears certain features of ‘expensiveness’ in terms of its textual-discursive characteristics and spacial emplacement. Local job advertisements in Enshi (like elsewhere) offering menial positions and petty jobs are often parsimonious in their use of language and space. They are invariably written in words rather than sentences, and go something like this: ‘waitress 0123456’, ‘cashier 900Y/M immediate start’ or ‘tailor cleaner driver apply within’. Many of these advertisements are small, computer-printed or even handwritten, black-and-white flyers on thin paper, and are (if they choose to circulate in public at almost no cost) posted either in a designated free, therefore very crammed, space for employment information, or simply as random flyers in unwarranted places.



Figure 3. Job Advertisements in Public Space in Enshi

Unlike these types of advertisements, the poster from Dohia, although offering a vacancy similar to those in the cheaply produced flyers, adopts notable features of corporate genre of

advertisement. For instance, it gives the job title a posh-sounding name ‘导购员’ (*daogouyuan*, someone who provides sales advice in a shop) rather than ‘售货员’ (*shouhuayuan*, someone who sells goods in a shop), what shop assistants are most commonly called in Chinese. It then gives a detailed list of the prerequisites of the position which specify age, educational qualification, skills, personality and remuneration package. Although this position has rather low requirements and significance, the poster uses ‘聘’ (*pin*) – ‘inviting’ or ‘offering’, implying the desirability of the employed – instead of ‘招’ (*zhao*) – ‘recruiting’ or ‘hiring’, plainly – for the word ‘employment’ to suggest that doing more or less the same job, but doing it with Dohia, makes someone desirable and significant. In other words, *this* (insignificant) position with Dohia is actually much more significant than *those* (insignificant) positions advertised elsewhere. This discourse is echoed in the use of the English phrase ‘Invite Application’ as well as the Chinese phrase ‘eagerly seeking talented people’. It is further reinforced by the vision statement in the right bottom of the poster, since the concept of ‘vision statement’ itself is associated with the modern western corporative culture. And again, this statement draws on specific registers of corporative discourses, such as the set phrases ‘good motivation and a strong sense of responsibility’ and ‘a lifetime career’.

Furthermore, what we are faced with here is a meticulously designed and beautifully presented job advertisement. Not only is its language use business-like and ‘bilingual’ (Chinese-English), its visuals are colorful, artistic and trendy. The poster is produced in quality print on glossy paper, therefore must be costly, and it is not found in places where similar vacancies are advertised, but in its own bright and nicely decorated shop front. All of these aspects suggest ‘expensiveness’ and ‘exclusiveness’ of Dohia, which is associated with modernity, cosmopolitanism and globalization that comes from a higher tier/scale of consumption while communicating to the local audiences in an asymmetrical relation. Clearly, this communication favors some (i.e. those who know English or know how to appreciate Englishness) over others (i.e. those who don’t), even though ‘Dohia’ is in itself a look-a-like of English.

5. Online meaning-construction in ‘Chinese’ Martian language

So far we have shown examples of globalized Chinese among Chinese diaspora in the Netherlands, urban migrant workers in Chinese metropolis, and rural peripheral space inside China. Our final case comes from the creative use of ‘Chinese’ online. As discussed above, phenomena of globalization become increasingly remarkable along with the invention and popularization of the Internet, which provides people with an electronically mediated platform of information exchange and communication. In understanding what goes on in different online environments (linguistically and otherwise), applying Gershon’s (2010: 6) notion of *idiom of practice* proves useful. She defines idioms of practice as follows:

By idioms of practice, I mean that people figure out together how to use different media and often agree on the appropriate social uses of technology by asking advice and sharing stories with each other. They end up using these technologies with the distinctive and communal flair that has been attributed to dialects, or idioms. Idioms of practice point to how people have implicit and explicit intuitions about using different technologies that they have developed with their friends, family members, and coworkers.

Although we might add to Gershon’s description that the processes of coming to an agreement on which particular ways to use and act on certain media can be less conscious and more haphazard than ‘asking advice and sharing stories’, it is clear that shared understandings emerge in different online environments as participants become acquainted with and ‘socialized’ into the different linguistic and other semiotic means of meaning-making that

conform to the expectations of other users and successfully communicate to desired ends. With this in mind, we shall now move on to examine our two cases, both of which illustrate the semiotic creativity of Chinese (or at least Chinese-speaking) Internet users in the creation of idioms of practice, and for purposes of identity and communicative work.

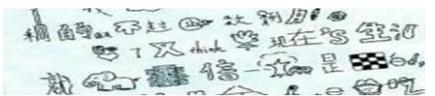
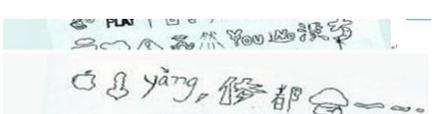
We start by providing two instances of Martian language. Figure 4 features the screen name, as well as a personalized message beneath it that is visible to other users, of two young Chinese girls (aged 11 and 13) on QQ, the Chinese equivalent of Skype.



Figure 4 Two examples of Martian language on QQ

Figure 5, on the other hand, is a love letter written by a middle school pupil and has recently circulated widely on the Internet. The letter was originally produced ‘offline’ – thus exemplifying the ‘leaking’ of Martian language outside online environments – and has recently seen heavy circulation on the Internet, framed by intense discussions of its features and the literacy skills of the producer.

The language being used in Figures 4 and 5 strongly deviates from standard Chinese - the language that people encounter in newspapers, television and other forms of public discourse. These are instances of a new variety of Chinese Internet language widely known as Martian language, particularly used by the Chinese after-90 generation. As the name implies, this is considered to be a language that people on planet Earth cannot easily – if at all – understand. A comparison of Martian language with standard Chinese shows that the norms of Martian language are indeed quite different from those of standard Chinese.

Martian Language	Standard Chinese	English
	亲爱的晶 我一向写信不打草稿的, 不过此次例外。	Dear Jing : I never draft when I write a letter, this time is an exception.
	想了又想, 现在的生活就象这封信一样黑白无味	I think that my life is just as boring as the color of chess: black and white.
	回想起你在家一起吃喝玩乐的日子就好激动。	Thinking of the days when we were playing with each other, I am so excited.
	虽然你还没有答应我, 俺都会.....	Although you have not said love to me, I will...

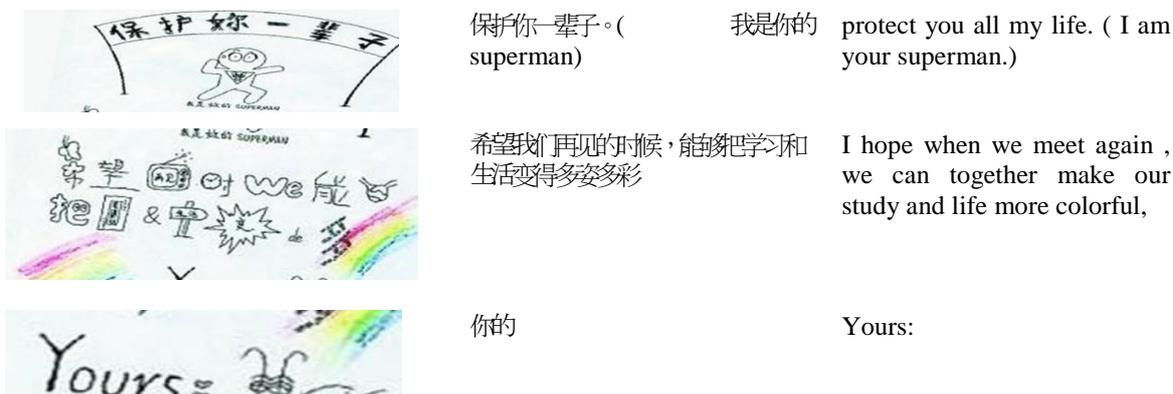


Figure 5. A love letter and its transcription/translation

Based on the above, we can recognize certain norms shaping Martian language.

Blending. Martian language makes use of extensive blending of resources. In both the screen names (Images 1 and 2), English is mixed with Chinese, and in Image 2 the screen name ‘I.MISS.Yòu’ is actually an even more complex mixture of English (‘I miss you’), Chinese (the tone markers), and Japanese (the letter ‘U’). In the love letter, Korean is also included, as in ‘우’.

In the love letter, we see a more pervasive blending which occurs on the level of vocabulary through the inclusion of English words such as ‘Dear’, ‘No’, ‘PLAY’, ‘We’, ‘Yours’, but also on morphological level (e.g. ‘还’ where ‘还’ is a combination of the English word ‘no’ and a Chinese character component ‘辶’), as well as in syntax (e.g. ‘还在睡觉’ and ‘睡觉’), where Chinese characters, Roman alphabet, diacritics and creative drawings are combined to form a phrase.

Non-standard spelling. Martian language also deviates from standard Chinese in terms of spelling, and the deviations appear in many different forms. Firstly, non-simplified traditional Chinese characters which have already been moved out of the modern Chinese dictionary are present (e.g. ‘夏’ and ‘夏’); one Chinese character is separated into two, or combined with some new components (e.g. ‘口’ is added to ‘夏’ as in ‘嘎’), and ‘儿’ is added to ‘日’ as in ‘日’.

In the love letter, some letters are also written in a dramatic and artistic pictographic manner, greatly deviating from the orthographic rules of standard Chinese. For instance, the character ‘会’ is written as ‘会’, a sign resembling a mushroom, while ‘希’ is written as ‘希’, picturing a butterfly dancing above a flower. Also, sometimes a Chinese character is simply replaced by an image without any resemblance to the form of the standard Chinese character. For example, a picture of a chess board ‘棋’ is used to gesture towards the idea of a boring life by employing the dull black-and-white color scheme of a chess board, while a picture of a rainbow ‘彩虹’ is used to refer to the Chinese character with the meaning ‘colorful’ (‘彩’).

Non-standard punctuation. There are unrecognizable strokes and symbols such as ‘6’, ‘★’, ‘!’, ‘S’, ‘•’, ‘●’, ‘X’ that appear frequently in the texts. In the love letter, there is almost no punctuation apart from the colon in the shape of two little hearts at the very beginning of the letter.

What seem to constitute the norms for Martian language are heavily penalized and stigmatized forms in standard Chinese. In China, there is widespread agreement on the elegance and legitimacy of standard Chinese, as well as the ugliness and sloppiness of ‘youth language’ exemplified by Martian language. That is, Martian language is not only seen as aesthetically displeasing, but also indexes certain things about its users – as does standard

Chinese, which is perceived as a ‘neutral’ form of language use while also emblematic of an imagined, shared Chinese identity.

Speaking or writing in standard Chinese would be deemed ‘correct’, while speaking with an accent or writing in an erratic (or what seems erratic from the point of view of standard Chinese) orthography would be ‘wrong’. If evaluated by the norms of standard Chinese, Martian language is ‘bad’ language that makes little sense and triggers indexicalities of sloppiness, lack of education, superficiality and so forth (see also Thurlow 2006). This can explain those arguments from the institutional segments of society disparaging Martian language and objecting to its use in public discourses. If a student composes a school paper using Martian language, he or she will receive a very low score and be sanctioned by the teacher (see also e.g. Carrington 2008).

Standard Chinese is thus the language of power, but ‘deviant’ writing is by no means always a sign of powerlessness (see also Androutsopoulos 2000). As Leppänen et al. (2009: 1082) point out, the linguistic (as well as other semiotic) choices made in new media environments “can of course be quite idiosyncratic, but more often than not they are motivated by the particular aesthetic, social, and cultural norms and conventions of the new media environments in question (Leppänen, 2009).” According to interviews conducted by the first author with the two adolescents whose screen names feature in Figure 1 and 2, this new language makes them feel cool, cute, exotic, sophisticated and fashionable, and makes them more easily accepted by their online peers. This indicates that inside their (online) peer group, the employment of Martian language guarantees access to certain idioms of practice, and is indexical to quite different identities from the ones it indexes in the ‘adult’ society (see also Jaffe 2000). It is also worth noting that initially Martian language was used by young people in their screen names, in instant messaging and chat rooms as a means of identification. Later, they found that their teachers and parents could hardly comprehend their new language, which quickly made it their secret code in their communications with each other. In a way, then, Martian language has ‘evolved’ from one having (purely) indexical meaning to one with communicative functions. This also illustrates that Martian language is not the sloppy, imperfect version of standard Chinese it is portrayed as in public discourse, but rather a sophisticated form of communication with its own sociolinguistic rules (see also Blommaert 2011; Velghe 2011).

To summarize, this example shows that Martian language is a new variety of ‘Chinese’ used by adolescents who are now empowered by the Internet and articulate meaning in their own code within their ‘imagined community’, and they use it as secret code to communicate with their peers, to establish certain identities, as well as to exclude adults. This ‘imagined community’ is generated by specific, enregistered forms of semiotic behaviors, distinct from standard Chinese and exhibiting different complexes of indexicalities.

6. Conclusion

We have presented cases from enormously diverse social contexts, in order to instantiate our argument: Mandarin Chinese, an already diversified and polycentric language, is undergoing a rapid diversification process both in China and in Chinese diaspora, and its standardized form is enregistered as a *lingua franca* in the various societies and communities we have studied. Such processes are the immediate outcome of globalization, and they serve as rare research subjects, allowing us to study globalization ‘in motion’.

Our first case shows the transformation of the Chinese language in the Netherlands, echoing the dramatic socioeconomic changes in China. Our second case is concerned with a new form of journalism – the Internet, which has largely restructured the public space. The

data analysis focused on a long debate entry combined with textual and visual signs. The migrant workers were abnormalized for their behavior that deviated from the tacit urban norm. Case 3 offers an argument of ‘look-alike language’ which attempts to capture the specific ways in which languages such as English and Chinese are used in relation to each other in shop signage in (a small city in) China. Such language use must be understood in the context of globalization in which the ideology of consumerism gives rise to the superiority of languages, symbols and objects which, in the processes of globalization, have become frequently associated with its center, i.e. the west or the urban. What ‘look-alike language’ describes is the phenomenon that language resources, both the global (English) and the local (Chinese), that are increasingly deterritorialized and reterritorialized as a result of globalization to create new, hybrid symbolic resources for identity construction. Our final case illustrates that Internet users creatively make use of the semiotic potential and the indexicals of different languages, signs, and modalities, and the mechanism in the creation of their own ‘languages’ is a continuous diversification of existing signs. Although hegemonic speech communities appear to offer space for all kinds of resistance and oppositional norms among powerless micro speech communities, here it seems that employing a code distinctive (enough) from the standard language is what enables these idioms of practice to appear and sustain themselves, and for important identity work to be done – and this is the starting point for the diversification processes.

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