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**DOI**

[10.1111/josl.12186](https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12186)

**Publication date**

2016

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Journal of Sociolinguistics

**License**

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Bailey, A. J., Canagarajah, S., Lan, S., & Powers, D. G. (2016). Scalar politics, language ideologies, and the sociolinguistics of globalization among transnational Korean professionals in Hong Kong. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 20(3), 312-334. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12186>

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# Scalar politics, language ideologies, and the sociolinguistics of globalization among transnational Korean professionals in Hong Kong<sup>1</sup>

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This paper argues that the sociolinguistics of globalization is accompanied by a constitutive scalar politics. Based on ten interviews with Korean professionals in Hong Kong, we report that Korean migrants' use and experience of English is characterized by competing language ideologies we identify as: Pragmatic English/Perfect English, Multilingualism/English Only, and Global Language/Local Language. Tensions within these ideologies were revealed as respondents referenced the contexts of their daily lives as intersecting sets of geographic, temporal, and social scales. We discuss how sociolinguistic relations associated with the transnational lifecourse, hybridizing identity, and racialization were imagined in ways that re-negotiated these scales to serve the interests of the participants and provide coherence to their communicative practices. Sociolinguistic relations both reference scales and constitute them. We conclude that attending to scales and scalar politics provides a better explanatory framework for the ways the uneven linguistics markets of globalization are negotiated by transnational subjects.

本文认为全球化的社会语言学与尺度政治是相互辅助的关系。基于对十位香港韩裔专业人士的访谈资料,我们发现韩裔移民对英语的运用和体验反映出几种相互竞争的语言意识形态:实用英语/完美英语,语言多元化/单一英语,全球语言/地方语言。这些语言意识形态之间的张力体现为地域、时间和社会尺度在受访者日常生活中的互相交错。我们探讨与跨国人生历程,身份混杂化,和种族化相关的社会语言关系如何重新协调这些尺度,使受访者受益并为他们的沟通实践提供连贯性。社会语言关系不仅指代尺度而且建构尺度。在结论里我们认为关注尺度及尺度政治为跨国主体协调不均衡的全球化语言学市场提供了一个更好的诠释框架。[Chinese]

KEYWORDS: Transnationalism, English, Korea, Hong Kong, language ideology, scale

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a burgeoning literature on the sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert 2010; Canagarajah 2013; Park and Wee 2012; Pennycook 2010). In the case of empirical studies of Korean migrants, research has accentuated the complexities of language choices arising from links between transnationalism, language ideologies, and negotiations of identity (Kang 2012; Park 2009; Song 2012). Indeed, Park and Lo (2012: 147) explicitly argue that transnational South Korea should be treated as a relevant site for 'refining, reframing, and reconsidering the current sociolinguistics of globalization.' In response to this call, our work reconsiders the sociolinguistics of globalization by unpacking the significance of context and generating knowledge about the resources, linguistic and non-linguistic, that may be at the disposal of migrants in negotiating the contexts of daily life. As Blommaert (2010: 2) notes, it is important to know how the 'sociolinguistics of mobile resources [are] framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows, and movements.'

There is a good deal of multi-disciplinary attention to how the contexts in and through which language is used and practiced affects the sociolinguistics of globalization (Collins, Slembrouck and Baynham 2009; Fast 2012). While scholars have long recognized that languages and social practices acquire different meanings in different settings, a series of recent interventions seek to more critically theorize the roles of context in such multiplicity (Pennycook 2010; Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen 2008). For example, Silverstein argues that language ideologies pivot on evaluations that individuals make for language in respect of its 'appropriateness-to and effectiveness-in context' (2003: 195). Similarly, in research on the language practices of transnational Koreans, Song (2012: 40) emphasizes that language ideologies are adopted in a 'contextually specific' manner. While already a difficult construct to define, context has become more contested in the 'time/space compression' (Harvey 2005) accompanying globalization and transnationalism (Lam and Warriner 2012).

Our paper intervenes in debates on context by extending scholarship on scales (Fortier 2006; Moore 2008). Our argument unfolds as follows. First, we differentiate the concept of scales from the concept of scalar politics. We next describe a research design that focuses on the language ideologies of professional Korean migrants living in Hong Kong. Third, we identify multiple language ideologies, and explore how tensions within these ideologies are framed by respondents using ideas about the geographic, temporal, and social scales of their daily lives. We then discuss how

re-negotiations of these scales can be understood as scalar politics which transforms contexts and sociolinguistic relations.

## 2. RETHINKING SCALES AND SCALAR POLITICS

In this study, we explore the relationship between scalar politics and language ideologies. Following Silverstein, we define language ideology as 'sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use' (1979: 193). Recent research on the sociolinguistics of globalization among South Koreans has described wide variation in language ideologies. One tranche of findings emphasizes the role of identity politics in context-bound sociolinguistic practices. Park's (2009) study on Korean attitudes toward learning and using English in Korea identifies three ideologies:

- necessitation (that one needs English for instrumental purposes);
- externalization (that English is an alien language from which one must detach oneself); and
- self-deprecation (that Koreans can never achieve true proficiency in English).

Diverse language ideologies have implications for daily life through context-bound identity politics. For example, Song (2012) describes how Koreans in the U.S. use two language ideologies in their daily lives: namely, language as economic commodity; and language as cosmopolitan membership. While the first enables them to tap into the status of English as a linguistic resource for jobs, the latter enables them to index their identity as cosmopolitans with cultural capital. Song links these ideologies with Park's (2009) ideology of necessitation.

Recent work has expanded the focus upon identity. In research on Korean educational migrants in Singapore, Kang (2012) describes a new type of transnational subject, the 'Asian Global'. Kang also points to an ideology of pragmatism which foregrounds the instrumental value of language and downplays implications for identity. The pragmatic ideology frees respondents from views of language that can pose identity conflicts while also opening up language for more practical purposes. Moreover, in other contexts, Koreans use socially dis-privileged languages, such as Singlish, for purposes of solidarity with local Singaporeans. To justify this, Koreans invoke an ideology of sociolinguistic competence which puts value on the ability to switch languages and, by implication, on the ability to decode the appropriateness of language use in context. Kang's research strongly suggests that language users are sensitive to the multiple contexts of sociolinguistic relations.

The present study represents our efforts to introduce an explicit scalar perspective to existing literature on the sociolinguistics of globalization. While

some scholars in human geography emphasize the socially constructed nature of geographical scales (Valentine, Sporton and Nielsen 2008), Brenner (2011) calls for a shift from scales analysis to the examination of scaling processes, i.e. the recalibration of scalar hierarchies and interscalar relations in late capitalist construction of new state spaces. Locating sociolinguistic processes within the uneven networks and vertical hierarchies of globalization, Blommaert (2005) operationalizes a scale concept that regards language as a placed resource with a value determined by its vertical position in the global hierarchy. Language statuses and norms are then defined by Blommaert according to scaled hierarchies. Prestige languages of the West (e.g. English) are of a higher scale, while languages in less developed communities (e.g. Swahili) are of lower scale. Similarly, elite language varieties (e.g. native-speaker varieties of English) are of higher scale, and non-native varieties (e.g. Chinese or Nigerian Englishes) are of lower. Therefore, 'prestige varieties of language' are treated as 'high-mobility resources' which unlock and 'allow mobility across situations and scale-levels' (Blommaert 2010: 12).

While inspired by Blommaert's attention to unequal power relations embedded in different geopolitical localities, we also recognize the limitation of his conceptualization of scales as fixed, objective and predefined. Writing at the intersection of scales analysis and educational linguistics, Canagarajah and De Costa (2015) propose to treat scales not merely as epistemological constructs but as a category of practice (cf. Moore 2008). The two authors argue:

It is not scales themselves (as perhaps containers of social and communicative life) that are of interest, but scaling practices . . . This notion of scale as a verb rather than a noun gives importance to constructs such as rescaling, scale jumping, and scale differentiation – all relating to the ways scales are practiced in social life. (2015: 3)

Our research thus makes a distinction between scales and scalar politics in order to address the dynamic nature of scaling process and the shifting power relations involved. By scale, we refer to the scope (reach) and hierarchies of context. Considering the contexts of daily life, we identify geographic scales that are sites of living and working (for example, some sites may be seen as local and others as global), temporal scales that are rhythms, timings, and transitions of daily life (for example, acquiring language competency, lifecourse changes), and social scales that are social networks which may involve distinctions based around generation, class, ethnicity, and racialization. Practices of daily life mean such scales are rarely experienced and understood in isolation, and tend to be intersectional.

While scales denoting the properties of contexts can be perceived as static, our concept of scalar politics refers to the contested processes through which different scales are interconnected to each other via shifting power relations. Scalar politics imply the possibility for the reconfiguration or transformation of

interscalar relations by the strategic linguistic practices of transnational migrants. To date, scholars have identified two dimensions of interscalar relations: the horizontal and the vertical (Brenner 2004; Lam and Warriner 2012). While the horizontal refers to practices across geographical scales (for example, the local, national, transnational and global), the vertical highlights hierarchical power relations embedded in the practices of daily life. In arguing for a view of scalar politics as 'contextualizing processes' we attend to important overlaps and intersections between the horizontal and the vertical dimensions in the recalibration and renegotiation of interscalar relations.

In addition, and following Silverstein (2003: 195), we argue that scalar politics are relational and constitutive. That is, scalar politics both reflect daily life and social practices (including language practices) and also 'place' and 'police' sets of resources which are selectively available for actors (Bailey, Mupakati and Magunha 2014; Fast 2012). As Xiang implies, scales may be renegotiated based on 'the scope of coordination and mobilization that arises from collective actions, which in turn generates new capacity for the actors' (2013: 284). In summary, we explore migrants' efforts to accommodate, evade, or reconfigure linguistic and scalar hierarchies by examining tensions within language ideologies and scalar politics.

### 3. LANGUAGE USE AMONG KOREAN PROFESSIONALS IN HONG KONG

To our knowledge, no prior research has investigated language use among Korean migrant professionals living in Hong Kong, despite the city being an important node within the Korean transnational field. Apart from being a regional and global *entrepôt* for transnational migration, Hong Kong is also a web of multi-stranded migration flows with mainland China. Hong Kong's network connections means it has a diverse linguascape in which the daily experience of language goes beyond a simple native/non-native or fluent/non-fluent binary (cf. Canagarajah 2013). Language use, including by Koreans, has the potential to be complex and contested.

Hong Kong currently has two official languages: Chinese and English. While the particular variety of Chinese is not legally specified, Cantonese is the most socially and culturally important language for the majority of Hong Kong residents (Lin 1997), and thus Cantonese is the de facto variety most commonly used in official communications. English was actually the only official language from 1883 to 1974, due to British colonial rule. Today, the influence of English in Hong Kong's education system is reinforced by the hegemonic discourses of global capitalism. In the multilingual and postcolonial society of Hong Kong, there is little stigma attached to speaking English with a local accent or using grammatical conventions that deviate from native-speaker norms. Lin argues that the free 'intertwining of Cantonese and English words in the everyday public and private life of Hong Kong people ... serves as distinctive linguistic and cultural markers of "Hong Kong-ness"' (2006: 288). However, following

Hong Kong's handover to Mainland China in 1997 and the increasing importance of cross-border business interactions, Mandarin Chinese has also gained traction as a major language of use in Hong Kong.

Korean migration to Hong Kong can be largely traced back to 1945. Based on 2011 data from the Hong Kong Immigration Department, the South Korean Consulate reported that there were 13,288 South Korean nationals living in Hong Kong. Most belong to the upper-middle class with approximately 81.9 percent of Koreans employed in Hong Kong working in professional, managerial, or administrative capacities (Hong Kong Population Census Office 2011). Over the last two decades, the so-called 'Korean Wave' has lent positive public perception toward Korean culture. Interest in Korean TV dramas and pop music in Hong Kong has rendered Korean language learning a growing trend among college students and young professionals (Kim 2010; Lin and Tong 2007).

In this study, Bailey, Lan, and Powers conducted semi-structured interviews with ten self-identified Korean professionals in Hong Kong. Respondents were chosen through snowball sampling and asked 19 questions regarding their backgrounds, attitudes, workplace interactions, and language negotiation strategies. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Follow-up questions were posed as necessary to elaborate on particular responses. The interviews were taped and transcribed.<sup>2</sup> Analysis proceeded in two steps. First, all authors read all transcripts to identify language ideologies and the bases of these ideologies. As introduced in the next section, we identified three sets of ideologies which each showed multiplicity. Second, we re-examined how the respondents framed their language ideology to explore possible links with broader sociolinguistic relations, material which forms the basis for section five, below.

Table 1 summarizes key biographical details about our ten respondents. Four worked in public universities (two as tenure-track faculty members, and two as Korean language instructors); four worked in corporate settings (in banking, shipping, advertising, and design); and two in private enterprises (in medicine and tutoring). All ten had higher education degrees, and five had received those degrees in the United States. In terms of ethnic background, nine of our respondents were full Korean and one was half-Korean, half-Chinese. Three respondents were male.

In general, the respondents represent the diversity of professional, educational, and familial situations found in transnational life. Koreans live in Hong Kong as part of transnational and inter-generational family units to advance and balance adult careers, children's education, parents' health, and so forth. Korean transnational life involves commitment to juggling often simultaneously competing demands from work, school, and home. Consider Jasmine: now in her late thirties, Jasmine is Korean-born and moved with her parents to Singapore as an eighth grader and stayed there for three years. The family then moved back to South Korea, where she obtained her bachelor's

**Table 1:** Respondent biographical details

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital status	Job title	Type of company
Violet	F	35–40	Married, children	Financial manager	Swiss German bank
Jasmine	F	Late 30s	Single	Professor	Local university
David	M	50s	Married to Sheila, no children	Chiropractor	Local/expat clinic
John	M	Early 40s	Married, children	Professor	Local university
Daisy	F	33	Single	Korean language instructor	Local university
Nancy	F	32	Single	Korean language instructor	Local university
Esther	F	25	Single	Interior designer	Local design firm
Amy	F	35	Single	Senior sales/marketing manager	Japanese cargo company
Derek	M	27	Single	English/math tutor	Local tutoring center
Sheila	F	40	Married to David, no children	PR manager	Korean advertising firm

Source: Author survey 2013

and master's degrees. She then moved to the U.S. for doctoral studies in Southern California. She did postdoctoral teaching for a year in upstate New York, followed by another year of postdoctoral work in Japan, before taking up her present post in Hong Kong a year before we spoke with her. Some respondents viewed Hong Kong as a stepping stone toward further international experiences, particularly in the U.S., while others saw it as a bridge back to South Korea. Some saw their lives in Hong Kong continuing indefinitely. As we describe below, the transnational trajectories of their lives were always on our respondents' minds.

Our respondents were asked in particular to relate their experience with four languages: English, Korean, Cantonese, and Mandarin. We asked each respondent to self-report their spoken language proficiency. Table 2 shows a high (but not universal) degree of native competence in Korean, and a similarly high degree of competence (native or excellent) in English. However,

Table 2: Language proficiencies and migration history

Pseudonym	Residence in HK	Lived in English-speaking country?	Spoken language proficiencies				
			English	Korean	Cantonese	Mandarin	Others
Violet	5 years	No	Conversational	Native	None	Basic	
Jasmine	1 year	Yes	Excellent	Native	None	None	Japanese
David	<1 year	Yes	Conversational	Native	None	None	
John	6 years	Yes	Excellent	Native	None	None	
Daisy	1 year	No	Conversational	Native	None	Basic	
Nancy	1 year	No	Excellent	Native	Basic	Conversational	French
Esther	Since age 3	Yes	Native	Excellent	Conversational	Conversational	
Amy	10 years	No	Conversational	Native	None	Conversational	Japanese
Derek	Born in HK	Yes	Native	Conversational	None	Basic	
Sheila	Born in HK	Yes	Native	Basic	Excellent	Conversational	

Source: Author survey 2013

hardly any of the respondents reported more than a basic proficiency in Cantonese, and only a few more reported proficiency in Mandarin.

#### 4. TENSIONS WITHIN LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

The goals of this section are:

1. to identify representative language ideologies;
2. to describe how these ideologies reveal tensions between respondents' expectations and daily language practices;
3. to link these tensions to geographic, temporal, and social scales of daily life.

We introduce three sets of language ideologies: Pragmatic English/Perfect English, Multilingualism/English Only, and Global Language/Local Language.

##### 4.1 *Pragmatic English/Perfect English*

This ideology relates to the variety of Englishes that respondents encounter, and to the values ascribed to each variety. For example, Violet experienced Hong Kong workplaces as diverse and containing complex norms, including norms about language. She described a language hierarchy, with American English the most preferable, symbolized by her American-educated Korean boss, who spoke English like a native, and who sometimes corrected mistakes in her work reports. Next came Hong Kong English, sufficient for work purposes beneath the management level, and regarded as a local English variety. Korean English occupied the bottom of the language hierarchy. Violet said she might use this with her Korean co-workers, but noted that it did not sound very good to her (cf. Park's [2009] ideology of self-deprecation).

In examining the transcripts for evidence about how such hierarchies and distinctions came into being we noted repeated references to two types of English: what we call 'Pragmatic English' and 'Perfect English'. Pragmatic English referred to the value attached to English when it became a *lingua franca* that could enable speakers from diverse national and ethnic backgrounds to communicate and function effectively in specific work and social settings. Its self-evident pragmatic value meant such English was not stigmatized as deviant or inadequate in these particular contexts. This variety of English contrasted with Perfect English, which was typically associated with American English or other native speaker varieties. As English was assumed to be the key language of globalization, having Perfect English held value to Koreans with global aspirations.

Respondents framed the tensions between the expectations for and practices of Pragmatic English and Perfect English, at the heart of this ideology, in terms of scale. Pragmatic English made sense to Violet because the restricted geographic scale of the workplace gave it value. Perfect English had value

because the aspiration to have a professional career pre-supposed a global geographical scale. Amy, who had been employed for over ten years by a Japanese cargo company partly for her bilingual proficiency in Korean and English, was also considering leaving Hong Kong to improve her (Perfect) English. Attracted by the United States, she articulated the limitations of her Hong Kong-style Pragmatic English:

Amy: Very frankly speaking, if I'm uh, living, or studying, or working in – the mother language is English community or environment. But Hong Kong is quite, not, not definitely English culture, right? They major speaking Cantonese or Mandarin Chinese. That's why uh, my English level also not so promote, I mean not so developed. Because sometime I have to speak how they speak. That means I'm Honglish.

Amy reveals the tension in the ideology by pointing to the limits of Honglish (Hong Kong English), which extend to her social identity. She frames this by suggesting that Honglish disrupts the acquisition (expected developmental rhythm) of Perfect English (temporal scale).

#### **4.2 Multilingualism/English Only**

A second language ideology involves contestations between Multilingualism and English Only. While our respondents often practice multilingualism in daily lives, their beliefs in the superiority of perfect/pure English can contradict their multilingual practices. So there are situations in which our subjects say that their multilingualism is detrimental to mastering pure English. There are also places where they report that the use of English Only is what they prefer in certain social or work contexts. By identifying English Only as a language ideology, we are trying to reference those moments when our respondents seem to prefer the learning or use of English in isolation from other languages. We asked Nancy, a 32-year-old woman working as a Korean language instructor at a local university, about her experiences of switching language in the workplace:

Nancy: I think it's pretty fine. And, in school, if I keep speak in English then I get really used to it. And, sometimes I can't think of any proper Korean words to describe things, because I speak English all the time. Yeah, but, I think the problem is that I'm forgetting everything. Like, my English doesn't have any progress anymore.

Int.: But you're using it every day. I think you're making progress every day. 'Cause you're using it.

Nancy: Oh no, not really. I'm in the same place all the time. 'Cause I'm not learning new things, I just say the same thing every time. So (.)

While Nancy sees multilingualism as necessary for her work, she implies it is the limited geographic scale ('in the same place') of her workplace that causes her to not think of 'proper Korean words' and her English to stop progressing ('just say the same thing'). Like Amy, she talks about the ideology in terms of a temporal scale by admitting that her English progress has stalled.

Jasmine's reflections on multilingualism (and bilingualism) also refer to her immediate workplace but go beyond this to evoke a broader social scale that has accompanied Korean globalization:

Jasmine: I'm a huge believer that bilingual[ism], can, can be negative sometimes, in the, in the writing skills or understanding comprehensive skill. So I've seen a lot of bilingual people who are not really good at writing in any of the, either language (.) people who are multilingual or bilingual, they assume very easily they're fluent in a language. But in the university level, you have to produce decent writing. Um, and then like you have to make an argumentative writing. It's just not there.

Jasmine suggests that bilingualism may actually distract learners from developing sufficient fluency in either language. What she 'expected' as sufficient was calibrated against a need for further language advancement and distinction in the face of the generational upskilling of global Koreans: 'So for, for my generation, being bilingual or being Korean and having English and Korean skill was a good way to get better career. But then now, I don't think that works. There are so many Koreans who have English ability'. Like Amy and Nancy, she recognizes the need to continue to develop English. This seems to echo Park and Lo's (2012: 157–158) finding:

English by itself does not make its speaker an ideal neoliberal subject; it is the constant self-development and self-fulfillment, as evidenced through the effort to acquire the language, in conjunction with other signs, that allows one to achieve the status of a worthy individual.

But, for Jasmine at least, such effort is framed by the intersection of her personal biography and career plans, social scale (a member of a highly skilled Korean generation), and geographic scale (being global).

#### ***4.3 Global Language/Local Language***

A third ideology involves tensions between Global Language and Local Language. Among Koreans, similar ideologies have been reported before (Kang 2012; Park 2009). Park (2009) noted tensions between Korean as a local language and English as a global language and termed this an 'externalization ideology,' in which English is seen as a threat to Korean ethnic and national identity. We expand this reading by exploring how Koreans in Hong Kong

reported more nuanced, and less oppositional tensions between local and global languages. To illustrate our point, we focus on expectations and experiences with Cantonese, the putative language of daily life in Hong Kong.

Few of our respondents claim proficiency in Cantonese (Table 2). Most regarded it as a local language and no one saw it in global terms. In this sense, Cantonese stood in contrast to English, at least some variants of which were seen as global, and Mandarin, which had regional and growing global significance. For some of our respondents, the value of learning Cantonese was conditional on the temporariness or permanence of the intended stay in Hong Kong. Amy, who aspires to move to the United States, told us, 'If I stay here long term, I would learn Cantonese.' Nancy also reported, 'If I want to be more like Hong Kong people, I would learn Cantonese.' The conditional clause in both statements shows the importance of temporariness (temporal scale) as a framing device in this ideology.

That said, Esther and Derek, who were both raised in Hong Kong, both felt some pressure to learn Cantonese. Esther managed to pick up Cantonese under peer pressure from her friends at school, although she never formally attended Cantonese lessons. Derek, on the other hand, who spoke very little Cantonese, seemed to be somewhat embarrassed about it. He expressed a desire to learn (and was, in fact, working his way through a self-study language book) particularly to improve social connections with his Cantonese-speaking colleagues: 'I think um, the fact that I cannot be, that I'm not fluent in Cantonese, it just inhibits or stops me from being very very close to that person outside the workplace'. Esther and Derek's motivation to learn Cantonese reflects their attaching greater importance to cultivating Hong Kong-based networks in order to enhance their career development in the city while also forging deeper social connections with local Hong Kong people (intersection of geographic and social scale). Such an attitude resonates with the ideology of sociolinguistic competence described by Kang (2012).

However, most respondents did not feel that Cantonese was the only linguistic route available to deepen local social connections. Many preferred to socialize in informal (Pragmatic) English, including when they were with other Koreans, English-speaking expatriates, and Hong Kongers with overseas education. Sheila – whose mother is Hong Kong Chinese – opined: 'I would never really fit in with the locals, you know, 'cause the language and everything.' Even Esther, who grew up in Hong Kong, has good proficiency in Cantonese, and uses Cantonese at work, said she mingled in English with cosmopolitan Hong Kongers who had been educated in the international school system like herself.

In summary, our respondents spoke about the tensions in this language ideology in ways that, at first, appear to reference a simple global/local binary. However, we found that the ideology involves diverse expectations and practices of building and maintaining both local and global career and social

connections (geographic and social scale) against a backdrop of assumed temporariness in Hong Kong (temporal scale).

## 5. SCALAR POLITICS AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC RELATIONS

This section introduces three sets of sociolinguistic relations that exhibit some re-working of the scales implicit in our respondents' language ideologies. Our goal is not to provide a definitive or exhaustive account of such sociolinguistic relations, but to highlight issues of agency and resource availability in the scalar politics at work here. Our examples relate to transnational lifecourses, hybridizing identity, and racialization.

### 5.1 *Transnational lifecourses*

Our Korean respondents talk about and actively construct transnational lifecourses. Our use of this term draws particular inspiration from the work of Kobayashi and Preston (2007) and Lam and Warriner (2012), and refers to the re-alignment of geographic, social, and temporal scales in transnational ways across the unfolding and linked lifecourses of our respondents and their family members. Although our research design study did not explicitly focus on family strategies, we found most Korean respondents had experienced or are expecting to undertake back and forth migrations connecting Korea, Hong Kong, and the United States. Moreover, there was an expectation such mobility would be associated with shifting priorities across the lifecourse (re-workings of temporal scale) and changing language uses (new sociolinguistic relations). For instance, single women Nancy and Amy mainly sought to further their careers, while married mother Violet was looking to provide a better English learning environment for her son.

Transnational lifecourses reference, and seek to re-align the scales of language ideology. In terms of geographic scale, respondents seek to combine locations and live across borders, rather than maintain binaries between here and there, or between the global and the local. For many, living both globally and locally was essential if career (often seen in global terms) and family (often seen in local terms) expectations were to be met. The possibility (and necessity) of new age and gender-graded norms responded to the tension that many felt about the slow pace of their Perfect English acquisition.

We illustrate the issues of agency and resource-availability by contrasting the transnational lifecourses of Nancy and Amy with Derek and Sheila. Nancy and Amy responded to tensions between Perfect and Pragmatic English with transnational aspirations that make a resource of their previous transnational experiences and future goals. Both women visited the U.S. before moving to Hong Kong, but neither had lived in the U.S. for a prolonged period of time. Unlike Jasmine and John, who had both experienced the racialization of the Korean accent in English-dominant U.S. academia, Nancy and Amy seem to hold, even

for a fleeting moment, a romanticized idea of the U.S. as a kind of 'Promised Land' for all comers. However, this imaginary is not a limitless resource as it is tempered by the material reality of their current job situations in Hong Kong. Nancy was recruited as a university Korean language instructor in Hong Kong. Although her Korean skills are valued, her job is contract-based and has to be renewed by the university every year. While the insecurity of her position, and the need to seek mobility opportunities beyond Hong Kong motivate Nancy's desire for Perfect English, Amy's response to the same tension led her to couching her desire to learn Perfect English in age-graded lifestyle factors:

Amy: Actually Hong Kong has many potential. Even though world economic crisis keep coming, and bubble economy, but . . . Hong Kong still very good place to develop, keep develop. But, uh . . . I living here ten years, and then I'm also middle of thirty, so before forty actually I want to try more new. That's why I also, as you mention, my English level in Hong Kong – actually I want to get more chance to develop my English as well.

Thus, Amy's wish to improve her English emphasizes the lack of challenge in her current job and her desire to 'try more new'. In this aspiration, she recalibrates the temporal scale associated with her current daily life in Hong Kong, and instead sees Hong Kong as a temporary stepping stone in a global journey.

In contrast to Amy and Nancy, who still aspire to migrate to the United States to further their English skills, Derek and Sheila's transnational lifecourses are highlighted by their (temporary) return migration to South Korea after having acquired native English proficiency via education in the United States and the United Kingdom. They are the only participants in our study to be born in Hong Kong and both identify as native English speakers due to their early study abroad experiences. Derek told us that he was able to get a job in South Korea due to his status as a native English speaker. He said, 'even though I ended up not speaking much English in my job, the fact that I could, uh – funnily enough, it was what separated me from the masses. From the mass of applications that flooded in.' Unlike Derek, Sheila needed to use English a lot on the job, working as a global public relations manager for a major cellphone company in Seoul.

Sheila: They knew that my role would just be global, dealing with the global foreign press. So they said, OK. That's, that's the main language she's gonna be using. But then obviously they really thought – because I'm half-Korean, they really thought I would be able to pick up Korean quickly.

While Sheila's Korean ethnicity did matter for her job prospects in South Korea, it was primarily her English language skills that enabled her to secure the internationally oriented job.

Though Derek and Sheila's return migration experiences confirmed the significance of English as symbolic capital in South Korea, they also point to job opportunities for transnational Koreans on the global scale. In contrast to Violet's portrayal of South Korea as being provincial and local (also as the backward home country left behind by Amy and Nancy), the return migrations of Derek and Sheila, facilitated by their transnational sociolinguistic capital and ethnic Korean heritage, enabled them to engage with this global dimension of Korean society and culture. Through strategic educational and career plans in different life stages, Derek and Sheila renegotiated the binary between the global and the local in order to take advantage of the privileged status of English as a global language and the increasing demand for multilingual talents in a globalized South Korean job market.

It is important to note that Derek and Sheila's negotiation of multiple scales and power hierarchies is an ongoing process, which is closely embedded in their transnational mobility trajectories. Both reported that working experiences and the Korean language skills acquired in South Korea proved to be beneficial to their current jobs in Hong Kong. Derek is taking care of his family business in Hong Kong, which requires extensive travel to South Korea. Sheila is working for a transnational Korean company in Hong Kong, which places a high demand on multilingual communicative skills. Like other respondents, Derek and Sheila felt quite comfortable displaying their Korean ethnicity in Hong Kong. Derek recognized that the popularity of Korean culture helps Hong Kongers to see the country as an advanced economic and cultural power:

Derek: I don't talk about Korean popular culture with my colleagues, 'cause I'm not interested in Korean popular culture, say pop music or pop media, like dramas or movies. But the fact that there is so much exposure and interest in it, and viewership, and consumption let's say in Hong Kong, that indirectly, um, their knowledge of Korea as a country – I guess the soft power helps. They don't see Korea as more backward than Hong Kong in terms of economic or cultural development. They actually see Korea as on par – at least on par with Hong Kong, in terms of economic and cultural, uh, parity.

Sheila, who is half-Chinese and half-Korean, also notes the favorable perceptions of Koreans in Hong Kong:

Sheila: I think they take more notice of Koreans and they think Koreans are very, like, uh, talented, creative – and you know – that they're on the trend now. So it does help . . . actually I feel quite proud of being Korean.

Derek and Sheila's migration trajectories and shifting linguistic priorities across their lifecourses have significantly complicated and reworked the presumed

hierarchical (scalar) relations between the United States/United Kingdom, Hong Kong and South Korea. Unlike Amy and Nancy, who imagined Hong Kong as a stepping stone for future career development in the United States, Derek and Sheila find in Hong Kong a cosmopolitan society where both their native competence in English and Korean ethnicity are positively evaluated and appreciated. To a certain extent, the two respondents' success stories in South Korea and Hong Kong reposition the United States and United Kingdom in relational ways as stepping stones or transitional stations on their quest for global career opportunities and hybridizing identity positions.

### *5.2 Hybridizing identities*

Another strategy adopted by the subjects to respond to tensions in language ideologies and re-align scales involved hybridizing identity positions. By hybridizing identity positions we do not presume the combination or mixture of two supposedly 'pure' identities. On the contrary, by using 'hybridizing' as a verb, we emphasize the formation of a flexible identity which is eclectic, accommodating, and not restricted to binary oppositions. Blommaert's concept of 'layered simultaneity' helps us connect such already experienced identity positions (often through migration) and aspirant identity positions to the sedimenting of practices of daily life (Blommaert 2005).

Both Derek and Esther reported hybridizing identities. Derek calls himself an overseas Korean who identifies with a third culture. By this he means that he has developed a feeling of affinity with people who have transnational educational experiences. Like Esther, Derek keeps contact with the local Korean community, though he feels most comfortable socializing with friends in English. Esther, who claims that she speaks pragmatic English, refuses a binary opposition in between her language use and identity. She considers code switching to be a natural ('not strange') practice of daily life:

Int.: So do you feel you're a different person in the workplace and at home? When you go home do you feel you are a different person?

Esther: Uh, I don't think I'm a different person, no.

Int.: OK. So, because in the professional setting, right, you need to speak English, but when you get home you have to speak Korean to your parents. Eating Korean food.

Esther: Yeah. But I think that's (.) that's part of who I am because I'm not a, like a pure like Korean person, so that's not strange to me. Like, even when I went to school, I would speak English at school and then come home and speak Korean. That's just part of my whole life. So it's not strange.

Codeswitching has become 'natural' as a regular and sedimented practice in her daily life. Moreover, multilingualism and overseas educational experience have not prevented Esther from also claiming a Hong Kong identity. She said:

Esther: I guess, for most of the friends that have similar background as me, who have pretty much grown up here since they were little . . . we just say like, we're pretty much Hong Kong people. Like, if someone, like a new friend who recently moved to Hong Kong, they would say that like we're pretty much Hong Kong people, we're like natives here.

Both Derek and Esther show how their hybridizing identities help resolve tensions in language ideologies, between Local and Global Language, and Multilingualism and English Only. Their identities also re-align scales, with Hong Kong seen as a context in which Korean professionals can have the advantage of being at home while on the move (both permanent and temporary). Hong Kong is a context in which to practice multilingualism while holding on to the symbolic importance of English as global capital.

Jasmine's re-imagination of her identity also connects to her ongoing responses to tensions in language ideology. Her narrative revealed a transition from compartmentalized identity and language use to something more hybrid and intersectional. We see her strategy of layered (contextualizing) simultaneity when she reflected on her time in the U.S.:

Jasmine: So, um, the American – I guess the American, or the Asian American um, stereotype is that they say like oh, your English is really great. Where are you from? And then it's often time, you know they're, they're, they're like second- or third generation Asian American and then people assume they are, you know like, the foreigners? So I just say like, no, I'm just, I'm Korean.

By confidently asserting 'I just say like, no, I'm just, I'm Korean' she renegotiates any authority that language use could command as a 'placed resource' by disrupting the expected territorial isomorphism between 'belonging elsewhere' and 'non-native speaker.' She further distinguishes her hybridizing identity from a hyphenated Korean-American position by resisting the latter's assumed de-territorialized hierarchy:

Int.: Do you have a Korean flag on your desk?

Jasmine: [Laughs] NO. No. I'm also, 'cause I'm, I'm more literature and cultural studies person and I, I'm opposite nationalism so I don't, I don't put any Korean flags or, you know – I have a cat picture (.) I keep my office modernist (.) In core like I have no doubt about my Korean-ness. Because um, I was raised and educated in Korea,

and then I have family in Korea, so I don't have any kind of identity crisis or anything, but I just have English speaking ability, English ability, but then I'm just Korean (.) I know for, for my friends or my students in the U.S., if they're Korean American, then they do have identity crisis.

Her strong sense of self ('I don't have any kind of identity crisis') is established relationally to Korean Americans through a hybridizing identity which draws on her previous global mobility and continuing commitment to this transnational lifecourse. This identity position and sense of belonging goes beyond just being based in Korea. Similarly, her commitment to spatial and professional mobility also implies that hers is not a diasporic identification, with an implied longing for a return from her current exilic daily round to a homeland. Such hybridization resonates with the sedimenting of (language) practice.

While we find Koreans re-imagining identity positions in hybridizing ways in response to tensions in language ideologies, and while this implies some form of linguistic agency, we caution against an overly celebratory reading of the potential to re-align scales in the absence of a fuller consideration of the workings of power. Using the example of racialization, we address this qualification in the next section.

### 5.3 *Racialization*

Sociolinguistic relations associated with racialization were imagined in ways that acknowledged tensions in language ideologies but attempted to re-negotiate underlying racial hierarchies associated with social scales. Here we adopt Omi and Winant's concept of racialization as 'the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group' (1986: 64). We explore the cases of John and Jasmine, two university professors who both recounted painful racialization experiences in the United States. John developed considerable anxiety about his accented English while studying in the United States:

John: Actually, when I stayed in the United States, I felt some kind of a psychological barrier inside of me. Even though I like to talk about something, I could not enunciate it freely, because I had to think oh, am I talking about it rightly? Is there any problem? Is it the right expression? Or something like that.

John told us that he felt intimidated speaking English in front of native speakers in the U.S. and his spoken English improved significantly only after he moved back to South Korea, and then later to Hong Kong. John attributed his greater confidence to Hong Kong's Asian context:

John: Maybe it was possible because I'm teaching in Hong Kong. Because there is no actually, uh, difference in the outlook. Because Korean people look very similar with the Chinese people. Some of my colleagues tell me that I look like a person from northern China. So it is, so – but, maybe there is a little bit higher, actually psychological barrier between me and the native speaker if I move to the United States.

John's reference to his Asian look highlights the importance of race in mediating his English language practices in the United States and in Hong Kong. What lies behind his 'psychological barrier' is the racialization of the Korean accent under the hegemony of American English. As a Korean in the United States, John realized that no matter how hard he tried to improve his English, he would still be racialized as a foreigner and a non-native speaker. As a Korean in Hong Kong, he felt that much of the racialization experience had been filtered out due to the high degree of physical similarity between those of Korean and Chinese descent.

Jasmine also spoke of the painful tensions in language use she experienced while studying in the U.S. as a minority student. She contrasted the contexts of Hong Kong and the U.S. in terms of people's tolerance for accented English: 'in Hong Kong ... they are more tolerant for different accents. But in America I feel in social situations that I have to perform sort of like Perfect English, and perfect mingling kind of English.' Here, she explicitly makes reference to the tension within the Pragmatic English/Perfect English ideology. She further explained what she meant by 'perfect mingling English':

Jasmine: Mingling is always hard for me. Very hard actually. So it depends on the person and the situation ... you know kind of like party situation where you have to meet a lot of people? That's very uncomfortable. Um, and then I think the different level of English is that um, when you can like joke with people? Then it's sort of the stage you show that you can enjoy the humor with them. So that, yeah. I think that level is quite hard.

For Jasmine, being able to mingle with native speakers not only requires Perfect English pronunciation, but sufficient cultural knowledge to understand and correctly employ humor. Jasmine acknowledged that the multilingual environment in Hong Kong made her more relaxed, which she expressed in terms of being less conscious about the boundary between the workplace and home. She said:

Jasmine: ... like in the U.S., I thought – I think I have like multiple layers of personalities that um, that I have to pull out, like work personality

and home personality. But then now more and more I think it's mixed. It's just kind of ... It's, it's – I used to think that, um ... they were completely different but then now I think it's getting more similar.

Jasmine's sociolinguistic performance of 'perfect mingling kind of English' is an attempt to accommodate and negotiate the racial (social) hierarchy she experienced as a Korean speaking English in the U.S. It also makes a resource both of her transnational lifecourse (for example, by recognizing Hong Kong's multilingual environment) and her hybridizing identity (for example, by mixing home and work personality).

In summary, John and Jasmine's experiences show how scalar politics and sociolinguistic relations are mutually constitutive. Tensions in language ideologies reflect scalar hierarchies and frame agency. In the tensions between Multilingualism and English Only, our two respondents emphasize the importance of having both competencies. English brings global access but may be interpreted as reinforcing the hegemony of English as a global language. Moreover, lived transnational experiences led both respondents to associate the native-speaking environment of the U.S. with racialization. For Jasmine, her equal valuation of multilingual competence helps to decenter the U.S. from her linguistic cosmology and restore some social status. It also has implications for geographic and temporal scales, as it renders her previous experiences in the U.S. as localized and temporary within an ongoing transnational lifecourse. This is in contrast to the globalizing context the U.S. offers to Amy and Nancy, who envision it as an eventual goal point. Imagined sociolinguistic relations draw on the transnational lifecourse and hybridizing identity to offer certain level of evasion or reconfiguration of underlying racist hierarchies.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study shows how the concept of scalar politics can deepen an understanding of the sociolinguistics of globalization and provide a better explanatory framework for the ways in which uneven linguistic markets of globalization are negotiated by subjects – and the limits on such agency. We extended Blommaert's (2010) scale hierarchies by taking note of diverse migration trajectories of our Korean respondents and their shifting language priorities across the lifecourse. In addition to geographical scales, we identify temporal and social scales, both as analytical constructs and categories of practice. Our conceptualization of scalar politics also attended to the multiple and shifting intersections between different scales and the agency of migrants in recalibrating and reconfiguring interscalar relations through strategic linguistic performances and practices. In finding that transnational subjects adopt and adapt scales as part of daily practice to give coherence to their

choices and ideologies, and to influence sociolinguistic relations, we concur with Delaney and Leitner (1997: 95) who noted:

once our concept of scale is freed from the fixed categories inherited from the past and our concept of politics is similarly expanded and enlivened, the questions multiply, and the analytic or interpretive problems relating scale to politics become more obvious.

In particular, for Koreans, the scalar politics at work draw broader attention to how relational hierarchies create frameworks of meaning and action in transnational daily life.

## NOTES

1. We are grateful to the Editors and Reviewers for very constructive feedback on earlier versions of this paper, and to Loretta Kim, Seungmo Kim, Sun-A Kim and Hyun Jee Oh for their kind assistance in referring potential respondents to us. We are particularly thankful to our research participants for the generosity of their contributions. Errors and omissions remain the responsibility of the authors. This study is based on field work supported by grants from the Worldwide Universities Network (PI, Suresh Canagarajah) and the David Lam East West Institute, Hong Kong Baptist University (PIs, Adrian Bailey and Shanshan Lan).
2. The following transcription conventions are used:
 

.	falling tone
,	sustained tone
?	rising tone
(.)	significant pause
CAPITALS	emphasis

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