



›Transiency‹ - a sustainable concept for the study of interaction and language ideologies under conditions of globalisation?

Hartmut Haberland, Lingcorp Midway seminar  
Roskilde, March 17, 2014

## The Lingcorp project

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An ethnography of language encounters  
– *L*anguage and *in*teraction in the  
*g*lobalized *corp*oration

## The Lingcorp project

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Det Frie Forskningsråd  
| Kultur og Kommunikation

Funded with almost 6.5 mio. Danish kroner for a three-year period (2012-2015).

Four sub-projects.

# The Lingcorp project

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- ▶ Dorte Lønsmann: Language ideologies and social categorization in multilingual workplaces in Denmark
- ▶ Spencer Hazel: Interactional dynamics in a world on the move: Navigating the new social ecologies of the contemporary workplace
- ▶ Sonja Barfod: Linguistic practices and ideologies in informal business settings
- ▶ Hartmut Haberland: Language learning and motivation in the globalized corporation

## The Lingcorp project

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Our original research plan was to find a workplace in Denmark with a global outlook for our case study – there are few but they are already overrun by researchers.

Realizing that ‘global’ and ‘globalized’ are not the same thing, we refocussed our work away from one big case to several mid-level sized companies.

## Was ist Globalisierung? (Ulrich Beck 1997)

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I have taken point of departure in Ulrich Beck's three-way distinction

- ▶ Globalization as a process
- ▶ Globality as its result
- ▶ Globalism as its ideology

(Haberland 2009, 2013)

## Was ist Globalisierung? (Ulrich Beck 1997)

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Two problems with this distinction:

- ▶ globality is not the only outcome of globalisation; a small company can be globalized without being global
- ▶ as far as language choice and language use is concerned, it is fine to explain the role of English as part of a hegemonic project, but less well suited to explain the role of other languages

## Was ist Globalisierung? (Ulrich Beck 1997)

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A lot of research on multilingualism in workplaces has been on English as a corporate language.

This is high on the agenda of many workplaces not just in Denmark, but also e.g. in Germany and Japan.



Japan Times, July 30, 2012

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The Japan Times

LANGUAGE | BILINGUAL

## Mikitani and his ‘Englishnization’ of Japanese business

BY MINORU MATSUTANI

STAFF WRITER

On July 1, Rakuten Inc. CEO Hiroshi Mikitani published a book about his company’s so-called Englishnization project titled “Takaga Eigo!” (「たかが英語!」 “It’s only English”) to coincide with the the start of the company’s *eigo kōyōgoka* (英語公用語化, making English the official language). The formal English name of the book is “Englishnization.”

Since the Internet shopping-mall operator announced its *eigo kōyōgoka* project in May 2010, it began to introduce English-language internal emails, documents and cafeteria menus, and also held *shanai kaigi* (社内会議, internal meetings) in English — even when meeting participants were all Japanese.

## Was ist Globalisierung? (Ulrich Beck 1997)

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English as a corporate language is a highly relevant research topic (Lønsmann 2011) but it is a matter of language policy from above and not necessarily a good description of practice on the company floor, nor of *all* the language ideologies framing the language policies and practices of these companies.

## Super-diversity

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So if globalisation theory is not enough as a theoretical backbone, what about that new buzzword, superdiversity (Vertovec 2007, Blommaert and Rampton 2011)?

## Super-diversity

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- ▶ What *is* super-diversity, actually?
- ▶ What does it apply to?
- ▶ Is it defined and how?
- ▶ How useful an analytical tool is it?

Vertovec 2007

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“To be sure, the ethnic and country of origin diversity of London is remarkable. Such diversity is manifesting in other parts of the country as well. However, observing ethnicity or country of origin (the two often, and confusingly, being used interchangeably) provides a misleading, one-dimensional appreciation of contemporary diversity. Over the past ten years, the nature of immigration to Britain has brought with it a transformative ‘diversification of diversity’ ... not just in terms of bringing more ethnicities and countries of origin, but also with respect to a multiplication of significant variables that affect where, how and with whom people live.” (Vertovec 2007: 1025)

## Super-diversity

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- ▶ Superdiversity is not just “a lot more of the same”.
- ▶ The ‘diversification of diversity’ is a ‘multiplication’ quite literally, i.e. diversity x diversity.

## Super-diversity

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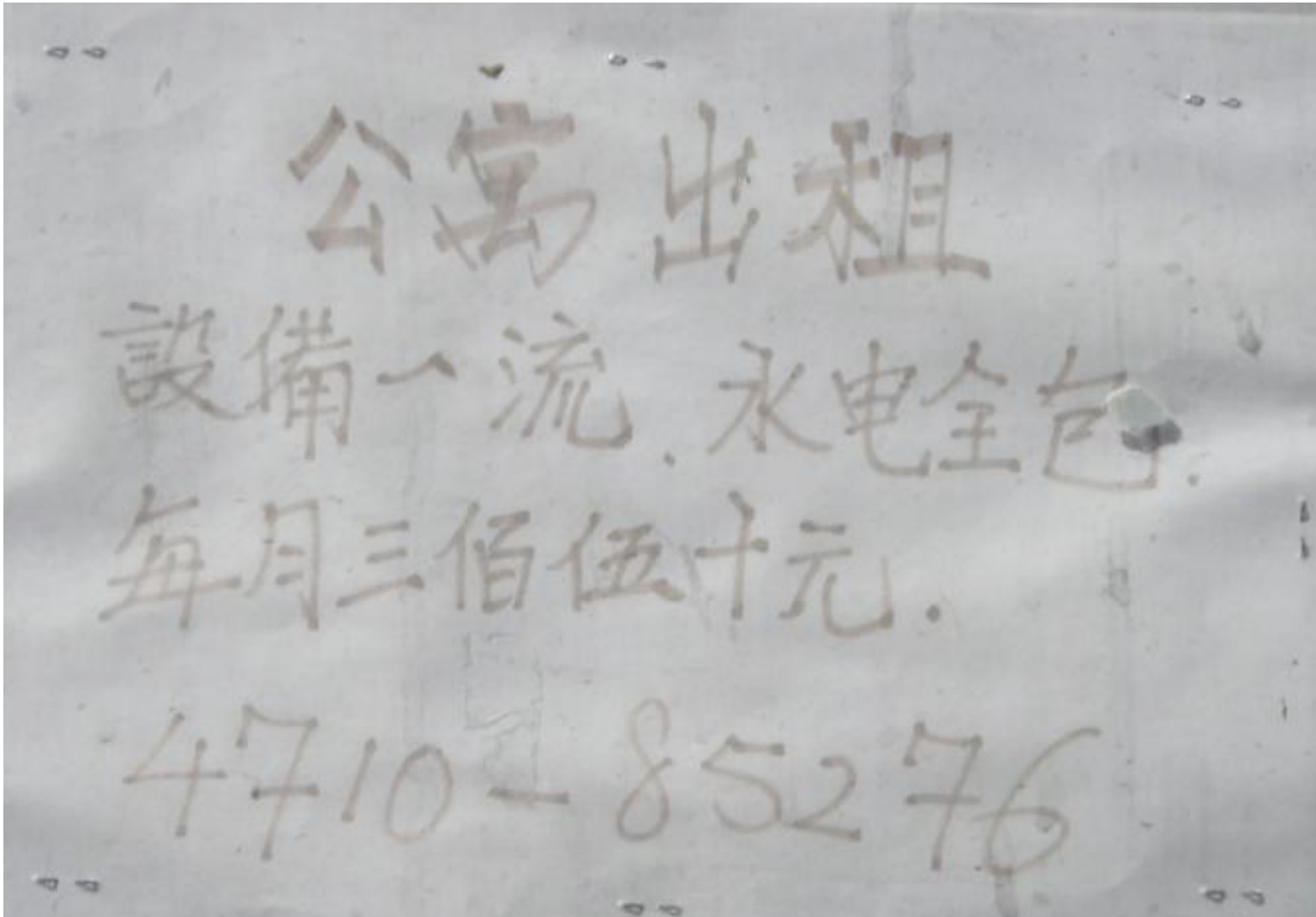
“Super-diversity is characterized by a tremendous increase in the categories of migrants, not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration, processes of insertion into the labour and housing markets of the host societies, and so on.” (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 1025)

“Steven Vertovec coined the term ‘superdiversity’, diversity within diversity, a tremendous increase in the texture of diversity in societies such as ours” (Blommaert 2013:4)

“Superdiversity ... is driven by three keywords: mobility, complexity and unpredictability.” (2013:6)

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Blommaert and Huang (2010)





公寓出租  
設備一流。水电全包。  
每月三百五十元。  
4710 – 85276

## Blommaert and Rampton (2011:2)

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- ▶ The text is written in two forms of Chinese,
- ▶ The mixed script articulates two ‘voices’, that of the producer and that of the addressee(s),
- ▶ ‘Yuan’ rather than ‘Euro’ is used as a currency, which indicates that the addressee(s) must be tourists from the PRC,
- ▶ The mixed character of the text indicates a transition,
- ▶ “this text points at two *very large scale* phenomena” (my emphasis): (a) transformation of Chinese diaspora (b) manifesting itself in Berchem of all places.

Blommaert and Rampton (2011:2)

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- ▶ The text is written in two forms of Chinese,

公寓出租

設備一流。水電全包

每月三百五十元

設備 are unambiguously traditional characters, 電 is a simplified character (for 電), but it could also be a traditional handwritten rendering of 電.

## Blommaert and Rampton (2011:2)

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- ▶ The mixed script articulates two ‘voices’, that of the producer and that of the addressee(s),
- ▶ ‘Yuan’ rather than ‘Euro’ is used as a currency, which indicates that the addressee(s) must be tourists from the PRC,

Well, 元 yüán means ‘Renminbi’ (the PRC currency), but Euro is 欧元 (‘europæisk yüan’) in Chinese. (The US dollar is 美元, the Hong Kong dollar 港元, even the Japanese Yen is sometimes called 日元 rather than 円.)

## Blommaert and Rampton (2011:2)

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- ▶ The mixed character of the text indicates a transition,
  - to the extent that it *is* mixed –

## Blommaert and Rampton (2011:2)

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- ▶ “this text points at two *very large scale* phenomena” (my emphasis): (a) transformation of Chinese diaspora (b) manifesting itself in Berchem of all places.

Both may well be correct, but it is doubtful that the text actually points at these phenomena.

Notice the the one-upmanshiplike ‘very large scale’ which echoes the ‘super’ of ‘superdiversity’.

(Stephen Potter 1952)

## Blommaert and Rampton: paradigm shift in the study of language in society

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“Rather than working with homogeneity, stability and boundedness as the starting assumptions, mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding are now central concerns in the study of languages, language groups and communication.” (Blommaert and Rampton 2011:3)

further by Blommaert and Rampton

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- ▶ management of ignorance ... not just ‘intercultural differences’
- ▶ salience of non-shared knowledge

(Blommaert and Rampton 2011:7, cf. Hannerz 1992)



## management of ignorance: Norwegian building site

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215 JOH: du kan ??nemt?? komma och (0.3) fylla igjen

216 (1.1)

217 JOH: återfylla

(data courtesy of Kamilla Kraft, MultiLing, 2014)

## Transiency

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This is part of an interaction where two languages (Swedish and L2 Norwegian) are used.

This is not a stable bilingual speech community.

If there is any predictability of understanding and reaction, it is based on the communication history of the participants, not on any stable framework shared with others.

Whatever community the interactants are in, it is not stable, it is *transient*.

The term was used by Mortensen (2013) on communities (of practice) in internationalized higher education where ELF scenarios are frequent.

## Transiency

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The current phase of modernity ... is characterised by extensive transnational mobility. National and sociocultural borders are constantly transversed as people undertake excursions of varying duration or relocate more permanently in pursuit of new opportunities, new experiences or new conditions of life. As a corollary of this extensive mobility, we witness a perpetual emergence of ephemeral social formations, often premised on engagement in shared activities such as work, education, or political, cultural or social projects.

(Mortensen and Haberland in preparation)

## Transient communities

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An example of an analysis of such a community is the study by Hazel and Mortensen 2013 about 'kitchen encounters' in an international program at a Danish university.

## Transient communities

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The study of transient communities is not particularly new. Millar (in preparation) refers to “historians of transport and ethnographers of urban public space ... (de Sapiro 2013)” and to Styhre’s concept of “nomadic organization”:

“an attempt to conceptualize the more fluid, ambiguous, continuously changing, loosely coupled forms of organizing that emerge in a postmodern capitalist context characterized by, *inter alia*, speed, change, and emergence. A nomadic view on the organization opens up for transient, temporal forms of organizing that are increasingly used, e.g., project management practices, temporal joint ventures, and the use of consultants on short term basis.” (2001:8)

## Transient communities

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What we are interested in is the challenge to classical sociolinguistic studies of multilingualism that takes the stable surroundings of multilingual exchanges for granted.

Key concepts of sociolinguistics are questioned by our focus on transiency.

## Transient communities

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“Sociolinguistic theory has based a number of its core concepts (like ‘domain’) on the experience (not just construction) of a stable bilingual community. In these communities (according to Fishman’s studies of Puerto Ricans in New York, and Blom and Gumperz’ study of Hemnesberget in Norway, but cf. Mæhlum’s critique (1996)), there are clear expectations of what language to speak to whom and when and about which topic.” (Mortensen and Haberland in prep.)

## Transient communities

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- ▶ Fishman's domain concept makes sense in stable multilingual communities.
- ▶ So does the distinction between situational and metaphorical code switching, and
- ▶ the concept of the sociolinguistic variable (Lavandera 1978).



## Transient communities

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- ▶ The same applies to the concept of indexicality (you have to ‘get’ it)
- ▶ and even to language ideologies (which within transient communities are rarely shared, but often not even recognizable).

## A very hot potato left to discuss

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- ▶ At the Nitobe symposium in Reykjavík (summer of 2013) an attempt to discuss ›*transient* multilingual communities‹ ended in a heated discussion of the concept of ›(speech) communities‹.
- ▶ Is the real issue not stability vs. transiency but the very existence of communities?
- ▶ Have we been caught in yet another essentialist trap?

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