Tilburg University

Understanding Society

Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

Paper 10

Voicing as an Essential Problem of Communication:

Language in education for Chinese immigrant children in globalization

by

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November 2011

Title

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Abstract

This article explores voicing processes of identity construction among migrant children inside China and in the Dutch Chinese diaspora. It is focused on the education related experiences of Chinese immigrants. We present three examples from our ethnographic fieldwork conducted in China and in the Netherlands to instantiate a theoretical argument: voice is the effect of as well as the condition for communication and the whole process of communication is essentially a voicing process.

Keywords:

Voice; Enregisterment; Migration; Discursive identity; China

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Voicing as Essential Problem of Communication

Introduction

This article explores the notion of voice in the discursive processes of identity construction among immigrant children through their education related experiences in China as well a s in Chinese diaspora. Over the past three decades in Mainland China, increasingly intense rural-urban migration has formed a sizable labor migrant population of over one hundred and fifty million, some ten percent of the country's total population (Dong 2011). The massive internal migration is an immediate result of China's dramatic economic changes and its deeper involvement in the world economy. In terms of trans-national migration, China has been one of the major emigrant countries. Moreover, we witness a gradual but important change of language use from Cantonese to Mandarin in the diasporized Chinese communities in the Netherlands as well as in the other Western European countries (Li & Juffermans 2011; Blommaert & Huang 2010). Both types of migration, internal as well as international, are part of a bigger and more general process – globalization – in which people relocate to a different place with a baggage of linguistic and cultural "belongings", enter into everyday encounters with the local communities. In such encounters and exchanges of social and linguistic values, some voices are heard or achieved their desired functions, while others are silenced, lost, or ascribed new meanings.

In this article we report on a joint ethnographic study conducted between 2006 and 2010 among internal labor migrants in China as well as Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands. A body of research literature addresses language shifts and identity construction of Chinese immigrants in the US, the UK and the European continent (e.g. Li Wei 2002; Zhu 2009; Scollon and Scollon 2003; Li & Juffermans 2011). Increasing research attention has turned to the discursive process of identity establishment among internal migrants in urban China (e.g.

Xia xxxx; Dong 2011). However, studies that bring together research insights from the two fields – internal vs. international migration – are rare, and we therefore examine both fields in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the complex linguistic and social practices of Chinese labor migrants in the host societies, including those inside China. Such a joint study combining internal and international migration is urgently needed, particularly when new telecommunication technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet make national borders vague and when migrants (whether internal or international) communicate with their families and friends thousands of miles away and follow events of their home country closely in an era of globalization (Blommaert 2011; Dong, forthcoming).

We take an ethnographic approach in our fieldwork and in our report of data analysis, which means that we follow the underlying rules and assumptions of ethnography toward language study (cf. Blommaert and Dong 2010). This theoretical and methodological stance urges us to invest extended periods of time and "immerse" ourselves in the fieldwork sites, in order to obtain a precise and holistic understanding of our ethnographees. Because of our ethnographic perspective, we refuse to "discriminate" one data type against another. In other words, we consider field notes as useful as audio-video recordings, and documents such as student written work and school leaflets no less important than interviews, because every piece of data we collect in the field gives us information on our ethnographees, and by putting them together we begin to see the whole picture of their life. It is important, however, to make "distinctions" between them, because these different modes of entextualization each carry distinct expressive potentialities and limitations, and each enable different forms of enregisterment, and hence of 'voice' itself. The subsequent analysis reveals such

entextualization and enregisterment, but we emphasize them here and believe it is a strength to bring these disparate kinds of materials together into a coherent account of “voice”.

Of the three examples reported in this article, two are from China and one from the Netherlands, two are interviews and one is a newspaper clipping. In all three examples we observe voice and voicing processes. In the next session we trace the notion of voice back to Bakhtin's theory, and discuss the more recent conceptualization of enregistered voices and voice as a social construct. We argue that voice is process *as well as product*, the outcome of as well as the precondition for communication, and we can only analyze it by attending to the entire process of communication. Voice is never a given; it defines an essential problem of communication: how do I make my voice heard? To illustrate our arguments, we present examples in which migrants deploy languages and other semiotic resources at various levels to voice their identities, to discover emerging voices of their new identities, and to navigate obstacles on the way to having their identities ratified. We further argue that such voices and voicing processes are always deeply ideological.

The immediate contexts of our study are educational institutions. In the China part of the research, the fieldwork sites are schools populated with both local and migrant children. For the Dutch part, the fieldwork sites are more diverse, including home education and informal socialization of migrant children to the local communities; but the research focus is always placed on the education related issues – formal as well as informal education – of the second generation Chinese immigrants. Education is indeed the key to understand the social position of our informants, the possibility of their (children's) upward social mobility in their respective societies, and the underlying inequality that defines many parts of their life.

Voice as a Semiotic Resource for Mobility

We often hear utterances such as "having my voice heard", "I hear his voice in your talk", or "this is a voice of an expert". Indeed, all kinds of voices are circulated in our everyday encounters, in the texts we read, or in the media we depend on so much to obtain information about the world. The concept of voice has a complex history of development and has acquired diverse meanings and models of application. One main theoretical source is the Bakhtinian notion of voice (Bakhtin 1981, 1984), which distinguishes social voice from individual voice and emphasizes the social dimension of this notion. In Bakhtin's terms, social voice refers to socially recognized and socially typifiable speech distinctions such as class, gender and profession, whereas individual voice is concerned with person specific, unique, situated figures. Bakhtin's work uses the terms "dialogic" and "voice", and yet the conceptualization is not restricted to phonation, oral speech, or dyadic conversation. Bakhtin (1981), for instance, is primarily concerned with written texts. Influential and important as Bakhtin's work is, questions such as where are the boundaries between the social and the individual remain unsolved.

Recent developments of this notion have moved beyond the Bakhtinian dichotomy of social versus individual voice. Agha's approach of theorizing voice, for instance, gives more attention to the "enregistering process" through which social voices are related to particular perceivable registers, and through which people are socialized in their use of the register – or at least are capable of recognizing the indexed social personae of the register (Agha 2005). The macro processes of enregisterment at the societal level are cumulative effects of micro communicative practices in which people encounter voices, recognize the characterological figures indexed by the voices, and moreover, produce metadiscourses and take footing and

role alignment toward the characterological figures in question (Agha, 2005; Goffman 1981). Along this line of argument, metapragmatic activities at the societal level are particularly critical because any single speech event is inadequate in having a voice enregistered – to become a register – and the indexical meanings of a voice, that is to say the stereotypes performed by the speech form, have to be continuously recognizable and confirmed by a society or a subgroup of a society. The notion of "enregistered voice" is deployed and developed in the Chinese contexts in Dong (2010) which shows the processes through which Putonghua, a once regional vernacular of Mandarin Chinese has been enregistered as a supra-local linguistic standard in modern mainland China. It argues that the grassroots voices articulated in the use of Putonghua receive uptake through tacit and ideological processes of enregisterment, in which the symbolic dominance of Putonghua is being accepted as natural and normative.

A rather different line of conceptualizing voice can be found in the work of Blommaert on voice and mobility. Following Hymes' (1996) stance on inequality (and more distantly, Jakobson 1960), Blommaert (2005: 68) argues that voice is primarily the capacity to make oneself understood by others. It is, in other words, the capacity to realize intended functions by mobilizing semiotic resources available to oneself. Voice fundamentally is a social issue, that the mapping of a linguistic form onto its function has to do with space and mobility (Blommaert 2008). People speak *in* and *from* a space (Blommaert 2005:223; Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005). Space is never neutral, but always projects a particular value, social order, authority and affective attributes, in which people take different positions and orient toward the topics as well as the interlocutors by systematically organizing various patterns of speech. People maintain their language competence, or expand their linguistic

repertoires and improve their communicative skills, but because they are "out of place" and travel across spaces, they lose voices and experience the changes of value attached to certain linguistic resources and patterns.

Some linguistic resources, such as standard accents, are highly mobile and index prestige, whereas others are stigmatizing and strictly locked in local and private domains. Dong and Blommaert (2009) describes a fieldwork observation that a migrant worker – a cleaner who works in a urban recreation center in a middle class residential neighborhood in Beijing – is effectively silenced by her urban interlocutors. In that episode, we observe the condition for having a voice and the effect of voicing. In other words, we observe voice as a pretextual condition – what it takes to make the migrant worker herself understood – and voice as an outcome of communication – the migrant worker being silenced. Our core theoretical argument is this: there are conditions for voicing, and the effect of voicing is understanding (or failing to be understood), and we can only observe such effect and condition by attending to the entire communicative process, a voicing process. We stress that voice is a process, but also a product. Questions of voice are always questions of power and inequality, whether it is about being understood in a particular space, or about giving voice to the voiceless, or about empowering the powerless. And that is why voice is deeply ideological.

Before embracing data analysis, let us first sketch the ethnographic contexts in order to prepare the reader for a fuller engagement with the empirical part of the article. We start with a discussion of some macro issues of the rural-urban migration within China and Chinese immigration to Europe, and then move to a micro level of educational institutions – important spaces for our informants to voicing their identities.

Migration Within and Beyond the Chinese Borders

Migration is usually seen as a phenomenon where people emigrate and immigrate, leaving their place of origin and settling elsewhere for an extended period of time. In Western Europe, migration has traditionally been concerned with transnational population movements, such as Turks and Moroccans to the Netherlands, or South Asian and Caribbean people to Britain (Bezemer and Kroon 2006; Extra, Spotti and Avermaet 2009; Rampton 1995; Blommaert, Creve and Willaert 2006). China's internal migration is a similar process in the sense that people “gravitate” to affluent places which offer them better life opportunities. The differences are that Chinese internal migration has no colonial background, and that it happens within the country's national borders. Internal labor migrants typically take low skill and low income jobs as cleaner, recycler, street vendor, domestic worker, etc., jobs that local urban citizens tend to avoid. Some have found better opportunities for life, most however are still struggling to feed themselves and their family. Migrant workers thus become effectively a new urban proletariat, ranked lower than the local resident working class. Over thirty years of mass labor migration, a sizable group of second generation migrants, children of migrant workers, has emerged and quickly formed as a distinct social phenomenon, and their education and academic future have attracted much public attention and media reports.

The common concerns of migrant children's education are that urban public schools have inadequate capacity to accommodate the influx of migrant children, and therefore migrant parents have either to pay higher fees for their children to be admitted at public schools, or to send them to privately run migrant schools which usually are poorly equipped and under achieving. Some parents have to leave their children to their relatives or boarding schools back in their hometown because they find the living and schooling costs of their children in

cities unaffordable. The unequal (usually higher) admission fees of urban public schools are often impossible for migrant workers who as a whole live on a lower income than their urban working class counterparts do. In contrast, privately run migrant schools require lower fees for basic education. To operate on a limited budget and still make a profit, however, migrant schools have to compromise school conditions and teaching quality (Han, 2001; Lu and Zhang, 2001; Woronov, 2004; Zhang, Qu and Zou, 2003; Zou, Qu and Zhang, 2005; cf. Dong 2011 for a fuller account of educational inequality that hinders migrant children's development).

Over the years, cities such as Beijing vowed to include most migrant children within the publicly-funded education system and to close down underachieving migrant schools. This ambition, however, is not easy to achieve. One of the reasons that discourages migrant children from joining public schools is the concern of being discriminated by their urban peer students and teachers. Many migrant children in the schools of Dong (2011) fieldwork reported that they believed their regional accents did differentiate them from local Beijing pupils and they often felt being “silenced” and becoming “voice-less” because of their accents. The Chinese fieldwork site of this article was a Beijing public school which was able to admit both local and migrant children. It therefore offered us a rare opportunity of observing daily encounters and voicing processes between migrant and local children in an institutional context.

We study the Chinese massive internal migration as part of the world labor flows of contemporary globalizing processes. In such processes, Chinese immigrants in Europe often locate themselves in a lower socioeconomic layer of society, similar to that of our rural-urban migrant workers, and their children often face similar social and education difficulties,

although their basic education rights are usually satisfied. Part of our data were collected from the transnational Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands, in order to compare the voicing processes of the two groups in education settings across continents. The Chinese diaspora in the Netherlands counts for a population of no less than seventy-five thousand (CBS 2010). Rather than a homogeneous group as one often thought, the Chinese community is highly diversified and stratified. Early Chinese immigrants, mainly from the coastal provinces of Guangdong and Zheijiang, arrived in the Netherlands as sailors and typically settled in and around the Amsterdam/Rotterdam regions between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A second weave of early Chinese immigrants happened in the 1950s. These Chinese immigrants often had complicated migration trajectories – they typically migrated via Java, Sumatra, Suriname, Hong Kong, and other countries or regions – and brought along with them diverse linguistic repertoires. They mostly entered the catering business and made the "Chinese-Indonesian" cuisine accessible across the Netherlands (Li & Juffermans 2011).

A recent layer of Chinese immigration has been characterized by an increase of Mainland Chinese who relocate to the Netherlands for the purposes of education and of professional developments since the early 1980s, and more remarkably in the past two decades. These "new immigrants", many of whom are non-Cantonese speakers, typically succeed in upward social mobility and entry the middle layer of the host society. These demographic changes in composition of Chinese diaspora reflects the social and economic changes inside China and its deeper involvement in the world economy. Prior to these changes, Cantonese was the dominant language in the Dutch Chinese diaspora; however, it has been down-scaled to one of the dialects while Putonghua, the standardized Mandarin Chinese spoken by most "new immigrants", gains purchase as an important linguistic resource among overseas Chinese in

the Netherlands, as well as in other part of Europe. The Dutch fieldwork sites of our study locate in Tilburg, the sixth biggest city of the Netherlands, including Chinese restaurants, Chinese community schools, Chinese churches and Chinese grocery shops.

To explain what is going on in our fieldwork sites, a short description of linguistic backgrounds is in order. China is a complex multilingual and multicultural society. Many ethnic groups have their own languages, such as Mongolian and Korean. “Chinese language”, or “Zhongwen (中文)”, is an umbrella term for the language spoken by Han Chinese, which is also complicated and which comprises many varieties. Commonly known in the West are Mandarin Chinese spoken in the North and the Northwest China, Cantonese in Guangdong and Hong Kong, Hakka (or Kejia dialects), and Fujian (or Min) dialects (Hu 1995; Ramsey 1987). In addition to this complexity, Putonghua, or “common speech”, is the linguistic standard in mainland China since the 1950s. It is standardized upon Mandarin Chinese spoken in Beijing and its nearby regions (see Dong 2010 for a fuller account of the standardization of Mandarin Chinese). Putonghua is the language of instruction in the education system of China, as well as the official language in the state’s other institutions. Moreover, English is a language of globalization which gives its speakers greater potential for social and geographical mobility. For our migrant informants inside China, the relationships between Putonghua and regional dialects are key to understand their social position and education issues; as for our Dutch Chinese informants, Dutch plays an crucial role in their socialization, along with the multiple relations among Putonghua as a rising linguistic standard, Cantonese as an established lingua franca, and their regional languages such as Hakka and Fujian dialects. Let us now look at the data.

Voice, Identities, and Educational Institutions

Migrant children enter into everyday linguistic exchanges with urban citizens and their voices are constantly measured and evaluated against local norms. The following example is a newspaper clipping taken from *Ningbo Ribao* (Ningbo Daily), the official local newspaper of the Ningbo city. Ningbo is an emerging industrial center in the Zhejiang province of China's eastern coastal region. Ningbo's booming manufactory industry has attracted hundreds of millions migrant workers from all over the country, and the young writer of the newspaper text, Example 1, is one of the many children who leave their home villages and relocate to this industrial city with their parents. The text is published as a stand-alone piece in the section of readers' stories of their own life in Ningbo. The writer is a primary school student who comes from Sichuan province in the western inland region with her parents and attends a local Ningbo public school (Page 6, Ningbo Daily 31/10/2006/ Issue11407). Sichuan is one of the major "emigrating" provinces in China, and some of its rural and mountainous areas are among the most "underdeveloped" compared to other parts of the country. Below we present English translation of the text, along with Pinyin[1] transcripts and Chinese words of several key elements of voice enregistering moments. The original text in Chinese characters can be found in Appendix 1.

Example 1 "Putonghua makes me a member of this city"

Putonghua makes me a member of this city.

Last summer I arrived in this city with my parents from Sichuan. I was curious about and excited by everything I saw in the streets: skyscrapers, broad streets, and flashing colorful lights in the night{鳞次栉比的高楼大厦，宽阔平坦的柏

油马路，五彩缤纷的霓虹灯 *lincizhibi de gaoloudasha*, *kuankuopingtan de baiyoumalu*, *wucaibinfen de nihongdeng*). But I felt that all of these were strange and far away from my life, because I was an outsider of this city {外地人 *waidiren*}, a person from elsewhere, a child of migrant workers.

After many twists and turns, my dad found a local school for me. On the first day of the semester, my dad and I came to my new school. “Wow!” the school was spacious and beautiful in my eyes. My teacher, Miss Zhang, was a pretty young lady who spoke perfect Putonghua. Her Putonghua sounded very nice {一口标准的普通话，字正腔圆，真好听 *yikou biaozhende putonghua, zizhengqiangyuan, zhenhaoting*}! She asked me to introduce myself in front of the class, but I couldn't – I couldn't speak Putonghua, how could I introduce myself? Miss Zhang was very kind and asked me to do so in my own dialect. I said “good morning, I am a child from Sichuan…” {俺是来自四川的娃子 *an shi laizi Sichuan de wazi*} then was interrupted by a loud laughter from the class. I was so embarrassed that I just wanted to run away from the class. You know, I used to be a top student in the school of my hometown; how could I be laughed at like this! Miss Zhang helped me again “what she used is the standard Sichuan dialect {标准的四川话 *biaozhen de Sichuanhua*}.”

After the class, Miss Zhang found me and told me that I should learn Putonghua otherwise I would encounter many difficulties in my life… Having her kind words in mind I was determined to study hard so that one day I would speak good Putonghua {把普通话学好 *ba Putonghua xue hao*}… Now I have finally get rid of my language barrier {语言的隔阂 *yuyande gehe*}and become part of the

city.

(*Ningbo Daily*, 31/10/2006, Issue 11407, p. 6)[2]

The text is a first person narrative on the writer's experience of her first school day in the city. We “hear” the writer's voice throughout; within the voice of the migrant child, however, we distinguish voice of others, and multiple layers of voices. In order to make this complex voicing process clear, we need to contextualize the text in its micro as well as macro settings. The micro setting is a public primary school (student age between 6 and 12), funded and managed by the local education authority. Its key functions, as in any other state school, revolve around reproducing mainstream social values and reinforcing the social structures. The school is located in a wealthy city, at least portrayed by the migrant child as “skyscrapers, broad streets, and flashing colorful lights in the night”, which sounds rather positive and praising in Chinese (鳞次栉比的高楼大厦，宽阔平坦的柏油马路，五彩缤纷的霓虹灯 *lincizhibi de gaoloudasha*, *kuankuopingtan de baiyoumalu*, *wucaibinfen de nihongdeng*), though it might not sound quite the same to a western reader. In many places of China, “skyscrapers, flashing colorful lights in the night” emblem urbanity, and being an urban citizen is often another name for being modern, wealthy, sophisticated, and so on, compared to the social meanings indexed by “being rural”. This description of the young migrant writer is therefore a reflection of the macro situations we have discussed above – the rural urban disparities, the uneven regional development, and hence the mass internal migration.

We address the dynamics of “voice” at the macro-level of institutions, communities, and societies, and at the micro-level of language as it is used to mediate face-to-face interaction in real time, in a period of dramatic increase of mobility, migration, and cultural and linguistic

contact. Let us first take a closer look at the migrant child's voice and then turn to the points of institutional and public layers of voice. The migrant child's voice can be analyzed into three parts, and in each part we see subtle but important voice changes. The first part describes her initial encounters with the city. She is apparently attracted by the modern city, but feels alien to it and labels herself as a "child of migrant workers", a not very appealing identity category. In this part of the text, the self-ascribed identity is that of a migrant child, a typifiable voice constructed on the basis of reflexive accounts of her perception of the city and on her perceived exclusion from the city.

The second part of the text is marked by an episode where the migrant child has to introduce herself in front of the class. She notices that her teacher speaks "perfect" which sounds "very nice" (一口标准的普通话，字正腔圆，真好听 *yikou biaozhende putonghua, zizhengqiangyuan, zhenhaoting*). Such qualifications of speech are of course deeply ideological and its indexical values go much beyond its linguistic features. The quoted utterance "good morning, I am a child from Sichuan…" {俺是来自四川的娃子 *an shi laizi Sichuan de wazi*} is particularly informative in several ways. First, the markedness of Sichuan accents here is mainly lexical: the use of dialect lexicon *an* (俺) rather than the standard lexicon *wo* (我) for the first person pronoun "I", and of typical Sichuan lexicon *wazi* (娃子) for "child" instead of the Putonghua lexicon *haizi* (孩子) (see Table 1 for a summary).

Table 1: The differences in lexicon usage between Putonghua and Sichuan dialects.

	In writting	In Pinyin	In writting	In Pinyin
Sichuan Dialect	俺	*an*	娃子	*wazi*
Putonghua	我	*wo*	孩子	*haizi*
English	I		child	

Therefore it is possible to deploy these recognizable emblems to represent her Sichuan accent in the newspaper account – a written text. Second, the phonological part of the utterance is inevitably lost due to the fact that it is a written and later printed text-artifact. However, Sichuan accents, together with Dongbei accents and Tangshan accents, generally are perceived as the "funny accents" in China, and are often used in comedy or other genres of entertainment in order to amuse an audience. That is the trigger of laughter from the class, although it is not the migrant child's intention. The evaluation of an accent as "amusing" or "funny" is ideological and highlights the "defects" of the accent as measured against the standard form of the language. The reaction of the local children precisely points to a social reality that linguistic forms are organized unequally in this space (as in any space), and the Sichuan child's accent is neither usual nor high-ranked: it is an "abnormal" accent, bespeaking an "abnormal" identity.

Here we see a pretextual gap: the differences between the migrant child's resources and the expected linguistic function, and both exist prior to and pre-inscribed in the communicative event. Such pretextualities condition what the migrant child can achieve in the communication: the migrant child's linguistic form fails to map onto its intended function, and her Sichuan accent brings laughter and shame. The outcome of the communicative process is a silenced voice. The voicing contrasts – that of the migrant child in the form of stigmatized accent, and that of her local counterparts – are discursive figures that allow social typification and identity categorization through metapragmatic activities.

In the third part, the teacher helps the migrant child out and says "what she used is the standard Sichuan dialect {标准的四川话 *biaozhen de Sichuanhua*}!" The teacher's voice, directly reported by the migrant child, is produced on an interpersonal level. As we observed

elsewhere (Dong and Blommaert 2009; Dong 2011), teachers are often friendly and positive in their everyday interaction with migrant children, and in many cases we observe that they voluntarily invest extra time and energy into their migrant pupils. When the teachers function at (and speak from) an institutional level, however, their voices are up-scaled to be institutional voices that reproduce dominant values and ideologies of the mainstream society. Miss Zhang's institutional voice is reported as a piece of advice on learning the standard language and its benefit to the migrant child's life. Through the diligent work of educational practitioners, as we observe, institutional mechanisms anchor dominant values in the teacher's daily efforts of maintaining linguistic correctness and purity (cf. Bourdieu 1991). Such daily efforts reproduce the symbolic dominance of Putonghua in a taken-for-granted manner.

In this third part of the story, we again "hear" the voice of the migrant child, but a different one from those of the first and second parts – it becomes a confident voice depicting a promising picture of life in the city. In this voice, the migrant child no longer perceives herself as being excluded from the city; rather, she professes an alignment to the local community – "Now I have finally get rid of my language barrier {语言的隔阂 *yuyande gehe*}" – and this claim is based on her improvement in Putonghua proficiency. In this part we see an empowered person who is able to use Putonghua as a means of communication and who is content with her accent as well as her newly achieved identity. Of course it might take time for this claimed identity to be ratified by the local.

There are multiple voices, particularly the changing voices of the migrant child and her identity making in an urban school. We also address the voice of a teacher as an institutional voice that articulates homogeneity and uniformity and reinforces normative expectations of pupils' linguistic behavior. The text is a public voice, being a newspaper article, that

articulates general rules of social conduct (speaking Putonghua is for one's own benefit) and reproduces stereotypical social images (the migrant versus the local).

Our second example is an interview of a local child on his perception of his migrant counterparts. Its micro context is a public primary school located in an old lane of the central Beijing. The area used to be inhabited by local people; gradually many of them have moved to newly built complexes on the outskirts of Beijing, because the property prices of the central Beijing kept rising and the old single-story houses became uncomfortable and inconvenient (usually without private bathroom, running water, etc.). The area was now largely occupied by urban low-income households and migrant families. Migrant families rented flats in the area often because they did low skilled jobs in or offered service to the neighborhood, working as cleaners hired by the neighborhood committee (*juweihui*), or fruit and vegetable sellers in the nearby markets. There were approximately two hundred pupils in the school, of which about half were migrant children. They were mostly born and raised in Beijing, although without Beijing *hukou*[3]. We observed that the migrant pupils almost always used Putonghua in and out of class such as on the playground. All teachers are local; and that the interviewer is a native Beijing speaker. Being a trained sociolinguist and ethnographer, the interviewer is aware of accent shifts of her interlocutors and adjusts her own accents accordingly. The interview is in Chinese language (Putonghua), and the English is our translation.

Example 2 “... some dialect of other place is very funny!”

Interview with Bingbing, a local pupil, during class break on June 8, 2007 [Field Recording DJ_2007-06-08-V040][4]

((Class break noise, unintelligible talk, Bingbing imitating a dialect talk, laughter from his peer students))

1DJ: ((Laughter)) What dialect are you imitating?

((unintelligible dialect-like talk continues, noise, laughter…))

2 Bingbing: Some dialect of other places {别地儿 *biedier*}.

3 DJ: Other place? Where? Your hometown?

4 Bingbing: No.

5 DJ: Then where?

6 Bingbing: Just a place elsewhere, I don't know where.

7 DJ: Other places? Your parents' language?

((noise, unintelligible talk…))

8 DJ: Where do you come from?

9 Bingbing: I am from Beijing. I am from Beijing. {我北京的 *wo Beijing de*。我北京的 *wo Beijing de*} I imitate (the dialect).

10 DJ: Who were you imitating?

11 Bingbing: hmm, hmm, I mimicked, I mimicked another person…

12 DJ: Do you find (the dialect) funny?

13 Bingbing: Yes very funny {特好玩 *tehaowanr*}!

This conversation was triggered by an episode in which the ethnographer (DJ) happened to hear Bingbing – a nine year old boy – mimicking a dialect during a class break. It was unclear why he started the dialect imitation; but it was apparent from his tone in the voice recording that he did not intend to ridicule a particular person but was playfully “performing” a dialect.

He claimed that the "dialect" was his invention. It is questionable whether that is indeed the case or the presence of the researcher questioning him played a role in his refusal to answer the question. The utterance "a place elsewhere" (别地儿 *biedier*) was loaded with a Beijing accent, noticeably with an [r] attached to "places" (儿 *er* in the Chinese transcript), and this emblem of Beijing accent enacted a marked Beijing local identity. Note that the child put emphasis both within turn 2 and within turn 6, signaling that he felt strongly that the dialect he produced was not the language "here" – standard Chinese in a Beijing school. This local identity performed in linguistic and communicative practice was echoed by his later metapragmatic remarks "I (am) from Beijing. I (am) from Beijing {我(是)北京的 *wo* (*shi*) *Beijing de*. 我(是)北京的 *wo* (*shi*) *Beijing de*}" and he repeated the remarks with a shift in emphasis – in the first sentence he put stress on "Beijing", whereas in the second sentence the emphasis moved to "I". In addition, the transcript of Chinese characters and Pinyin revealed another salient lexical emblem of Beijing speech – the omission of link verb "am" – and this again echoed his identity claim. In contrast to the Sichuan child in Example 1, Bingbing was clearly proud of his accent, as well as the identity indexed by the accent. The linguistic cues – particularly the marked Beijing accent with an "r" and the omission of a link verb – indexed a local identity; and his metapragmatic remarks made the child's self-perceived identity explicit. Both the linguistic and the metaprgamatic activities convey the meaning that the Beijing speech, which is often seen as another name for "standard Chinese", defines the institutional as well as the geographic space of the school , where people have to "posses" this dominant language in order to have their voice heard.

This was an utterance of a local Beijing child; in his voice we differentiated another voice – the voice of a dialect speaker. The "dialect" might be his total invention, or a creative

imitation of a familiar figure. One thing we were sure, that as soon as Bingbing performed the "talk", both he and his audience (DJ and the other pupils who were present) immediately recognized that he was producing a "dialect" – a voice remarkably different from the rest of his utterance. This perceived differentiability led to the typifiability of this dialect voice, or voicing contrasts between the standard and the non-standard, the local and the non-local. Whether it was an actual dialect or an imagined one was no longer an issue, as it became an "enregistered voice", a social voice connected to a register of "non-standard accent" and indexing a particular stereotypical social personae. Hence the switch between a dialect-like talk and an everyday speech pointed to a switch between an imagined identity and a real one. The role alignment that Bingbing displayed was similar to what Agha (2005) defined as "patterns of congruence/non-congruence across interactional turns among semiotic behaviors expressing voicing effects" (Agha 2005:53). Bingbing's alignment to the imagined stereotypical voice of dialect was not motivated by positive social personae related to dialect such as prestige or politeness, but by an idea that the dialect was "very funny" (turn 13). Similar to what Example 1shows, presenting an accent in an amusing way in fact disqualifies it; rarely anyone would suggest Putonghua "funny" or "terrible" – Putonghua is just "normal" (Dong 2010; cf. Silverstein 1996 for a discussion of a similar phenomenon in American English).

So far we have looked at voicing processes of migrant children in education settings within China. In the third example, we turn to the data collected from our Dutch fieldwork in a Chinese restaurant in the Netherlands. It shows the competition of various languages and language varieties in the education of second generation Dutch Chinese.

Example 3 “If he speaks the dialect, we ignore him...”

Compare to Chinese internal migrant children, children of diasporized Chinese families in the Netherlands are not only contending with multiple Chinese language varieties, but also face the additional challenge of learning Dutch and English within educational settings. Cantonese used to be the dominant code for communication within the Chinese community. Immigrants, especially those in the catering business, had to learn Cantonese in order to survive in the Netherlands, and in many cases they gave priority to Cantonese over Dutch because restaurant owners, as we described earlier, were mostly early immigrants from Hong Kong and other southeast Asian regions who had Cantonese as their first language. This situation is changing, however, as we shall see in the following data. The interviewee was a kitchen worker who immigrated from the Fujian Province to the Netherlands in the 1990s. Our interview was about language choice and language education of one of his children. The kitchen worker and his wife spoke the Fujian (Min) dialect and Putonghua. The interview was conducted in Chinese language and was recorded in field notes. DY stands for the interviewer and W stands for the kitchen worker. Our English translation is given below and the field notes in Chinese characters can be found in Appendix III.

Interview with Mr. W, a kitchen worker from the Fujian province [Field notes 2010-03-20 16:00-17:00].

1 DY: Where did your son grow up?

2 W: He grew up in Fujian, my hometown, taken care of by his aunt.

3 DY: Why did you bring him back to the Netherlands?

4 W: He is almost three years old, and should go to school soon. So we brought him

back.

5 DY: Do you think it is better that he goes to school here than in China?

6 W: Yes, he should begin to learn Dutch now. He will learn Dutch in Dutch school.

7 DY: Can he speak any Dutch now?

8 W: No, almost none.

9 DY: Do you teach him Dutch at home?

10 W: No. when he goes to the Dutch school, he will pick it up soon.

11 DY: What languages do you speak to him at home?

12 W: We speak <u>Zhongwen</u> to him at home.

13 DY: Don't you speak the Fujian dialect to him?

14 W: No. When he was in China, he spoke Fujian dialect. <u>Nobody</u> in my home speaks <u>Putonghua</u>. My mom can speak the dialect only. She is illiterate. My son has been to the kindergarten in China for half a year where he learned Putonghua. But he can only listen (to Putonghua), he cannot speak (Putonghua).

15 DY: How about now?

16 W: Now, he is better. We speak only <u>Putonghua</u> to him.

17 DY: Does he make any improvement now?

18 W: Yes. He has to speak (Putonghua). If he speaks the dialect, we ignore him, pretending not to hear him. So he has to speak Putonghua to us.

19 DY: Don't you teach him Cantonese?

20 W: No. Putonghua is most important now. Even <u>Hong Kong people</u> have begun to learn (Putonghua). Cantonese is no longer that important, even in the Netherlands, in recent years. Look at the two boys ((referring to the sons of the restaurant owner)),

they can speak very good Putonghua. They learn it from their parents.

The interview is a metapragmatic discourse of an immigrant father on his child's language education. Compared to the first two examples of voices from migrant children, this example is primarily concerned with a father's voice. In the father's utterance, however, we distinguish some voice-making moments of the child, in negotiation of the “legitimate” language for the family space. As a whole, the discourse is concerned with relationships between languages: Dutch in relation to Chinese, the Fujian dialect in relation to Putonghua, and Putonghua in relation to Cantonese. It shows that Putonghua gains voice both inside family and in the diasporized Chinese community in the Netherlands.

From turn 1 to 10, Mr. W indicated that going to school was a main reason of bringing the child to the Netherlands, and learning Dutch within formal education was an important factor in this decision. The father himself, however, did not speak much Dutch. This iwas typical among first generation immigrants who entered the Netherlands (as observed elsewhere, cf. Blommaert & Huang 2010; Li & Juffermans 2011), joined the catering industry straightaway, and managed to make a living without much exposure to the Dutch society. This linguistic incapability, however, limited their geographical as well as their social mobility. Instead of focusing on their own development, they put hope in their children who acquired Dutch from formal education, in order to deploy this linguistic resource in their academic development as well as in their social integration. For the migrant family, Dutch is therefore a language for public life, a valuable currency that can buy the child a better future.

The following part between turn 11 and 18 is concerned with family language – the Fujian dialect and Putonghua. Putonghua was not a language for the private domain in the

Fujian province, judged from the father's account, and its proficiency was closely related to literacy and schooling. Fujian dialects (or Min dialects), as discussed elsewhere (Dong 2011), are extremely heterogeneous due to historical and geographic reasons, and the internal variations are so great that there are a number of mutually unintelligible subgroups (Ramsey 1987). Putonghua therefore serves as a common language not only between Min-speakers and non Min-speakers, but between different groups of Min-speakers. Although preschool is not part of formal education in China, it is where children start socializing with others within an institutional space and Putonghua functions as language of instruction. Echoed to what the first two examples show, Mr. W's description reflects the dominant role of Putonghua in China and the national efforts of promoting Putonghua within the country in order for people to communicate in a mutually intelligible language.

When the child moved to the Netherlands, Putonghua is no longer the language for public life in the host society, but became the language of family life, and when he spoke the Min dialect which used to be the home language, the parents “ignore him, pretending not to hear him. So he has to speak Putonghua” at home (turn 18). Therefore in order for his voice to be heard, the child had to use Putonghua, and Putonghua turned out to be the only valid language for communication in the family domain. The immigrant parents' decision was rather dramatic, but not unreasonable. This language choice pointed to language ideologies back in China: that Putonghua was enregistered to be the dominant language, the linguistic norm was taken for granted. When they migrated from China to the Netherlands, they migrated with their linguistic resources as well as linguistic ideologies.

In the final part (turn 19 and 20), Putonghua no longer competed with the Min dialect as a family speech, but with Cantonese as a community language in public and semi public

spheres. Earlier the father pointsed out that Putonghua was more “important” than the Fujian dialects and here, he further developed his idea and claimed that Cantonese had lost its dominance and Putonghua is replacing Cantonese as the main communicative tool among Dutch Chinese. He gave an example that the restaurant owner, who was a Hong Kong immigrant, required his children to learn Putonghua. The restaurant owner belonged to an earlier generation of immigrants who had been established in the host society and who were able to offer jobs to new immigrants. He was an example of success in the host society and was therefore to be followed and imitated by new immigrants. One reason of the changing relationship between Cantonese and Mandarin observed by the interviewee was the changes in the demographic composition of new immigrants – more and more Chinese immigrants came from Mainland China instead of Hong Kong and they spoke Putonghua rather than Cantonese. A more fundamental reason, however, was that the new generation of Chinese immigrants were no longer predominantly labor migrants. Increasingly, Chinese migrants moved to the Netherlands as highly skilled professionals who were more affluent and who functioned within better socioeconomic situations than those of the earlier generation. This new current of migration was part of globalization, in which changes in power relations at a macro level often collapsed into microscopic language choice. In additio n, the increasing use of new communication technologies (mobile phones, the internet, Skype, etc.) enabled migrants (of either kind) to remain in close contact with relatives and f riends back home. All these macro socioeconomic issues were articulated through the voicing processes of a kitchen worker, and echoed by similar processes gone through by the restaurant owner's children. This example revealed the father's voice, but also revealed the processes of Putonghua enregisterment as a legitimate and dominant voice in the Chinese diaspora while the Mainland

China emerged as an important player in globalization. In such enregistering processes, Chinese diaspora no longer oriented toward Hong Kong as the only “center”, but also toward Beijing (and Shanghai, Shenzhen, etc.) for social, cultural, and linguistic authenticity.

Conclusions

We have argued that voice is an effect and a condition, and that the whole process of communication is a voicing process. Voice is not a given; in any communicative event there are conditions for voicing, and the effect of voicing is preferably understanding. We all enter communicative activities with pretextual resources and capacities, value attributes that are pre-inscribed into the language instance, or politico-economic contexts that influence the speech event long before it is produced. Voice therefore is a single word definition of an essential problem of communication, the problem of how one makes oneself understood.

We observe this problem in all three examples, extracted from our fieldwork data from both within China and Chinese diaspora in the Netherlands. Our examples are all concerned with voice of migrant children in education related contexts. The first example is a newspaper clipping of an internal migrant child's urban experiences. In the episode it describes that the migrant child's voice is silenced by her local counterparts' laughter when she speaks in her home dialect. The teacher helps her and encourages her to learn Putonghua. The teacher's voice is both interpersonal and institutional in the sense that she makes the language norm explicit and reinforces the institutional code for communication. By the end of the episode, the migrant child is satisfied with her newly learnt language – Putonghua – and her newly achieved local identity. It is arguable whether this identity is recognized and ratified by others; but one thing is certain, that she makes her voice heard in more and more social encounters.

The second example is an interview with a local child on his “dialect performance”. The voicing effects of the child's dialect-like talk are that the imagined dialect is presented in an amusing way and this highlights the defects of a non-standard language variety, and perhaps more, this abnormalizes the language variety against the norm. The third example is from our Dutch data pool. It is an interview with a Chinese kitchen worker on his plan of his child's language education. The child of the kitchen worker has to learn Putonghua in order for him to have a voice at home, while Putonghua is neither the language of the host society (Dutch) nor the traditional home dialect (Fujian dialect). The choice of the kitchen worker reflects the recent changes of the Chinese community in the Netherlands (and most probably also across Europe), and the changes of China's position as well as the Chinese languages' position in the globalized world.

We draw data from both China and Europe and investigate the Chinese internal and international migration integrally as part of globalization. This combination gives us a broader perspective to understand the voicing process of labor migrants and of their children as holistically as possible. The educational and education related contexts of the three examples are essential, as many Chinese labor migrants see education as the only means of their children's upward social mobility. We conclude that voice is the outcome of as well as the precondition for communication, and that it is essential to attend to the entire process of communication in order to understand voice.

Notes:

1 *Pinyin* is Roman alphabet representation of Chinese characters devised in the 1950s in the Mainland China.

2 The newspaper is available online at:
http://www.cnnb.com.cn/gb/node2/newspaper/nbrb/2006/10/node69731/node69749/index.html, last viewed on 15/07/2009; the complete account of the story also can be found in its original form of Chinese characters in Appendix I.

3 *Hukou*, or household registration, groups people into agricultural/rural or non-agricultural/urban *hukou*-holders at birth, and transgenerationally, as children depend on their parents' *hukou* status (mainly their mothers' *hukou* status). Possessing a local *hukou* means one is entitled to local resources and social services.

4 Transcription conventions:
_ (underline) stress; = interruption or next utterance following immediately; (( )) transcriber's comment; ( ) omitted part in the utterance.

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Appendix 1: Chinese text of Example 1

题目 普通话让我融入这个城市

去年夏天，我随父母从家乡四川来到了这个陌生的城市－宁波。这儿的–切让我感到新奇：鳞次栉比的高楼大厦，宽阔平坦的柏油马路，五彩缤纷的霓虹灯。然而，这一切对我来说既遥远又陌生，因为我是一名外地人，一个民工的子女。爸爸千辛万苦为我联系了一所学校。开学第一天，爸爸陪我来到了新学校。“哇！”学校好大又好美！我的班主任是一位既年轻又漂亮的女教师。她讲一口标准的普通话，字正腔圆，真好听！她让我在同学面前作一番自我介绍。我嚅嚅地说：“俺不会说普通话，俺怎么介绍自己来？”张老师亲切地说：“就用家乡话把心里想说的告诉大家就行了。”我吞吞吐吐地说：“大家好，俺是来自四川的娃子，以后请……”话未说完，大家就哄堂大笑，我的脸“噌”地就红到耳根，站在那里手足无措，要知道在老家的学校我也是个优等生，何曾受到过这样的嘲笑！最后还是张老师帮我解了围：“这有什么好笑的？她说的可是标准的四川话哩。课后，张老师找我谈话：“你得学习普通话，否则的话会给你今后的学习、生活带来很大的困难，你明白吗？” “嗯！”我暗下决心，一定要把普通话学好。...我终于消除了语言的隔阂，融入了这座城市。

Appendix II: Chinese transcript of Example 2

1 DJ：((笑声))你说的什么呀？

((类似方言，听不清说的是什么，其他同学的说话声，桌椅的噪音，笑声...))

2 乒乒: 别地儿的话

3 DJ：别地儿？哪儿呀？你老家话呀？

4 乒乒：不是。

5 DJ：那是哪儿的呀？

6 乒乒：就是别地儿的话，我也不知道哪儿的。

7 DJ：别地儿的？你爸妈这么说话？

((噪音，不清楚的对话...))

8 DJ：你老家哪儿呀？

9 乒乒：我北京的。我北京的。我学的（方言）。

10 DJ：跟谁学的呀？

11 乒乒：嗯，嗯，就是学的，跟别人学的......

12 DJ：你觉得（这方言）好玩儿吗？

13乒乒：就是特好玩！

Appendix III: Chinese field notes of Example 3

1 DY：你儿子是在哪里长大的？

2 W：他在福建长大，我的家乡，他的姑姑照顾他。

3 DY：你为什么把他带回荷兰？

4 W：他快三岁了，很快要上学了。所以我们把他带回来。

5 DY：你觉得他在这里上学比在中国好么？

6 W：是的。他现在应该开始学荷兰语了。他会在荷兰学校学习荷兰语。

7 DY：他现在会说荷兰语么？

8 W：不会，基本不会。

9 DY：你在家教他荷兰语么？

10 W：不。他去荷兰学校，很快就学会了。

11 DY：你们在家和他讲什么语言？

12 W：我们在家和他讲中文 。

13 DY：你们不和他讲福建方言么？

14 W：不。他在中国时，讲福建方言。我家里没人讲普通话。我妈妈只会讲方言。她不识字。我儿子在国内去过半年的幼儿园，学 了普通话。但是他只能听（普通话），他不会讲（普通话）。

15 DY：现在怎么样了？

16 W：现在他好多了。我们只和他讲普通话。

17 DY：他有什么进步么？

18 W：是的。他必须讲（普通话）。如果他讲方言，我们就不理他，装作没听见。所以他必须和我们讲普通话。

19 DY：你不教他讲粤语么？

20 W：不。现在普通话最重要。连香港人也开始学（普通话）。粤语已经不重要了，这几年在荷兰也是这样。你看，这两个孩子 ((老板的儿子))。他们的普通话非常好。