Popular Culture, Voice and Linguistic Diversity

Young Adults On- and Offline

Sender Dovchin, Alastair Pennycook and Shaila Sultana

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Sender Dovchin · Shaila Sultana
Alastair Pennycook

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Sender Dovchin
Centre for Language Research
University of Aizu
Tsuruga, Japan

Alastair Pennycook
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
University of Technology Sydney
Ultimo, NSW, Australia

Shaila Sultana
Department of English Language
University of Dhaka
Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Contents

1

Language, Culture and the Periphery

This book deals with the language of young adults in both online and offline environments. The very fact that we can talk of 'offline' environments points to the salience of life online: for many young people today, being online—on Facebook, Twitter, What's App, texting, chatting, Skyping—is part of everyday life. You do not set aside a time of day to 'go online'—you simply are online much of the time. It no longer makes sense to view this as some alternative and lesser (virtual) reality: being online is as real as anything else. These online and offline worlds are also interlinked, with offline worlds becoming part of the online and online affecting face to face interactions. So this is the first context of this book: the intertwined worlds of online and offline conversations, postings, comments and chats.

Why young adults? By and large, this is where the action is, and these are also the people who interest us as educators. These are the people who have grown up with the new technologies, who learned to 'swipe' a page at an early age, whose fingers move comfortably across mobile keyboards, messaging, adding emoticons, chatting, watching and multitasking. They are also at an age of flexibility, happy to try stuff out, exploring identities, messing around with language and engaged with

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popular culture. They are sitting in our university and other classes, watching us (now and then), checking their mobile devices (more often) and living in multiple linguistic, cultural and spatial worlds. These are also the consumers of popular culture, people for whom music, TV dramas, films form not just a backdrop to their daily lives, not just a pastime when they are not doing something else, but a fabric around which parts of their lives are built.

The book is about three particular aspects of this young adult action. First, we are interested in the way they use, mix and mash up language. In line with contemporary trends in sociolinguistics, we no longer view this through a lens of bilingualism or code-mixing, but rather take this use of multiple linguistic resources as the norm. Young people are exposed to and take up a range of linguistic and broader semiotic resources in their daily communications. These young adults are also the drivers of innovation, the setters of new trends, the ones bending the rules, making up the terms and changing the way language works. As they communicate in and across various social groups, these new trends may move rapidly around the globe, getting picked up and passed on from online forum to Twitter account, from YouTube clip to café discussion, while at the same time they may also define subcultural language uses, showing who is in and who is out, who knows how to mess with language and image in this way and who does not.

Second, we are interested in the sources from which they draw these multiple resources. While language classes, travel and other more traditional modes may provide some of the input into their linguistic repertoires, it is a popular culture that plays a major role here. These young adults tend to be highly engaged with music, dance, film, gaming and multiple forms of popular culture, which provide not only content to be discussed or parodied but also voices and linguistic resources. They take up and play with the voices of popular culture, and in so doing gain access to a range of languages, ideas and ways of articulating the world. The linguistic creativity, parody and play, therefore, involve voices, sounds, images and phrases drawn from a variety of cultural forms, from well-known songs to film scenes, from information about sport stars to details about technology.

Third, we are interested in how these relations get played out in the Asian periphery. Much has been made of the diversity brought about by migration to European cities, but much less attention has been paid to the diversity that now occurs in contexts marked by online rather than physical mobility. The Asian focus allows us to turn the attention away from Europe and North America, which are so often the focus of such studies and instead to look at the vibrant and emerging Asian scene, which again, we might suggest is where the action is, as Asian and non-Asian forms of popular culture circulate through the digital pathways. The peripheral focus adds a further dimension to this, allowing us to look in depth at two contexts that have to date received little attention in the literature: Bangladesh and Mongolia. At the same time, this peripheral focus draws attention to questions of access and distribution: Who gets to play around with language and culture in what contexts?

Eye Shopping: *güzel çanta*

Before exploring these themes of language mixing, popular culture, digital literacies and the periphery in greater detail in the following sections, a couple of examples may serve to show the kind of thing that is going on. Here in Excerpt 1.1, for example, is a Facebook (FB) posting by Altai, a 20-year-old female third-year chemical engineering student at the National University of Mongolia. The examples below have been

Excerpt 1.1 Language guide: regular font = Mongolian; *italics = English*; **bold = Turkish**; **underlined bold** = **Korean**; *underlined italics* = *French*

Facebook status	Translation
1. Altai: Undraa! **çok güzel çıkmışsınız tatlım**…zondoo unsey hairtai shuu… **annesine benziyor**…*love n miss*	Altai: Undraa! you look so pretty sweetie… lots of kisses love you…looking like your mother love n miss
2. Altai: **Ai syopping** @ *Louis Vitton*… **güzel çanta**…	Altai: Window shopping @ Louis Vuitton…lovely bags…

retrieved from Altai's daily FB wall status updates, where she actively posts about her daily activities, including the places she has been to or the photographs she has taken, or the movies she has seen (Dovchin 2015). A general guide to transcription conventions is provided at the end of the chapter, while specific guides to language identification conventions are provided before each excerpt. All data examples were translated from Mongolian and Bangla into English by the authors, and all the names used for the research participants are pseudonyms to protect their real identities.

In the first line, Altai uploads a photograph of her friend (Undraa) with a caption combining Turkish and Mongolian in Roman script and a popular transnational online phrase 'love n miss' to show affection. This is a typical example of her Facebook repertoire, where the extensive incorporation of Turkish is often integrated either with Mongolian or English resources. As will become clear throughout this book, the identification of a linguistic and cultural *origin* of such resources is rarely without problems: To say here that 'love n miss'(a common globally available phrase) is in English, or that 'Ai syopping' (a phrase from Korean English) is Korean, or that 'Louis Vitton' (a popular brand name) is French is not so much to tie such terms to a language of origin, but rather to point to the already-mixed cultural and linguistic resources these young people draw on (Dovchin 2015).

The rather unexpected use of Turkish here can be explained by her high school experience, which has resulted in the development of linguistic skills in Turkish and English. Altai is originally from Khentii Province in the East of Mongolia, bordering Russia. Her family moved to the capital, Ulaanbaatar (UB), where she attended a Turkish high school. Initially, Turkish high schools were established in Mongolia from the mid-1990s, when large numbers of Turkish people started coming to the country. Today, there are five Turkish schools still operating in Mongolia. Turkish schools are well known for their Turkish and English-medium teaching, targeting natural science specialized studies, and are regarded as some of the best high schools in Mongolia, with extremely strict entrance examinations. Students who gain entrance are often provided with a comfortable dormitory and free-of-charge study materials. Many graduates of these schools get impressively high scores in

state examinations. More recently, these schools have also become the target of controversy due to their alleged association with the exiled Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen, who is now blamed for masterminding the military coup in Turkey. In fact, it is alleged that Gülen-associated Turkish schools are currently operating in 173 countries. Since the failed military coup attempt, Turkey has escalated its all-out campaign to put pressure on dozens of countries around the world to shut down Gülen-linked Turkish schools.

In line 2, Altai updates her Facebook status, echoing the anglicized Korean expression 'Ai syopping' ('아이쇼핑'; 'eye shopping') for 'window shopping', the online symbol '@' to show her location at the French handbag store Louis Vuitton, accompanied by Turkish, 'güzel çanta' ('lovely bags'). The use of various Korean-oriented resources is not so much a result of a knowledge of Korean, but rather, according to Altai, an obsession with Korean dramas. When she was studying in Ankara, Turkey, for a year as an exchange student, Altai was extremely homesick. To overcome her loneliness, she started watching Korean TV dramas downloaded from Internet TV channels, subtitled in English. Although her obsession with Korean dramas is associated with her Turkish experience, this also points to the wide popularity of Korean TV dramas in Mongolia—and elsewhere since the 1990s. The boom of Korean TV dramas has dominated the Mongolian commercial broadcasting scene, popularizing Korean movie stars and K-pop singers amongst the urban youth population in Mongolia (Dovchin 2015).

Because of her obsession with Korean TV dramas, Altai frequently imports Korean resources into her own speech. She has also travelled to Seoul a few times with her family. Thus, although Altai does not by her account speak Korean, she incorporates Korean-oriented semiotic resources borrowed from her favourite Korean movies (Dovchin 2015). Altai's use of English, Korean, Mongolian and Turkish, then, already points to a number of important concerns for this book: we see linguistic and other semiotic resources combined in what appears a quite casual and carefree manner. While some of these combinations and usages may appear quite unexpected, for her and the community to which she is appealing, they are not particularly noteworthy or strange: many of her FB friends have related repertoires of resources. Popular cultural

resources may be of many kinds—from shopping to Korean dramas—and may reveal aspects of the particular life history, class location and interests of the participants (her use of Turkish and comments on LV bags are clearly marks of socio-economic privilege). These resources are also quite diverse, and contrary to assumptions about the domination of English language and American cultural forms, may include a range of others from Korea, Japan, China and other parts of Asia. This in turn has implications for how we understand the Asian periphery: as Choi (2012, 2016) shows, Korean dramas have become a linguistic and cultural resource for many—both young and old, Asian and non-Asian—and circulate widely through different channels.

Language and the Periphery

Our focus on Mongolia and Bangladesh enables us to highlight several aspects of the contemporary global, Asian, linguistic and popular cultural scenes. Significantly different in terms of size (Mongolia is 10 times bigger), population (Bangladesh has 50 times more people), population density, histories, economies, elevation, climate and much more, these two countries nevertheless share a similar status as seemingly peripheral players both globally and in relation to a rapidly changing Asia. Each sits uncomfortably close to one of the Asian giants, India and China, with various ramifications—for example, Chinese mining interests are affecting the social and economic fabric of Mongolia, while the Bollywood film industry seeps into daily life in Bangladesh—and each has also suffered periods of colonization (by the Russians and the British, respectively), with implications for the roles played by Russian-oriented and English language and music. As we have already seen above, however, it is always more complex than a simple analysis along historical or political economic lines would suggest, with other players such as Turkish or Korean dramas becoming part of the daily lives of young Mongolian adults.

Our focus is not on a comparison of the two contexts but to see how online consumers—those with the economic and cultural capital to access various media—become non-peripheral participants in a variety of

cultural and linguistic flows while also negotiating their own social and cultural locations. The notion of the periphery needs some further discussion. As we can observe from Altai's eyeing of LV bags, and what we might call cosmopolitan use of English, Korean and Turkish alongside Mongolian, to be in the periphery is clearly a relational prospect: within every centre, there are peripheries, and within every periphery, there are centres. Indeed, as a modernist binary, the centre–periphery construct has been widely critiqued for its oversimplified framing of global relations and weakness in dealing with multiplicity, relativity and mobility: 'The global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models' (Appadurai 1996, p. 32; cf. Appadurai 1990, 2000).

It is on such grounds that sociolinguistic models such as Phillipson's linguistic imperialism have been strongly critiqued. Based on the classic centre–periphery model of imperialism that describes the 'Centre's attempt to control people's consciousness' through the 'Centre's cultural and linguistic penetration of the Periphery' (Phillipson 1992, p. 53), Phillipson mapped language relations onto this broad model of political economy. As many recent accounts have shown, however, we need a more multifaceted model. In the context of the Philippines, as Martin (2014, p. 53) observes, centre and periphery relations are played out on local levels, comprising for example an inner circle 'of educated, elite Filipinos who have embraced the English language', an outer circle who may be aware of Philippine English as a variety but are 'either powerless to support it and/or ambivalent about its promotion' and an expanding circle for whom the language is 'largely inaccessible'.

More generally, we need to take seriously Blommaert's (2010, p. 20) injunction to approach the sociolinguistics of globalization in terms of a 'chequered, layered complex of processes evolving simultaneously at a variety of scales and in reference to a variety of centres'. If a sociolinguistics of globalization is to deal in terms of the periphery, it needs to avoid doing so through centrist eyes and avoid the exoticization of the periphery. The challenge is to encompass an understanding of the multiplicity and relativity of centres and peripheries, and to focus on processes of centralization and peripheralization (Pietikäinen and

Kelly-Holmes 2013). As we have suggested elsewhere, an understanding of the *styling of the periphery* in countries located geographically, politically and economically on the Asian periphery, such as Bangladesh and Mongolia, can show how young people use linguistic and cultural resources to stylize and reconfigure their own location, which not only 'relocalizes cultural forms in these contexts but also relocalizes assumed traditions in the context of a flow of diverse cultural forms' (Sultana et al. 2013, p. 705). We need to account not only for flows and mobilities, nor only for macroformations of the global economy, geographical positioning and language commodification, but also the operations of globalization from below (the workings of local, informal, cultural and linguistic formations).

Boys from the Periphery: 'Hey Babes, Come on!'

A further example will help shed light on some of what we are looking at here. Excerpt 1.2 shows the common use of linguistic and cultural resources fashioned by young adults' engagements with different genres of popular culture. These are again shaped by socio-economic background and demographic locations that have influenced the nature of their exposure to popular culture. The participants in Excerpt 1.2 study at an expensive private university in a posh area of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, but they do not belong to the privileged upper-echelon of the society. Both Nayeem and Ashiq had their earlier education in rural schools, the former in Noakhali, in north-eastern Bangladesh, the latter in Pabna, in north-western Bangladesh. Shamim was born and brought up and went to school in Chittagong, the second largest city in Bangladesh.[1] All three are majoring in Business Administration at the University of Excellence (UOE). They are chatting, while looking at the students walking past the courtyard, their favourite hang-out on campus[2] (see the transcription guide at the end of the chapter).

Excerpt 1.2 Language guide: regular font = Bangla; *italics* = *English*

Casual conversation	Translation
1.Ashiq: ((looking at the female students walking by)) *Hey BABES, come on!*	Ashiq: ((looking at the female students walking by)) Hey BABES, come on!
2.Shamim: ((looking at the girl Nayeem says that he has chosen for himself)) *OH MY G::O::D* /ga:d/**!!!!**	Shamim: ((looking at the girl Nayeem says that he has chosen for himself)) OH MY GOD /ga:d/**!!!!**
3.Nayeem: ((losing sight of the girl)) hai, hai ((sound of anxiety)), koi galo? dosto, kisu akta koira de!!!	Nayeem: ((losing sight of the girl)) Alas ((sound of anxiety)) where has she gone? Mate, do something!!!
4.Ashiq: ((as if he is trying to draw the attention of the girl Nayeem is looking for)) < *Illa::ve you* go::. *Illa::: ve/you* go::: ((in a melodramatic tone)). *Illa::ve you* go::: > ((breaks into laughter))	Ashiq: ((as if he is trying to draw the attention of the girl Nayeem is looking for)) I love you, oh you! I love you, oh you! ((in a melodramatic tone)). I love you, o you! ((breaks into laughter))

Here, Nayeem uses a variety of linguistic resources gathered from diverse genres of popular culture. The set expressions 'hey', 'babe' or 'I love you', commonly found in Indian and Western films and songs, point to these participants' use of popular culture as a source of linguistic material. Nayeem favors English expressions, such as 'babe', 'oh my god', 'I love you', 'oh no', 'awesome' or 'what a lovely [*sic*]', this latter, he explains, apparently derived from 'what a lovely shot' heard in cricket commentaries. In interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the ethnographic research, Ashiq and Nayeem repeatedly mention that they lack fluency in spoken English, but like using set expressions because they feel 'cool', fashionable', 'smart', 'bold' and 'confident'. They prefer creating a feel of transnational 'cool talk' using English (Blommaert 2014). Their inclination towards transnational popular expressions also reflects the social ideologies that encourage these young adults to produce these expressions as a vehicle of sophistication and coolness (Dovchin et al. 2016; Sultana 2013; Leppänen et al. 2009).

Ashiq adds a Bangla word 'go' at the end of 'I love you' in line 4. 'go' is usually used for drawing attention as in 'ogo'(O you!), 'ha go'(Look here!) or in 'ke go'(Who are you?). It is also used as a suffix in invocations or lamentations, at the end of 'ma'(mother) as in 'mago' or Allah (lord)

as in 'Allahgo'. The coexistence of 'I love you' and the Bangla word 'go' side-by-side is unusual and unexpected, but can be seen as an example of everyday linguistic creativity (Swann and Maybin 2007). The pronunciation is exaggerated and enunciated with stress, and Ashiq's utterance is theatrical, similar to what we call filmic ways of speaking (cf. Chap. 4). With the stylization of 'I love you' and combination of English 'I love you' with Bangla 'go', Ashiq tries to draw attention of passing-by female students and simultaneously creates the desired dramatic effect amongst his friends (male hassling of women is often aimed more at other males than at the women themselves, who nonetheless have to suffer such public harassment).

Ashiq and Nayeem may have acquired linguistic and cultural texts from popular culture, but the means by which they realize this performance is linked to their educational and demographic backgrounds. Blommaert and Backus (2013) identify individual repertoires as 'indexical biographies'—carrying marks and associations of time and space of individual life trajectories. Their 'biographically ordered repertoire of linguistic resources' which include English too are dynamically 'shaped by complex life trajectories' (Tagg 2016, p. 60). The pronunciation of 'babes' is distinctly different from English /beib/, sounding more like /beb/ and with a more prominent /b/ than the softer English /b/. The diphthong /ei/ is replaced by a short vowel /e/, as has been observed in other Bangladeshi speakers (Hoque 2011). Vowel lengthening and similar enunciated pronunciation are observed in 'god' in line 2, which approximates the pronunciation of /gad/ in American English. In line 4, /ʌ/ sound in *love* is replaced with a Bangla vowel sound /a/ and is lengthened. While the vowel lengthening allows Ashiq to express the desired theatricality and the pronunciation of /gad/ indicates his exposure to popular culture, his pronunciation of /beb/ and /lav/ sounds more like 'banglicized English'[3], i.e. spoken English that approximates Bangla or regional varieties of Bangla in segmental and suprasegmental features (Sultana 2014a).

Because of the wide acceptance of the association of English with the privileged social class and pronunciation as a marker of better education in urban schools and colleges, pronunciation approximating Standard English has become the indicator of individual sociocultural,

demographic and educational background in the context of Bangladesh. Spoken English that sounds more like Standard English indicates a privileged upbringing and education in urban centres. By contrast, 'banglicized English' is marked by phonological features of Bangla and varieties of Bangla widely used in different regions in Bangladesh. Consequently, 'banglicized English' is looked down upon in an urbanized context like Dhaka, having associations with speakers who have come to the city from rural areas or have had education in rural schools and colleges. Thus, the segmental features of these English words give a better understanding of 'unequal Englishes' (Rubdy 2015; Dovchin et al. 2016; Sultana 2014a) as situated and realized in everyday conversations.

Nayeem and his friends are strategic in terms of their use and the kinds of affiliation, disaffiliation, inclusion and exclusion they develop in their language practices. In their use of 'banglicized English', Ashiq and his friends are marked out from their urban counterparts, who may, by contrast, use a form of 'anglicized Bangla', that is pronunciation of Bangla with English phonological and prosodic features, suggesting an affiliation with exclusive English-medium education in urban schools and colleges in Dhaka (Sultana 2014a). Nevertheless, with their use of few words in English derived from popular culture and recombination of these English words and phrases with a filmic way of speaking (cf. Chap. 4), they emerge with their own style of communication. These young adults, with their performance of streetwise cool young adult identity attributes, momentarily challenge the condescension, prejudice and discrimination affiliated with 'banglicized English' and the 'hick' identity attributes associated with it (cf. 4 2014a, 2016a; Dovchin et al. 2016). Finding themselves socially and linguistically disadvantaged, they use diverse forms of linguistic and cultural resources and strengthen their position in their immediate social landscape.

The English they use thus reflects their diverse exposure to different social landscapes, a transition from the least privileged education system in rural/provincial towns to an English-medium education system at a private university in the capital city. The English they use allows them to enact different facets of their identification discursively within the broader ideological framework of a society that is stratified by class, language, and educational and demographic backgrounds. However, the

extent to which they can redefine their social positioning may be questioned (cf. Chapter 6). Here, then, we see several further implications for the discussion in this book: English, we know, often plays an important role in relation to popular culture and urban youth culture, and it is often used to give a sense of urban or global cool. And yet these English resources may equally locate people within a stratified world of unequal Englishes (Dovchin et al. 2016).

Popular Culture and the Everyday

As we have seen in the two examples above, popular culture seeps into the daily talk and lives of these young adults. These are not merely references to a song or a film but rather the use of language picked up through engagement with popular forms of entertainment that in turn index a larger world of people, places, languages and cultures. As we shall see further in the next chapter, these can include references to people, lines from films in Hindi, songs and much more. Before proceeding, however, we need to consider in greater depth the notion of popular culture. As we might note in the example above, as these young men call out to young women across a public space at their university, an engagement with popular culture may endow people with new cultural and linguistic resources, may allow them to take on new voices, to play new roles, to do things they would not do otherwise, but such take-up of popular culture may be equally crass, sexist, crude, unpleasant or many other things. Popular culture is not something to be uncritically celebrated.

Recent times have seen an upsurge in studies of the sociolinguistics of popular culture (Alim et al. 2009). While this in turn raises a number of questions about authenticity (what is the status of performance data as everyday language use?), a theme to which we return in Chapter 3, it is also worth turning a critical eye on popular culture itself (Lee and Moody 2012). A constant theme in discussions of popular culture has to do with its commercialization. In noting its role in the formation of identity, its connections to desire and its localities, we may romanticize the authentic, precommercialized forms of popular expression as a true original voice from the margins and overlook the forces of commercialization that

render the local as popular. Popular culture may indeed be racist, homophobic or misogynist: its frequent articulations of heteronormative sexuality constantly position other sexualities as other. It can be crass, maudlin, simplistic, dull, tedious, overmarketed and reactionary (Pennycook 2010). And yet, to dismiss popular culture as shallow, commercial and conservative is to overlook several important points.

Different positions on the political spectrum, from conservative critics of low culture to leftist critics of mass culture, have often been strangely united in their denigration of the popular (Brantlinger 1983). A strong theme in Marxist-derived arguments equates popular culture with 'mass culture', and this in turn with ideological forms that subjugate working people. As Adorno (1975, p. 18) puts it, the 'total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment, in which… enlightenment, that is the progressive technical domination of nature, becomes mass deception and is turned into a means for fettering consciousness'. From this point of view, mass culture serves both to distract working-class consumers from the realities of oppression and to refresh workers in their leisure time so that they are better able to participate in the workforce. This intellectual heritage clearly informs some of the critique of globalization and popular culture, which is seen 'in some gloomy Frankfurt School fashion, as the worldwide Americanization or standardization of culture, the destruction of local differences, the massification of all the peoples on the planet' (Jameson 1998, p. 57). Language and globalization are from this perspective a process of '*the homogenization of world culture*… spearheaded by films, pop culture, CNN and fast-food chains' (Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1996, p. 439; italics in original).

The global dominance of certain languages and cultures is seen to be a submissive acceptance of their domination by an uninformed periphery, and to take up English is indeed to be a consumer of mass culture. From this 'dystopic, neo- or post-Marxist, political economic critique that still tends to employ…the metaphor of "penetrations"' (Jacquemet 2005, p. 259; and see Phillipson 1992, cited above) to sing in English, to watch English-language movies, to engage with English-medium popular culture is to act as an ideological dupe of the world system. To avoid such talk of penetration (with its uncomfortable sexual and cultural imagery), it has been common to employ the terminology of flows, yet here again,