

Beijing Forum 2019

Language, Culture and Identity in Inter-Civilization Interaction (II)

In the afternoon of November 2, 2019, the second session of the sub-forum “Language, Culture and Identity in Inter-Civilization Interaction” was held in School of Foreign Languages, Peking University. Six speakers delivered speeches and shared their research during this session.

Professor Gao Yihong from Peking University, as the first speaker, delivered a speech, titled “Faithful Imitator, Legitimate Speaker, and Dialogical Communicator: Language Attitude and Identity Development Among Chinese Intercultural Volunteers”. Language attitude is an integral part of intercultural communication competence, which is crucial in the development of L2 identities. In her research, Professor Gao attempted to conceptualize patterns of L2 identity development, following a conceptual framework of English L2 identity prototypes and empirically based on a research regarding Chinese intercultural volunteers’ attitudes towards varieties of World Englishes before and after four international events. First, the conceptual framework of four prototypes of English learners was introduced, i.e., the faithful imitator, legitimate speaker, playful creator, and dialogical communicator. Second, the empirical data were interpreted under this framework. By comparing the volunteers’ language attitudes before and after the events, three major types of identity development were conceptualized. While the influencing factors for such differences in identity development were complex, it was proposed that the quality and quantity of intercultural experience and the depth of reflection are crucial for the development of intercultural communication competence.

The second speaker was emeritus professor Sandra Silberstein, from the University of Washington, who shared her research, titled “Language, Culture, and Identity as Mutable, Hybrid Performance”. Older, more traditional views of identity view our speaking selves as products of static categories, often with identifying “accents.” In this perspective, one is categorized, for example, as an English speaker of Chinese, an American, a member of an ethnic community, a northerner or southerner, even male or female. But recent decades have seen models of identity that acknowledge the mutable, unstable, hybrid, and performed character of language use. Professor Silberstein explored this variable and interactive aspect of language and identity in her paper.

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Professor David Adger, from Queen Mary University of London, spoke on the topic of “Language Unlimited”. He began by explaining his conception of what human language is. Professor Adger expressed his belief that language is a form of communication, through which animals also can exchange information. Besides, there is also a language of thinking. Thus, it would be partial to say that language can be used only to communicate. Then, he introduced the characteristics of human language, namely unlimitedness and creativity. Language is a comprehensive system, and we can make our creation and complicate them according to certain rules. He also explained the operation of the grammar rules of language. Professor Adger argued that the abstract structure behind sentences cannot be materialized. At the end of his speech, he introduced examples of the combination of language and cultural diversity in London. In his study, he found that children would naturally reorganize the grammar due to their complex language background, but it may also present certain challenges at the same time.

Professor Peng Qinglong, from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, delivered a speech titled “From 3A culture empire to 5A cultural community – On the complexity of Australian multicultural identity transformation”. As a product of a "mixed civilization", being third civilization outside the Eastern and Western civilizations, Australia did not embark on the path of multiculturalism from the beginning, but experienced the development of foreign culture to local culture, and finally, to multiculturalism. Australia, born out of British culture, has established a single white culture at the cost of destroying its aboriginal culture. It attempted to develop an Anglo-America-Australia cultural empire bounded by Western cultural values. However, its long-term implementation of a White Australia policy has collapsed under the impact of internationalization. It has had to carry out a multicultural policy and gradually form a cultural community of Five A (Aboriginal-Anglo-America-Asia-Australia) cultural interactions. This was due to its internal cultural game and also the impact from foreign cultures, and there have not been many literary works that have reflected such change. Influenced by a populist wave, Australia has shown evident introversion characteristics. New developments in which various viewpoints are agitated and conflicts intensified have placed Australia in a predicament between Western and Eastern cultures. Thus, whether Australia's multicultural identity transformation can walk out of the adversities is a new topic worthy of attention.

Following, professor Max Deeg, from Cardiff University, shared his perspective on the topic

“Multiple and Hybrid Identity and How to Cope with it—Examples from the Past”. His study was based on the challenging assumption that before tackling the issue of intercultural identity it is important to acknowledge the multiple and hybrid constellations, determined by language, religion, “ethnicity”, social status, etc., that are and have been—in the past—rather a normality than an exception in complex societies. On the basis of selected historical examples, Prof. Deeg talked about the forms of multiple and hybrid identities, how they had shaped individual and communal identities, and how they had coped with the tensions created by different ways of multiple “belongings”. The main example is the question of how medieval Chinese Buddhists were often exposed to a double identity, a cultural one—Chinese—and a religious one which was perceived as foreign (Indian). Different strategies to come to terms with these tensions were introduced and discussed.

Finally, professor Jamie Jungmin Yoo, from Yonsei University, delivered a speech on “Korean Ci Lyrics in the Sinographic Cosmopolis” in which he discussed how Korean poets expressed their own voices in the form of Chinese poetry. Professor Yoo examined the ci (詞) lyrics composed by a Korean writer, Yi Che-hyŏn (李齊賢, 1287–1367). Paying particular attention to the linguistic reality of “diglossia” in East Asia, Yoo’s study explored how this Korean writer interacted with the Chinese literary tradition and tried to convey his own vernacular linguistic practices in the form of Chinese lyrics. During the political intervention of Yuan (元) to Koryŏ (高麗) from the late thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, Yi Che-hyŏn communicated with the larger international cultural communities in Beijing and elsewhere and actively adopted Chinese canons into Korean literary circles. Through examples, Yoo’s study illustrated how the Korean poet dealt with the Chinese literary tradition and poetic canons, and how he attempted to negotiate the potential conflicts between literary Chinese and vernacular Korean as well as between canonical conventions and his personal interpretation and sentimentality.