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## TRANSLINGUAL DISCRIMINATION

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## Translingual Discrimination

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**Abstract:** Moving beyond two main concepts of interlingual and intralingual discrimination, this Element addresses the concept of translingual discrimination, which refers to inequality based on transnational migrants' specific linguistic and communicative repertoires that are (il)legitimised by the national order of things. Translingual discrimination adds intensity to transnational processes, with transnational migrants showing two main characteristics of exclusion – translingual name discrimination and its associated elements such as name stigma and name microaggression; and translingual English discrimination and its elements such as accentism, stereotyping, and hallucination. The accumulation of these characteristics of translingual discrimination causes negative emotionality in its victims, including foreign language anxiety and translingual inferiority complexes. Consequently, transnational migrants adopt coping strategies such as CV-whitening, renaming practices, purification, and ethnic evasion while searching for translingual safe spaces. The Element concludes with the social and pedagogical implications of translingual discrimination in relation to transnational migrants.

**Keywords:** translingualism, discrimination, English, migrants, transnationalism

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## 1 Translingual Discrimination

### 1.1 Introduction

Widely reported across the Australian media was the death by suicide of Chinese national twenty-four-year-old Zhikai Liu, who had exhibited signs of undiagnosed mental ill health after moving to Australia to study at the University of Melbourne (SBS, 2019). Liu suffered from severe insomnia and started developing suicidal ideation. He refused to seek help for his suspected depression and later took his own life. One of the most severe triggers that worsened Liu's mental health was his insecurity and anxiety over his English language skills. As his sister described, her brother faced language barriers in Australia. He felt extremely anxious and depressed when he could not fully understand what was happening in his university classes while encountering the daily language used to communicate with people around him (Jamieson, 2018). According to the final report of the Victorian Coroner, Audrey Jamieson (2018), 'The investigation has identified that Mr Liu experienced suicidal ideation and demonstrated symptoms suggestive of depression, especially adjusting to his new environment, confronting language barriers and experiencing study difficulties at university.'

Zhikai Liu is just one of millions of 'transnational migrants' – mobile groups and individuals (e.g., moving groups, tourists, immigrants, refugees, guest workers, students, individuals, etc.) – within the current massive transnational flows of migration of people who are moving to new spaces (Appadurai, 1997). These transnational flows of human mobility can be regulated by the imaginations and fantasies of moving, or wanting to move to seek better social, educational, and financial opportunities (Appadurai, 1997). Yet, the major portion of these transnational migrants appears to be knocked back by the given realities of the 'national order of things' in the country of their settlement (Malkki, 1995a), or, as Löfgren has suggested, by an 'international cultural grammar of nationhood' (Löfgren, 1989, p. 21) – a set of general rules, traditions, and policies that are needed to form the nation-state. As Malkki (1995a, p. 516) notes in terms of movements of international refugees, '[j]ust as power secretes knowledge, the national order of things secretes displacement, as well as prescribed correctives for displacement'. Thus, the international refugee regime is, in fact, 'inseparable from this wider national order of things, this wider grammar' (Malkki, 1995a, p. 516).

In fact, when these transnational migrants are mobilised, they seem to be brought down to national systems based on the utopia of national sovereignty and the rigid national and domestic orders in many aspects of their lives (Hsu, 2020). In particular, the sociolinguistic practices and backgrounds of these transnational migrants seem to be some of the leading

subversions of the national order of things (Dovchin & Dryden, 2022). This is exactly what happened to Zhikai Liu – a transnational migrant (more specifically, an international student from China to Australia) – who gravely suffered from an adverse impact of transnationalism, emerging specifically from the national ‘language’ order of things. This involved tension between the idealisation of standard Australian English (SAE) and the marginalisation of Zhikai’s ‘transnational’ background English, which we also theoretically call ‘translingual’ English (Canagarajah, 2013) – the mobilisation of diverse semiotic resources and adaptation of different negotiation strategies to make meanings in English rather than focusing on fixed English grammar and its orderly linguistic systems.

This Element seeks to illustrate many of the real-world challenges of transnationalism by bringing out how transnational migrants can represent such a subversion of the national order of things in the domain of their language practices. As Malkki (1995b, p. 6) highlights,

One of the most illuminating ways of getting at the categorical quality of the national order of things is to examine what happens when this order is challenged or subverted. Refugees can represent precisely such a subversion. They are an ‘abomination’ . . . produced and made meaningful by the categorical order itself, even as they are excluded from it.

In line with Malkki’s point, I argue that when transnational migrants whose first language is, for example, not English move to an English-dominant host society, they subvert the rigid standard national language orders in the communicative aspects of their lives. More specifically, they suffer from translingual discrimination – language-based discrimination against transnational migrants, whose sociolinguistic backgrounds and linguistic practices are displaced, subverted, and challenged (Dovchin & Dryden, 2022). Translingual discrimination and its main effects, such as linguistic stratification, division, and prejudice, decrease the socio-emotional well-being and psychological and mental health of its victims as they seek to conform to the linguistic and cultural grammar of nationhood. We, as language educators, thus need to ask the following critical questions: In what ways do transnational migrants subvert and challenge the national order of language? To what extent do transnational migrants resist the order? Do they have any coping mechanisms? If so, how, what, and why? What emotional expressions result from encountering this order? How often and in what ways do they suffer from linguistic subversion? This Element, therefore, seeks to uncover how translingual discrimination is experienced by migrants, how they see themselves, and how we can understand their reflexive understanding of what translingual discrimination means to them.

## 1.2 Interlingual and Intralingual Discrimination

Decades of research on language discrimination in applied linguistics have been widely discussed in the main framework of linguistic human rights (LHR) (Blommaert, 2001a, 2001b; Makoni, 2012; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Wee, 2005, 2011), foregrounding interlingual and intralingual discrimination (or interlanguage and intralanguage) as its two key concepts. Interlingual discrimination is mainly defined by the unequal hierarchical relationship between minority and hegemonic language groups at the level of inter-nations, where the minority groups cannot fully utilise their mother tongues or first languages in critical social, political, and educational participation. Particularly in postcolonial contexts, unequal ideologies and practices of interlingual discrimination are prevalent, while former colonial languages are still homogenising minority languages in critical social domains (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995). The members of these minority groups are not able to fully exercise their linguistic rights to their mother tongues while also being denied the opportunity to become bi/multilingual in their mother tongues (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). A form of ethnic conflict, as a result, may lead to ethnic disintegration and conflicts, since minority languages are often linked to specific ethnic groups. Interlingual discrimination perspectives thereby resist discriminatory hegemonic linguistic practices, advocating for the revitalisation of minority languages and the development of compulsory conventions on linguistic human rights. For example, previous studies show the oppression of minority languages, which has been widespread in many former colonies. The French language has been maintained in parts of Africa, while national, ethnic, or minority languages were violated and subverted (Salhi, 2002). English has been and continues to be an imperialistic language, as there is still massive unequal linguistic power between English and other global languages. Anglophone nations, for example, use English to suppress other non-English-speaking nations around the world (Phillipson, 1992, 2010). Intralingual discrimination has been evident in situations such as immigrant children being subjected to corporal punishment for the ‘crime’ of speaking their mother tongue in the context of the Celtic languages in Britain or France, or Sami in Scandinavia. The same discrimination was also apparent in the Europeanised countries of the Americas and Australasia, and in colonial Africa. The same applies to the exclusion of the Kurdish language in Turkey, while the Turkish language is promoted as the standard language (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995).

While the concept of interlingual discrimination has strongly advocated for the critical significance of minority language rights, continually striking a note of caution towards the unequal power relations between minority and hegemonic languages at the level of inter-nations and states, it also closes an investigation of the complexity of intra-groups' sociolinguistic realities (Blommaert, 2001a, 2001b). The account of interlingual discrimination, as a result, has been criticised by certain scholars for reducing inequality to interlanguage diversity at the level of inter-nations, particularly constraining its understanding only on 'named languages' that are accepted by the national order of things. As Blommaert (2001a, p. 135) points out, the main flaw in interlingual discrimination consists of 'Diversity and inequality within particular units conventionally called "language" is not treated (there is cursory mention of it, but it remains undeveloped). What is at stake is the difference between, e.g., "French" and "Berber", "English" and "Swahili", "Dutch" and "French": things that have a name.' In other words, language discrimination, with its simple 'hegemonic-minority' model, is reduced to conflicts between standard language categories. Its diversion from internal inequalities within a nation presupposes the existence of a 'language community' since it assumes that 'the promotion of the mother tongue is the best way to ensure the protection of speakers' socio-economic interests' (Wee, 2005, p. 49). The account of interlingual discrimination, therefore, leads to the idea that the battlefield of linguistic discrimination is constructed by nations, each identified by a language, and nations are effectively defined as ethnolinguistic groups (Blommaert, 2001a). Nevertheless, the association of 'language' with 'named languages' could be highly problematic because there is also a massive inequality internally embedded within those particular 'named languages'.

While the term 'interlingual discrimination' is not necessarily obsolescent and still has applications in the context of inter-nation linguistic power struggles in several ways, the concept of intralanguage or intralingual discrimination has instead been proposed as a better candidate to grasp internal or intra-group linguistic inequalities (Blommaert, 2001a, 2001b; Makoni, 2012; Wee, 2005, 2011). To understand language discrimination, it is essential to understand internal language inequalities, 'the situation where speakers themselves exercise control over their language, deciding what languages are, and what they may mean' (Stroud, 2001, p. 353). While interlingual discrimination suggests that minority languages are becoming the victims of former colonial language homogenisation, here we get the other side of the coin, the intralingual position, focusing on the implications of the internal variations within each language. If an intralingual variation is accepted as a potential source of discrimination, then speakers of non-standard varieties of the standard language can claim to be the



victims of discrimination as they are judged to be less acceptable than their standard-using counterparts (Makoni, 2012). Intralingual discrimination is, as Wee (2005, p. 54) notes, ‘less often linked to distinct ethnic identities’, and is more likely to lead to ‘social’ rather than ‘ethnic’ conflicts, ‘where speakers of the non-standard variety are judged to be less sophisticated or less respectable than their standard-speaking counterparts’. The tension between the standard form associated with an institutional setting such as school and the degrading of a non-standard variety associated with informal settings such as home may mean that language users often collude in their own intralingual discrimination (Wee, 2011). Users of Singaporean English (Singlish) are, for example, potentially discriminated against due to a language policy that promotes standard English in Singapore while devaluing other language varieties such as Singlish (Wee, 2011). The controversy regarding which variety to use in formal domains also surfaces in parts of Africa (Makoni, 2012), where, for example, an issue before the court was raised by a mother whose son was being taught a wrong variety of isiZulu, ‘kitchen (isi)Zulu’, which was claimed to have adversely affected her son’s development of proficiency in isiZulu. A similar example is also apparent in Mongolia, where the non-standard Mongolian dialects, accents, and pronunciations practised mainly in the remote or rural regions can be marginalised by the mainstream urban population (Dovchin, 2018). Intralingual discrimination is, therefore, mainly contested within an in-group space, where the speakers of a non-standard variety may endure resistance even from their fellow speakers within the same linguistic and cultural group (Blommaert, 2001a).

While a canonical view of intralingual discrimination is defined by the understanding that speakers are discriminated against based on certain in-group linguistic variations and internal language sub-varieties, investigating intralingual discrimination may also involve a host of exclusions (Dovchin & Dryden, 2022). The core belief of intralingual discrimination raises questions about whether it sufficiently addresses the superdiverse linguistic differentiation beyond intra-groups and its complex transnational and transcultural interconnection with other social, ethnic, racial, gender, technological, political, economic, and ideological factors. Its focus is on particular group-specific and in-group linguistic community rights predicated on notions of intra-group discrimination and inequality. It is, for example, still centred around nationally defined or ‘standardised’ sub-varieties such as Singlish, within the same linguistic community nation such as Singapore. The core linguistic battlefield is between the standard and non-standard varieties within the same linguistic community nation, still aiming towards the central grammar and lexicon of sub-varieties of the dominant language, which is what makes Singlish, for example,

still English, with English characterised by various grammatical shifts, new lexical items, and different pragmatic and phonological features.

Indeed, language discrimination may also occur within, beyond, and across intra-groups because someone who is intralingually discriminated against in one context may be included and validated in another, depending on which aspects of an individual's identity are engaged by that time and space (Dick, 2011). Speakers of Singlish, for example, are not necessarily subject to the disadvantages of intralanguage discrimination because their Singlish can also be appreciated when they move beyond Singaporean contexts, where these varieties are, for example, accepted or even celebrated. A young Mongolian man who learned his English based primarily on African-American English vernacular from hip hop music in Mongolia was largely admired by his peers for using 'cool English' or 'American English' in Mongolia. Yet, when he moved to Australia, his English was discriminated against as 'accented' and 'not up to standard' (Dovchin, 2018).

Intralingual discrimination, centred on nationally defined or 'standardised' sub-varieties, lacks adequacy to deal with other numerous linguistic possibilities and contexts in current transnational conditions. Its attempt to understand the discrimination against the 'systematised' substandard national variants tends to leave out many other new, superdiverse, hybrid forms of transnational linguistic potentials (Dovchin & Dryden, 2022). Makoni (2014, p. 28, for example, points out the intralingual discrimination framework does not address 'gendered forms of language discrimination, thereby underscoring the complexity of the notions of language and "group" on which LHR is anchored, including the complex interconnectedness of cultural communicative practices and power'. This framework, therefore, must consider socially and discursively constructed transnational group relations that may reflect diverse forms of language discrimination.

Interlingual discrimination does not take us far enough and remains an exclusionary paradigm: just as Blommaert (2001a, 2001b) has argued that the concept of interlingual discrimination may do little more than pluralise monolingual discrimination between named inter-languages, so I am suggesting that the concept of intralingual discrimination does little more than to pluralise the discrimination between the standard and 'named' sub-varieties of those same language groups. This framework, therefore, must consider socially and discursively constructed transnational groups, who are constantly displaced or replaced; de-territorialised or re-territorialised in this current globalised world, covering diverse and complex layered forms of language discrimination. Intralingual discrimination, therefore, cannot do justice to those 'other' kaleidoscopic (Pennycook, 2007, 2008), vernacular, and pidgin (Mufwene, 2002),

or emergent transidiomatic practices (Jacquemet, 2013), defined by one's transnational movement in Appadurai's (1997) vision of globalisation.

### 1.3 Translingual Discrimination

Moving away from the two dominant visions of interlingual and intralingual discrimination, I locate the idea of language discrimination in the space of replaced and displaced transnational migrants within a more complex alternative position that I call 'translingual discrimination' (Dovchin & Dryden, 2022). As transnational migrants start moving to new spaces for more opportunities, they also retain the imprint of both their countries of origin and of settlement, 'driven by diverse goals, serving different needs of the nation-state, and equipped with varying levels of capital' (Darvin & Norton, 2014, p. 113). Transnational migrants, per Bhabha's (1994) 'third space', and their movements allow for a superdiversity of forms of contact and communication that are available in a range of transnational communicative resources, codes, modes, styles, and repertoires (Hawkins & Mori, 2018). The sociolinguistic movements of these transnational migrants are often treated as emergent, constantly being reconstructed by the communicative dynamics of their participants (Li, 2018). As a result, new terminologies, such as the users of 'translingual' (Canagarajah, 2018; Lee, 2022; J. Lee, 2017), 'translanguaging' (Fang & Liu, 2020), 'transidiomatic' (Jacquemet, 2013), 'transglossic' (Sultana et al., 2015), 'transcripting' (Li & Zhu, 2019), and 'transgrammaring' (Barrett, 2019, 2020) practices are recognised by applied linguists, inclusive of a 'trans- turn' to fully capture the linguistic and communicative complexity of these transnational migrants. The fundamental tenet of this 'trans- turn' problematises the traditional bi/multilingual view of language to separate linguistic categories through bounded language categories. Instead, it advocates for the shifting between and across linguistic and semiotic repertoires, presenting on-the-spot and embryonic negotiation of fluid resources for meaning-making (Lee & Dovchin, 2019). Transnational migrants are actively engaged with the continual process of semiotic mobility across time and space, and displacement from and replacement into a newer context while resemioticising (Tebaldi, 2020) and relocalising available resources (Tankosić & Dovchin, 2022). The essential importance is on language users' 'fluid and creative adaptation of a wide array of semiotic resources' and language as 'a product of their sociohistorical trajectories through a multitude of interactions across space and time' (Hawkins & Mori, 2018, pp. 2–3).

Meanwhile, this very idea of 'trans-' movement in applied linguistics has long been outshone by the translingual practices and experiences of

‘playfulness’ (Li et al., 2020; Tai & Li, 2021) of its participants, mediated mainly by digital communication (Li & Zhu, 2019), popular culture (Dovchin et al., 2017), social media (Schreiber, 2015), and other types of youth cultures (Rampton et al., 2019). Translingual practices are frequently understood as linguistically creative (Bradley et al., 2018) and innovative (Lee & Dovchin, 2019) while enjoying full participation in translingual communication in its all-fantastic dimensions – the sounds, the shapes, the unfamiliar combinations, and the odd grammatical structures (Kramsch, 2006). The playfulness in trans-perspectives celebrates translingual users’ creativity, innovation, and positivity, focusing on vivacity and energy. This trend is, of course, associated with the fact that one’s translingual register is intensely connected with a celebration of re-becoming, changing, re-transforming, re-creating, and renewal (Dovchin et al., 2017), privileging the kind of ‘heterodox language mixing that features in everyday recreation on the ground’ (Rampton et al., 2019, p. 648). ‘Playful talk’ is becoming popular in trans- perspectives. It entails a ‘wide range of verbal activities and routines, including teasing, joking, humour, verbal play, parody, music making, chanting that can emerge in learners’ talk’ (Lytra, 2008, p. 185) while allowing users to bring and incorporate various resources into their daily communicative repertoires. These linguistic resources are often multimodal (e.g., drawings, arts, links, and emojis), expressive (e.g., word choice, laughter, gesture, voice tone), and include ‘playful naughtiness’ (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 111) through ‘pleasure of doing things differently’ (Pennycook, 2007, pp. 41–2) to create alternative linguistic, cultural, and identity practices (Sayer, 2013).

Nevertheless, not all linguistically trans- practices and encounters are ‘playful’ because the sociolinguistic realities of transnational migrants can also be predominantly overshadowed by precarity, disparity, racism, and inequality orchestrated by the national order of things in the settlement society (Dovchin, 2021). The mobility of transnational migrants, which may, in fact, intensely feed the ‘discrimination’, has been reductively represented in the studies of trans- perspectives, while the impact of translingual playfulness has been discussed considerably. It is apparent that transnational migrants are playfully involved with different types of trans- practices, but it is not at all clear to what extent, how, and why particular local constraints either limit or expand one’s translingual practices. Transnational migrants can be linguistically playful, but they are also deeply embedded in local economies of order and disparity (Dovchin, 2021). How do we, for example, understand when a young Mongolian migrant woman’s ‘Mongolian-sounding English accent’ may create a ‘playful’ interaction with her Australian interlocutors while they also tease her for having a ‘sexy’ accent? Perhaps an ‘English accent’ spoken by a Mongolian

person may sound playful to some English users. However, from the perspective of this young Mongolian woman, it is neither playful nor joyful to be teased for her accent. In other words, the contemporary theorisation of trans- perspectives does not sufficiently interrogate the disparity and discrimination experienced by its users, romanticising the creativity of language without sufficiently interrogating injustices involving race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic realities (Kubota, 2015). Research on global Englishes (Jenkins, 2007; Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019; Tupas & Rubdy, 2015) similarly reminds us that current approaches towards hybrid English brush aside inequalities that mediate relations between English users since they have been seduced into celebrating hybrid English but overlook the massive inequities sustained by the different usages of English today (cf. Milroy & Milroy, 2012). This type of inequality is apparent, for example, in academic contexts, where British universities expect British standard English, which also goes for American English and North American universities (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2019).

The conceptual understanding of translingual discrimination thus aims to fill this critical research gap in existing trans- theories, urging a more vital need to acknowledge one of its most overlooked characteristics – linguistic discrimination experienced by so-called playful and creative translingual users and migrants. The concept of translingual discrimination thereby points to the critical issues between language and inequality, innovating the analytic potential of applied linguistic theories by taking concepts such as linguistic racism (Corona & Block, 2020; Dovchin, 2020a), unequal Englishes (Tupas & Rubdy, 2015), raciolinguistics (Rosa & Flores, 2017), and linguicism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2015) seriously. The main ethos of these concepts is to reveal the unequal power relationship between ideologies and practices such as so-called native or non-native, first or second language users (Kumaravivelu, 2016). The focus is on the central role that language plays in the enduring relevance of race/racism, institutional/interpersonal discrimination in the lives of migrants, racialised or ethnic minorities in the highly diverse transnational host societies of the twenty-first century, and what it means to speak or communicate as people with transnational identities. It further examines how an individual's basic human rights are violated, and how they are deprived of education, employment, health, and social opportunities, based on their use of language (Dovchin, 2020a). Integrating these main arguments in current trans- perspectives will break new ground by disclosing the sociolinguistic reality that it is not always applicable to celebrate translingual playfulness without fully acknowledging ongoing, often deeply entrenched, local constraints. It is almost impossible to develop a thorough analysis of people's apparent translingual choices without acknowledging how ongoing communication is always associated with

the existing social experiences of those making these choices. Hence, the idea of translingual discrimination may become helpful in understanding the relationships among transnational linguistic practices, dominant ideologies, and structural inequalities.

So, what is translingual discrimination? The concept of translingual discrimination refers to the ideologies and practices that produce unequal linguistic power relationships between the transnational migrant-background language users and the majority population from the host society, focusing on the central role that language plays in the enduring relevance of discrimination, disparity, and exclusion in the lives of transnational migrants. Translingual discrimination is language-based discrimination against transnational migrants in the host society, whose sociolinguistic backgrounds and linguistic practices are displaced, subverted, and challenged. As transnational migrants operate in different spaces, they are often positioned in multiple different and unequal settings as their particular sociolinguistic backgrounds and the past experiences they bring with them are assigned different national values and standards that may eventually cause them to become subject to discrimination in their countries of settlement. Blommaert's (2010) idea of an 'order of indexicality' is essential here for translingual discrimination since 'indexicality', in Blommaert's vision (2010, p. 38), as 'registers', 'social categories', and 'recognisable semiotic emblems' for groups and individuals, is ordered in hierarchies of value in different contexts. As Blommaert (2010, p. 38) describes, those orders of indexicalities may operate within 'large stratified complexes in which some forms of semiosis are systematically perceived as valuable', while others are 'less valuable and some are not taken into account at all'. Then, all are subject to 'rules of access and regulations as to circulation'. From this perspective, the concept of translingual discrimination refers to the different orders of indexicality with which transnational migrants' sociolinguistic practices and backgrounds are embedded, as some forms of translingual indexicality can be deemed as legitimate, while others can be seen as less valued. In translingual discrimination, some indexicality is not accepted at all, while all are subject to systemic orders of standardisation and nativisation as to circulation by the national political and socio-cultural context (Lippi-Green, 2011). Standard monolingual national language ideologies are primarily enforced on how transnationals communicate, while their translingual backgrounds only gain importance when others validate or legitimise them (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Foo & Tan, 2019). What may be a gain or advantage in one context can be a total loss in another. The English spoken or used by an upper-middle-class person in Mongolia, for example, is unlikely to be validated as upper-middle-class quality in London or Oxford. What happens to transnational migrants in their