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Reference:

Pang Ching Lin, Stirling Sara, Long Denggao.- 'Mei nu, mei nu, tai gui le!' : to use or not to use Chinese language in Beijing's Silk Market

Language and intercultural communication - ISSN 1470-8477 - 15:2(2015), p. 267-284

Full text (Publishers DOI): <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/14708477.2014.993323>

To cite this reference: <http://hdl.handle.net/10067/1226080151162165141>

**‘Mei nu, mei nu, tai gui le!’*: To use or not to use Chinese Language in
Beijing’s Silk Market**

Ching Lin Pang, Sara Sterling, Long Denggao

***Miss, Miss. That is too expensive!**

Introduction

As a key destination in the burgeoning capital city of Beijing, the Silk Market (*xiushuijie*) acts as a microcosm of the modernization and internationalization of China on a larger scale.

Remarkably, the marketplace put in place only in the 1980s is promoted by the government as one of the top three tourist destinations in Beijing, at the same level as the iconic cultural heritage sites of the Great Wall and Forbidden City (Pang & Sterling, 2013). Clearly, the modernization of China has itself become an attraction for visitors both foreign and Chinese alike. The Silk Market has evolved from an outdoor market pandering to black-market currency traders and selling goods for expatriates residing in the nearby embassy district to a multi-story shopping center, which at first glance could be mistaken for one of the city's numerous luxury shopping malls. The façade resembles a shopping mall, but inside, it is evident that it is something more flexible, with less boundaries and rigidity than the officially demarcated stores that are characteristic of fixed-price shopping centers.

The Silk Market is a destination designed to seduce tourists with promises of being an all-encompassing Chinese cultural shopping experience. The clientele ranges from international tourists on organized bus tours, to wholesale businessmen looking to profit from the market's flexible price-schemes, to residents of Beijing, foreign or Chinese, looking to bargain or simply purchase daily goods. In this article we focus on language students residing in Beijing. With an academic background and formal knowledge of the Chinese language, students are also familiar with Chinese cultural practices, to varying degrees. We aim to scrutinize the (un)importance of Chinese language in the bargaining ritual between Chinese language students and Chinese vendors in the Silk Street Market within the general context of the language of the market.

As a shopping destination in Beijing, the Silk Market is renowned for its reputation as a one-stop shop, where visitors can meet all shopping needs while consuming typical 'Chinese' products. However, the mobile, global character of the market, through the plethora of languages spoken and concurrent flows of global goods, is integral to its survival and continued success amongst a sea of similarly-styled markets in newer areas of the city. The global and the local are always at

play in the Silk Market, as while China continues to support its presence as a destination for international travelers, it is situated in the local at all times, as the ‘local’, or ‘Chinese’ aspect of the market is the core of its presence. We have argued previously (Pang & Sterling, 2014) in our discussion on female vendors that following the theories of everyday perspective of migration (Ley, 2004; Ho & Hatfield, 2011) the global takes shape and becomes significant through every day or local practices and processes. For that article, we interviewed 20 young female vendors in 2011 with repeat interviews in subsequent years, hailing from the Northern and Eastern provinces of China (ibid). Similarly, students of the Chinese language are moving incessantly between the global and the local during their stay in Beijing, as their stay in China is temporary. International students are fluid in their global/local consciousness, as at times they act as unofficial representatives of their country in China, in various functions and occasions, but in conjunction with this role, their increasing familiarity with Chinese market shopping rituals and practices makes them part of the ‘local’ Beijing scene. They acquire this cultural knowledge through experience and empowered action, or as Gregson and Rose would write, ‘performance and performativity’ (2000), aided by their prior knowledge of the Chinese language, which becomes a source of reciprocity and connectedness as well as a strategic linguistic tool during the act of shopping and negotiating in the Silk Market.

The idea of expectation and concomitant result and experience is central to the process of consumption in the Silk Market, particularly for students possessing some degree of familiarity with the language, although as will be discussed later, the language of the marketplace and the ‘local’ Chinese language as studied by students do not always consist of the same vernacular terms. The hybrid nature of the international market in China’s capital city in terms of language is part of the larger-scale globalization of market languages, with English as a dominant lingua franca, and Mandarin Chinese as the official ‘local’ language. Both English and Chinese act as *linguae francae* in the day-to-day transactions of the Silk Market, in addition to other global languages, and thereby complicating the complexity of language acts and performances in the marketplace. The language of the market becomes, in fact, its own entity, created by the actors by which it is performed.

In examining the encounter between the global and the local from a symbolic interaction perspective (Goffman, 1971), one is able to discern a multiplicity of acts at play during the

shopping experience at the Silk Market: perception, performance, strategy, and negotiation. The concept of space itself and its flexible, mobile nature also leads to a reinterpretation of ideas of what constitutes a place in a language-transaction (Blommaert, Slembrouck & Collins, 2005; Li, 2010). The semiotization of the marketplace from the perspective of language students and the vendors allows us to delve into different layers of exchange and encounters within the global-local framework and contextualize these interactions in different frames.

Intercultural Communication in the Market: Performance, Action, Ritual and Pluralism at Play

It goes without saying that the ‘intercultural’ must be subjective and based on particular rituals and interactions, as the idea of culture itself should not be reified, and must be necessarily analyzed with specific experiences in mind (Verschueren, 2008). He argues that ‘a static comparison of cultures’ seems the worst possible basis on which to approach intercultural communication” (ibid 25). In the Silk Market, ‘culture’ can be conceptualized at the level of Chinese shopping practice and language use, and the very messy business of bargaining culture, the ‘culture’ of the market place, or any number of combinations of these and others. When referring to Chinese culture, it is perceived from the perspective of language students, and not meant as a singular fixed entity. Each individual brings along, consciously or unconsciously, his/her own notions of cultural practices, and thus shaping ‘Chinese’ shopping culture in the market. A useful alternative frame is provided by Gregson and Rose (2000), who suggest studying these events within the context of “performance and performativity”. By so doing a deeper understanding of communicative and social practices is achieved. This is to say that ‘performance is what individuals do, say, “act-out’, and performativity is the citational practice, which reproduce and /or subvert discourse, and which enable and discipline subjects and their performance—these are intrinsically connected through the saturation of performers with power” (434).

There is an inherent sense of ritual to the act of shopping, even in the midst of chaotic bargaining and physical over-crowding. The practice of shopping in the Silk Market requires a sense of understanding of a specific communicative and experiential practice in order to successfully engage in interculturality, and more practically, to speak the language of the marketplace. In

other words we endorse the view of the semiotization of the marketplace from a ‘flexi multilingual’ perspective (Blommaert, Slembrouck & Collins, 2005; Li, 2010).

Silverstein (2004) writes, “In ritual, participants spatiotemporally manipulate signs (of these beliefs) and areas of knowledge in their uttered words and their actions with each other and with objects...Rituals can be verbal or non-verbal, or, as is usually the case, a combination of multiple modalities” (626). The act of ritual is integral to intercultural communication, as it is a shared understanding, or misunderstanding at times of the actions that are taking place and their meaning that are the substantial, tangible elements of communicative interactions. As he continues, ‘...To participate in an interaction one must presuppose (such) culture to be conceptualizations of the “what” and “who” in communicative context that are already both shared and in the instance precipitated’ (ibid 645). Silverstein uses the example of ‘wine-talk’, or the vocabulary used by wine aficionados when discussing and drinking wine to demonstrate a particular set of shared knowledge, which enables the ritual of communication to occur. As all parties are cognizant of the terminology and its proper usage when describing particular phenomenon, this becomes culture as “performatively enacted” (ibid), or the backbone of wine-culture. Silverstein’s example of wine-culture and its associated linguistic rituals provides us with an understanding of a particular culture, without reification. Thus, we can similarly look to the common usage in the Silk Market of stock-phrases by vendors and the non-verbal actions of using a calculator, as market shopping culture.

The importance of communication and language are central to the events that occur within the Silk Market, for all participants involved, but the focus remains on the consumer-side, and the side of language students for the purposes of this article. Language can be verbal or non-verbal, as in the case of the calculator as a central communicative device. Students are often encouraged to ‘speak’ their desired price through the act of punching numbers into a calculator, replicated with the act of the vendor punching another number, with this ritual occurring several times before a price is agreed upon. This ritual has been termed by Bodoimo as ‘calculator communication’ in his study on Africans in China (2012). At the same time, verbal communication is used, with various languages employed at times in a flexi-multilingual fashion, and sometimes singularly. The interplay of these two acts, and an understanding by language students of how to manipulate both to successfully obtain their desired price for a product is

representative of knowledge of the language of Chinese market culture. This ability demonstrates what Hymes called ‘communicative competence’, which he described as possessing ‘several sectors—there is behavior, and underlying it, there are several systems of rules reflected in the judgments and abilities of those whose messages the behavior manifests’ (2001, 63). Hymes was a pioneer in understanding the significance of the performance of language, not just knowledge of grammatical structure, as ‘the ethnography of symbolic forms’ in anthropology (65).

Thus, the question arises- can this experience be considered multi-cultural, or a specific, monocultural event in a Chinese market? Language students, even those with years of experience in China, and with bargaining in the Chinese marketplace, bring with them their own cultural and historical specificities, from their home-country, their mother-tongue language, or their usage of English, as a first, second or third language. They must also react to vendors’ perceptions of their ‘culture’, through the use of English or other languages in transactions. In a rudimentary sense, there is a multiplicity of cultures, or cultural acts involved in shopping at the Silk Market, so the experience of the marketplace is for sure multi-lingual and multi-cultural. As migrants, albeit temporary, they face issues such as stereotyping, prejudice, and other pre-conceived notions of behavior based on socio-cultural, linguistic, or racial difference.

Gumperz, another pioneering theorist in linguistic anthropology, described what he called a “verbal repertoire”, a term which can encompass both purely grammatical language as well as the non-verbal interactions between speakers that enable mutual understanding (2001, p. 50). Habermas also wrote of communicative action as actors ‘sharing the same repertoire...enabling speakers to understand “the same matter in the same way”’ (cited in Knoblauch 2001, p. 6). Bourdieu (1982) was critical of Habermas’ conceptualization of what constitutes a communicative action, as Knoblauch (2001) writes, ‘to Bourdieu, it is a mistake to look for social effects, i.e., the co-ordination of actions between speakers...It is the use of *language in social contexts* which makes language work’ (ibid, italics in original). These two lines of thought are not diametrically opposed, however, as Bourdieu’s ‘social contexts’ can be aligned ‘repertoire’ in that they both take place in some social structure that is understood, either created by the speakers, in the case of Gumperz and Habermas, or in the situation itself, in the case of

Bourdieu. Both are useful in demonstrating the usability of language within the act of communication, and for our purposes, communication in the Chinese marketplace.

While it has already been noted that a multiplicity of cultures, or pre-conceptions of cultural rituals is part of communication in the Silk Market, the notions of mobility and flexibility, need to be scrutinized in order to fully grasp the quotidian language praxis in the Silk Market. Although China's cultural politics and official stance on language may appear inflexible and immobile, within its marketplaces and other places of negotiation, commercial or non-commercial, the flexible and mobile abound. Even in the official discourse on language, in which the international is embraced via the practice of government-sanctioned and encouraged study of English, from primary school onwards, there is a steering away from isolating China and ideas of Chinese culture. Instead, China in its modernization project discloses its gaze to the global, and simultaneously protects the local, as is evident through the dissemination of Chinese language across the globe in Confucius Institutes as well as independently funded language centers and schools (Pan & Seargeant, 2012). The spread and popularity of Chinese language on a global scale combined with the rise of English-language learning in China are demonstrative of the kind of mobility described above, and although the government-promulgated ideas of 'traditional Chinese culture' are well-represented throughout Chinese society, tangible aspects of global culture, such as the Silk Market with its famous fake luxury brands, cannot be overlooked as having been firmly entrenched in modern Chinese life.

Conceiving the communication of Chinese as a flexible, mobile language, open to interpretation, aids in the examination of perceived differences between Western and Asian languages, and by extension, cultures. Chang writes of the perception of Western languages, which are thought to 'stress precise, straightforward communication, based on an individualistic culture, in contrast to Chinese, which as a verbal style often described as imprecise and ambiguous' (1999, pg. 536). Instead of viewing Chinese as a language which is one of indirect communication, Chang argues, we should instead look at what he terms the 'indeterminate linguistic space—a social mechanism which enables relational adjustments to take place' (ibid 541). Thus by creating an opening for multiple meanings, Chinese proves to be a language that is rife with pluralities, formulating endless opportunities to fine-tune the nature of the conversation, based on the position of the self and the other party involved. In the Silk Market, this space is created when the performers of the

bargaining dialogue vacillate between vendor-customer, to foreigner-foreigner, female-female, friend-friend, or any number of different social or gender roles.

Bargaining and the Marketplace: Negotiation in Action

The previous section focused on aspects and theories of intercultural communication, related to the Silk Market. The notion of the market itself and the practice of bargaining or more precisely interactions between people in commercial transactions can be considered communicative acts, which in turn might take different forms in various contexts and locales. Ample study has been conducted on different types of markets, ranging from the cornershop in Germany to a garage sale in the United States, to a public outdoor market in France, all of which contribute to the theorization of markets and how they are conceived of by their consumers/inhabitants (Dyers and Wankah, 2012; Everts, 2010; Gregson & Rose, 2000; Herrmann, 2004; de la Pradelle, 1995).

Studies of markets and of the practice of buying things in the market, regardless of the market style or the good, all suggest a sense of ritual in market-life, from how one greets the vendor to how the process of bargaining unfolds. The Silk Market is no exception, as there are certain language acts that are replicated and performed on nearly every occasion. One will hear calls as soon as one begins to walk through the packed corridors filled with goods, ‘look-a, look-a, you want Louis Vuitton, Gucci?’. This is a standard phrase in the area of the market selling handbags and leather goods. Similar refrains for various brand names can be found on the remaining upper four levels of the market, as well as expressions such as ‘pretty lady, you want silk?’ and the like, as will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this paper. Such speech events are introductions to the ritual of bargaining, and are represented in markets throughout China that sell ‘fake’ branded goods, designed to lure the customer in with the promise of well-known brand names.

In a study of a local market in Southern China, Orr identifies three different frames through which service encounters occur:

1. Valet frame, in which the attender waits on the attended, ascertaining his or her wants and needs and striving to satisfy them
2. Consultation frame, in which the professional provides expert opinions and advice to a client with or without prompting by the latter
3. Transaction frame, where seller and buyer seek to satisfy their competing economic interests and maximize their personal gain. (2007, pg. 77).

These three frames, as Orr continues, are intertwined. She states that, ‘in bargaining there is a dominance of transaction frame over valet and consultation frames’ (ibid 100). In the Silk Market, these frames are decidedly intertwined, as would-be buyers, all with different goals for their experience, are engaged in the three aforementioned frames. For instance, in the consultation frame, language students and other consumers are told ‘this is real leather, this is good quality’ and then are given a ‘proof’ of the authenticity of leather by the commonly used tool of holding a lighter to the object, thus showing that it is not plastic, otherwise it would have burst into flames. The transaction frame may or may not enter into play, depending on one’s interest in the item. These three frames illuminate three general steps of the process of selling, but also illuminate how markets work, in a brilliantly clear way.

Orr’s concept of the three frames outlines a basic overview of transactions in the market place. The idea of the market and its negotiations are described by de la Pradelle, talking about a weekend outdoor market in France, as ‘A kind of game. The social actors implicitly agree to play a game whose first rule is that none of them may derive advantages or privileges exterior to the exchange situation’ (1995, pg. 362). While the act of bargaining as a means of buying goods in the Silk Market might be interpreted as a kind of game, with particular rules flexible but yet following a fairly standard protocol, one must distinguish this market from the one described by de la Pradelle, as gains can be made on both the vendor and consumer side. Vendors aim to get repeat customers, and to spread word of their stalls to as many people as possible, which would occur outside of the initial bargaining and exchange of money for goods. It could also be viewed as a type of privilege to get to know personal details about the customer, who often helps them to learn new words in English or other languages of use to the vendor. On the side of customers, language students gain an experience of practicing their Chinese with a native speaker, in engaging with vendors on a personal level, at times becoming a repeat customer, they learn the market value of goods, and can use this knowledge as a negotiating tactic for future purchases.

Bargaining is common practice at markets throughout China, and as in any market without fixed price signs, one must interact with vendors and bargain to obtain their desired good. The act of bargaining is part of Chinese social life, and with the knowledge of Chinese language, it acts as a stepping stone into feeling as if one is actively behaving as a 'Chinese'. However, as Keane writes, 'one might respond that marketplace haggling is an archaism from those parts of the world that have not yet achieved fully modern economies. But it certainly is one of the most common everyday experiences of money and even of capitalism to be found in the world today' (2008, pg. 35). China's modernization since the end of the 1970s, officially labeled 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', appears in many cases to be a form of hyper-capitalism, with bargaining central to this development. The price of the good is entirely negotiated in the bargaining process, between the vendor and the consumer, and although both parties have standards prices in mind, the mutual agreement is one that, unlike fixed-price stores and shopping centers, is flexible.

French writes that bargaining in this manner 'follows tacit rules and implicit regulations established by convention' (2001, pg. 161), and states that in the process of bargaining, there is often a 'series of paired offers and rejections' (ibid 164). Although the price must be agreed upon in the final act of bargaining, the steps of the bargaining process are implicitly agreed upon before the bargaining begins, and it is when consumers are not familiar with the rituals involved in bargaining that miscommunications may arise. If one comes from a culture where bargaining is not a part of the shopping experience, one might not fully understand the implicit bargaining norms of the Silk Market, which could be either advantageous or disadvantageous, depending on the final outcome of the communication that ensues. For instance, in her research on bargaining in garage sales in the United States, Herrmann writes that, 'Given the cultural norms of posted prices, bargaining is often considered embarrassing or unsavory' (2004, pg. 55). This might explain the unease of language students from the United States at the outset. However as one becomes more familiar with Chinese-style bargaining, gaining the linguistic and cultural competence that comes with experience, they may consider themselves as gaining cultural capital through this form of knowledge. As Hermann writes, 'Bargaining carries a psychological reward, beyond the obvious pecuniary one, for participants...it allows them to put something of themselves into their acquisition' (ibid 73).

Lu and Chen (2011) write that ‘guanxi’, or the word that ‘describes social connections and relationships’ outside the traditional terms of Chinese kinship, has essentially replaced kinship in these types of service encounters, which did not formally exist for decades, as it has “an instrumental value and a utilitarian function” (61). Indeed, a person who possesses the ability to perform ‘guanxi’, or social networking is likely to become adept at bargaining, by being personable and following the give-and-take routines of the bargaining dance in the market place, and creating ties where they previously did not exist. Dyers’ and Wankah’s (2012) study of Greenmarket Square in Capetown shows that a kind of negative ‘guanxi’, in the form of xenophobia, is created between African migrant vendors who are not South African, through the use of French, and other actions, which seem neutral, but are perceived as ‘acting white’, and thus creating alienation and friction between various migrant groups hawking merchandise in the same square. Language thus can either enable social networks and connections to exist, or act as a device of polarization, depending on how it is performed, and perceived.

For language students, as temporary migrants in Beijing, the act of bargaining can be a type of experiential souvenir, a memory and skill set that will remind them of their life in China, and having engaged in the practices and rituals of the market. This is also a form of cultural capital in the sense posited by Bourdieu, as ‘differentiated consumer goods to establish social status’ (Zukin & Maguire 2004, pg. 173). The goods that are purchased represent their time in China, and thus their future status once returning to their home country signifies that they have spent time abroad, and that not only the goods from a Chinese market, but the manner in which they were acquired, namely in Chinese, for the most part, and through bargaining, become means of conveying one’s social status. Hindman’s research on expatriates shopping in Nepalese bazaars is an example of shopping as cultural capital, as she writes, ‘In Nepal, expatriates spend a good deal of energy distancing themselves from tourists. In a place where whiteness alone marks one as an outsider...they take pains to emphasize characteristics making them different from tourists’ (2009, pg. 676).

Language students are similar in this respect, as they also strive to differentiate themselves from typical Silk Market tourists, lacking the skills of the Chinese language, the bargaining ritual and most important the market language. Bargaining represents, to students from some countries, something that is foreign, while for others, in countries where bargaining is commonplace, the

ritual has a different meaning. Ideas of bargaining and the rituals and performances of language(s) that take place in the Silk Market are highly subjective, as although the influence of one's home country can be significant, in other instances, personality of the consumer dominates his or her view on the experience.

Language Students in the Silk Market: a Case Study

Targeting language students as consumers in the Silk Market, as opposed to a general overview of shoppers, ranging from long-term expat residents to international business travelers, supports and exacerbates the view of the semiotization of the marketplace from a 'flexi multilingual' perspective, as was aptly put forward by Blommaert et al. (2005). In so doing we aim to contribute new knowledge to this field with empirical data. We hasten to add that the thickness of the data is by no means representative, given the relatively small sample. Language students possess, to some degree, a familiarity with Chinese culture, acquired through the formal study of Chinese language in the classroom. Learning Chinese language enables them to better understand and adopt Chinese cultural practices. Secondly, the perspectives on the market and on China in general are grounded in day-to-day reality. They live in the city, in which they study, work, and become embedded in Chinese society. Consequently they develop and perform the verbal repertoire (Gumperz, 2008) and intercultural skills (Gregson & Rose, 2000; Verschueren, 2008) at a deeper level than other customers including tourists, short term business people and expatriates.

Fieldwork was conducted in various months from November 2011 to November 2012, in the form of semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with a total of forty language students, ranging in age from 17 to 45. The interviewees were consciously gathered from four geographic regions: the United States, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, and Eastern Europe/Russia. Although this is not by any means a complete representation of language students in Beijing, as interviewees from Asian, African and South American countries are omitted, these four groups can provide some insight onto the experience of "Western" language students in Beijing. Interviews were conducted in various locations, including coffee shops around the Wudaokou area, in Beijing's Haidian district, where a large number of universities

are concentrated, as well as on the campuses of Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU) and Tsinghua University. Although ideally interviews would have been conducted at the Silk Market, this approach was non-systematic, as well as time-constraining, and thus the interviews were conducted instead in the above-listed places. A total of 24 females and 16 males were interviewed, and the average age of interviewees was 24.35 years old. 14 total countries were represented.

While some students were studying in exchange programs, for durations ranging from a semester to several years away from their home universities, others were enrolled directly at language schools in BLCU (Beijing Language and Culture University) or Tsinghua, or as Master's students in these or other Chinese universities. All students had been living in China for a minimum period of two months at the time of the interviews, although many had been living in Beijing for several years, with the longest at five years. Pseudonyms are used for each student, as all informants felt more comfortable speaking honestly when told that their real names would not be used.

This cross-section of language students and their experiences in the Silk Street Market is emblematic of the concepts and theories presented in the first two sections of the paper, as they participated in and were engaged with the language of the market, the Chinese language, and the language of bargaining. Instead of a detailed questionnaire, we opted for semi-structured interviews, exploring the perception and experiences of international students towards the Silk Street Market, shopping, bargaining, usage of Chinese and other languages. In these interviews, the following basic questions were posed:

1. How long have you been in China/Beijing? How long have you studied Chinese?
2. How did you hear about the Silk Market?
3. What were your impressions of the market when you first arrived there?
4. How do you feel about your experiences there, and in particular, having to bargain? Have you bargained before?
5. How does your Chinese language ability affect your bargaining practices/techniques?
6. Describe your techniques for shopping/bargaining in the Silk Market.

7. What items have you bought there? How do you feel about the quality of the goods purchased?
8. Would you go back again/have you returned?
9. If you've been back, did you notice any changes (due to renovation)? How did you feel about the 'new' layout (with glass store front, etc.)

The glocal nature of language in the Silk Market was often noted by students, many of whose second or third language was English, depending on their level of Chinese. Although all students studied Chinese, they did not all utilize the language itself in the Silk Market, as Chinese was at times viewed as a disadvantageous bargaining tool, and English or other languages were deemed more useful. The prevailing opinion, however, was that knowledge of Chinese was advantageous, to some degree, for bargaining and shopping in the Silk Market.

While there was no clear consensus from each group regarding the experience of various aspects of shopping in the Silk Market, there were some sentiments that were brought up more frequently amongst one group in comparison to the other three. For instance, three students from Group 1, the United States, expressed a feeling of empathy for the salespeople, and they did not think it was necessary to bargain for what they deemed to be such a miniscule amount of money. Steve, 20, stated: 'I don't like saying no to people, it's really hard, I see these people in their little shops, and do I really want to negotiate for like 10 *kuai*?' In a similar vein, Shawn, 29, remarked:

I felt aware that it was a Western privilege, having a good job and a lot of money, so I thought it was foolish and unnecessary to engage in a kind of prolonged bargaining, usually you're yelling at each other, and really you're only talking about fifteen cents. Eventually if I thought it was a reasonable price, I didn't think about it, and just bought it, I feel like we both got a good deal.

These two statements both put at the fore the idea that the vendors working at the market are not viewed in the same context as salespeople in the United States, they took a kind of pity on their status as vendors in a Chinese market. In the end, they did not engage in bargaining as it was viewed as too difficult, or not worth the trouble. This places the students more along the residence/familiarity spectrum as tourists, as opposed to long-term Beijingers, who are fluent in the language of bargaining, and play the 'game' to get their desired price. This group may have been familiar with the necessary performances to use to bargain, yet for one reason or another chose to not to enact them. Yet they deliberately chose not to enter into the game of bargaining

(de la Pradelle, 1995), and its concomitant acts of performance, strategy and negotiation. It also backs up the sentiments of vendors (Pang & Sterling, 2014) in the Silk Market, who, when asked by the researchers which nationality they liked the best, unanimously stated “Americans”.

Most of the American students experienced bargaining for the first time in the Silk Market, but had been taught by either Chinese teachers, classmates or guidebooks the basic steps involved in the process. As this entire group consisted of all native speakers, they were also quick to point out the fact that the vendors spoke so many languages, and were impressed by the level of the English, as well as paying attention to the phrases commonly used by vendors as the initial step of the bargaining/shopping process. Isabel, 20, remarked:

When they want you to buy something they say ‘looky looky’, when I always thought was funny...when we try to get something really cheap, they say ‘you’re ripping us off, we can’t feed our kids!’ Really? Of course you can feed your kids, come on.

Although Americans were not the only group who noticed these phrases, some viewed them as a mere tactic to attract sympathy, and thus did not believe the vendors. In this case, the intercultural communication between the native speaker and non-native was unbalanced, as the native English speakers heard these phrases as humorous, and insincere. Again, it must be emphasized that within each group, various sentiments were held, and each individual reacted in his or her own way. While some laughed off the phrases, and understood that such phrases were commonplace and practical for vendors, and continued to engage with vendors in Chinese, others reacted to them negatively, as in the above statement by Isabel. Although they know the intricacies of bargaining, conceived as a game (de la Pradelle, 1995) or as a ritual (Silverstein, 2004) some deliberately abstain from maximizing the personal gain in the transformation frame (Orr, 2008).

Group 2, the Northern Europeans, although not as uniform a group as the first, also shared some tendencies. In their respective countries, bargaining was not a familiar practice, so in China it became a new practice, associated with Chinese markets and Chinese culture. This group as a whole did not particularly enjoy bargaining, but accepted it as part of the ritual in the Chinese market, and thus accepted its general principles. As a more multi-lingual group, these students were also more insistent on speaking Chinese, and some became frustrated when they were spoken to in English or other languages. Nicola, 19, from Germany, stated: ‘I TRIED to use

Chinese, but all those people in the shops immediately spoke English, so I didn't even have a chance to use Chinese...'. They also understood the relevance and usefulness of initiating the bargaining process in Chinese, and amongst this group in particular, it was felt that speaking in as much Chinese as was possible was advantageous. As Catherine, 20, from Belgium remarked: 'Using more Chinese—shows psychologically that you know something about China, that you know the language; that you've already come there, you're not just a tourist'. The phrase 'not just a tourist' was used by members of all groups, as the students distinguished themselves as part of the Beijing landscape, and familiar with the marketplace and the country, and thus being viewed as a tourist was undesirable. By skillfully using their intercultural skills they benefit significantly from the exchange.

Group 3, from Southern Europe, consisted of only three nationalities, and while France is geographically centrally located in Western Europe, for the purposes of this paper, the culture of the marketplace in France placed it more towards the Southern European spectrum, in terms of familiarity and practice with the market. The students from this group, all also multi-lingual, shared a sense of familiarity with bargaining and shopping in a market as opposed to solely in shops where prices were fixed, and no negotiation was allowed. They also had experience travelling in countries where bargaining was necessary, Morocco, for instance, and thus could compare the Chinese bargaining experience to that of other countries. Miguel, 32, from Spain, stated: "My first reaction was why are people so pushy? But then I figured out that you get the same thing in all big cities---you go to San Francisco, Chinatown is there, in London, Portobello...". This group had experienced different types of bargaining and different styles of negotiation as a result of both familiarity with weekend markets in their home countries, as well through travel.

Fabiano, 24, from Italy, remarked: "I'm used to this stuff, we're in the culture of doing this, also I was in Morocco this Summer---if you've been there then here is really easy. There they give you tea, sit down, it's really serious!". An awareness that bargaining can take on multiple forms allows students such as Fabiano to be fairly easy-going and open in their demeanor, as they understood the fundamentals of bargaining, and communication was part of not just the shopping act, but of daily life, as students from these countries often remarked that they possessed the type of personality that encouraged talking to people on the street, and making friends quite easily.

They expressed a convivial attitude towards the Silk Market, for the most part. Some were perplexed that the Silk Market was called a ‘market’, as their visualization of a market was not a multi-story indoor building that resembled a shopping center. Leon, 24, from France, stated:

It felt like a big indoor market, a little messy, people yelling at you from every direction, but this gives you a lively feeling, like what you would expect from a market. It was pleasant—perhaps not pleasant, but memorable. It’s a kind of modern Chinese market. In California or France we had markets on the street and you still have that feeling of chaos, and you find that even though it’s indoors here, I mean modern, in that there’s electricity and heat, but other than that, it’s still a place where people want to sell as much as possible.

Leon’s characterization of a market as ‘chaotic’ and ‘messy’ was echoed by students from all groups, but was common especially amongst members of Group 3.

The fourth group, whose members were from Eastern European countries and Russia, were the most ‘non-Western’ as a whole, as several spoke English as a third language, with Chinese occupying second place. As seven of the 10 interviewees hailed from Russia, this group was also more uniform demographically than Group 2 or 3. It should be noted as well that all members from this group were females, as the researchers did not encounter any male students from this group who had been to the Silk Market, and were willing to speak with us. Vendors named the Russians as the top nationality of problematic and difficult customers. As this group was fluent in Chinese they have become very skilled in using Chinese language as a type of bargaining chip, using it if convenient, and not using if inconvenient. In addition, certain students of this group reiterated that speaking English in the Silk Market was a disadvantage, as if they conversed with vendors in English, they were not having the lowest price, as opposed to using Russian or Chinese. Elena, 23, from Russia, who was studying a Master’s degree in marketing, cashed in on her multilingual and intercultural skills in the service encounter:

If you speak Russian it is easier...they know Russia is very big and lots of people from the far east of Russia go this market, to China, and these people are not rich, like people from Europe, so I can play, like, this is my major, I know all about this, but if I spoke English, they will never think I could do this. If I speak Russian I get better prices. If I speak Chinese, they don’t know I’m Russian, so they won’t reduce the price, but if I speak Chinese and Russian, I can teach them Russian and communicate, but I don’t like to do this every time in the Silk Market.

Her compatriot Natalia, 22 echoes the view of Elena insisting on the advantages of multilingualism in the Silk Market:

First I start in Russian, because a lot of sellers understand Russian, and then if there are some Chinese customers looking to buy something that's the same, I listen for the price in Chinese that the seller gives, and then I tell them in Chinese that I've lived in China for 5 years, but not in a bad way, just smiling, saying, 'well, actually I can understand'...I say 'hey, mei mei' (little sister) or 'mei nu, mei nu (beautiful girl), tai gui le (too expensive)', smiling, then they will help...When I went the first time my mother's friend said not to talk in English, or they'll make the price very high, so I never talk in English".

For both of these students, a level of awareness at how they were perceived, as Russians, by vendors in the market, because a tactical tool for the use of Russian and Chinese, to identify themselves as separate not just from tourists, but from Western Europeans and other Anglophone nations. They used their Russian identity and reputation as hard bargainers to obtain better prices, as opposed to those perceived coming from Western Europe. Not all in this group agreed that Russian was the most useful language, as some interviewees only used Chinese, with some even pretending not to speak any Russian, also aware of the stereotype of Russians as tough bargainers, and the negative reactions that could arise from vendors when miscommunications occurred. One story stood out in particular as one where the two participants in bargaining were not using the same 'repertoire' in Gumperz's and Habermas' terminology, or more simply, the same understanding of Chinese market bargaining behaviors and rituals.

Olena, 23, from Russia, had experience with Chinese markets prior to her visit to the Silk Market, having lived one year in the popular Russian tourist destination of Hainan island, as well as experience with bargaining in Russia. She described a visit to the market which ended badly for both parties involved:

I went there and saw a very pretty dress, so I wanted to ask about the price, but she forced me to try it on. I didn't like the color, so she brought me another color, but I still didn't like it, and I didn't want to buy it. She started to shout at me, 'Why did you ask to try it if you don't want to buy it', and I said, 'How could I buy it if I don't try it on?' We were speaking English at this point, actually. She started to grab my hand and stop me from leaving the store, and I said 'Get away, leave me alone, I want to go', and she said 'You're cheating me!', or something like that, and some other American girls in the shop were really shocked...then she reduced the price, and I said, 'You're so rude that I don't want to buy it, even for nothing' and then she said, 'You're a bitch', I was appalled! I was so shocked...she kept on yelling something in Chinese and English...I'm sure I didn't do anything wrong, so I was really frustrated by this.

From the perspective of the vendor, if the customer is already in the process of trying on clothes, this is a tacit signifier that s/he will purchase the item, and the only thing left to do is to negotiate the price. However, from Olena's perspective, it is not possible to decide if one wants an item unless it is tried on, and in this case, the dress did not fit as she would have liked, so she decided

she did not to make a purchase. Because Olena did not share the same agreement as to how bargaining worked, and felt that she was in fact pressured to try on the dress, the escalation to yelling an obscenity in English came quickly, as both parties became angry, and in the end, the transaction was negative for both vendor and customer. Although she spoke Chinese proficiently, as well as English, language proficiency alone was not enough, as the language of the market and bargaining were not clearly understood, which was a key factor in the misunderstanding and miscommunication. This episode reflects the mixed and ‘contaminated’ nature of the semiotized marketplace, leading to conflict rather than to conviviality.

As demonstrated in some of the above sentiments expressed by all four groups, the idea of how bargaining works in the Silk Market is the primary key for being a successful consumer, besides being able to navigate various languages as tools of communication and bargaining itself. Another factor that was noted by all groups was physical appearance, and the perception of vendors regarding their nationalities. Five of the students interviewed were of Asian descent, from Groups 1-3, with 1 Korean-American, 1 Japanese-British, 1 Chinese-Dutch, and 2 Chinese-French students in total. Their stories were slightly different from those of non-Asian appearance, as they all, with the exception of the Korean-American student, were approached by vendors in the initial dialogue in the Chinese language, and were perceived as Chinese. Although during the course of the bargaining process it was clear in most cases that they were not from the mainland as they were not native-Mandarin speakers, the initial perception had an impact on the way that the transaction was handled, in the view of students. These students could use their Asian heritage as another bargaining tool, as was told by Yvette, 25, from France:

I used Chinese there—I have the impression that they’re nicer to people who are Asian, and because my Chinese is not so good, they think I’m from Hong Kong...and as I do speak a bit of Cantonese, it’s easier, I use a few words (in Cantonese) to show them I can speak, then I speak a kind of broken Mandarin, and they’re nicer, I think. They say, ‘this is the price for Western people, but this is the price for you!’.

In Yvette’s case, being mistaken for a Hong Kong Chinese was an event that could then be manipulated into pretending that she was from a place where people are well-versed in Chinese bargaining, and thus used the misperception as a strategy to be used to her advantage, playing the part to get a better price. Calvin, 24, a Korean-American student, experienced a different scenario stating that ‘The vendors did speak to me in Korean...maybe because of my Asian appearance they kind of get more physical with me, if I bargain a little too hard, sometimes they

hit me...’. In this case, similar to that of Russians, Calvin erroneously categorized as Korean based on appearance, was treated harshly, given the infamous reputation of Koreans among vendors as tough bargainers.

Several students remarked that being ‘European’, regardless of their level of Chinese or experience with bargaining in Chinese marketplaces place them in a disadvantageous position. Yvgenia, 23, from Russia remarked:

They can make prices higher because they see your European face...I bargain very well, I’m Russian! I bargain better in Chinese because if you bargain in some other foreign language, they understand that you’re in China for not such a long time, and you don’t know the rules, you don’t know how to bargain, and stuff like that. If you bargain you have to bargain in Chinese! You already have some problems because of your face, because it is European, so you have to speak Chinese.

While the Asian-appearing, or more specifically, Chinese-appearing students had an initial advantage due to a perceived familiarity with Chinese bargaining practice, the opposite was seen to be true, from Yvgenia’s point of view. While one can pretend not to speak English, or Russian one cannot simply pretend to be Asian-looking, and thus students who appear ‘European’ are approached in a different manner than those who were perceived to be Asian. The two African-Americans interviewed, however, were not perceived to be from Africa, as they felt it was clear that they were American by their pronunciation of Chinese and fluent use of English amongst co-shoppers. So, the perception of race and nationality can impact the flow of the bargaining process in the Silk Market, either positively or negatively, or in some instances, neutrally.

Another issue brought up by students from all four groups was the intense physical contact in the Silk Market, namely being touched and snatched by vendors as a means of luring them into their stalls. It is common in the Silk Market for vendors, particularly those in high-traffic areas such as the ground floor, in which leather bags, wallets and shoes are sold, to clutch potential customers’ arms as they pass by. Female students were more negatively impacted by this phenomenon than males, as they felt that being touched, or “harassed”, a word used by numerous students, was something that made them feel anxious or upset. Comparing the Silk Market to a similarly-structured shopping center in the United States, Kathleen, 24 remarked:

The building—it’s a standard Chinese market—big, a lot of people. It’s more crowded than the mall in the States, not so much the aisles are narrow, but the way of people dealing with you—

shouting at you, harassing you, I don't really respond to harassment in terms of 'yes, I want to give you my business' The personal interaction, touching, is awkward...in China, the personal interaction, touching, is awkward...in China, your personal space is a bit smaller, and I don't like someone grabbing me, it sets off alarm bells in my head.

Rebeca, 19, from Sweden, said, describing the physicality of the vendors in the Silk Market: 'A lot of people, a lot of sound, and people who try to pull you, when you try to pass by with things in front of you, the first time I found it quite annoying, but now I'm used to it'. This was a widespread sentiment for all groups—while the grabbing and touching was uncomfortable at first, primarily for females, it was later accepted as part of the experience of shopping in the Silk Market, although it was agreed upon by a majority that they were less likely to engage with vendors who used this type of tactic to initiate the transaction. On the other hand, Denis, 26, from the Netherlands, one of the aforementioned Chinese-Dutch students, said:

Sometimes they're a bit aggressive, they're shouting and if you walk away they grab you, but even so, sometimes I buy, because I really want the product, but I need to walk away, because it's part of the bargaining process.

This perspective was shared by students who had lived in China for a longer period of time, and had become familiar with bargaining strategies in the Chinese market setting. One must act interested, and set a price, and if it is initially rejected by the vendor, the customer walks away, but with the knowledge that the vendor will try to catch him afterwards, and reel him back into the sale.

It should be noted that the exchange is not always one that is viewed similarly between vendors and customers. Some students, even though familiar with Chinese language and the language performance/ritual necessary to be successful in the market, fail to understand or refuse to accept the minimal social encounter (Bailey, 2001) of the vendors, eager to strike a deal, thus overlooking the valet and consultation frame.

Conclusion: Performative experiences and the language of the market

The experience of language students in the Silk Market is one that can be described, returning to the terminology of Gregson and Rose as a performative experience, as the students themselves are empowered with knowledge of the cultural and verbal repertoire of Chinese market language

practice, to be acted-out in fluid terms. The multiplicity of languages spoken by students and vendors alike leads to the creation of a type of ‘bargaining language’, consisting of performances by both actors in Chinese, English, Russian, either alone or in some combination thereof.

Generally the use of Chinese is considered an asset, as it places vendors and student-consumers at a perceived status that is more even than that of a non-Chinese speaking tourist. Knowledge of Chinese enables more direct social interaction and trust between vendors and students. Students for sure manage to strike a more advantageous deal when interacting in Chinese instead of English. However not all students engage in the bargaining ritual. American students show a propensity not to enter into the bargaining ritual as they consider the cited price to be fair. This is an exception as most interviewed students hailing from Europe and Russia embrace the bargaining ritual, some with more trepidation than others. They cherish bargaining as a form of cultural capital and an experiential souvenir of their sojourn in China.

Yet just speaking Chinese is not in and of itself the tool that indisputably leads to a successful and pleasant bargaining experience. More importantly, one must not only master the Chinese language, but particularly the language of the market with the proper order of offers, rejections, use of the calculator, and non-verbal cues, in order to become fluent in the practices of shopping in the Silk Market. This explains why some students, who speak fluently Chinese but are unaware of the market language, experience unpleasant encounters with vendors ranging from the perception of being ‘harassed’ by assertive and tactile vendors to arguments and verbally aggressive quarrels. The negative experience derives from misunderstanding the service encounter by students as in the bargaining process Chinese vendors tend to overlook the valet frame by jumping prompt and decisively into the consultation and transaction frame of the service encounter. They hardly give students the opportunity or time to look around the shop, compare and think it over.

China is continuing on its path to modernity, which involves the incorporation of English into its economic development, through places like the Silk Market. Once practiced, English transforms into a market lingua franca in tourist destinations, yet at the same time, the rise in popularity of Chinese, the core topic of this article allows for a new type of interaction between Chinese citizens and new immigrant groups. The market itself develops its own language, its own lingua franca, which is created out of the performances of language students and other shoppers, and the

vendors. No longer a country solely known for emigration, China, and Beijing in particular, has become a destination country for those seeking opportunities outside their home country. As the popularity of Chinese continues to grow, so does the number of students who choose to study in the country, as a means of improving their chances for future success in their lives and careers. The interactions of language students and vendors in the Silk Market lead to the creation of a 'new' language, namely the language of the market. This new language of the market is emblematic of Chinese modernity, often than not fraught with misunderstandings, and perceived as chaotic, yet accepted at the same time. Through these experiences, students and vendors shape and are shaped by this new language, and they thus become embedded in the glocal nature of the Silk Market on the whole.

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