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Language, voice and place among South Asian Youth in Hong Kong

Contemporary sociolinguistic developments have shown how the modern ethno-national ideological imaginations of 'language' are harder to maintain under current conditions of mobility and cultural/linguistic superdiversification. In contrast to the idea of language as a bounded system tied to a given territory, the last decades have seen the emergence of alternative vocabularies that allow us to better describe people's communicative practices vis-à-vis wider socio-economic processes involving unequal distribution of symbolic and material resources. By drawing on multi-sited and auto-ethnographic research carried out by a group of 10 youngsters with Nepali and Pakistani background in Hong Kong, this paper examines closely some of these alternative terms. In particular, attention is paid to 'repertoire', 'enregisterment', 'voice' and 'semiotic traces of power', with focus on their analytical potential to describe intersections between ideological constructions of language, space and time in the context of the life trajectories of these youngsters. Data analysis will show some policy implications derived from this approach, in contrast to dominant deficit perspectives underpinning contemporary language education policies for South Asian students in Hong Kong whereby their linguistic repertoires are examined against the background of standard languages and modern understandings of "legitimate speakers".

South Asian youngsters in Hong Kong: Negotiating language, place and identity

