Brown Bag Talk

Language Issues of Migrants

in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Date & Time
November 16, Monday, 2020
12:00-13:30

Venue
Middle-sized Meeting Room, 3F,
Inamori Foundation Building, Kyoto University

▌No Reservation required

Migration has been both a key driving force and the major inevitable outcome of the globalization of the human society. Yet the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (commonly abbreviated as COVID-19) has significantly disrupted and conceivably altered the ways human mobility takes it course. And in this global health crisis, (international) migrants are particularly made vulnerable (all the more). In this lecture, I discuss the various language issues confronting migrants in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. First, I focus on how language barriers have given them only limited access to information regarding the pandemic and have made it complicated for them to receive necessary health care when infected by the disease. Second, I look into the difficulties they encounter when communicating with health care providers at the time of detection, diagnosis, and cure. Third, I talk about the isolation they face which results from their inability to communicate with the immediate people around them at a time when family and friends may have been separated from them because of physical distancing requests. Fourth, I point to the kind of xenophobic language directed towards foreigners, but most especially migrants, because of the stigma attached to them as potential carriers of the virus leading to the disease. I also take a look at the overall changes and disturbances in patterns of international migration, primarily those resulting from border closures and immigration policies which have prevented movement between countries. And while there are already too many issues at hand, I still find it prudent to point out lessons from all these experiences and draw implications and suggest recommendations relating to language in the context of migration. In this lecture, I therefore conjecture on the pandemic from a migration linguistic perspective, an interdisciplinary and multidimensional approach to the study of language in the context of migration which I proposed earlier (Borlongan, 2019, 2020). Of course, I do hope that this lecture (and the resulting article) could be a contribution to the suddenly — as a matter of urgency, of course — growing scholarly work on the current pandemic, particularly in relation to migration.

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He earned his Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics in 2011 at age 23 via a competitive accelerated program in De La Salle University (Manila, the Philippines). His dissertation titled' A Grammar of the Verb in Philippine English' was supervised by Professor Emerita Ma. Lourdes Bautista and was recognized as Most Outstanding Dissertation by De La Salle University. At present, he is Lecturer in Sociolinguistics at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (Japan). He was previously with De La Salle University, Tamagawa University (Tokyo, Japan), and The University of Tokyo (Japan) and also held posts at Nanyang Technological University (Singapore), SEAMEO Regional Language Centre (Singapore), the University of Freiburg (Germany), The University of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia), and Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages (Kaohsiung, Taiwan). He is Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts (RSA). He was awarded The Br. Andrew Gonzalez FSC Distinguished Professorial Chair in Linguistics and Language Education by the Linguistic Society of the Philippines and De La Salle University in 2019. He edited 'Philippine English: Development, Structure, and Sociology of English in the Philippines', to be published by Routledge in 2020, which serves as the handbook of Philippine English and a festschrift in honor of Prof. Bautista. He is Director of the Philippine component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-PH) and is also the compiler of the Philippine parallels to the Brown and the Before-Brown corpora (Phil-Brown and PBB respectively) and the Diachronic Corpora of Expanding Circle Englishes (DCECE) and co-compiler to the Malaysian parallel to the Brown Corpus (Mal-Brown). He led the development of the Migrant Linguistic Index (MLI), which measures a migrant's propensity for acquiring, learning, and using language(s) in his/her host country. His teaching and research have focused on sociolinguistics, migration linguistics, world Englishes, English linguistics, and historical linguistics.

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