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No strings attached? Multilingual performance and fleeting conviviality in host-tourist encounters

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This paper is grounded in my long-standing research on tourism discourse which I have done in close collaboration with my colleague Adam Jaworski (e.g., Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011). In fact, for this presentation I will focus on a host-tourist interaction which we have always found intriguing but never actually written about. In a transaction between two tourists from Germany and a vendor at a market in Seoul, we find the vendor not only selling his sweets but also narrating the production process as a rather spectacular “multilingual performance”. Although the dominant language of the interaction is English, the vendor uses (mock) German in several instances of code-crossing. The interaction is also replete with numerous metapragmatic comments (e.g., tourists’ praise for the vendor’s skill) and other metadiscursive features (e.g., laughter). In this regard, we see how multilingual performance becomes a tool for the vendor to assume agency; he thus takes his sales pitch beyond a mere economic transaction and into the realm of flirtatious, convivial solidarities (cf Williams & Stroud, 2013). This is not to romanticize host-tourist exchanges, which are inextricably hegemonic, but rather to humanize them – to acknowledge that besides commodification sits a world of friendly co-existences.

References

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Crispin Thurlow is Professor of Language and Communication in the Department of English at the University of Bern, Switzerland. His most recent books are *The Business of Words: Linguists, Wordsmiths, and Other Language Workers* (2020) and *Visualizing Digital Discourse: Interactional, Institutional and Ideological Perspectives* (2020). He serves on the editorial boards of journals such as *Language in Society*, *Linguistic Landscape*, *Critical Discourse Studies*, and the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*. More information about Crispin’s work can be found at www.crispinthurlow.net

Recommendation (for student section)

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