

Editorial: Thematic Issue on Linguistic Diversity and Human Mobility: Explorations in Migration Linguistics

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1. Linguistic Diversity and Human Mobility: Greater Mobility, Greater Precarity

Mobility and migration have long been at the forefront of innovation, discovery, and paradigm shifts in human history (Hollifield, 2023; McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024). English, for example, was shaped into its current form and established its status as the global lingua franca through the migration of the Anglo-Saxons and Normans to Britain, as well as the British across the globe. Historical forced migration, such as the Atlantic slave trade and coolie labor, shapes the present-day demographics of the destination countries. At the individual level, Nobel laureates Albert Einstein, Enrico Fermi, and Roald Hoffmann are also migrants.

Likewise, in the present era, migrants continue to reshape the social, political, and economic landscape, despite the relatively smaller proportion, which is 281 million, or 3.6% of the world's population (McAuliffe & Oucho, 2024). For instance, half of the American recipients of the 2025 Nobel Prize in science are migrants. Similarly, tech giants' leaders, such as Google co-founder Sergey Brin, incumbent CEO Sundar Pichai, and Tesla's Elon Musk, are also migrants. Migrants or their descendants have been elected as leaders in major destination countries and cities, such as the 44th United States President Barack Obama, 49th Vice President Kamala Harris, former United Kingdom Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and, most recently, New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani. In this context, linguistic diversity has never been more relevant in contemporary society. For instance, there are more than 600 to 700 languages reportedly spoken in New York City. In Toronto, one's 911 call can be responded to in more than 240 languages. Taken together, human mobility has never been greater than ever.

Yet, human mobility and linguistic diversity have never been more contested ever at the same time. In particular, since the 2010s, society has responded quite harshly to migration. In 2015, conflicts in Syria led massive influx of refugees and migrants into Europe, marking a migrant crisis in the region. Subsequently, this has led to the rise of far-right political parties or the rightward shift of the existing ones up to the present. Donald Trump became the U.S. president in 2017, posing a restrictionist approach towards migrants. Moreover, with the global spread of COVID-19 in 2020, prejudice, violence, and discrimination against Asian communities intensified rapidly. Conflicts between Ukraine and Russia since 2022 and Palestine and Israel since 2022 have resulted in massive forced displacement, the worst since World War II. And most recently, Donald Trump's return to the presidency in 2025 has led to

an even more hardline, restrictive approach to immigration in the United States, and even countries like Japan have seen the growth of xenophobic far-right political discourse.

In such contexts, language is being used as a tool for marginalization and peripheralization in a manner quicker than Borlongan and Lim (2024) predicted. The second Trump administration designates English as the official language of the United States in 2025, while attempting to dismantle language access to those with limited English proficiency. Nationalistic language policies have also been implemented in several countries. Israel demoted Arabic from its official status in 2018, Latvia gradually removed Russian from public education since 2018, and Ukraine has required Ukrainian to be used in most aspects of public life since 2019.

What lies behind such trends is that diversity is often perceived as a threat to social cohesion, although it does not necessarily cause social division on its own. Recent studies have shown that fragmentation emerges primarily when diversity interacts with structural inequality, exclusionary political rhetoric, and weak integrative institutions (Hartl et al., 2025; McKenna et al., 2018). Digital echo chambers and the rapid spread of misinformation also significantly amplify existing cleavages, transforming minor differences into deep affective polarization (Cinelli et al., 2021; Hartmann, 2025).

However, it is diversity, particularly linguistic diversity arising from migration, that has increasingly become a defining feature of contemporary societies, reshaping sociocultural, educational, and economic landscapes in complex ways. Migrant languages contribute to the enrichment of national repertoires by introducing new epistemic perspectives, cultural literacies, and communicative resources that can enhance intercultural competence and social innovation (Blommaert, 2010). Multilingual and multicultural cities demonstrate how the presence of multiple migrant languages can give rise to cosmopolitan forms of sociality, foster international business networks, support diaspora entrepreneurship, and sustain transnational social fields that connect origin and host societies (Vertovec, 2007). Migrant languages also expand educational possibilities: bilingual programs, heritage-language maintenance, and plurilingual pedagogies cultivate cognitive flexibility, promote identity affirmation, and strengthen community cohesion. Moreover, the emergence of generative AI, with its capacity to process, translate, and model diverse linguistic inputs, not just democratizes access to multilingual services for migrants, but also empowers them.

On the other hand, the increasing visibility of migrant languages also raises contentious political, ideological, and social challenges. Migrant-driven linguistic diversity is frequently entangled with public anxieties related to national identity, social cohesion, and perceived

threats to monolingual norms, which can fuel xenophobic discourse, assimilationist pressures, and restrictive language policies (Piller, 2016; Wodak, 2021). Such tensions manifest in debates over language access, the legitimacy of multilingual public signage, the allocation of educational resources, and the role of migrant languages in professional or civic domains. Socioeconomic inequalities may deepen when migrant languages are stigmatized, leading to symbolic exclusion, labor-market discrimination, or limited upward mobility. The rise of generative AI also introduces new risks: because AI systems rely on uneven training data, they tend to privilege high-resource languages while underserving, flattening, or misrepresenting low-resource migrant languages. This could inadvertently reinforce digital hierarchies of linguistic prestige, exacerbate epistemic injustice, and accelerate the marginalization of migrant linguistic varieties that lack sufficient digital presence. Thus, while migrant languages can profoundly enrich multilingual societies, they also encounter structural, ideological, and technological forces that complicate their full participation and visibility in public life.

2. Migration Linguistics and Linguistic Diversity

With such possibilities and potential impacts that diversity can provide in mind, linguistic diversity must be re-examined from a migratory perspective. Historically, discussions of linguistic diversity have centered primarily on endangered and/or indigenous languages. In other words, linguistic diversity has traditionally been viewed as a core principle underpinning efforts to prevent endangered languages from disappearing and to promote their revitalization. However, this focus has tended to narrow, leaving less attention to the forms of linguistic diversity that emerge from human mobility, migration, and transnational life.

Given this, we argue that migration linguistics can contribute to updating the concept of linguistic diversity. Proposed by Borlongan (2023), it is the new sub-discipline of linguistics, defined as

the interdisciplinary and multidimensional study of the various aspects of language within the dynamic process of human mobility. It is a systematic study of migration, focusing on how language effects and likewise is affected by the whole migration process. It is concerned with how language is used, why language is necessary, what language represents, and which language is acquired and learned before, during, and even after migration (p. 42).

Since then, this more refined field has been making the new academic discourse on linguistic diversity in the migratory context: Special issue of *AILA Review* titled *Multilingualism and Mobility in the Twenty-First Century: New Trajectories and Possibilities in Migration Linguistics* (Borlongan & Lim, 2024) was published, and, some articles of which, as well as other studies, were presented at the International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA) World Congress in August 2024. The International Conference on Migration Linguistics was launched in Tokyo in December 2024, followed by its second installment in Manila in December 2025, where researchers, students, practitioners, and policymakers discussed various issues, theories, and practices related to languages in migratory contexts. This thematic double issue, comprising 16 articles, titled *Linguistic Diversity and Human Mobility: Explorations in Migration Linguistics*, builds on and contributes to this emerging trajectory. The primary objectives of this issue are to: (1) discuss the use, acquisition of, and attitude towards languages across transnational, internal, and community migrations; (2) examine how linguistic diversity brought about by migrants shapes the society, revisiting the concept of linguistic diversity from the migratory context; (3) interrogate how emergent technologies—particularly generative AI—reshape migrant linguistic practices, mediate linguistic inequalities, and reconfigure the future of multilingual societies; and (4) strengthen migration linguistics as a timely, appropriate, and relevant academic endeavor in contemporary society by consolidating theories, concepts, and practices discussed in this new sub-discipline.

3. Outline of This Thematic Issue

The first part of this thematic double issue brings together eight empirical and conceptual contributions that advance migration linguistics by examining diverse migratory trajectories, scales of movement, and communicative environments. Collectively, the articles foreground migrants as active linguistic agents navigating complex ecologies of work, family, education, technology, and infrastructure. Rather than treating migration as a singular or homogeneous experience, the studies assembled here demonstrate how language mediates migration differently across labor sectors, family settings, institutional regimes, and digital spaces.

Several contributions focus on labor migration and precarity, which highlight how linguistic resources are mobilized under conditions of structural vulnerability. Catapang, Borlongan, and Go examine how large language models such as ChatGPT are becoming embedded in migrants' communicative environments, reshaping access to information while simultaneously producing new ethical and material risks. Quizon's analysis of Filipino labor

migrants' airport narratives shows how precarious language circulates through digital platforms to generate solidarity and collective knowledge in highly surveilled spaces of aeromobility. In a different workplace context, Alexander and Gonçalves investigate digitally mediated interaction among migrant workers in Norway, revealing how dominant language ideologies are negotiated, resisted, or reproduced in everyday occupational communication.

Other articles attend to migration across the life course and within families, where language choices are intimately tied to identity, belonging, and survival. Saito's case study of a Chinese mother in Japan illustrates the tensions between heritage language maintenance and integration into the host society, showing how family language policy becomes a site of ideological struggle. Guinto's linguistic ethnography of a Filipina domestic worker in Hong Kong similarly foregrounds migrants' agency, demonstrating how multilingual repertoires function as biographical resources that enable social navigation across transnational spaces.

Expanding the spatial and conceptual scope of migration linguistics, McLellan proposes community migration as an additional analytical category, drawing on historical and contemporary cases from Borneo to show how entire ethnolinguistic groups migrate, merge, or diversify over time. This perspective complements studies of individual mobility by emphasizing longer-term ecological and contact-induced linguistic change. At the national scale, Subida and Ponce examine internal migration in the Philippines. They documented how prospective overseas workers adapt their language practices during pre-departure preparations to Metro Manila, where Tagalog, English, local languages, and hybrid forms such as Taglish (Tagalog-English) serve distinct communicative functions.

Finally, Selorio's contribution on educational migration traces how Filipino students navigate language, policy, and aspiration in English-using destination countries, underscoring the central role of language proficiency in shaping both mobility pathways and post-study futures. Together, these articles demonstrate that migration is not a single event but a process unfolding across multiple stages, sites, and institutional encounters, all of which are linguistically mediated.

By bringing these studies into dialogue, this thematic issue advances migration linguistics in three key ways. First, it broadens the empirical range of the field by integrating transnational, internal, digital, and historical forms of mobility. Second, it highlights language not only as a means of integration but also as a locus of inequality, resistance, and ethical concern. Third, it underscores the need to examine emerging technologies, infrastructures, and policies as integral components of migrants' communicative environments.

In doing so, the thematic issue affirms that language remains “at the heart of migration” (Borlongan, 2023, p. 38), which shapes how people move, how they are governed, and how they imagine their futures in an increasingly mobile yet unequal world.

4. What Should Migration Linguistics Do?

As discussed, contemporary society has seen division, exclusion, inequality, and polarization as it becomes increasingly diverse linguistically, ethnically, and culturally. However, linguistic diversity brought about by human mobility should not be a means of othering, marginalizing, and peripheralizing. Here, we outline what migration linguistics should do in our society, where divisive discourse can easily get viral.

As descriptive linguistics has long sought to document, preserve, maintain, and empower endangered indigenous languages in the name of linguistic diversity, migration linguistics must likewise document, preserve, maintain, and empower migrant languages in an age of intensified mobility and deepening social division. To document migrant languages is not merely to catalogue linguistic forms, but to record the lived communicative realities of migrants, such as their repertoires, trajectories, and strategies for navigating precarity, displacement, and belonging across borders. To preserve migrant languages entails resisting their systematic erasure from public institutions, education, media, and digital infrastructures, particularly at a time when exclusionary ideologies frame linguistic difference as a social problem rather than a social fact. To maintain migrant languages is to recognize them as dynamic, evolving practices sustained through everyday labor, care, and transnational networks, rather than as deficient or transitional varieties destined to disappear. Finally, to empower migrant languages is to foreground migrants as linguistic agents and knowledge producers, whose communicative resources constitute not a burden on social cohesion but a vital infrastructure for superdiverse societies.

It must also be emphasized that migration linguistics should not be limited to a mere sub-discipline of linguistics. As Borlongan (2023) puts it, interdisciplinarity is the first and foremost key nature of migration linguistics. As migration is a dynamic process involving different aspects of society, concerning other disciplines of the humanities, social sciences, and even natural sciences, migration linguistics can benefit from them, and, other disciplines can also be enriched by migration linguistics. This non-limiting nature also applies to the outputs of migration linguistics. That is, migration linguistics should not be confined to scholarly publications or theoretical debates alone; rather, its insights must extend into concrete

practices, programs, and policy interventions that meaningfully support migrants in their everyday linguistic lives. To document, preserve, maintain, and empower migrant languages is therefore not only an academic endeavor but also a social commitment that translates research findings into language access initiatives, educational frameworks, workplace communication strategies, and inclusive public services. In this sense, migration linguistics necessarily operates at the intersection of research and practice. It calls for sustained collaboration among scholars, practitioners, educators, community organizations, and policymakers, ensuring that linguistic knowledge does not remain abstract but actively contributes to improving migrants' access to rights, resources, and social participation. By embracing this engaged orientation, migration linguistics positions itself as a field that not only analyzes language under conditions of mobility but also helps shape more linguistically just and socially responsive societies.

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