

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

SPEAKER SERIES

The Otherness of Talk: Race, Identity and Language in China's English Classrooms

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The British Council estimates that roughly a quarter of the world's 1.5 billion English learners live in China, and English language teaching in this country has developed into a multi-billion-dollar industry. Most analyses of the phenomenon attribute this acute desire for English in China – and the lengths parents will go to for their child's fluency – to rather amorphous factors such as globalization, migration, and educational benefit, a move that ignores the culturally complex ways in which languages are adopted, appropriated, and travel about the world. Drawing upon an ethnographically informed semiotic perspective, this talk suggests that the spread of English in China is rooted in discourses of race, identity, and modernity. Through the mediating power of linguistic chronotopes, English enables Chinese learners to envision themselves as future-oriented, mobile, and dynamic actors despite the economic and social barriers constraining their lives.

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All Welcome!