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Paper 2

Voice and Social Relations in a City Market

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Abstract

This study investigated the ways in which people communicate in encounters where the participants have different biographies, trajectories, and linguistic histories. It was conducted in Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market, and focused on a Chinese butcher’s stall. Researchers conducted linguistic ethnographic observations over a period of four months. The analysis concluded that superdiversity was experienced and perceived as a normal part of social life in the market. The Chinese butchers told of the physical hardship of setting up a new business in the market, and of their determination to succeed. The butchers were recorded as they engaged in communicative events in which they encountered the voices of others, and through which they began to find their voice. The day-to-day practices of buying and selling in the indoor market were normally characterized by good humour, conviviality, generosity of spirit, and people’s willingness to get on with other people. We saw that elaborate performance, including gesture and mime, was a feature of the spatial repertoire of the market, as people with different proficiencies in different languages entertained themselves and each other, and conducted commercial interactions. Communicative interactions included movement across languages, but languages were by no means the most significant dimension of the translanguaging event. The translanguaging repertoire in play incorporated biographies and learning trajectories, and aspects of communication not always thought of as ‘language’. In translanguaging events spaces for communication were opened up, and people made meanings in whatever way possible. The market was a place where resources could be tried out in translanguaging spaces and encounters. Our observations of the market traders’ communicative repertoires were not limited to face-to-face encounters, nor to interactions in the market. The butchers’ exchanges with family at home, and their social media communication, represented important dimensions of their communicative repertoires.
Executive Summary

Between September 1st and December 19th 2014 we (Rachel Hu and Adrian Blackledge) repeatedly visited Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market to conduct linguistic ethnographic observations of a Chinese butcher stall. Our aim was to investigate the ways in which people communicate in encounters where the participants have different biographies, trajectories, and linguistic histories. We visited the stall on thirty occasions, and wrote more than 104,000 words of observational field notes. We audio-recorded the stall-holders as they worked, and on their breaks, amounting to 35 hours of workplace interactions. We also video-recorded one three-hour session at the stall. We interviewed the key participants, and Rachel audio-recorded other informal conversations with them. Together we interviewed eighteen of the other stall-holders in the market. We took 300 photographs inside the market hall, and a further 120 in the surrounding neighbourhood. The key participants also audio-recorded themselves in their family and domestic setting. Most of these recordings were made in their family home, with one or two exceptions. In all the key participants audio-recorded 47 hours of family and domestic interactions. In addition we asked them to collect records of their social media posts. They copied 445 messages, almost all of them from their mobile phones, in the ‘WeChat’ platform. This collected material of observational field notes, home- and work-based audio-recordings, video-recordings, interviews, social and digital media posts, and photographs, constitutes the stuff out of which we have woven together meanings for this report.

We have gathered together our analysis in six sections, as follows:

- **Markets** The market traders told us that the profile of national and ethnic backgrounds of their customers had changed in recent times. Their account was that ethnic, religious, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity was experienced and perceived as a normal part of social life in Birmingham, and not as something particularly special. The market traders were more concerned with the role of the city council in the support and administration of the markets, and with the local management of the markets. At the same time they were proud of the markets, and the role they played in the city. One of the stall holders, a flower seller, said ‘This is the heart and soul of Birmingham, irrespective of what anyone else thinks, the market is the heart of Birmingham’. The market traders did not view the arrival of speakers of many different languages as in any way problematic. In the discourse of the market traders there was a clearly identifiable local language ideology which permitted and even encouraged meaning-making by whatever means possible. It was a language ideology which had the potential to act as a catalyst for convivial engagement.

- **Narratives of Becoming** The narratives of Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen, the couple who were proprietors of the butcher stall, told stories of arrival in the UK, gaining legal status, setting up a business, developing a market, and orienting to the future. Gaining legal status to remain and work in the UK afforded the couple important protection against exploitation. The couple told us that setting up the business was initially difficult, as they were lacking knowledge of the butcher’s trade. They endured physical challenges,
but they developed a customer base by supplying a niche market. As the business became established they gained in confidence, and were better able to negotiate with suppliers and customers. As they looked to the future they became increasingly aspirational, seeking new opportunities beyond the market stall.

### Ideological Becoming

Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew deployed a wide range of discourse strategies as they interacted with each other, and with their colleagues and customers. Their interactions constituted constant and ongoing negotiations, in which they conducted their business, set fair prices and stuck to them, pushed for sales, commented on their customers, made evaluative remarks about typifications of ‘British’ cultural practices, translated and translanguage, and made meaning in zones of encounter by whatever means possible. The discursive worlds of Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew were constituted in pathways of linked events through which they began to find their voice. This notion of ‘voice’ extended beyond the verbal repertoire to include gesture, metapragmatic signs such as smiling, and other means of communication. A further dimension of their ‘becoming’ was their focus on bringing up and managing a young family.

### Everyday Encounters

The day-to-day practices of buying and selling in the indoor market were normally characterized by good humour, conviviality, generosity of spirit, and people’s willingness to get on with other people. The market hall can be described as ‘superdiverse’, with people of myriad national, educational and socio-economic backgrounds, with different legal statuses and biographical trajectories, coming together in zones of encounter where social relations were rapidly formed, and just as rapidly moved on from. This superdiversity had become normalized over time, as a result of accumulated experiences of difference. Difference was something that people lived with, and differences between people could even at times have a unifying effect. Proficiency in English was not a requirement for convivial interaction with others in the indoor market. Rather, a willingness to engage with others was a social skill required in this superdiverse context.

### Voice

The market was a place in which encounters were often ephemeral, even where they were serial, and relationships were formed in brief interactions, usually between market traders and customers. However, the fleeting nature of many interactions in the market did not mean that practices did not sediment into registers, or norms, as they were repeated. We saw that elaborate performance, including gesture and mime, was a feature of the spatial repertoire of the market, as people with different proficiencies in different languages entertained themselves and each other, and conducted commercial interactions. We saw people create points of communicative overlap, often through metacommentary on appearance, language, and gesture. However, we also saw that the interaction of biographical trajectories and spatial repertoires was not always a straightforward experience for all concerned.

### Everyday Translanguaging

We frequently observed communicative interactions which included movement across languages, but in which languages were by no means the most
significant dimension of the translanguaging event. The translanguaging repertoire in play was a repertoire which incorporated biographies and learning trajectories; it included aspects of communication not always thought of as ‘language’, including performance, gesture, and physical humour. Translanguaging events were records of mobility and experience; they were responsive to the market-place in which, and the people with whom, they occurred. In these translanguaging events, spaces for communication were opened up, and people made meanings in whatever way possible. The market was a place where communicative resources could be tried out in translanguaging spaces and events. It was a place where people made fun of each other, teased each other, and sometimes became irritated with each other. Fundamentally it was a place for buying and selling. Translanguaging was a means by which this was successfully and convivially managed.

The journey for Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew was not just about movement from one temporal frame and geographical location to another; not just another timespace. It was also about a biographical trajectory of learning through encounters with others, with their voices, and with their signs. It was about emergence and becoming, and about finding a voice.
1. Introduction

Kang Chen is separating ribs from pork belly. With the meat cleaver sliding underneath the thin layer of the ribs a whole layer comes out of the roll of pork belly quite smoothly. This is the first time I have seen how the ribs are separated. Kang Chen is quite skilful with the whole process, no hesitation, no careful planning and checking, he just does it as if without thinking too much of it, very quick and accurate so the meat on the ribs won’t be too little to put off customers, nor too much to make him lose profit. It’s just perfect.

This field note, written by Rachel Hu in September 2014, introduces one of the main characters in our story. Forty-two months before the observational field note was written, in February 2011, Kang Chen had, by his own account, no idea how to cut meat. He was not a butcher, and had no experience in the trade. His wife, Meiyen Chew, pregnant with their second child, similarly had no knowledge or experience of butchery. But they were starting up a new business as butchers in Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market. This is a story of their journey from the early days when, they said, they ‘knew nothing about it in the beginning’, to becoming not only ‘the first and only Chinese butcher in Birmingham’, but ‘just perfect’. The journey, and the story, is of course about more than just learning how to separate ribs from pork belly. It includes other characters along the way, and it is a journey, and a story, that is far from finished. In the terms of Mikhail Bakhtin (1986: 21), it is a narrative of “emergence”; a story of “becoming” (in Russian stanovlenie; in German das Werden). For Bakhtin, the literary scholar, the novel of man’s emergence is accomplished in real historical time, with its fullness, its future, “its profoundly chronotopic nature” (23), in which human life is embodied in a specific temporal-geographical location, a ‘timespace’. The chronotope, said Bakhtin, “is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied” (1994: 187). We repeatedly looked into the world of the story of Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew from September to December 2014. Their narrative traverses the globe, from Changle, in the Fujian province of southern China, and Furong, Malaysia, to London, and on to Birmingham. It is a narrative of tough times, hard work, and determination. It is a multivocal narrative in which the voices of others – strangers, colleagues, friends – are taken up and re-accented, creatively developed, and applied to new conditions and contexts (Bakhtin 1981: 345). It is a story set in a market hall in a superdiverse city in which difference is acknowledged, accepted, and deployed as a resource as people rub along together. It is a story revealed in repeated sequences of scenes in which people encounter each other to buy and sell meat and offal. It is a story in which different ways of speaking come to the fore, then return to the background, observe each other, comment on each other, keep their distance from each other, intervene or interweave into something new (Busch, 2015). It is a story of everyday encounters, many of them fleeting, and all of them influential in the narrative of emergence and becoming. It is a story in which meaning is made through new language practices that make visible the complexity of exchanges between people with different histories and biographies. It is a story of becoming, and of finding a voice.
2. Markets

Markets are places where we encounter difference. More than any other city spaces, they define human engagement with difference, with different people, different clothes, different goods, and different ways of speaking (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). The market-place has historically been the centre of all that is unofficial, it remains with the people. In the market-place “a special kind of speech was heard, almost a language of its own” (Bakhtin 1994: 213). Markets offer “an ideal setting to explore the relationship between economy and society, especially when we consider the ways that these markets reflect, but also shape, the nature and meaning of social and cultural diversity” (Daniel Hiebert, Jan Rath & Steven Vertovec 2015: 16). They entail encounters between people, frequently across lines of social and cultural difference. For some people street markets are the primary means by which they encounter people from other backgrounds. Hiebert et al (2015) propose that the “spatial concentration of diversity” (p.17) in a market-place inevitably contributes to cosmopolitan attitudes and identities. They argue that diversity shapes markets, and markets shape diversity. Markets also contribute to the configuration of social life. They reflect the basic sociocultural and socio-economic diversity of local areas, bringing together people into a public arena who might otherwise remain apart. This happens, say Hiebert et al, in settings that are both relatively controlled through ‘rules of engagement’ and also highly adaptive and dynamic. Markets offer particularly rich seams for social research because they “exemplify the global process of space-time compression, juxtaposing people with backgrounds from distant places and distinct cultures together in the same place” (Hiebert et al 2015: 17).

Jean Duruz, Susan Luckman, and Peter Bishop (2011: 599) describe food markets as “significant spaces of intercultural exchange, everyday belonging, and citizenship”. They suggest that markets offer a particularly beguiling research landscape, representing cosmopolitanism in microcosm, with diversity a hallmark of their everyday interactions. Markets, they propose, are not purely economic settings, but are also distinctive cultural sites where different ethnic groups come into contact through everyday activity, and where complex, fluid relations may be found and encouraged. Elspeth Probyn (2011: 683) points out that “marketplaces are always sites of the flows of trade and consumption”, and ask how we might empirically investigate these flows. Dawn Lyon and Les Back (2012) focused on the sensuous nature of the work of fishmongers in Deptford market in London. Their attention to the interconnections of mind and hand, and knives and fish (tools and materials) enabled them to analyse the market place as a space in which learning occurs, as workers learn not only the skill and craft of fishmongery but also the repertoire of the social landscape of the market. This in itself, suggest Lyon and Back, becomes a skill.

Sophie Watson (2009a: 1577) argues that markets represent a much neglected public space and site of social connections and interaction in cities. In her review of existing studies she finds that markets have been subject to surprisingly limited analysis to date, particularly in the British context. Watson (2009b) argues that the sociocultural context of markets warrants textured investigation to make sense of when, where, and how encounters across difference occur productively or antagonistically, or somewhere in between. In her study she explores the potentiality of markets as public space where multiple forms of sociality are enacted. Watson conducted research in eight UK markets (Watson 2006a, 2009a), focusing on a multiplicity of
lived encounters and connections, and found that markets represented a significant public and social space as a site for vibrant social encounters, for social inclusion and the care of others, for ‘rubbing along’ and for mediating differences. Watson shows that the social encounters and connections found in markets provide the possibility for the inclusion of marginalised groups and for the co-mingling of differences (2009b). Her research in the market sites revealed their significance as social space across four dimensions: ‘rubbing along’; social inclusion; theatricality/performance; and mediating differences. She concluded that a minimal level of encounter in the form of inhabiting the same space as those who are different from oneself, such as markets can embody, has the potential to play a part in challenging racist discourses and stereotypes of unknown others. The informality of market trading and shopping, the openness of market spaces, the proximity of stalls to one another, the lack of restraint on entering and leaving market sites, gave rise to a multitude of easy encounters and informal connections. The social interactions between traders and between traders and shoppers represented “a kind of social glue holding the market’s sociality in place and providing a focal point through which shoppers could relate” (Watson 2009a: 1582). However, Watson’s research (2006b) also demonstrates that when markets are neglected, or their surrounds are under-resourced, they are less likely to thrive as spaces of connection and sociality. ‘Rubbing along’ across differences in the public space of the market is not inevitable.

Daniel Thomas Cook (2008) found that in markets and market-places people engage in ritual performance, adopting postures and representations of typified identities which “refer always in some way to exchangeable values and exchange relations” (p. 7). He points out that how exchanges are conducted in markets is as relevant to the ‘value’ of something as what is being bought and sold. Giovanni Semi (2008) similarly argues that market activity incorporates something beyond the simple exchange of goods and money, as in all market activities “social relations arise which are situationally dependent upon the invisible, but vital, commodity of trust” (p. 139). Cook insists that market behaviour is about engaging with the tensions and challenges posed by the inescapable presence of economic valuation. What is crucial in markets, he argues, is “the active, mutual valuation of goods wherein people perform, propose, and test relationships – relationships which may be fleeting, recurring, or the most permanent imaginable”. Throughout our discussion of Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market we will return to this notion of fleeting, recurring, and long-term relationships. In his study of street markets in Santiago, Chile, Joel Stillerman (2008) found that play and humour were central to the experience and practice of shopping, oiling the wheels of sales interactions, and that this was part of its appeal. His study of flea markets in the same city revealed that humour was kept backstage, often as metacommentary on the customers. Semi (2008) notes that part of the character of many markets is lively banter, double entendres, puns, and jokes, and that interactions in markets often walk a fine line between conviviality and conflict, as “joking, conflict, and work at the market intermingle in different, ever-changing forms and ways” (p.147). Semi notes that what can transform a potentially conflictual interaction into something that leads onto other social relations is participants’ willingness to make humorous use of their differences and transform them into a terrain of encounter and contrast through joking and banter. As we consider interactions in Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market we will return to this notion of the acknowledgement of difference as an interactional resource.
Birmingham markets are constituted on a 21-acre site, with 235 trading units, and include the Wholesale Market, the Bull Ring Indoor Market, the Rag Market, and the Outdoor Market. The focus of this study is the Bull Ring Indoor Market, which hosts over eighty stalls, and includes one of the largest fish markets in the UK. In addition to many butchers’ and fishmongers’ stalls, there are businesses providing tailoring, key cutting, shoe mending, ironmongery, engraving, jewellery repairs, shoes, clothing, mobile phones, fabric, old fashioned sweets, curtains, blinds, bedding, greetings cards, exotic foods, frozen foods and hair and beauty products. The market is open from 9:00 am to 5:30 pm, Monday to Saturday. The market legally began in Birmingham in 1154 when Peter de Bermingham, a local landowner, obtained a Charter of Marketing Rights from King Henry II. The name ‘Bull Ring’ referred to the green within the corn market that was used for bull baiting. The 'ring' was a hoop of iron to which bulls were tied for baiting before slaughter. By the middle of the thirteenth century Birmingham had developed from a village into a leading market town, and a major cloth trade was established. In 1835 a new Market Hall was opened beside St Martin’s Church. At 111 metres long, 55 metres wide, and 18 metres tall, the hall housed 600 stalls. In 1869, a fish market opened on Cowper Street. 1884, a sheltered vegetable market in Jamaica Row was also completed. However, the Market Hall was destroyed on 25 August 1940 by a war-time incendiary attack. In the 1960s major redevelopment work began on the new Birmingham Bull Ring Centre. This was to be a mixture of traditional open-air market stalls and a new indoor shopping centre, the first indoor city shopping centre in the UK. The outdoor market area was opened in June 1962. Demolition of the 1960s Bull Ring shopping Centre commenced in 2000, with market traders moving to the Rag Market in Edgbaston Street to accommodate the rejuvenation. The 1960's Bull Ring Shopping Centre was replaced by the new ‘Bullring’, which opened its doors on 4th Sept 2003. Bull Ring Indoor Market is now at the corner of Pershore Street and Edgbaston Street, with the Rag Market and Open Market just south of St Martin’s Church.

Many of the traders we spoke to in 2014 were ready to proudly claim personal credentials in terms of the longevity of their time on the markets, some of them telling us that they had worked in the trade for up to forty years. The proprietor of the shell fish stall said she had started as a Saturday girl fourteen years ago. She said ‘The shop’s been here a hundred and seventy-five years, it’s in the fifth generation now. It’s always been family-run, it started with a man called Byron, and it went down’. A large sepia photograph of Byron presides over the stall to this day. The manager of a butcher stall added that the market itself was part of the city’s inheritance:

1 because it’s part
2 it’s inbred within the community
3 and the history
4 you take that away
5 you take the market away
6 you’re going to lose a big part of your inheritance
7 you know, it’s all to do with history
and if you lose that
you’ve got no future

The view of the butcher was that interaction in the markets between traders and customers was ‘a big part of our identity’, as:

what people need
is to be able to talk, touch and relate
you take that away
and we’ve lost everything
this is like, you know, the last outpost
you could say

A feature of the traders’ stories was the extent to which they viewed the indoor market as a community characterized by co-operation and good will. A number of the traders spoke of a co-operative attitude in the market, as they helped each other out with their stalls. Many of the stall-holders had a positive view of increasing and diversifying migration. The flower-seller said ‘you’re better off embracing it’, and added that we should be looking for ‘a bit more diversity’. He spoke of a customer who was an English language learner who, in his view, learned more English by going to the market than she ever would in class. The flower seller said ‘it doesn’t really matter if people speak to you in English, Chinese, Portuguese, it doesn’t make no difference, it’s just the flow of people what’s the main concern’. The question of which language was in use was of less significance to him than the number of potential customers visiting his stall.

The market traders told us that, in their view, the profile of national and ethnic backgrounds of their customers had changed in recent times. A fishmonger said ‘we have customers who are Romanians, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, and Hungarian, and many more’. When we asked the market traders how they communicated with customers from such a range of linguistic backgrounds they said diverse communicative strategies were deployed both by themselves and by their customers. There was a clear sense that in their view communication in the market was unproblematic. A fishmonger said ‘they don’t speak much English, that’s not a problem’. He said there were people working in the market who could speak Polish, or Romanian, or Czech. The manager of a butcher business argued that there was a need for schools in England to include learning of East European languages, as these languages were now in practice in our cities: ‘you have French, German, and Spanish, and that’s it. You don’t have the chance to learn Polish or Czech’. The proprietor of an African grocer stall said that she made a point of teaching her customers the names of particular products, ‘and next time they come to buy it they could tell me I know the name, I know it’. The manager of the Design Studio said more important than being able to ‘speak well’ was ‘understanding each other’. Language was not that important, he said, ‘understanding is more important’. At the delicatessen counter the manager said people would find a way to communicate, as ‘the language of money speaks volumes, doesn’t it?’ He
expressed the hope that when he was talking to people ‘their English becomes better’. The manager of the hardware store said customers would bring pictures of what they wanted on their mobile phone and show her. A butcher said gesture was an important strategy in the market, saying his customers would point at the product they wanted. He added a brief story in illustration: ‘I served two last week, couldn’t speak a word of English, and I got them in the fridge, they showed me what they want, I took eighty pounds off them straight away’. The ‘showing’ of the produce is of greater significance here than the question of proficiency in a shared language. A fishmonger told us that when his uncle arrived in the UK as an immigrant from Pakistan he didn’t speak any English at all, so he got his friends to help him and ‘he clucked like a chicken when he wanted to buy chicken in the market’. As the fishmonger told the story he wiggled his elbows and bobbed his head in a physical characterisation of a chicken. Rampton (2014: 5) proposes that the notion of conviviality “describes a particular local ideology”. In the discourse of the market traders there is a clearly identifiable local ideology which permits and even encourages meaning-making by whatever means possible. It is a language ideology which offers a potential catalyst for convivial engagement.

The market traders told us that the changing customer demographic had led to changes in the demand for produce. The manager of the delicatessen stall talked about adapting to the needs of a changing clientele, saying ‘with the amount of different nationalities we’ve diversified into doing as much range as we can, basically to fill the need of every nationality coming into Birmingham’. He said that many migrants ‘understand more on the delicatessen lines than the English people, so we’re capitalising on that and benefitting’. The manager of the shell fish stall also said she had changed her product lines as a consequence of changing customer requirements, as people asked for ‘things like sea urchins and things like that…we do a lot of stuff that a lot of other places don’t, like we sell live eels’. One of the fishmongers had posters of fish on his stall. If a customer pointed to a fish she used to cook in her home country, he could ‘shop on the internet using the Latin name’, and supply it for her. One of the long-standing butchers said the needs of customers were very different from those of former generations of (stereotypically) English customers. He told us that the needs of new customers were ‘totally different to Mrs Smith and Mrs Jones, chops and sausage and a rashers of bacon’. He said there was now a market for ‘livers and tongues, all of the offal, the insides’. He said the stereotypically English shopper, the ‘Mrs Jones and Mrs Smiths’, were now only ‘two per cent or five per cent of the market’. In this butcher’s opinion the changing demographic was ‘a blessing, really’.

The market stall-holders talked about the indoor market as a workplace characterized by cooperation among the community of traders. The traders talked about their business practice, including selling and ordering strategies, negotiating prices, the increased diversity of customers, communication with customers, language learning, trust and respect, quality, competition, and business set-up. Many of them said they had seen changes to the markets over years, including changes in taste, cuisine, and produce of their customers, and changes in the role of technology,
and to the environment of the markets. The market traders’ account was one of ‘commonplace diversity’ (Wessendorf, 2010), suggesting that ethnic, religious, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity was experienced and perceived as a normal part of social life in Birmingham, and not as something particularly special. The market traders were more concerned with the role of the city council in the support and administration of the markets, and with the local management of the markets. At the same time they were proud of the markets, and the role they played in the city. One of the stall holders, a flower seller, said ‘This is the heart and soul of Birmingham, irrespective of what anyone else thinks, the market is the heart of Birmingham’. The voices of the market traders provide a rich context in which to view “the wider meaning in the mundane” (Hiebert, Rath & Vertovec 2014: 18).

Chinese in Birmingham

The focus of our study was a butcher stall run by a ‘Chinese’ couple, Tiankang Chen and Meiyen Chew. In 2011 1.2% of Birmingham residents said they were ethnically ‘Chinese’, an increase from 0.5% in 2001 (Office for National Statistics 2012). National census figures show that Chinese people started living in Birmingham as early as 1911 (Chinese Community Centre, 2015). There is evidence that Chinese laundries were in existence in Birmingham at this time, but they largely died out in the 1940s with the new availability of domestic washing machines. The Chinese population did not settle in significant numbers in Birmingham until the 1960s. The 1961 census shows the number of Chinese residents as less than 1000. By 1991 migrants to Birmingham from Hong Kong outnumbered migrants from mainland China by three to one. In the 1980s an area of Ladywood was redeveloped as ‘China Town’, housing a number of Chinese restaurants and supermarkets. Today film clubs, casinos, betting shops, and Chinese churches have been added. By 2001 the proportion of migrants from Hong Kong and mainland China was more or less equal, and by 2011 there were more migrants from mainland China in Birmingham than from Hong Kong. In 2011 the resident population of the Ladywood ward numbered 30,133. The 2011 census records that 2,155 (7.2%) residents of the ward categorized themselves as ethnically ‘Chinese’. 165 residents of Ladywood said their main language was ‘Mandarin Chinese’, 145 said ‘Cantonese Chinese’, while 1,251 said their main language was in the category ‘All other Chinese’. This was a higher number than any other language category in Ladywood. However, these statistics relating to main languages spoken other than English probably say more about the census as an imprecise instrument than about the linguistic repertoires of residents of Ladywood.
Methods

Together with Principal Investigator Angela Creese, Rachel Hu and Adrian Blackledge identified Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market as an ideal site in which to investigate how people communicate in business settings when they bring different biographies, histories, and linguistic / semiotic proficiencies to the commercial encounter. The research team identified a Chinese-owned business: a butcher’s stall inside the indoor market hall. We approached the proprietors, Tiankang Chen and Meiyen Chew, for permission to conduct ethnographic observations of communicative interactions in and around their stall. The couple were willing to be involved in the research as key participants, and signed consent forms. The empirical research began on 1st September 2014, and ended on December 19th 2014. During that time Rachel visited the stall twice a week, and Adrian once a week (always while Rachel was also observing). We wrote thirty sets of field notes, running to more than 104,000 words. After five weeks of observation we fitted small digital audio-recording devices to the butchers and recorded their spoken interactions during our observational visits. In addition to Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew, we also audio-recorded two of the assistant butchers on several occasions. One of the assistants, Yiran, was a Chinese student working part-time on the stall. The other, Bradley, was English, and a long-term member of the staff team. In all we audio-recorded 35 hours of workplace interactions. We also video-recorded one three-hour session at the stall. We interviewed the key participants, and Rachel audio-recorded other informal conversations with them. We interviewed eighteen of the other stall-holders in the market. We took 300 photographs inside the market hall, and a further 120 in the surrounding neighbourhood. We also asked Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew to audio-record themselves at home in their domestic setting with their family. They had three very young children, and Meiyen Chew’s parents were visiting them from Malaysia at the time of our research. In all they audio-recorded 47 hours of family and domestic interactions. In addition we asked the couple to copy and send to us examples of their online and social media communications. Kang Chen audio-recorded some of his regular QQ conversations with his mother in Fujian. The couple also sent us 550 WeChat messages from their mobile phones.

Subsequent to the data collection period Rachel transcribed the audio-recorded material, and Adrian and Rachel met for two hours each week to discuss transcripts and field notes. We wrote separate reports on the field notes, the work-place audio-recordings, the home-based audio-recordings, the social media posts, the photographs, and the interviews. In this report we bring together analysis of the several data sets.
3. Narratives of Becoming

Tiankang Chen and Meiyen Chew are a couple with three young children. Tiankang Chen said he was originally from Changle in Fujian, in the South of China. He had relatives in the UK, and had arrived in 2001. He said he met Meiyen Chew in 2006, when they were both working in a take-away restaurant in the South of England. Tiankang Chen talked about his eagerness to travel, which he attributed to ‘the inspiration you gained from your village folks’. He said the stories told by villagers who had travelled made him want to follow in their footsteps. Changle owes its relative economic prosperity not just to China’s economy, but “to hundreds of thousands of native sons and daughters who have been smuggled out of the country in recent years to make their fortunes overseas” (Keefe 2009: 33). Emigrants from Changle typically send their savings back to Fujian Province, and the money has helped to fuel the local economy, providing funds for schools and community centres, underwriting wedding banquets and new business ventures, and allowing for the construction projects in ancestral villages. By the 1990s remittances to Changle amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars each year. Kang Chen said his experience since migrating to the UK had been mixed, and he told us that although there were good financial reasons to live and work abroad, ‘the stress and struggle is just too much, while life in your village is like living in heaven’. He said he could never be as relaxed and comfortable in the UK as when you were ‘in your own country speaking your own language’.

Meiyen Chew was from Furong, Malaysia, and said her family had moved to Malaysia from China when China was invaded by Japan in the 1930s. She said her grandfather had died on the day she was born ‘so I was said to be bad luck to our family by those superstitious people’. Meiyen Chew had come to the UK with her sister when she was eighteen. Another sister was already living in the UK with her boyfriend, and they ‘often told us how wonderful it was here, as you go shopping and everything else, especially you earn big money here’. She said she came to the UK on a two-year student visa to study English, and while doing her studies had found a part-time job in a Chinese take-away. She told us that although her name was Meiyen Chew, the Malaysian version of her name was Zhou /周:

it’s the Malaysian Pinyin so it doesn’t make sense to you as it’s quite different from what is used in mainland China for Mandarin. Apart from Malaysian Pinyin, you also have a different phonics system for Cantonese and Minnan, although the general rules are the same. They have quite different spellings and hence pronunciation mainly because they are dialects differ from Mandarin. For example the Chinese surname 陈 is Chen in Pinyin of Mandarin. But in Cantonese phonics it is Chan, while in Fujian phonics it is Tan. So you can tell what someone’s origins are from the way their name is scripted.

In this section we represent the narratives of the couple through their voices. They told their stories to Rachel in informal interviews, and in extended conversations with Rachel in the market hall. Like Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen, Rachel is a Chinese migrant to the UK. She shares (broadly) the experience of creating a life in the UK, where, like Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen, she has a young family. These areas of commonality do not erase the many differences between Rachel and the proprietors of the butcher’s stall. However, both similarities and differences were
crucial dimensions of the conversations and interviews. Each of the interactions we refer to here was audio-recorded (others were recorded as field notes, but not audio-recorded), and was conducted (very largely) in Mandarin.

The stories told by Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen often concerned the process of learning to become butchers. We do not treat these narratives as representations of objective ‘truth’, but as contexts in which the couple position themselves as characters in their story, at the same time situating themselves as authors / narrators. It is in the dynamic tension between ‘themselves’ as characters and ‘themselves’ as narrators that we are able to see their ideological worlds coming into being. In telling their story they deploy ‘chronotopes’ (Bakhtin 1981) to invoke and enable the social and political worlds in which the actions occurs. Bakhtin (1981) borrowed the metaphor of the ‘chronotope’ from Einstein’s Theory of Relativity to describe the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships in literature. In the literary chronotope (literally ‘timespace’):

> time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history.

(Bakhtin 1981: 84)

Analysis of chronotopes enables us to view narratives historically. The chronotope enables the narrator to contextualize events and characters by situating them in time and space, and to establish and introduce generically typical narratives. Chronotopes can be seen as “invokable chunks of history organizing the indexical order of discourse” (Blommaert 2015). We recognize types of narratives, and this recognition is often ushered in through specific kinds of plot, character, actions, meaning and value. Narratives of personal experience are typically understood as ‘past’ by default, so the expectation is that the speaker will use spatio-temporal deixis and other linguistic resources to frame the narrative as there-and-then, not to be confused with the here-and-now storytelling event (Perrino 2011). Rachel Falconer (2010: 111) points out that in Bakhtin’s understanding of narrative, characters “gradually acquire a sense of historicity, of being embedded in specific times and places”. A similar process can be traced in migrant narratives of becoming. Brigitta Busch (2015:15) points out that speakers “not only point backwards to the past of the language biography, which has left behind its traces and scars, but also forwards, anticipating and projecting the future situations and events we are preparing to face”. Furthermore, participants in interactions may align with various temporalities, deploy temporal skills to signal temporal frames to each other, adopt or contest the temporal frames proposed, turning time into a negotiated semiotic resource (De Sainte Georges and Duc 2007). In the narrative told by Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen they (separately, but connectedly) situate events, actions, and characters in chronotopes which index particular genres, and which invoke particular histories and indexicalities. Their stories are concerned with questions of legal status, setting up a business, developing a market, and orienting to the future.

_Becoming legal_
Meiyen Chew (MYC) told Rachel (RH) about events when the couple tried for the first time to set up a market stall business. The narrative interview, like most exchanges between Rachel and Meiyen Chew, was conducted in Mandarin. Here we present an English translation.

1. MYC: this isn’t our first stall
2. we’d tried quite a few times
3. a couple
4. even when we didn’t have the status yet
5. RH: you mean you didn’t have indefinite residence status or
6. MYC: no, I mean we had no legal status to stay in the UK
7. we blacked out then
8. and this was why we were conned the first time
9. we tried to have our own business
10. RH: no! was it by Brits or Chinese?
11. MYC: Chinese
12. it was our first stall
13. and it was taken away only two weeks after we set it up
14. he knew we didn’t have legal status
15. and took advantage of
16. our eagerness to set up our own business at that time
17. he actually sold us the stall
18. which turned out to be leased out to him
19. from the real landlord
20. and he didn’t tell the landlord at all
21. what’s more he hadn’t paid his rent for quite a long time
22. so the landlord forced him to close down his take-away
23. until he paid more rent
24. RH: ah no this way he knew
25. that you wouldn’t dare sue him
26. MYC: that’s right
27. we were conned out of five thousand pounds
28. since we couldn’t sue him
29. RH: no! that’s a lot of money (2)
30. oh well what goes around comes around
31. and he will get it one day
32. MYC: don’t know
33. [both laugh]
34. so we were conned
35. and we had to close it down the second week
36. oh no the second day after we opened up
37. the landlord phoned us
38. asking who we were
39. and we told him we were the owners of the stall
40. he said he was the landlord
41. and no one had told him about us at all
In lines 1 and 2 the narrative is situated in the indeterminate past. In line 4 an indexical (‘the status’) links this past to a narrative type which can be characterized as ‘migration history’, or ‘migrant journey’. The indexical points to a particular set of social attributes, and to a particular narrative genre. Rachel clarifies ‘status’, and Meiyen Chew reiterates the chronotope (‘we had no legal status to stay in the UK’). At line 8 another chronotope is deployed (‘the first time’), now referring to a more specific timespace, situated within the broader chronotope of the migrant journey. This is what Jan Blommaert (2015) has termed a “scalar effect”, as the more specific timespace dimension of the narrative is situated in the broader scope of the conditions represented. A further refinement of the chronotope (that is, a further co-existing chronotope) is introduced at line 13 (‘it was taken away only two weeks after we set it up’), this representation of timespace referring both to an event in a single moment (‘it was taken away’) and a period of time (‘two weeks after we set it up’). At line 14 it becomes clear that the couple was vulnerable to sharp practice because they ‘didn’t have legal status’. The ‘con’ occurs in the ongoing timespace of the migrant journey, and is again a scalar effect. Meiyen Chew makes several more references to ‘time’ (lines 21, 23, 35, 36) in narrating the story, articulating the complex layered historicities of the narrative. Three iterations of ‘we were conned’ emphasise the salient events of the narrative, which are situated in chronotopes of the ongoing migrant journey, the period of pre-legal status, a duration of time (‘two weeks’), and specific points in time. These chronotopes represent layered histories which co-exist and interrelate in the world of the narrative, linking indexically through ‘legal status’, and they “occur simultaneously at different scale levels” (Blommaert 2015: 16). At lines 30 and 31 Rachel attempts to mitigate the hurt of the narrative of the ‘con’ through the introduction of a further chronotope, in which she imagines an indeterminate future in which justice will be done. Meiyen Chew (‘don’t know’) seems unconvinced.

**Becoming a business**

Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen told the story of how they set up their current butcher’s stall in the Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market. Meiyen Chew said their application to set up the stall was finally approved after a long and difficult process, which involved writing a business plan. They did not know how to do this, and were only successful when one or two of the existing stall holders offered them support and advice. Kang Chen described setting up the business as ‘really, really difficult’, and said he would have given up if he had not been very determined to make it work. Meiyen Chew had a similar story to tell:

1 the very beginning  
2 was really hard  
3 although we’d both worked in restaurants  
4 and take-aways before  
5 neither of us had been a butcher  
6 we didn’t even know  
7 how to cut the meat for the stall
the first day
we went to one of the suppliers
and asked him how much stock we’d need
for a stall like us
we were told
that we would need
at least seven hundred pounds worth of meat
to last for the day
so we listened to him
and bought seven hundred pounds worth of produce in one go
without considering that
we hadn’t got one single customer yet
when the meat was taken back to the stall
it could be only dumped
on the display board in a big pile
as we didn’t have
any trays or dividers to display the meat
looking at the meat Kang said to himself
we are stuffed
so Kang rang me at seven a.m.
when I was still at home
to ask
how we should cut the meat
as it all came in whole sides and pieces
I was at home
preparing to get Liwen to nursery
we were not that good
at using the scales either in the first week
so by the end of the first week
the seven hundred pounds worth of meat was still there
so we decided
to discount the whole lot
originally it was five pounds a tray
and now we did five pounds for two trays
haha
so after the first week
we knew
how much we would need for the second week
and we went to the supplier
and told him
that we would decide how much we want
instead of him telling us
at that time
only half of the counter was stocked with meat
as we didn’t need the rest
Falconer (2010) proposes that we should pay attention to the heterochrony, or the interplay of different chronotopes, in individual texts. The first line of Meiyen’s story (‘the very beginning’) deploys a chronotope which indexes a particular story type, typified by content which tells of setting up, or starting out, or a narrative of origin, or, we might say, of becoming. In this timespace neither she nor her husband had any confidence in their new profession, and felt that they lacked even the most fundamental skills: ‘we didn’t even know how to cut the meat’. At line 8 another chronotope is introduced, as the generic ‘very beginning’ now coexists with ‘the first day’. As before, there is a scalar effect here, with the more specific timespace situated within the broader scale of ‘the very beginning’. The new chronotope introduces a small story within the overall narrative, as the narrator rehearses, in indirect discourse, a dialogue between the Chinese stall-holders and the meat suppliers. At this narrated point in timespace the couple is passive and non-agentic, lacking the knowledge required to critique the information they are given. At lines 16 to 19 Meiyen Chew first relates the event of their purchase of a large amount of meat (16-17) and then shifts in timespace (18-19) to a point at a distance from these events, when and where reflection occurs: ‘without considering that we haven’t got one single customer yet’. In the shift of chronotope the narrative is “shot through with different timespace frames provoking scaled meaning effects simultaneously understandable at different scale levels” (Blommaert 2015: 17). The effect of this is that through the narrated experience the learning, or in Bakhtin’s terms the ideological becoming, of the couple, continues. At line 20 the timespace shifts again from the supplier to the butcher’s stall. The helplessness of the couple in the face of their new trade is captured in Kang Chen’s dramatic utterance reported by Meiyen Chew as direct speech: ‘we are stuffed’ (26). A further chronotope is introduced at lines 27-28, as it emerges that (despite the collective pronoun in the story of the supplier) Meiyen Chew was ‘still at home’ when Kang Chen phoned her at seven o’clock that morning. The more specific chronotope is situated within both ‘the very beginning’ and ‘first day’ chronotopes, and there are different scale levels in play. Tara Collington (2002: 101) demonstrates that the important changes in a narrative take place not when the medium shifts but when the chronotope changes: “within a new chronotope the events may be the same, but the probability and the significance of events happening in a certain way will have changed”. The narrative of Kang Chen’s phone call to Meiyen Chew (27-31) tells of his lack of knowledge and skill in butchery, and also of the collaborative practice of the couple in running the business. At line 36 the narrative moves forward in timespace: ‘by the end of the first week’.

The strategy adopted by the couple to sell the meat, heavily discounting it for a quick sale, is narrated at lines 38-42. This is proposed as a key point in the couple’s process of becoming butchers. At line 43 (‘after the first week’) the narrative takes the two protagonists beyond the chronotope of ‘the very beginning’ to another dimension which is beyond the beginning, and marks the start of knowledge (‘after the first week we knew how much we would need for the Hong Keen butcher’s stall” (Blommaert 2015: 17).
second week’) and confidence. This is also a chronotope associated with agency. Anna De Fina (2003: 93) defines agency as “the degree of activity and initiative that narrators attribute to themselves as characters in particular story world”. In Meiyen Chew’s narrative there is movement from passivity on the part of protagonists in the story to activity and initiative. Morson (2010: 93) points out that “essential to each generic chronotope is a specific ‘image of man’ and concept of agency. Agency, of course, pertains to our control over the next moment of time”. In the reported interaction with the supplier the couple are no longer passive, and are represented no longer as victims, but almost as heroic figures overcoming adversity. Anna De Fina and Alexandra Georgakopoulou (2012) note that reported speech can contribute to the creation of a certain self-image for the teller, particularly in relation to agency. Narrators may report the speech of themselves as characters to emphasise their own role, “thus presenting themselves as agentive social actors” (2012: 169). In Meiyen Chew’s narrative she reports that “we went to the supplier and told him that we would decide how much we want”. This is not merely an attribution of agency to the characters in her story. It is also a changed trajectory, a development from the passivity attributed to them in reported speech earlier in the narrative (‘we are stuffed’). In short, it is a narrative in which the protagonists begin to find their voice. The final chronotope in this section of narrative (‘at that time’, line 50) positions the two butchers as pragmatic and practical in setting up their business, as they leave half the counter unstocked.

A second example of Meiyen Chew’s narrative of setting up a new business similarly shifts in timespace, as several chronotopes co-exist and provoke meaning effects simultaneously understandable at different scale levels. Morson (2010: 101) argues that the chronotope of the modern novel “places high value on ordinary actions and daily life”. In this section Meiyen Chew narrates a period beyond the first day of the previous section, but still at an early stage of the development of the business:

1  in the past
2  before I could drive
3  I had to pay eighty pounds
4  for someone to drive me there
5  to get all the stuff
6  later on when I could drive
7  I was told
8  that I had to go and do everything myself
9  as they were short staffed
10  so after dropping Liwen at nursery
11  at eight in the morning
12  I would go straight to the slaughterhouse
13  and clean and pick up everything from there
14  I had to clean the intestine
15  and the stomach
16  straight after the pigs were killed
17  it’s such a hard and disgusting job
18  I only got home
19  at about two or three o’clock in the afternoon
The story Meiyan Chew tells here is of collecting pig’s offal from the slaughterhouse, and juggling this hard physical work with her duties as the mother of a young child. The first two lines of this narrative describe a timespace (‘in the past before I could drive’) when running the business was physically hard for the couple, and index a story-type of the migrant’s tough journey of economic survival. At line 6 the chronotope shifts (‘later on when I could drive’), with the construction parallel to the invocation of the ‘before I could drive’ timespace. However, the change of frame from being a non-driver to a driver did not bring immediate relief from the hard work of butchery. Rather, a more specific timespace (‘eight in the morning’) shifts in scale and introduces a mini-narrative of further hard labour (12-17). Discourse of temporality (‘after dropping Liwen’, ‘straight after the pigs were killed’, ‘at about two or three o’clock’) moves the narrative forward in timespace. We heard Meiyan Chew telling the story of having to manage her baby daughter while working on the new market stall when she was speaking to her mother (Mo) at home. They had been discussing the Meiyan Chew’s challenging schedule, which continued now that her eldest daughter was attending school. This exchange, like most of those including or in the presence of Meiyan Chew’s parents, was conducted in Cantonese, and is transcribed in traditional (also known as ‘complicated’) script.

1 MYC 我嘅日喺度讀, 帶佢地返學, 我點樣帶? 阿弟又唔係好肯去嚟, 我又愛夾硬攬, 妹妹又推去, 妹妹坐車, 推唔到, 攬唔到
   yesterday I thought, to take them to school, how will I be able to take them. Ah D doesn’t want to go, I have to hold him in my arms. Sister’s in the pushchair, I don’t have the strength to hold him in my arms, nor can I push the buggy easily

2 Mo 又係難, 啊?
   it’s really difficult, eh?

3 MYC 嚮架又難開到死
   and that car is flipping difficult to drive

4 Mo 早啲去, 八點三、四個字你就要去
   go early, you need to go by eight fifteen or eight twenty

5 MYC 聽日.. 点般帶細佬, 点樣攬呀?
   tomorrow, how can I take the children, how can I do it?

6 Mo 唔愛賣豬肉呀?
   do you need to sell pork?

7 MYC 賣, 豬肉唔駛賣呀, 豬肉照賣
   yes I still have to sell pork

8 Mo 你細佬哥呢?
   how about your little boy?

9 MYC 我呀, 阿弟返三日嚟, 一三五嚟, 我 part time 唔喺, 我得閒去行吓, 蹴吓, 忙嘅时候
   for me, three school days for Ah D, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I work part time. I go there when I am free, and help out if it’s busy

10 Mo 昨覺開就可以幫手
   you can help out when they are asleep
It is not clear whether Meiyen Chew is dropping a hint in the hope that her mother will take the children to school. If so, the hint is not taken up, and the best advice Meiyen Chew’s mother can offer is for her to help out at the market stall when the children are asleep. This prompts Meiyen Chew to relate a narrative about the early days of the butcher stall, when she had to take her baby daughter with her to work and help out at the stall as and when child care allowed. This interaction gives us an insight into Meiyen Chew’s busy and challenging life, looking after three very young children while trying to support the family business.

Kang Chen told the same story from his own perspective, also in Mandarin. Like Meiyen Chew, he begins the story with reference to the time when the couple did not have a car:

1. you have to be strong and hang on to it
2. when we first started
3. we didn’t even have a car
4. the only transportation we had
5. was a small trolley from the supermarket
6. I had to go to the wholesale market
7. twice or three times a day
8. to get the stock for our stall
9. using the trolley
10. to be honest
11. talking about it now
12. can never express the pains and difficulties
13. we went through back at that time
14. you could only get close to how we felt then
15. by going through the whole process yourself

The narrative takes as its point of departure the chronotope ‘when we first started’, again indexing the story-type of the migrant journey. Kang Chen tells the story of the hard labour of taking a supermarket trolley to the wholesale market ‘twice or three times a day’. At lines 11-15 Kang Chen’s narrative undergoes a chronotope shift such that the usual ‘there-and-then’ of the narrated story begins to blur with the ‘here-and-now’ storytelling event. In a process of what Sabina Perrino terms ‘coeval alignment’ (2011: 97) Kang Chen invites his interlocutor (most immediately, Rachel Hu, the interviewer, but Kang Chen is no doubt aware that there is a wider audience) to take a journey back in time with him to experience the narrated world and the narrating world simultaneously. Perrino (2011: 98) refers to this process of “participant transposition” as “cross-chronotope alignment”. In Kang Chen’s voice it seems possible that
there is a wormhole in the timespace of the narrating event through which the timespace of the narrated event may be accessed. One way to understand the narratives of Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen is in precisely these terms.

*Becoming a market*

The couple’s determination to succeed, and their indomitable work ethic, was also visible in their conversations at home, which were never far from the subject of their business. In the following exchange they are discussing the fact that some of their staff wanted to work five days a week, despite the fact that the stall opened six days a week:

1. **KC** 佢星期四休息  
   he is off on Thursday
2. **MYC** 佢星期四休息呀  
   is he off on Thursday?
3. **KC** 佢做五日, 五日鬼佬, 阿. Brad 話我都想做五日, 我話我想唔駛做添, 我想做三日兩日, 我想唔駛做添  
   he works five days, five days, kwailo. Brad said he also wants to work five days. I said I want to do three days, two days, or no need to work at all
4. **MYC** 照計, 有做有錢, 方做方錢  
   you work and you get paid
5. **KC** 我仲想做董事长, 唔駛做, CEO 人啲簽兩個字走人. 我又想做總統, 有方得做先, 係咪?理想同現實係兩回事嘅嗎, 是不是呀?  
   I also want to be CEO, just sign and finish work, I want to be the president, can I be? The ideal is different from reality, right?
6. **MYC** 係呀, 方錢咪咩呀  
   yes, no money
7. **KC** 仲有得揀呀  
   you don’t have a choice
8. **MYC** 仲有得揀呀  
   you don’t have a choice

At this time Kang Chen had appointed a new ‘white British’ assistant butcher. In turn 3 he characterises the staff member as ‘kwailo’, a derogatory Cantonese term which refers to ‘Western’, or ‘white British’ people. ‘Kwailo’ is the English translation for this word based on its Cantonese pronunciation, meaning ‘foreigners’, or ‘foreigners who look like ghosts’. It can have racist overtones, and is at times used by Chinese people when they want to articulate negative or exclusive comments about Westerners. Literally meaning ‘white devil’, or ‘ghost person’, it is here deployed by Kang Chen to index those who are not prepared to work hard enough in his business. On this occasion even Bradley is subject to criticism, as he too wants to work five days instead of six. This prompts an interaction between Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew in which they are entirely in accord about the work ethic required in business. Kang Chen scoffs
at those who want things easy, exaggerating their claims and ironically voicing (or double-voicing) them himself, saying that he wants to be the Chief Executive Officer, or even the President, but this is not life’s reality. The work ethic of the couple is more succinctly summed up by Meiyen Chew, as she says, flatly, ‘照計,有做有錢,冇做冇錢’ < you work and you get paid >. They finally agree that for ordinary people who are neither CEO nor President there is no choice but to work, and work hard. Discussion about work in the domestic setting frequently revealed the couple as determined and focused in their business, albeit with a caring and fair attitude to their staff.

An important dimension of everyday practice for the market traders was their relationship with regular customers. Hong Keen butcher’s stall had an ongoing trade with local restaurants in Ladywood. Some of the restaurants had credit arrangements with the stall-holders. This enabled them to order meat and offal freely, without making immediate cash payment. Orders from restaurants in particular were often made via the messaging function on a mobile phone. The use of mobile technology by small business owners and freelance or self-employed workers remains a neglected area (Tagg 2015). Mobile messaging apps used by participants in our study such as WeChat remain under-researched due to their relative novelty. Nor has the topic been significantly approached within the business literature. Business discourse research has typically focused on computer-mediated communication accessed from an office desk rather than mobile technology, and on email and IM rather than messaging apps such as WeChat. This is likely due in part to a time-lag between usage and academic attention because of the relatively recent rise of the smartphone, but it neglects consideration of the implications of the smartphone for mobility (Tagg 2015; Tagg and Seargeant forthcoming) and for increasing digital convergence ‘between formerly separate applications, modes, activities’ (Androutsopoulos 2010, p. 208) on one device or platform. Furthermore, the focus in business communication research has tended to be on the use of social media by and within large businesses and corporations. Such research has tended to assume a distinction between people’s personal or social use of social media and their working lives. Our analysis, then, addresses a number of gaps in research, as it includes a focus on how mobile technology is appropriated by small business owners into their working and social lives. In particular, our research highlights the role of linguistic resources in the construction of social relationships and realities.

In what follows we present typical messages in the We Chat platform as examples of everyday communication related to the mundane business of ordering and supplying meat to local restaurants. In the first message a restaurateur initially expresses disappointment that calf meat (veal) is not available, and we see several subsequent communications. In each case the original message is on the left, and our translation on the right:
In this typical series of messages the chef at the restaurant does not seem concerned that his initial order cannot be filled, and instead orders pork belly, chicken legs, pig’s kidneys, ox bones, and chicken offal. This type of message was repeated many times, as WeChat was a medium commonly used by local restaurants when ordering from Hong Keen. During our observations we noticed that restaurants also ordered by telephone.

In another typical message, Kand Chen let a restaurant called ‘Chinese Fine Cuisine’ know that part of their order would be delayed because he was waiting for a delivery of beef:

The interaction is business-like and efficient. The butcher is constrained by the rhythm of deliveries from his supplier, and the proprietor of the restaurant understands this. The repetitive
movement of orders of meat and offal is exemplified in further messages from the same restaurant:

Here Kang Chen is not able to meet the precise requirements of the restaurant, but again this does not appear to cause problems. In another interaction with Chinese Fine Cuisine Kang Chen asks for clarification and confirmation of their order:

In this example Kang Chen asks the restaurant whether they would like their order fulfilled in two separate deliveries, at different times. They agree with this proposal. Again the negotiation is
business-like and practical, focusing almost exclusively on the activity of buying and selling meat. In one instance here, however, the restaurant apologises for making an addition to the original order. This matter-of-fact politeness oils the wheels of local commerce. In another example of communication with the same customer, Kang Chen checks the restaurant’s order because he ‘forgot’. In this instance he seems to include a metacomment on his own forgetfulness, perhaps covering his embarrassment as he does so. Caroline Tagg (2012) cites examples of humour as a strategy to deflect embarrassment in text messaging. Although Kang Chen’s ‘I forgot hehe’ in the following example may equate more to a nervous laugh than to explicit humour, the strategy is similar:

Tagg (2012) suggests that in text messaging users often refer to an earlier part of the same text message and explicitly comment on it. Here Kang Chen comments on his mistake in forgetting the customer’s order as well as on his admission of the same. Kang Chen’s representation of laughter (‘hehe’) following his confession (‘I forgot’) reflexively draws attention to his mistake, acknowledging his forgetfulness or disorganization on this occasion. Although a less explicit apology than the apology of the restaurant, Kang Chen’s metacommentary equally serves to accomplish commercial activity. We can see in these everyday examples that Kang Chen’s business transactions with restaurant customers conducted through WeChat are oriented towards the efficient conveying and eliciting of information and, as such, are brief, to-the-point and devoid of many interpersonal elements beyond ‘ok’ and ‘thanks’.

Returning to the butchers’ narrative about setting up their business, Meiyen Chew talked about the couple’s practice of offering for sale produce which would attract a niche market:

1. to attract more customers
2. we managed to source pigs’ blood
3. to make blood curd
sometimes if the market lift was not working
we would have to go through the lifts in Debenham’s
and sometimes the blood just spilled on the floor
so that we had to clean it off
before the security guy caught us
we brought back raw pigs’ blood in buckets
and we didn’t know anything about it
in the beginning
we didn’t understand why
the blood wouldn’t coagulate
and it took us some time to figure out
that you can’t mix the blood from different pigs
and one bucket could only be used for one pig’s blood
otherwise the blood wouldn’t solidify
so in the beginning
we had to pour the blood away
as it wouldn’t coagulate at all
you have to add water and salt
to make it coagulate
you don’t boil it
since the blood becomes solid on its own
you only need to add some water
half water and half salt
if you don’t add water it will be too hard
while if you add too much water
it will become too easy to break
and is not to the customers’ taste
now we can’t have it for free
and we have to pay for it
while previously
we were making pure profit from blood curd

In line 3 ‘blood curd’ is indexically linked to a particular taste, global region, and, it might be said, set of cultural practices. Blood curd is a characteristic feature of the cuisine of southern China. At lines 4-8 a self-contained narrative incorporates indexicals which seem to clash with each other, as ‘Debenham’s’ becomes the timespace in which, anachronistically but vividly in the world of the narrative, buckets of blood are carried and ‘sometimes’ spilt on the floor. The timespace shifts from the generalized ‘sometimes’ to a more precise representation of actual events. The blood on the carpet of the department store is real. At line 11 Meiyen Chew introduces one of two iterations of the chronotopically generic myth of origin story-opener, ‘in the beginning’. Temporality is again key here, as at line 14 ‘it took us some time’ to figure out how to make blood curd. The story of learning how to make blood curd is a narrative of becoming. You can’t mix the blood of two pigs in one bucket; salt and water must
be added in correct proportion. However, as the timespace of the narrative shifts into the here and now there is no unequivocally happy ending: despite their endeavor and their learning, they now make less profit than they once did, as they are charged by the slaughterhouse for the blood.

The couple told us that the development of a niche market was a key strategy in their establishment of a customer base. Meiyen Chew described how selling ‘fish balls’ was a means of attracting customers from China. She said there was no local supplier in Birmingham, so ‘Kang drove to London every Sunday with a gigantic empty suitcase and came back with the luggage full of fish balls each time. It was a hard job as that was his only day off’. They said they advertised the sale of fish balls by making posters in super-sized Chinese characters which said, ‘we sell Fuzhou Fish Balls here’. Fuzhou fish balls, from Kang Chen’s home region of Fujian, became a mobile, translocal product, recontextualised from southern China to the Midlands of England. In addition to blood curd and fish balls, pigs’ offal was a feature of the butchers’ portfolio, as Kang Chen told us:

1. we started
2. to attract regular customers
3. by selling offal
4. such as the pig’s small intestine
5. colon hearts stomach and so on
6. we sold pig’s hearts at fifty pence each
7. while the other butchers were selling them by weight
8. that way we attracted more customers
9. to come back to us
10. at first it was groups of people from Fujian
11. who came to us to buy pig’s stomach
12. then crowds of Vietnamese came to us to buy offal
13. word spread among their friends
14. and we were known for selling offal
15. and this built up our customer base

As we have seen, the couple worked hard to establish their customer base. Their business strategy included selling cuts of offal which were not sold by other butchers in the market, including pig’s intestine, colon, and stomach. At lines 6 to 9 Kang Chen tells another small story, in which he relates a successful strategy of undercutting other butchers’ sales by selling hearts at fifty pence each rather than by weight.

Timespace shifts as he comments on this brief anecdote, saying ‘we attracted more customers to come back to us’, and ‘at first…then…’. He tells the story of the stall’s growing reputation among people from Fujian and Vietnam. In the narrated events of the story Kang Chen represents himself and Meiyen Chew as a couple with the business acumen to identify a niche market and supply it. In doing so he also represents himself in the interaction
with his audience as a business man with nous. In autobiographical narratives the narrator has a role in the represented content of the story and in the ongoing interaction with the audience. Here Kang Chen tells the story of his business flair and industry, not only to represent his past self in this way, but to position himself in the present.

Fish balls, blood curd, intestine, colon, heart, stomach - all play important roles in the narrative of the couple’s determination to build a successful market. More than this, Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen tell of hard work, determination, courage, and business acumen. These are elements of the butchers’ learning, of their ideological becoming, related as a narrative which represents them in the past and positions them in the present. Their narrative also looked to the future.

**Becoming in the future**

Kang Chen told us that he did not see himself running the butcher’s stall in the market for ever, and that he had an eye to the future:

1. I am always looking
2. for other business opportunities
3. but sometimes it’s the timing
4. sometimes you just don’t have the time
5. to do further investigation
6. when you don’t have enough staff on at the stall
7. I will just cross that bridge when I come to it

Kang Chen articulates his aspiration to seek and engage with ‘other business opportunities’. Caroline Hart (2012) describes aspiring as a state of being or doing, but also as a capability which individuals may engage in to different degrees. She views “an individual’s capability to aspire as a freedom in its own right and as a gateway to enabling future capabilities and functionings” (2012: 79). If individuals have limited opportunities to develop their aspirations freely, their freedom in choosing ways of being and doing may be compromised. Aspirational discourse is a form of ‘future-oriented’, or ‘anticipatory discourse’, which Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon (2000) and Ingrid de Sainte Georges (2003) define as the study of the ways in which discourse may be used to produce certain actions (or inactions) in the future. In the example here Kang Chen relates both his aspiration (lines 1-2) and the constraints which mitigate against that aspiration (‘you just don’t have time’, ‘you don’t have enough staff on the stall’). Finally he settles on a position between freedom and constraint, remaining on the aspirational path but leaving his ambitions to one side for now (‘I will just cross that bridge when I come to it’). We argue that in the liminal space between constraint and freedom to choose ways of being and doing lies the process of **becoming**.

Meiyen Chew told us of one of the couple’s strategies in the present, or the very recent past, to ensure that they are competitive with other butchers in the market:
when people cook at home
no matter whether they choose to buy more or less
it is good for business
buying meat is like a daily necessity for most households
but you only go out for dinner
when you have extra money to spare
also our low price does make it more inviting to customers
for example we used to sell hens at seven pounds for three
but we could only sell three boxes a day
now we have lowered our price to six pounds for three
and we can sell ten boxes
this way we can compete with our rivals
it’s good for our relationship with suppliers
and makes it easier to bargain with them
over bulk purchase

Here the chronotope represents present timespace. Meiyen Chew focuses initially on families’ need to put meat on the table as ‘a daily necessity’. At lines 8-11 she tells another story of the couple’s business strategy, dropping prices when they found sales were struggling, and making sure that they are able to move their stock. Whereas discourse about the early days of the business were characterized by accounts of struggle, overcoming hardship, creating niche markets, and building a customer base, discourses of the present and implied future are characterized by accounts of competitiveness and bargaining power. This is a narrative both of learning and of a trajectory of confidence. It is a discourse of becoming.

Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew did not restrict their entrepreneurial dreams to the sale of meat and offal, however. The couple were relatively new to business and entrepreneurship. They had set up their stall in Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market less than three years before the period during which we conducted our observations. Notwithstanding this, their discourse in the family home – perhaps more than that in the busy market hall – regularly turned to discussion of creative ways of extending their business portfolio.

In a typical example, Meiyen Chew (MYC) and Kang Chen (KC) discuss the possibility of buying a house so that they can profit from renting it in the private letting market:

| 1 | MYC | Wolverhampton 房价这么便宜 
house prices in Wolverhampton are so cheap |
| 2 | KC  | Wolverhampton 房价多少? 
Wolverhampton, how much are the house prices? |
| 3 | MYC | 排屋,六十千到六十五千 
terraced houses, sixty to sixty five thousand |
| 4 | KC  | Wolverhampton 沒有大学那裏有发展, 就那裏會貴 
Wolverhampton can’t be compared to around the university, where there is potential for growth house prices will be high |
The interaction between the couple is entrepreneurial, as they consider the potential for investment in a property to rent in the private letting market. At this point the discussion appears to be more or less hypothetical, as they play around with figures which are at best approximate. The driving force here appears to be Meiyen Chew rather than Kang Chen. She introduces the topic, understands that the house is to be sold at auction, and knows the opening auction price. She also has a clear idea about the margins beyond which the property would not be profitable: ‘it will be too much if the bidding price comes to eighty thousand’. Kang Chen is not entirely passive in the discussion, however, taking his cue from Meiyen Chew to propose that if the property costs fifty thousand pounds it will make a profit in the market. He adds a caveat too, warning that if the house is in ‘an Asian area’ it will not be possible to charge a high rent. In the discussion the couple draw on stereotypes. Kang Chen states that Wolverhampton can’t be compared with the university area in Birmingham. He had told Rachel previously about his idea of setting up a Chinese diner on campus at the University of Birmingham, and here implies that the rental market in Wolverhampton will be less vibrant. In fact at the time of our observation Wolverhampton University had around 24000 students on roll, so parts of Wolverhampton at least would potentially be fertile ground for investment. Meiyen Chew deploys a stereotype to

1阿差 is Cantonese slang referring Indians or Pakistanis with a tone of racial discrimination.
support her argument that they should not go too high in their bidding for the property at auction, saying ‘Indians buy houses for refurbishing’. The interaction provides a window into the entrepreneurial attitudes of the couple. Furthermore, the assertion that ‘if it is in Asian area the rent can’t be too much’ also deploys a recognisable typification.

In a second example, recorded by the couple on the same day, as they perused advertisements in the local newspaper or a web site, Meiyen Chew spotted another potential entrepreneurial opportunity. This time, rather than proposing that they bid for a house, she is looking at an advertisement for the sale of a city centre car park:

1 MYC Highgate, B5 那里, 一百千, car park
   Highgate, B5, one hundred thousand, a car park
2 KC 停车场? 買得过?
   a car park? is it worth buying?
3 MYC B5 还在市中心
   B5, in the city centre
4 KC 就是 city council?
   is it city council?
5 MYC 不是, 要是申請那塊地可以用来做什么, 打電話去问市政府
   no, if you apply for specific use of the land you have to call the city council
6 KC 不知道在那里
   I don’t know where it is
7 MYC B5, Bradford Street
8 KC 你覺得好, 个个都觉得好, 愈拍愈高
   if you think it’s good everybody will think it’s good too, the bidding price will be high
9 MYC (xxxx)
10 KC 要不要試試?
    shall we try?

Once again Meiyen Chew is the proposer of the entrepreneurial idea. She does not clearly articulate a business plan to turn the car park to profit, and Kang Chen puts his reservations, saying that if she sees this as a good business opportunity, so will others, and that will drive up the cost. However, as before he is willing to support his partner’s ambition, and concludes the interaction saying 要不要試試? < shall we try? >.

In another example we heard Meiyen Chew telling her mother (Mo) that she had hardly slept the night before, having woken up at around two a.m. with an idea to profit from export of baby milk formula from the UK to China:

1 MYC 我谂通 佢嚟個 35 鎊 6 罐呢, 包寄倉包送到包清倉包裝, 其實呢係嚟個費用, 嗑 6 罐喝价錢, 牛奶粉呢就自己買, 啭係咪咁, 啁係方理由咁平, 嗑 35 溝呢就係寄費, 你圍起 5 鎊 8 一罐嘅, 加 8 鎊咪 10 幾鎊, 中國賣 300 幾溝一罐, 你寄返去
In this brief interaction between Meiyn Chew and her mother we develop a vivid understanding of the younger woman’s passionate entrepreneurial attitude. She has been lying awake most of the night trying to work out in her head whether her putative project has the potential to be profitable. Her mother seems unconvinced, either blinded by Meiyn Chew’s mental mathematics, or perhaps feeling that her daughter has enough on her plate already with three young children and a developing business. In turn 9 Meiyn Chew seeks to clinch her argument with reference to the Chinese milk scandal of 2008, which led to the death of six infants and the hospitalisation of 54000 more from the consumption of milk formula adulterated with melamine. These events led to the development of a black market in milk powder sales, and buying and shipping foreign made milk powder to China is reported to have proliferated among Chinese people living overseas, including in Birmingham. BBC News (8th April 2013) reported that increased demand was being fuelled by ‘unofficial exports’ to China, and supermarkets including...
ASDA, Sainsbury’s, Tesco and Morrisons announced that the purchase of certain brands would be limited to two units per customer per day (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-22066243).

Meiyen’s argument here may be altruistic in seeking to protect the next generation of Chinese babies, but it is more likely that she is developing a plan to profit from the aftermath of the milk powder scandal in China. Once again we see Meiyen Chew as an entrepreneurial force, at least in her aspirations.

Meiyen Chew told us how important it was to the business that their stall was in the indoor market rather than in the streets of China Town, which adjoined the markets area:

1  if you are there
2  you can only target
3  your Chinese or regular customers
4  it is still the market that attracts more customers
5  many more customers
6  from all backgrounds
7  shop here in the market
8  when a group of customers
9  walks past our counter
10  we say
11  here come the fish
12  sometimes you can catch big fish
13  or lots of fish
14  but sometimes only teeny fish or no fish
15  here in the market
16  one net can catch all sorts of fish
17  but if we were in China Town
18  we could only catch Chinese fish

Meiyen Chew narrates her story through discourse in which the space of the markets (‘here’) is oppositional to the space of China Town (‘there’). Wortham and Reyes (2015: 47) remind us that deictics are denotational indexicals which establish reference in a narrated event by indexically presupposing or creating an aspect of the narrating context itself. Spatial deictics (e.g. ‘here’, ‘there’) presuppose information about place and location. Deictics are often important because they link narrated and narrating events, because their contributions to the narrated event depend on information they presuppose about the narrating event. In the example here Meiyen Chew is speaking to Rachel in the market, and three iterations of the deictic ‘here’ serve to emphasise the significance of the market as the space for the business. Her point is made by creating a parallel discourse in evaluative indexicals in which ‘there’ and ‘in China Town’ are negatively evaluated, and ‘here’ and ‘in the market’ are positively evaluated. Meiyen Chew creates a mini-narrative, and a vivid metaphor, to illustrate her argument. The narrative, in the present tense (lines 8-11) is brought to life through direct speech, as ‘we’ (Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen) are reported to say ‘here come the fish’. These may or may not be words the couple have said, but in the world of the narrative they serve to colourfully illustrate their view of passers-by as potential customers. The metaphor further serves to articulate a view of business as long-term, and potentially undulating in fortune: sometimes you catch big fish, sometimes you catch small fish, but either
way business goes on. In direct speech (‘here come the fish’) Meiyen puts words into her mouth and her husband’s mouth: at this moment they are one and the same, working together to the same ends. There is little distance between the narrated event and the narrating event: Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen find their voice in the narrative, and Meiyen Chew finds her voice in telling the story. The characters represented in the narrative are no longer uncertain, lacking confidence, or without knowledge. They are purveyors of meat and offal, and fishers of women and men. And they are finding their voice.
4. Ideological Becoming

Mikhail Bakhtin conceptualized language as a medium through which we participate in a historical flow of social relationships, struggles and meanings (Bailey 2012: 501). Bakhtin argued that when we engage with the words of others in a “contact zone” (1981: 345) we selectively assimilate these words. This process of assimilation, he proposed, is “the ideological becoming of a human being” (1981: 341). In the process of assimilation the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances (Bakhtin 1986: 89). The discourse of the other no longer performs as information, directions, rules, and so on, “but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behaviour” (1981: 342). That is, we become what we are, and never stop becoming what we are, by engaging in social relations with others. In his research on adolescents in England, Ben Rampton summarised ideological becoming as “the dialogical processes by which people come to align with some voices, discourses and ways of being, and to distance themselves from others” (2014: 276). Our speech is filled with the words of others, which we re-accent and rework. The words of others may be authoritative, and backed by legal structures. Or they may be what Bakhtin called ‘internally persuasive’ – not acknowledged in society, but powerful nonetheless. In the gap between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse we learn to become ourselves: “The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determines the history of an individual ideological consciousness” (1981: 342). For Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew authoritative discourse in the indoor market resides partly in regulation and licensing. This is regulation that was already there, which preceded them: “it is, so to speak, the word of the fathers” (Bakhtin 1981: 342). Regulatory discourse does not change, nor is it normally ambiguous. It has a single meaning, and “it demands our unconditional allegiance” (1981: 343). But when someone else’s discourse is internally persuasive, entirely different possibilities open up:

Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness: consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself

(Bakhtin 1981: 345)

Our own discourse is gradually wrought out of others’ words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and the boundaries between the two may be barely perceptible. The creativity and productiveness of the word, which is half ours and half someone-else’s, consists in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, and is freely developed, applied to new material and new contexts. The word enters into a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses, and our ideological development becomes a never-ending struggle between various available points of view, approaches, directions, and values. For Bakhtin this struggle with another’s discourse sharply influences an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness. The struggle is not the same for all speakers in all times and places. Nor do all words submit easily to assimilation, as they may “remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it”
(1981: 294). Sarah Freedman and Arnetha Ball (2004) proposed that this process of assimilation of the discourse of others was how we develop our way of viewing the world, our system of ideas. Kamran Khan (2013: 66) adopted the notion of ‘ideological becoming’ in his analysis of the journey towards British citizenship of a Yemeni migrant, and demonstrated that when different voices, words and discourses are assimilated and brought into contact this process informs the development of one’s own voice. Khan argued that the independence of one’s own voice is a source of empowerment that permits the speaker to reduce the command of the other’s discourse through the autonomy granted by one’s own voice. Mika Lähteenmäki (2010) suggests that what Bakhtin calls ‘ideological development’ can also be understood as ‘finding one’s voice’, the crucial aspect of which is the appropriation of discourses representing different interpretations and evaluations of reality. Stanton Wortham (2001: 147) points out that to become a self one must speak, and “in speaking one must use words that have been used by others”. In their ethnographic research in a South African township Jan Blommaert and Fie Velghe (2014: 150) speak of the process of “learning voice” for a young woman in a marginalized community as she draws on the repertoires of others to achieve her social goals. As we acquire new knowledge we also acquire attitudes and beliefs (what Bakhtin calls ‘ideology’) constituted in discourses with which we come into contact (Malinowski and Kramsch 2014). We will later develop the notion of ‘repertoires’ as “biographically organized complexes of resources” that “follow the rhythms of human lives” (Blommaert and Backus, 2011: 9), and propose that this notion of a biographically changing repertoire is consistent with Bakhtin’s notion of ideological becoming. Bakhtin recognized that language is diverse (or perhaps, in contemporary terminology, superdiverse) in the process of its heteroglot development. Language is a process teeming with future and former languages, and “pregnant with possibilities” (1981: 356). Lähteenmäki (2010) proposes that Bakhtin’s notions of ‘voice’ and ‘heteroglossia’ have great potential in conceptualizing new forms of linguistic diversity associated with the increased mobility of linguistic resources.

The process of ideological becoming is ever-present and ongoing. It is therefore empirically challenging, as analysis of discrete speech events offers limited purchase on change. Stanton Wortham and Angela Reyes (2015) argue that in order to understand long-term processes such as ideological becoming we must uncover how people, signs, knowledge, and dispositions travel from one event to another and facilitate behaviour in subsequent events. For this reason they propose analysis of the pathways along which linguistic forms, utterances, cultural models, individuals and groups travel across events. Wortham and Reyes adopt Jakobson’s (1957) notion of the ‘narrated event’ and distinguish this from what they term the ‘narrating event’: “The narrated event is what is being talked about, while the narrating event is the activity of talking about it” (Wortham and Reyes 2015: 3). While Jakobson’s ‘narrated event’ refers not only to narratives but to any denoted content, the ‘narrating event’ refers to any discursive interaction among participants, whether or not the speakers are telling stories. We can begin to gain an insight into the ongoing process of ideological becoming for Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew by analysing their repeated interactions with customers, colleagues, and other protagonists in the indoor market. We can develop this understanding through analysis of their narratives of becoming, as they tell their story of setting up a new business in the indoor market, and as they interact with, and assimilate, the voices of others. Analysis of these discourses as narrated and
narrating events enables us to take a coherent look across field notes, audio-recordings, and interviews with Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew, and additional audio-recordings of informal conversations over time.

**Becoming a butcher**

Adrian Blackledge wrote an observational field note as a group of customers approached the butcher’s stall. The interaction was not audio-recorded, as it occurred during the period of observation before audio-recording began:

Three young men of Middle-Eastern or South-East European appearance arrive. The most confident of the three men wants to buy chicken. Bradley serves him. He asks how much for a chicken, and Bradley tells him. The customer says ‘biggest one’. Bradley picks a chicken and shows him. The customer says, ‘no, bigger one’, and Bradley selects another. The customer looks satisfied with the selection now, and he asks for another chicken. Bradley chooses another, and asks, using both words and a ‘cutting’ gesture with his hands, whether the man wants the feet and head cut off. The man initially says yes, then says, ‘no, only-’ and makes a ‘cut-throat’ sign with his left hand. As far as I can see Bradley chops off the feet of both chickens anyway. He bags the two chickens, and gives the bag to the customer. Now one of the other men in the group looks interested in buying something. Kang Chen gets interested. The customer points to chicken pieces, and asks ‘how much that?’. Kang Chen says ‘ten pounds one kilo, eighteen pounds two kilos’. There ensues haggling over the price, with the customer making a series of offers which Kang Chen flatly refuses, always with a smile on his face. Now all three of the customers are smiling, finding amusement in the attempted bartering. The customer says ‘one kilo’, then, almost immediately, ‘two kilo’. Bradley and Kang Chen bag up the chicken. Now Kang Chen says ‘any (xx) for you?’. The word I don’t understand, or recognize, does not appear to be ‘English’, but seems to refer to pork. Kang Chen shows the three men the trays of pork. They seem interested, but show Kang Chen a bag of pork they have bought earlier from another stall. Kang Chen says ‘how much that?’. They don’t immediately answer, so Kang Chen asks again. One of them says ‘three fifty’, and Kang Chen responds: ‘that must be pig’s head’. The three men leave, but within a minute they are back again, looking at the pork. Kang Chen says ‘cheap-cheap’ and the customers echo him. Kang Chen says ‘very good, no fat, no bone inside there’. While Kang Chen and Bradley are serving the three men they often smile broadly, usually at something Kang Chen has said. He seems to enjoy moments when the customers’ English proficiency is not as confident as his, and he is able to make a joke at their expense. This is all done in a friendly and more-or-less convivial way. Kang Chen continues to ask whether the men want anything more. One of them asks him how much he wants for all of the remaining chickens on the counter (there appear to be about half a dozen). After some thought he says ‘thirty-five’. The man holds out a twenty pound note. Kang Chen says ‘thirty five’. Still the man presents the single note. Kang Chen says ‘three, five’, very slowly and deliberately, holding up three fingers of his right hand and five of his left. The man again
offers the twenty pound note. Kang Chen draws a three and a five in the air. Still the man offers the note. Now Kang Chen draws a three and a five on the inside of the glass counter. The man continues to present the twenty pound note. Kang Chen says ‘no, thirty five’. By this time the negotiation has become something of a performance, with smiles all round. The customer finally gives up and the group leaves, with Kang Chen looking over at Rachel and me with a big grin on his face.

The interaction between the three customers and the butcher, Kang Chen and his assistant, Bradley, falls into several sections. First, Bradley attends to the customers. On the whole when Kang Chen and Bradley were on the stall Kang Chen served more of the Chinese customers, and Bradley served those who did not appear to be Chinese. Kang Chen watches this interaction, and it is only when he believes that the group is going to add further purchases to their initial order that he participates actively (‘Kang Chen gets interested’). The next section of the interaction involves Kang Chen haggling with the customers over the price of chicken pieces and pork. A third section occurs after the men first leave the scene and then return, and decide to buy pork. A fourth section revolves around a negotiation over the cost of a large number of chickens.

In the first section the butcher’s assistant, Bradley, serves the three men, one of whom asks for the ‘biggest’ chicken. Before he wraps the meat Bradley wants to know whether the customer wants the chicken’s heads and feet cut off. In asking the question Bradley uses ‘both words and a cutting gesture with his hands’. The cutting gesture is an ‘indexical’, signalling its object by pointing to it (Wortham and Reyes 2015). Here Bradley’s gesture presupposes that the customers have limited proficiency in English, and are likely to understand him better if he scaffolds his spoken question with an action which represents the meaning of the words. When the customer initially agrees, but then wants to make it clear that he prefers only the head chopped off, he introduces another gesture to represent his meaning. The customer’s metaphorical gesture (‘a cut-throat sign with his left hand’) is deployed not because he believes that Bradley has limited comprehension of his language, but more likely because (1) his language is not among the available orders of discourse here and now, and (2) he is not confident that his limited English is comprehensible. The trader and the customer do not have a spoken language in common, but gesture will do as they communicate by whatever means possible. Although part of the communicative interaction does not appear to proceed successfully (the field notes tell us that Bradley cut off the feet), the indexical signs (here literally signs made with the hand) begin to accumulate and establish gesture as relevant social action. We will see that gesture played a significant role in encounters and repertoires in the indoor market.

In the second section (from ‘Kang Chen gets interested’ to ‘that must be pig’s head’) Kang Chen involves himself in selling to the three customers. One of them (literally) points to chicken pieces and asks ‘how much that?’. The butcher tells them, and in doing so indicates his policy that the more you buy, the better the price. The social practice of haggling over the price of goods is typical in the market, but less so outside of the market. Kang Chen refuses to cede ground to the customer, but the interaction is convivial, with smiles all round. The smiles of both the butcher and his customers are examples of “everyday metacommentary” (Rymes 2014: 1), as they are deployed as a means of sharing the protagonists’ understanding that they are engaged in a meta-
negotiation: ‘Now all three of the customers are smiling, finding amusement in the attempted bartering’. The smiles are comments on communication, acknowledgements that the customer is trying it on, and the trader is having none of it. They signal an understanding of the social action in play, by pointing to its communicative value (Rymes 2014: 11). If the customers’ attempt to knock down the price fails, nothing is lost. This is understood by all, and the attempt is a source of amusement. The field note is almost inevitably a further level, or layer, of metacommentary, as Adrian’s note comments on the smiles which comment on the haggling interaction. The present text (this report) is of course a further level, or layer, of metacommentary – and so it goes on. Having completed the sale of two kilos of chicken pieces without knocking down the price, Kang Chen asked the customer whether he would also like to buy some pork. This is a typical strategy for this butcher: he would regularly ask his customers to top up their purchase in some way. Kang Chen adapts a translanguaging strategy here, deploying a word for ‘pork’ which he thinks will be familiar to the customers. Although he does not know for sure where they are from, he makes a snap assessment and tries out a word which acts as an indexical, pointing to his willingness to communicate on their terms, and to meet them in their linguistic territory. It is not clear whether they understand the term, as Kang Chen also physically shows the men the pork. When the customers show him (again showing rather than telling) they have already bought some pork elsewhere, Kang Chen precisely echoes their earlier question: ‘how much that?’. Repetition in discursive interaction is rarely neutral, and here recontextualised speech serves to align the butcher with his customer. When he finds out how much they paid for their pork at another stall he suggests that they have been sold an inferior cut of meat: ‘that must be pig’s head’.

The third section of the field note describes the three men leaving, only to return a minute later, apparently having changed their mind about the pork. The field note indicates that Kang Chen and his assistant comment to each other – both in words and in smiles – about the customers, and (it seems) the way they speak. Rymes (2014) argues that metacommentary serves an important role in pointing to what people see as significant in an interaction. The field note here proposes that Kang Chen enjoys ‘moments when the customers’ English proficiency is not as confident as his, and he is able to make a joke at their expense’. The smiling metacommentary of the two butchers reveals the significance of this. In the final section of the field note (from ‘One of them asks him’) one of the men asks Kang Chen how much he wants for all the remaining chickens on his counter. He has to consider the unusual order, and says ‘thirty-five’. The customer offers a twenty pound note. This may be an example of miscommunication, or an attempt to haggle. However, our interpretation (having been present at the time) is that the customer was recontextualising the earlier example of convivial haggling, which elicited much smiling and entertainment. Kang Chen deploys four different semiotic strategies to communicate ‘thirty-five’ to the customer, who steadfastly continues to present his twenty pound note. It is not certain (and was not certain at the time) whether Kang Chen realized that the order for all the remaining chickens had been a means of setting up the joke. However, by the end of the interaction both sides are engaged in an artistic representation of haggling. That is, the social action no longer functioned at face value as a commercial interaction, but became performance, and for entertainment rather than trade. The performance indexes the stereotype of the immigrant customer haggling with the butcher, unable to understand, and failing to complete the interaction.
In Bakhtin’s (1984: 194) terms it is a stylization, as the customer light-heartedly parodies the socially typical actions of haggling over prices and communicating with gestures. Despite the suggestion that Kang Chen enjoys a joke at the expense of these customers, it appears that the joke is ultimately on him. However, no harm is done, and the interaction ends with ‘smiles all round’ once again.

What can we say about Kang Chen’s interaction with three young men who came to his stall to buy chicken? Little enough from this single example. However, if we view it as typical, and connect it with other, similar events we begin to see a pattern which reveals that the butcher engages in a wide range of strategies to ensure that communicative practice enables commercial activity at his butcher’s stall. First he watches, perhaps evaluating the customers, and their potential to spend money at the stall. He offers discounted prices on the basis of ‘the more you buy the lower the price’. He engages in haggling over prices, but does not give any ground. He translanguages, apparently deploying linguistic resources not normally associated with his background. He echoes the customers’ language, perhaps to align with them. He deploys a strategically simplified version of English. He engages in direct sales talk (‘very good, no fat, no bone inside there’). He comments on the customers and makes jokes at their expense. He smiles and engages in convivial interaction. He deploys a range of gestures for communicative purposes. We have seen that when they started out as butchers, three years before this observation, Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew had no knowledge of the trade:

The very beginning was really hard. Although we had both worked in restaurants and take-aways before, neither of us had been a butcher. We didn’t even know how to cut the meat for the stall

Three years later Kang Chen is still engaged in the process of becoming who he is through interaction with the discourse of others. The field note makes visible the multiple means by which he interacts with this group of customers. In each discourse strategy we can observe the dialogical process by which he aligns with some voices, discourses and ways of being, and distances himself from others. This discourse is half his, and half the discourse of the other. Haggling over prices, offering a symbolic word in another language, echoing the voice of the customer, strategic simplification, gesture, metapragmatic signs such as smiling: these internally persuasive discourses are both the voice of the customer and the voice of the butcher. They have been assimilated through multiple similar interactions with customers. Through these interactions and negotiations the word comes to be re-accented in the voice of Kang Cheng.

We can look at another example of this process, this time as a transcript of an audio-recording. Here Meiyen Chew (MYC), Kang Chen (KC) and the assistant butcher, Bradley (BJ), are discussing a birthday party to which Bradley has been invited. You can listen to the interaction at the following link:

1. KC: you going?
2. BJ: I dunno
3. KC: uh?
4. BJ: I dunno
5. MYC: he dunno (3) you said you’re going
6. KC: it’s free beer
7. BJ: uh?
8. KC: free beer
9. MYC: you said you’re going
10. BJ: I said I was going, it’s money ennit
11. MYC: uh? you got free beer, no?
12. BJ: no, pay for your own beer
13. MYC: pay for own beer
14. KC: got free beer?
15. MYC: no free beer, pay for their own beer
16. KC: you pay?
17. BJ: you gotta pay your own b- beer yea
18. KC: uh? you pay yourself?
19. MYC: [to KC:] < has to pay >
20. KC: fuckin hell!
21. BJ: [laughs] pay your own dr- beer
22. KC: pay yourself?
23. BJ: yea gotta pay to get there pay for drinks buy Clive drink then pay to get home (. ) many money
24. MYC: [to KC:] < they pay for the transportation to and back from there >
25. BJ: ten twenty, about a hundred pounds
26. MYC: hundred pounds
27. BJ: me and me and er Amy to go, plus baby sitter, that’s another twenty pounds, so hundred and twenty
28. MYC: you have to family you go by yourself?
29. BJ: I’m going by myself, cheap cheap
30. KC: [to MYC:] < are these occasions all like this? >
31. MYC: [to KC:] < don’t know > [to BJ:] the birthday invitation is like this pay for your own beer?
32. BJ: yeah
33. MYC: [sighs] British!
34. BJ: the Chinese then if you get a birthday invitation they pay for you?
35. MYC: pay for everything
36. BJ: yeah?
37. MYC: if you invite if you invite somebody to the restaurant
38. BJ: yea
39. MYC: they pay for everything if I invite you to my birthday party
40. BJ: you pay
41. MYC: if I invite you to my home to have a party then we cover every drink buy everything buy beer
42. BJ: oh right
and then you just have just drink and enjoy yourself

English now hehehe if you got if you get invited to like your house you gotta take beer, wine, present

you have to buy the present for the, course, but er you don’t have to bring beer bring wine

right then I need to get some more Chinese friends hehehe

Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen are astonished by Bradley’s account of having to pay to attend a party. Kang Chen articulates his surprise in the vernacular: ‘fuckin hell!’, while Meiyen Chew deploys a resigned and exasperated stereotype: ‘British!’ Bradley concludes that he may ‘need to get some more Chinese friends’. Throughout the discussion ‘Chinese’ cultural practices are stereotypically constructed as different from ‘British’ cultural practices, and are characterized as oppositions. The narrated event of ‘Chineseness’ versus ‘Britishness’ constructs a fault line between two sets of cultural practices which appears to represent difference. However, the narrating event - the discussion of stereotypes of ‘Chinese’ and ‘British’ social life - constitutes an arena of communication in which the protagonists unite around their interest in cultural differences. It is important to investigate the local ways in which people define and use stereotypes in everyday interactions (Reyes 2006: 28). The stereotypes in play here are deployed not so much as hegemonic and oppressive structures, but rather as flexible and intricate resources which constitutes common ground in the discussion of difference. In addition to these typifications of ‘British’ and ‘Chinese’ cultural practices which underpin the conversation, there are other features of discourse to note here, including translanguaging, translation, strategic simplification, and the construction of difference and sameness as a resource for social relations.

At turn 5 Meiyen Chew deploys a discourse strategy which is characteristic of interactions between the couple when they are conversing with a third party, in that she ‘translates’ for Kang Chen: ‘he dunno’. Although the interaction is entirely in English at this point, Meiyen Chew intervenes to repeat Bradley’s point. At turns 13 (‘pay for own beer’) and 15 (‘no free beer, pay for their own beer’) she repeats the strategy, confirming to her husband that Bradley will have to buy his own beer at the birthday party. Here Meiyen Chew appears to speak on Bradley’s behalf, again ‘translating’ English into English for her husband. At turn 18 Kang Chen asks, perhaps in disbelief, ‘uh? you pay yourself?’ and Meiyen Chew answers in Mandarin: ‘has to pay’. At 24 Meiyen Chew translates Bradley’s explanation that transport is paid for: ‘they pay for the transportation to and back from there’. Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen both believed that her English proficiency was more advanced than his. This practice of Meyan Chew translating / interpreting for her husband was a regular pattern. A few moments later (30) Kang Chen asks Meiyen Chew a clarification question in Mandarin: ‘are these occasions all like this?’. After answering him in Mandarin (‘don’t know’) she puts the question to Bradley in English: ‘the birthday invitation is like this pay for your own beer?’ In shuttling between languages (Canagarajah 2011) Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew treat their linguistic repertoire as an integrated system. They deploy translangugating practices (Garçia and Li Wei 2014) to make sense of their multilingual world. Their social interaction constructs the ‘zone’ in which the conversation occurs as a communicative space where translation and translanguaging are not merely tolerated, but are commonplace, everyday practices. Through these and other strategies
(in Rampton’s terms) they align with some voices, discourses and ways of being, and distance themselves from others. We will return to discussion of translation and translanguaging in contact zones.

In this brief interaction Bradley appears to deploy strategically simplified English in explaining his account of the party, including: ‘pay for get up there, many money’ (10), and ‘I will by myself, cheap, cheap’ (14). This type of discourse seems to have evolved in the relationship between Bradley and Kang Chen. In fact it is characteristic of the way in which Kang Chen spoke to his customers. In particular, as we saw in the field notes, he often deployed the phrase ‘cheap, cheap’ when engaged in sales talk. For example, in serving a regular customer Kang Chen said: ‘I just free delivery for you, cheap, cheap’. He knew the customer well, and the phrase ‘cheap cheap’ seemed to be delivered with humour, in a stylized way. On another occasion Kang Chen served a woman (FC):

1
KC
five kilo ten pounds cheap cheap
2
FC
cheap cheap
3
KC
yeah cheap cheap

Here the customer echoes the butcher, making a metacomment on the phrase ‘cheap cheap’, creating a verbal representation of it in a convivial yet evaluative way. In the previous example, when the group of men came to buy chicken, we saw customers behaving in the same way: ‘Kang Chen says cheap-cheap and the customers echo him’. Now Kang Chen stands his ground and repeats the phrase which has been held up to mild ridicule. On more than one occasion we heard Kang Chen ventriloquate this phrase in the mouth of a typical customer. In the following example there are no customers at the stall, and Kang Chen and Bradley create an impromptu role play which represents a negotiation over prices between the voice of a typical customer and the voice of a typical market trader:

1
KC
ten pounds? cheap cheap
2
BJ
(xxxx)
3
KC
five pounds? half price
4
BJ
two pounds
5
KC
two pounds? OK, I give you three pounds, keep the change

Here the butchers are clowning around, and in doing so they represent themselves as characters in a typical sales interaction, as they play out the role of customers always looking for a better deal. In Wortham and Reyes’ (2015) terms the narrating event comments on the narrated event, and in doing so links to hundreds, if not thousands, of other speech events in which the butchers served customers and engaged in negotiations over prices. The representation of the sales interaction is a typification which serves as a reflexive resource for the butchers to have fun with their work role, and also to comment on their typical customer. The phrase ‘cheap cheap’ was clearly a resource within the repertoire of both butchers. Its deployment was often stylized and ironic, indexing the voice of a typical interaction between a market trader and a customer in the superdiverse market. Returning to the conversation about Bradley’s birthday invitation, his deployment of ‘cheap cheap’ indexes his light-hearted attitude to the ‘narrated event’ of the
birthday party, rather than an attempt to speak in a way comprehensible to Kang Chen. ‘Cheap cheap’ has become a resource developed between the two butchers, to be deployed (usually) as a metacomment on their interaction with customers. As we have seen, it was also picked up by customers as a means to comment on the butchers.

In saying ‘many money’ Bradley is probably not speaking in a way which he believes is more comprehensible than his usual, non-market repertoire. Rather, it may be that his discourse flattens distinctions between himself and Kang Chen, as they share a ‘lect’ which for each of them is both ‘theirs’ and ‘not theirs’. Throughout the short discussion the construction of typifications of ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Britishness’ as different is an acknowledgement of difference which is deployed at least partly as a means of constructing a space for sameness. In the next section we will elaborate on the notion of the construction of ‘difference’ as a resource for ‘sameness’ and communication in superdiverse contexts. Here the clearly articulated and stereotypical differences between ‘Chinese’ practices and ‘British’ practices in relation to social life open up a space for discussion which is convivial and good-humoured. This is clearly evidenced in Bradley’s conclusion that he needs ‘to get some more Chinese friends, hahaha’. In saying this, and in his laughter, he both acknowledges and limits difference.

In this interaction the discourse of difference becomes a site for communicative interaction, and for shared experience. All participants are interested in what we might characterize as ‘cultural’ differences between ‘Chinese’ and ‘British’ practices. But they are differences around which they can unite, and which they can share. While these differences are not seen as particularly unusual, they are at the same time being acknowledged. Difference is something that people live with, and “diversity can have a unifying effect” (Wessendorf 2014: 60). Paul Gilroy (2006b) argues that instead of focusing only on ‘difference’, we might also consider ‘sameness’. He refers to the interaction of sameness and difference as “conviviality – just living together” (2006b :7). Gilroy (2006a) calls for a shift in thinking about difference which no longer misunderstands and oversimplifies ‘culture’ as “ethnic property to be owned and held under copyright” (2006a: 43). In the interaction here the acknowledgement of difference is a threat to no-one. It does not lead to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication. Rather, through the shared deployment of stereotypes, “a degree of differentiation can be combined with a large measure of overlapping” (Gilroy 2006a: 40).

In both of these examples Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew deploy a wide range of discourse strategies as they interact with each other, and with their colleagues and customers. Their interactions constitute constant and ongoing negotiations, in which they conduct their business, set fair prices and stick to them, push for sales, comment on their customers, make evaluative comments about typifications of ‘British’ cultural practices, translate and translanguage, and make meaning in zones of encounter by whatever means possible. But it is more than this. The discursive worlds of Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew are not made of a series of separate communicative events, despite the frequency and regularity of their service interactions with customers. Rather, their ideological becoming is constituted in pathways of linked events (Wortham and Reyes 2015) in which they encounter a world of alien discourses which become both theirs and not theirs, and through which they find their voice.
A central concern of Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew was that of their family. This extended to education, health, work, and the care and welfare of their children. The couple had three very young children at the time of our observations – the youngest of them born on the day before our fieldwork was due to begin. We heard on a number of occasions that the parents were concerned with the educational success of their children. In the following example Kang Chen is attempting to teach mathematics to his young daughter (LW):

1. KC 這個是加,這個是減,就是除掉,ok到這邊來做
   this is add, this is subtract, that is to take away, OK, do it over here
2. LW 爸爸, 5 take away 5 是 5
   Dad, five take away five is five
3. KC 這個是 5, 5 個蘋果吃掉 5 個, um um um um um, 还有几个?
   this is five minus five, you have five apples and you ate five, um um um um um, how many apples left?
4. LW 5 個
   five
5. KC 吃掉 5 個, 吃到肚子裏面, 还有几个?
   you have eaten five apples, into your stomach, you still have five?
6. LW 6 個
   six
7. KC 那有愈吃愈多的?
   how can you have more after you have eaten them?
8. LW 七, 八, 九, 十, 十一, 十二
   seven eight nine ten eleven twelve
9. KC 我不要跟你說, 你這麼笨,還愈吃愈多
   I don’t want to talk to you, you are stupid, you think you have more apples after you have eaten them
10. LW 是零, 零
    zero
11. KC 是啊, 5 個吃掉 5 個了嗎, 不是沒有了, 就是零,是不是?
    yes, five eaten five, nothing left, that is zero, isn’t it?

In turn 1 Kang Chen takes a factual and business-like approach to teaching mathematics, pointing out the appropriate written symbols which represent mathematical concepts. In telling his daughter where to do her maths he seems to expect her to be able to work independently. However, the five-year-old girl has different ideas. Whether through her incomplete understanding of subtraction, or her attempts at playful engagement with her father (or perhaps both) she sustains the interaction. She begins by stating an incorrect equation, boldly and apparently confidently making the assertion, in mixed Mandarin and English, that five minus five is five. This engages Kang Chen’s attention, and he makes the problem more concrete.
through a number-story about apples. At turn 3 he tells the story, miming eating five apples, and asks his daughter for a revised solution. At turns 4, 6, and 8 Kang Chen’s daughter provides different answers to his question, each of them incorrect. It is only when he expresses his frustration, and says he is no longer willing to talk to her, that she immediately produces the correct answer. This restores and stabilises the interaction, which had momentarily threatened to capsize. It is only at this point that it becomes clear that Kang Chen’s daughter has been playfully teasing him all along.

A further dimension of family life was the care and welfare of the children, and arrangements made to support the parents with their care. In the example here Meiyen Chew asks her mother for help taking her daughter to the clinic for an appointment:

1 MYC 媽,拜五你識唔識帶阿妹去打針?
   Mum, do you know how to take little sis for an injection appointment on Friday?
2 KC 你問個 Yvonne 得唔得閒
   ask if Yvonne is available
3 MYC 唔問 Yvonne. 媽,我聽日同同阿妈帶你去
   no, don’t ask Yvonne. Mum, tomorrow I’ll ask Tung Tung’s mum to take you there
4 KC 呢个星期五?
   this Friday?
5 MYC 唔
   um
6 KC 你唔 book 二三四?
   why didn’t you book Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday?
7 MYC 就係拜五
   it’s only on Fridays
8 KC 呵?
   ha?
9 MYC: 就係一五有護士在那裏, 就係懷孕时候看的, 只有是星期五,沒有其他
   the nurse is only there on Fridays
10 KC 只有一个護士
   there’s only one nurse?
11 MYC 很小,經常 fully booked
   it’s very small, and always fully booked

Arrangements for the care and welfare of the three young children while their parents were at work on the market stall were a key aspect of the rhythm of family life. The responsibility for these arrangements was largely Meiyen Chew’s domain, although as we can see in this example, Kang Chen was also willing to become involved and to express his opinion. The discussion includes Meiyen Chew’s parents, and is therefore conducted mainly in Cantonese. At turn 9, however, Meiyen Chew switches to Mandarin to answer her husband’s question (‘why didn’t you book Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday’). This may be because she wants to speak only to
Kang Chen. However, this interaction fits a pattern we have seen elsewhere: when Kang Chen either asks for clarification or implies that he has not understood clearly, as he does at turn 8 here, Meiyen Chew invariably switches to Mandarin.

A few minutes later Meiyen Chew’s mother expresses her uncertainty about taking her granddaughter to the clinic:

1. Mo 我又唔曉講話, 啟野都唔識, 点样來去?
   I don’t know how to speak, I don’t know anything, how can I go?
2. MYC 我寫張紙俾你, 攪俾佢睇
   I’ll write it down on paper, you can take it with you
3. Mo 同爸爸一齊去
   I’ll go with your dad
4. MYC 同爸爸一齊去, 帶阿妹去, 帶阿弟去
   go with Dad, bring ah Mei and ah D as well
5. Mo 几多点?
   what time?
6. MYC 十点, 你十点出到去, 打得針嘅十点半, 你講十点
   ten o’clock, you go there at ten, finish the injection by ten thirty

Meiyen Chew’s mother says she is concerned about not being able to speak English at the clinic. Meiyen Chew tells her mother that she will write down what she needs to say. However, her mother is not reassured by this, and suggests her own strategy, of taking her husband with her. This means that the other two children will also have to make the trip, but Meiyen Chew agrees. This is a typical, quotidian example of the kind of domestic negotiation about child care in this family over the period during which they recorded themselves. Three days later Meiyen Chew recorded the family following her daughter’s appointment at the clinic:

1  Fa 妹妹冇乜爽, 都唔笑
   little sister’s not feeling well, not laughing
2  MYC 今日都冇笑
   no, not laughing today
3  Mo 腳仔痛痛, 打兩隻腳仔
   her two little legs are sore after the injection
4  Fa 有冇發燒?
   has she got a temperature?
5  MYC 冇發燒, 眼瞓多少, 正常
   no, it’s normal to feel sleepy

Meiyen Chew and her father and mother all express their concern that the young girl is experiencing drowsiness and pain following her injection. Although this is an everyday
interaction it offers an insight into the caring nature of the adults in the family. As we have seen, Meiyen Chew also juggled with arrangements for taking her children to school. Kang Chen started early at the market stall, and she was anxious to help him. More than once she talked about the difficulties of keeping on top of child care and work.

Meiyen Chew was always willing to keep her transnational relatives up-to-date with family developments in the UK. Here she describes to her brother-in-law her daughter’s behaviour, and announces the name of her new baby:

In the last week of August 2014 Meiyen Chew gave birth to a daughter, referred to here as ‘little sis’. Meiyen Chew describes the subsequent ‘tantrums’ of her other daughter, Liwen. Her brother-in-law appears to make a link between physical characteristics and childhood behavior. Meiyen Chew’s brother-in-law also commented on the name the baby would be given:

In this sequence Meiyen Chew and her brother-in-law exchange views about names for the baby. It is notable that Kang Chen’s brother asks Meiyen Chew about the baby’s ‘English name’. He is willing to offer Meiyen Chew advice about her baby’s name, worrying that it sounds like a bot’s name. However, Meiyen Chew points out to him that it is only when it is written in Chinese that
it sounds like a boy’s name. Implicitly she argues that the name is fine for a girl in England because her name is unlikely to be written in Chinese.

For this family an important dimension of their discourse was the management and organisation of domestic finance. The family was constantly concerned to ensure that their expenditure on basic and luxury items was good value for money. In a typical example Meiyan Chew discusses with her mother (Mo) and father (Fa) the cost of mobile phones:

1. **MYC** 爸,你嘅个 Nokia,冇耳机嘅个又落价,落到三十鎊而家, 昔日六十鎊, 而家賣三十
   Dad, that Nokia phone, the one with no headset, the price has dropped, it was sixty pounds now it’s thirty

2. **Mo** 三十可以買
ty thirty pounds is a good buy

3. **MYC** 冇耳机,一溝錢,一鎊店有
   there’s no headset, but that’s just one pound from the pound shop

4. **Fa** 有时買啲嘢,都唔知買好唔買好 Nokia, 冇嘅个中国货?
sometimes with that sort of thing you don’t when is the best time to buy. It’s Nokia, but are there any Chinese phones?

5. **MYC** 我睇吓
   let me see

6. **Fa** 三十鎊唔駛買咭呀,包埋咗呢?
thirty pounds including the SIM card?

7. **MYC** 四十
   forty

8. **Fa** 十九溝電話,有咁平嘅
   phones selling for nineteen pounds is so cheap

In this interaction Meiyan Chew discusses the price of a mobile phone which appears to be advertised in the local newspaper, or on a web site. In turn 2 Meiyan Chew’s mother approves of the deal. However, her father is more cautious, asking whether this is the right time to buy, and whether there are any Chinese phones for sale (he may or may not have known that a month before this interaction, in October 2014, the Finnish phone company Nokia signed a major deal with China Mobile). He also wants to know whether the price of the phone includes the SIM card. In turn 8 it appears that Meiyan Chew’s father consults the newspaper or web site himself and notices that some phones are on sale for as little as nineteen pounds. This brief interaction offers an insight into the quotidian discourse through which the family constantly kept a check on family finances and ensured that they got the best deal for their money.

We heard the family discussing the cost of anything from insurance to bus fares. In another everyday example Kang Chen and Meiyan Chew are discussing the purchase of vests:

1. **KC** 哎,你方買長袖,淨係買烏龟衫
err, you didn’t buy long sleeves, only vests

2 MYC 烏亀衫好啦,衣家冇爛
vests are good, they won’t get worn out

3 KC 梗係買長袖,傻咗
you should have bought long sleeves, silly

4 Fa 烏亀衫貴否
are vests expensive?

5 MYC 60鎊減到21鎊
the price was cut from sixty pounds down to twenty one

6 Fa 咁平
cheap

7 MYC 係
yes

In turns 1 and 3 Kang Chen criticises Meiyen Chew for buying the wrong items. However, her father intervenes by asking about the price of vests. In doing so he mitigates the potential disagreement between the couple. He offers his daughter a cue to say what a bargain she found in purchasing the vests, and he readily supports her: ‘咁平 < cheap >’. In this brief interaction the good value of the items seems to override the question of their suitability. Throughout the family’s discussions of domestic finance there is an overriding concern to know the value of money, and the value of goods.

A further feature of family life was attention to food. Meiyen Chew in particular took on the role of regulating food consumption in the household, frequently checking that the children had eaten, and making sure that they were eating what she considered to be a good diet. In the following example, however, Kang Chen initiates questions to her daughter, Liwen (LW):

1 KC 好啦,阿弟去吃飯囉麗文, 你們吃過飯飯沒有?
all right, Ah D have dinner. Liwen, have you eaten?

2 LW 有,中午吃飯
yes, at noon

3 KC 中午吃,你早上不也吃了, 中午吃,現在肚子又餓了
you had lunch, you also had breakfast, but you should be hungry now

All of the adults in the family become involved in the regulation of the young children’s eating. In the following example Meiyen Chew’s mother is critical of the two children who are eating sweets when they have not had their dinner:

1 Mo 打你兩個,沒有吃點飯,就吃糖糖,都沒有了
I should hit you two, you haven’t eaten dinner and you’re eating candy
On a number of occasions we heard the family discuss and comment on particular foods. In the following example Meiyen Chew, Kang Chen, and Meiyen Chew’s mother are at the dinner table:

1. **MYC** 這個是豬尾巴,作要不要?  
   this is pig tail, do you want it?
2. **KC** 呢個鹵水几好食, 呢個豆腐泡, 我地瞓得時係学校, 三文六个  
   this gravy sauce is tasty, this bean curd, when we were at school it was three dollars for six
3. **Mo** 平  
   it’s cheap
4. **KC** 重平, 瞑時時九幾年, 好貴  
   not cheap, it was in the nineties, but now it’s expensive

The commentary on the quality of the food is integrated with discussion of economics. This was not unusual in this family. In the following example a question about buying beer becomes a discussion of discounted groceries at the supermarket:

1. **KC** 几时去 Sainsbury 買啤酒番嚟?  
   when are you going to buy beer from Sainsbury’s?
2. **MYC** 等陣去囉, 今日几多号?  
   later today, what date is today?
3. **KC** 八号  
   eighth
4. **MYC** 聽日先去, Sainsbury 发 coupon 过来嘅, 買上三十鎊便宜六鎊, 但是酒不包在里面, 那个不成  
   I’ll go tomorrow we’ve got a coupon from Sainsbury’s, six pounds discount for purchases of thirty pounds excluding alcohol
5. **KC** 你買兩罐奶粉都去咗几十鎊  
   if you buy two tins of milk powder that come up to twenty pounds or so
6. **MYC** 係呀, 早知我就去 Sainsbury 買, 我今日買咗兩罐返嚟  
   yes, I should have bought the two tins at Sainsbury’s
7. **KC** 佢相干, 你摆啲度又唔會壞, 又唔會臭嘅  
   no problem, you put them here, they won’t turn bad
8. **MYC** 佢唔知包唔包奶粉, 如果佢奶粉唔包又係死  
   I don’t know if milk powder is excluded, it’s no use if it is

The couple always have an eye on finance, checking the best deals and ensuring that they get value for money. Milk powder was often a priority for Meiyen Chew in balancing domestic finances.
In another dinner-table interaction Meiyen Chew suggests that they shop for food in the market on Saturday:

1. MyC 星期六的時候你們搭車出來, 收工过后去那个 market
come out by bus on Saturday after work we’ll go to the market
2. KC 星期六夜晚好多人
it’s very crowded on Saturday evening
3. MyC 人多先熱鬧
it’s lively
4. KC 要不要吃那个 mackerel 魚?
shall we have some mackerel?
5. MyC 不要, mackerel 好腥
no, mackerel is smelly
6. KC 以前去 Sainsbury Morrison 我地都係買 mackerel 魚食 食唔食三文魚?
we used to buy mackerel at Sainsbury’s or Morrison’s, how about salmon?
7. MyC 三文魚又係, 食多又壞
too much salmon is no good
8. KC 買条 turbot 反唔蒸
buy a turbot for steaming
9. MyC 唔好食, 又多骨, 又滑滑
no good, too many bones, and it’s slippery
10. KC 就係 咁先好食, 你乜嘢口味
it tastes good, you have a strange sense of taste
11. MyC 你買返嚟試下
you try to buy some
12. KC 咁大, 一个人边度食得哂
it’s so big, how can I finish it on my own

In turn 1 Meiyen Chew switches from Mandarin to Cantonese. This is a dinner-table conversation, and although they do not speak, it is likely that Meiyen Chew’s parents are present. The couple discuss the relative merits of different fish, disagreeing in an agreeable way as they debate what to buy at the market at the weekend. On this occasion it is less the value for money than the taste, texture, and size of the fish that is crucial. In this respect food provides a quotidian site of negotiation between the couple.

A final feature of becoming a family was a link to family in the territory from which Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew had migrated. Links to China and Malaysia were a common topic in the family discourse. Particularly with Meiyen Chew’s parents staying with the young family at this time, reference to Malaysia was a frequent part of everyday discourse. In the following example Meiyen Chew’s parents have been shopping.

1. KC 拎咗几箱返來?
how many luggage cases have you brought back?
Shipping goods home is a key dimension of transnational practice. Here Meiyen Chew’s father has invested in new luggage in which to ship purchases when he returns home to Malaysia. His professed insecurity about technology was a regular discourse in the family, particularly relating to computers and mobile phones.

In the same discussion about the goods purchased by Meiyen Chew and her parents during their shopping trip, Kang Chen expressed his reservations about the clothes his wife had bought for a relative in Malaysia:

1 KC 講開又講, 你買衫返去俾巧兒著, 人地馬拉熱都熱死 by the way, you brought some clothes for Hau Yee, it’s so hot in Malaysia
2 MYC 夜晚佢地瞓覚, 又開冷氣, 又方拎毯 they have air conditioning on when they sleep, and no blanket
3 KC 馬拉熱死, 重要長袖 it’s so hot in Malaysia, and with long sleeves
4 Mo 夜晚黴俾佢瞓覚著 she can wear them for sleeping at night
5 KC 冷氣開細啲咪得 you have to turn down the air conditioning
6 MYC 冇開冷氣又黴唔到 I can’t sleep without the air conditioning on
Kang Chen repeats his point that it is hot in Malaysia, despite the fact that Meiyan Chew and her mother are from Malaysia themselves. He is clearly anxious that the clothes purchased for their relative are inappropriate for the conditions in Malaysia.

In another reference to Malaysia Meiyan Chew tries to teach her father how to watch videos online on his mobile phone:

1. **MYC** 睇乜嘢?
   what do you want to watch?
2. **Fa** 有咩睇乜都睇得?
   what can you watch, anything?
3. **MYC** 睇新聞,光明日報,星州日報,報紙
   news, Kwong Ming daily, Singapore daily newspaper
4. **Fa** 係日日,係过时嘅
   current or back dated?
5. **MYC** 日日
   current
6. **Fa** 係本地,馬來亜?
   local or Malaysian?
7. **MYC** 星州日報咪馬來亜
   Singapore Daily is Malaysian
8. **Fa** 有戲睇嘅冇?
   any drama?
9. **MYC** 有, Youtube. 嗳, 星州日報,你識睇冇?
   yes, Youtube. see, Singapore Daily, can you see?
10. **Fa** 重要新聞
    main news
11. **MYC** 睇到冇?
    can you see?
12. **Fa** 睇到
    yes
13. **MYC** 你愛睇戲就 youtube 呢度. 你愛睇個歌? 邓丽君?
    you can watch video in Youtube here. which song you like? Deng Li Jun?
14. **Fa** 愛打落去?
    I type the name?
15. **MYC** 愛打落去, 有網先睇得到
    type, but you can only watch with internet access

In this interaction Meiyan Chew shows her father how to access the internet on his mobile phone. In order to gain his interest she focuses on web sites in which he is likely to be interested. These are news and music channels which he knows from back home in Malaysia. Meiyan Chew offers her father the new technology as a means of making available that with which he is
familiar, including an online version of a Malaysian newspaper, and a video of one of his favourite singers.

There are few references to China or Chinese in the material audio-recorded at home by Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew. However, the couple was regularly in communication with Kang Chen’s mother through QQ, and with his brother via WeChat. A familiar characteristic of transnational relationships is the transfer of money, often electronically. A stereotype of a transnational family is that the migrant traveller will send funds back to the home country once having made a life in the new place and found paid work. In the examples we see here, however, Meiyen Chew’s brother-in-law is trying to arrange to send money from China to the UK to support the young migrant family:

In the continuing sequence of messages Meiyen Chew’s brother-in-law not only wants to enable the transfer of money, but also would like to make sure the technology is in place for him to communicate transnationally with his brother:
Meiyen Chew’s brother-in-law complains that her brother has not added him to his WeChat account, and nor has he added him as a contact for the international messaging application, QQ. Although we have clear evidence of transnational communication in action here, such communication is only as effective as the organization of its users.

The family frequently made references to emblematic templates which represented a version of Chineseness. A sustained interaction, audio-recorded in the domestic setting, concerns discussion of the possible purchase of a mythical ‘Pixiu’, made of jade:

1. Mo 你第二个礼拜带阿康去睇
   let ah Kang take a look next week
2. Fa 睇乜?
   what to see?
3. MYC 佢講嘅玉嘅貔貅
   she is talking about the pixiu made of jade
4. Fa 哦嘅隻,咁貴
   oh that, it’s very expensive
5. MYC 一隻一百鎊就講買, 兩隻兩百鎊就買, 兩隻一千鎊,買唔過
   we will buy it if they are a hundred pounds each or two hundred for two, but they’re not worth a thousand for two
6. Fa 佢招到財就買, 兩隻千幾鎊呀?
   we’ll buy if it can really help to increase our wealth, a thousand pounds for two
7. MYC 千五鎊
   fifteen hundred
8. Mo 睇佢減到几多
   see if they can lower the price
9. MYC 太貴啦, 千五鎊, 平你五百鎊, 一千都買唔過
   too expensive, fifteen hundred pounds, even if they can sell for a thousand it’s not worth it
10. Fa 貓貅係三個腳
    pixiu has three legs
11. MYC 佢講貔貅是一种凶猛的瑞兽, 能吞万物而不泄
    it says pixiu is a fierce auspicious animal, it swallows everything without expelling
12. Fa 佢動物王, 驚佢
    it’s the king of all animals, be frightened
13. MYC 意思講 dun 住个財嚟度
    it means keeping the wealth in
14. Mo 吸纳四方之财, 有赶走邪气、带来好运
capable of drawing wealth from all directions, warding off evil spirits, bringing good fortune

Once again we see here a discussion of the value of money. Pixiu is a Chinese mythical hybrid creature, resembling a winged lion. Pixiu is particularly an influential and auspicious creature for wealth, which is said to have a voracious appetite for gold and silver. Therefore Pixiu has been regarded as an auspicious creature that possesses mystical power capable of drawing wealth from all directions. The family is discussing the possible purchase of a jade Pixiu. However, Meiyen Chew regards it as ‘too expensive’, and her father says it is ‘very expensive’. Meiyen Chew’s mother wants to haggle over the price. Notwithstanding the cost, in turns 12 to 15 the three protagonists represent the mythical creature as powerful and capable of bringing good fortune (Meiyen Chew may be reading this from an advertisement). The discussion adds a further dimension to our understanding of the family as one that carefully weighs the value of money against that which may be purchased. Throughout the discourse audio-recorded in the domestic environment, it was clear that the sense in which the business couple were ‘becoming’ was by no means limited to them becoming butchers. An important aspect of their trajectory was their focus on bringing up and managing a young family.
5. Everyday Encounters

Wessendorf (2014: 44) conceptualizes the normalization of difference as “commonplace diversity” to describe ethnic, religious, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity experienced and perceived as a normal part of social life. She argues that diversity becomes normalized over time, and as a result of accumulated experiences of difference: “Because of these regularly occurring encounters with difference, diversity becomes commonplace” (45). This does not mean that difference is therefore neutralized. Commonplace diversity does not mean that people’s national, ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds are unnoticed. While these differences are not seen as particularly unusual, they are at the same time commonly acknowledged. Difference is something that people live with, and acknowledgement of diversity can have an effect of contributing to unity. This does not indicate an indifference to difference, rather difference is acknowledged and people are aware of the manifold cultural differences around them, but they do not see them as unusual. Wessendorf argues that in order to navigate a public space characterized by a variety of languages and backgrounds, people need to master a code of practice and certain social skills (61). Beatriz Padilla, Joana Azevedo & Antonia Olmos-Alcaraz (2015: 632) explore the notions of sameness and difference in superdiverse settings, and find that “heterogeneity is common and experienced on a daily basis, such that ‘difference / otherness’ is internalized and may be transformed into a quotidian positive feature”. Sophie Watson (2006a) argues for an understanding of encounters enacted in public space which is predicated on a commitment to the public acknowledgement of others who are different from ourselves, and to the social relations these encounters produce. Watson emphasizes “the micro-publics of social contact and encounter” which provide understandings of identities “as a mobile and incomplete process” (2006a: 18). That is, we must examine social contact and encounter if we are to understand the mobile and incomplete process of ideological becoming.

Wessendorf cites Lyn Lofland’s (1989) notion of ‘civility towards diversity’, and argues that in a super-diverse context, “civility towards people who look, speak or behave differently is learned through everyday contact and interaction in a multiplicity of day-to-day, social situations” (Wessendorf 2014: 64). She refers to “cosmopolitan pragmatism” (Wessendorf 2010:20), where, in order to get around, buy things, get help to get on a bus, carry a buggy up the stairs, and so on, individuals cannot afford not to be interculturally competent. Wessendorf (2010) points out that the demographic nature of a superdiverse context also brings with it the emergence of numerous ‘zones of encounter’ (Wood & Landry 2007). Lofland (1998) made a distinction between private, public, and parochial realms in which encounters occur. She argued that a crucial dynamic of the public realm emerges from the fact that not only do many of its inhabitants not ‘know’ one another in the biographical sense, they often also do not know one another in the cultural sense. The public realm is populated not only by persons who have not met but often, as well, by persons who do not share symbolic worlds. For Lofland the public realm is constituted of those areas of urban settlements in which individuals in copresence tend to be personally unknown or only categorically known to one another. Put differently, the public realm is made up of those spaces in a city which tend to be inhabited by persons who are strangers to one another or who know one another only in terms of occupational or other non-personal identity categories (e.g. bus driver / customer). The public realm is a form of social space distinct from
the private realm and its full-blown existence is what makes the city different from other settlement types. The public realm is the city’s quintessential social territory (Lofland 1998: 9).

Wessendorf takes this up, proposing that while the private realm is characterised by relations with friends and kin, the parochial realm is characterised by more communal relations among neighbours, with colleagues in the workplace, or acquaintances through associations and informal networks. The public realm, in contrast, is the world in the streets where one meets strangers. However, the boundaries between these realms are fluid: a market can, for example, be experienced as the public realm by a person who goes there for the first time, but it can gradually turn into a parochial space for traders and their regular customers.

Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham (2009: 3) propose the term ‘everyday multiculturalism’ to describe the everyday practice and lived experience of diversity in specific situations and spaces of encounter. Wise and Velayutham (2009: 6) explore how social actors experience and negotiate cultural differences on the ground and how their social relations and identities are shaped and re-shaped in the process. They point out, however, that even where cross-cultural contact is civil and courteous, this does not necessarily translate to a respect for difference, or signal any shift in private attitudes to otherness. Wise (2009) turns to the notion of the ‘contact zone’ to describe the space in which people engage in cross-cultural encounters and negotiate through the deployment of improvised language resources. Wise suggests the term “quotidian transversality” (2009: 22) to describe how individuals in everyday spaces “use particular modes of sociality to produce or smooth interrelations across cultural difference, whether or not this difference is a cultural one” (23). The term highlights how cultural difference can be the basis for commonsensality and exchange, where identities are not left behind, but can be shifted and opened up in moments of non-hierarchical reciprocity, and are sometimes reconfigured in the process. Wise points out, however, that while everyday civil encounters are important, they do not ensure a culture of tolerance, and inequalities must be recognized and addressed.

Suzanne Hall (2012: 18) argues that individuals need to socially acquire repertoires to traverse and participate in different spaces of the city. Crossing boundaries between the familiar and the unfamiliar demands particular social and cultural skills. Hall refers to Ash Amin’s (2002) notion of ‘micro-publics’, “the social spaces in which individuals regularly come into contact” (Hall 2012: 6). These are not simply spaces of encounter, but of participation, requiring a level of investment to sustain membership. Giovanni Semi, Enzo Colombo, Ilenya Camozzi, and Annalisa Frisina (2009) found that one of the most relevant practices in the everyday use of difference was translation, as the everyday sphere emerges as a place where one adapts what one has to the specific demands of the context. It is an ongoing process of adjustment, re-positioning and re-attribution of meaning in which difference, its representations and related discourses, the recipes for action which are available and deemed satisfactory for capitalizing on it or opposing it, are translated, and adapted for concrete use in the specific contexts people find themselves operating in (Semi et al 2009: 70).

Conviviality
Wessendorf (2012) proposes that the notion of *conviviality* is a useful heuristic to describe people living together or sharing the same life. Gilroy (2006a) points out that although public and political discourses often associate immigration with crime and conflict, other varieties of interaction have developed alongside these discourses. These patterns of interaction emerge “with an unruly, convivial mode of interaction in which differences have to be negotiated in real time” (39). He refers to the interaction of sameness and difference as “conviviality – just living together” (2006b: 7). Gilroy (2004: xv) further defines conviviality as “the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature in Britain’s urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere”. Gilroy argues that convivial social forms have come into being spontaneously and unappreciated, rather than as the outcome of government policy. Conviviality, he argues, is a social pattern “in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity, but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not – as the logic of ethnic absolutism suggests they must – add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication” (Gilroy 2006a: 40). In these conditions, he proposes, a degree of differentiation can be combined with a large measure of overlapping. Betsy Rymes (2014) takes up the notion of communicative overlapping in proposing that individuals communicate across difference by negotiating or seeking out common ground and then creating new shared terrain. She argues that the extent to which we can communicate is contingent on the degree to which our repertoires expand, change and overlap with others. People form alignments not necessarily by speaking the same native language or categorizing each other demographically, but when they find some kind of common ground. Understanding ‘the other’ is not a matter of identifying difference, but of raising awareness of multiple repertoires and expanding points of communicative overlap.

Gilroy (2006b) argues that problems often assumed to be inevitable features of a clash of civilisations, cultures and outlooks melt away in the face of a sense of human sameness. He points out that institutional, generational, educational, legal, and political commonalities intersect with dimensions of difference. These commonalities complicate the simple notion of ‘cultural groups’, or ‘communities’, which might otherwise be held to be united by their apparent difference from others. He suggests that conviviality acknowledges this complexity and, though it cannot banish conflict, “can be shown to have equipped people with means of managing it in their own interests and in the interests of others with whom they can be induced heteropathically to identify” (2006a:40). Gilroy argues that this is far from being a romantic notion, and nor is it a panacea to solve tensions which continue to exist in society. Gilroy emphatically points out that “Recognising conviviality should not signify the absence of racism” (40). Rather, in conditions of conviviality racial and ethnic differences have been rendered unremarkable and ordinary, as people discover that the things which really divide them are much more profound: taste, lifestyle, leisure preferences. Gilroy argues that in such a scenario difference is less of a threat to social cohesion because it is commonplace, everyday, and almost unnoticeable. Gilroy argues that sustaining and valuing conviviality is a legitimate goal for bringing citizenship to life, and one which requires acts of creativity and imagination.

Piia Varis and Jan Blommaert (2014) propose that in the superdiversity that characterizes online-offline social worlds, it is too easy to focus on differences and downplay the level of social
structuring that actually prevents these differences from turning into conflicts. They suggest that relationships of conviviality are characterized by largely “phatic” and “polite” engagement in interaction. Ben Rampton (2014) adds a word of caution, counselling that we take care with the term ‘convivial’. He argues that whether or not small talk can be characterised as convivial will very much depend on the contingencies of where, when, how, by and to whom it is produced. Rampton (2014: 5) points out that “there are no forms of communication that are inalienably convivial”, and this simply follows from the fact that although it is a very valuable part of the puzzle, you can never get at what people mean through language alone. Rampton emphasizes the importance of detailed description of the shared spaces and everyday routines which make ethnic and linguistic difference subsidiary to people getting on with their quotidian lives. It is to detailed description of the shared spaces and everyday routines of people in Birmingham Bullring Indoor Market that we now turn.

As we observed we noticed a group of customers approaching the butcher’s stall. They looked like a family. Meiyen Chew told Rachel that some customers ‘all come together in big groups, this way it’s cheaper, I think they have many sons, kids’. In this instance there are just three in the group. Adrian’s field notes are followed by a transcript of the audio-recording of the same events:

Two heavily overweight women in headscarves, long skirts, cardigans and striped socks stop at the stall. They are perhaps Romanian (although I am guessing). They buy a large bag of chicken wings. They also want to buy a hen, and are unimpressed with the price. B holds the hen up in two hands, stretching it from end to end. ‘Look at the size of that’, he says. The women buy the hen. Now a young man appears and joins the women. He starts by (I think) asking Mr C how to say ‘good morning’ in Chinese. Mr C tells him and the man mimics him two or three times. The customers want to leave their purchase behind the stall to collect later. There are gestures here I don’t quite understand. Mr C mimes driving a car, and says ‘car’. The young man at this point bends forward with the upper half of his body, sticks out his bottom and extends his left arm and the forefinger of his left hand out behind him. They all laugh. I’m sure the mime means something, but at the same time it might be untranslatable. B picks up the tiny mantelpiece-style clock from its usual position next to the till and points to it, saying ‘eleven o’clock’. This seems to be the time arranged for the collection of the meat.

You can listen to the interaction at the following link:

Female customer (FC); male customer (MC); Bradley (BJ); Meiyen Chew (MYC); Kang Chen (KC)

1. MC: good morning
2. KC: good morning
3. MC: how do I greet good morning?
4. KC: eh?
5. MC: good morning
6. KC: good morning
7. MC: no, in your language
8. KC: 早上好
   <zaoshang hao>
9. MC: zaoshang hao
10. KC: 早上好
    <zaoshang hao>
11. MC: zaoshang hao
12. KC: ah
13. MC: zaoshang hao
14. FC: (xxxx)
15. BJ: the tail? Are we waiting for delivery?
16. FC: yea (xxx)
17. BJ: I gotta wait for delivery
18. KC: car coming later
19. MC: pork
20. BJ: yea
21. MC: delivery coming later
22. KC: driver
23. BJ: eleven, eleven o’clock
24. MC: eleven
25. FC: eleven
26. MC: (xxxx)
27. BJ: yeah, walk around, come back, hahahaha
28. MC: I leave it here everything
29. FC: I buy, leave here (xxx)
30. BJ: okay, yep
31. MC: how much?
32. BJ: twenty six so far
33. FC: that’s too, that’s too much
34. KC: 这个是她妈, 这个肯定是她妈, 跟她一样一样的!
    <this must be her mum, this must be her mum, a spitting image of her>
    your wife’s mum? (xxx) yea, no sister?
35. MC: not sister
The field note describes what was in many ways a typical and everyday interaction between the butcher, Kang Chen, his wife, Meiyen Chew, his assistant, Bradley, and three customers looking to buy chicken wings, a hen, and pigs’ tails. The customers complain about the price of the hen, and the butcher’s assistant responds with good humour but refuses to drop the price. Adrian, stationed relatively unobtrusively four or five yards away from the action with his notebook, is not able to hear everything that is going on. Moreover, if he were able to hear everything he still might struggle to interpret the fine grain of rapid-fire interaction in the market-place. This was the kind of interaction observed repeatedly during the four months of observations of the butcher’s stall. However, two aspects of the interaction mark it as less than typical. First, one of the customers asks Kang Chen to teach him how to say ‘good morning’ ‘in your language’. This was not a unique instance of this kind of request, but nor was it typical. In turn 1 of the transcript the customer initiates contact with the butcher as he approaches the stall, saying, in heavily-accented English, ‘good morning’. Kang Chen responds in kind, also saying, in heavily- but differently-accented English, ‘good morning’. However, the customer has not quite made clear his intention that he would like Kang Chen to teach him how to say ‘good morning’ in Chinese. Turns 3 to 7 negotiate this request. In making the request for Kang Chen to teach him how to pronounce the Chinese greeting the customer acknowledges difference (Watson 2006a), as it is clear that at the very least the communicative repertoires of the customer and the butcher are different. The customer’s request is a (metasemantic) metacommentary (Rymes 2014) on that difference. Paradoxically, in acknowledging and commenting on difference the customer creates “a point of communicative overlap” (Rymes 2014) between the two protagonists, as he opens up a space for interaction. The metacommentary also implies common ground, as both customer and butcher are speakers of languages other than English, and speak English with heavy accents. The customer hands the role of expert to the butcher, who becomes teacher to his new pupil. In this instance acknowledging difference creates the potential to limit difference, and opens up a space for communication. The customer’s convivial request holds up ‘difference’ for scrutiny, and difference becomes a resource for exchange and interaction. As soon as Kang Chen understands what it is the customer is requesting he is more than willing to engage in the linguistic game of teaching the customer how to say ‘zaoshang hao’. In turn 12 Kang Chen makes a sound which seems to indicate his approval of the customer’s pronunciation, and the customer has one more iteration of the greeting before leaving the activity aside.

More unusual than this was the customer’s subsequent mime. We had become used to customers pointing to the cut of meat they wished to purchase. We have had also noticed customers using other physical gestures to order their meat – a man touched his own tongue when he wanted ox tongue; a man pointed to his own head when he wanted to buy pig’s head. As we will see, another man widened and narrowed his arms repeatedly, as if pulling a piece of elastic, as he asked for pig’s small intestine. The mime described in the field note here, however, goes beyond these examples, in that it was of the order of performance rather than merely communication. As the field note describes, the man ‘bends forward with the upper half of his body, sticks out his bottom and extends his left arm and the forefinger of his left hand out behind him’. Neither of
the researchers observing the performance and writing field notes understood the meaning (if any) of the mime. As the field note reports, although it was assumed that the physical performance probably meant something, it ‘might be untranslatable’. Only later, when the audio-recording of the same incident was listened to repeatedly and transcribed, did it become clear that the young man’s wife (or mother-in-law – it was not clear which) had asked the butcher’s assistant for ‘tail’. Then it was clear that the man was making a physical representation of a pig (or possibly an ox, as the stall also sold ox tail – but the fact that the man’s sole utterance during the performance was ‘pork’ suggests he was ‘being’ a pig) in order to support his wife’s request. The mime was probably unnecessary, as the butcher’s assistant, Bradley, understands the woman’s question immediately (turn 15). The mime is convivial (Gilroy 2004), and part of the entertainment for an audience comprising the market traders and the man’s wife and her mother, two researchers, and any passers-by. During our four months in the indoor meat and fish market we frequently heard and saw traders shouting their wares and putting on larger-than-life performances to attract customers to their stall. As such, performance and conviviality were part of the everyday fabric of the market. That is, they were a feature of the “spatial repertoire” (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015) of the market. It was certainly less usual for customers to put on a performance for traders than vice versa, but the performative aspect of this customer’s repertoire was permitted, and was deployed, because in the market hall clowning around is commonplace and acceptable. Also, the particular type of performance presented on this occasion was not inappropriate because, as we have noted, gesture was a common feature of the discourse (the orders of discourse), and therefore of the spatial repertoire of the market hall.

The corporeal dimension of the interactants’ repertoires is further evidenced when Kang Chen mimes driving a car, presenting his hands to the customers as if he were holding a steering wheel. While acting out this mime Kang Chen says ‘car coming later’ (l. 18) and ‘driver’ (22). Whether the mime clarifies anything for the customers is not clear. Again the mime may be more to create a convivial space than merely to communicate. In the field note we find evidence of more visual cues, this time for a more explicit communicative purpose, as Bradley ‘picks up the tiny mantelpiece-style clock from its usual position next to the till and points to it’. At the same time Bradley says ‘eleven, eleven o’clock’, indicating with both words and his pointing gesture that the delivery of pigs’ tail will not arrive before eleven, and that they should return at that time. The male customer says something which we were not able to hear clearly enough for transcription, and Bradley says ‘yeah, walk around, come back, hahahaha’ (turn 27). At this point the male customer says ‘I leave it here everything’, asking whether it is all right for him to leave his purchases at the stall and return later to pick them up. His wife adds her voice, saying ‘I buy, leave here’. Before he leaves the scene the male customer asks how much his purchase of meat has cost so far, and when Bradley replies ‘twenty-six so far’, the female customer says ‘that’s too much’. She appears to want to argue about the price, and perhaps to negotiate down the cost of the meat. We saw many customers attempt to do this during our time in the market. We spoke to market traders who were happy enough to engage in this kind of haggling, and were prepared to do a favour for some of their customers. Others were less enthusiastic about the practice. In any event it was clear that haggling was an aspect of the spatial repertoire of the market, linking the repertoires formed through individual life trajectories to the particular places
in which these linguistic resources were deployed (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). On this occasion, however, the female customer did not push the point.

It was not uncommon for the couple, Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew, to comment to each other on their customers, creating a private moment in the parochial space of the market. Here we perhaps have an overlap between Wessendorf’s (2014) public, parochial, and private realms, as Kang Chen looks at the two women customers and says to his wife, in Mandarin, ‘This must be her mum, this must be her mum, a spitting image of her’. The moment is private in that it is a metacomment between husband and wife, and is spoken in Mandarin in the hearing only of interlocutors who have no comprehension of that language. It is parochial in that it leads to a moment of conviviality, as Kang Chen offers the older woman a (teasing) compliment, ‘no sister?’, extending communal relations in a way that transcends the mere economic transaction of the sale of meat. The metacomment on the appearance of the older woman, good-natured and good-humoured, again creates a point of communicative overlap between the protagonists in the interaction. The several good-humoured activities between the traders and these customers in the short time they are in contact may be ephemeral, but they are more sustained than many interactions between market traders and their customers. The moment is clearly also in the public realm, conducted in a place where, on the whole, strangers encounter each other in the process of buying and selling meat and fish.

Bradley joins in with Kang Chen’s joke, picking up his cue and contributing his own version, pointing to Kang Chen and telling the customers: ‘my brother, this one my brother, he’s my brother, yea, hahaha’. Everyone present laughs at the joke. When Bradley says (three times) that Kang Chen is his brother it is funny because it is a comment on visible difference – Kang Chen is ethnically Chinese, while Bradley is not, so the idea that they are brothers is humorous. The metacomment on difference again has the potential to limit difference, as Bradley validates and rewards Kang Chen’s joke by repeating his own version of the same. Bradley’s joke limits difference while commenting on difference because it aligns Bradley with Kang Chen, and also aligns the traders (whether ‘Chinese’ or otherwise) with the customers (whether ‘Romanian’ or otherwise) through shared laughter. Here we see what Wessendorf (2014) terms ‘commonplace diversity’. This does not mean that people’s national, ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds are unnoticed. While differences here are not seen as particularly unusual, they are at the same time acknowledged. Difference is something that people live with, and at times like this diversity can have a unifying effect. Wessendorf argues that in order to navigate a public space characterized by a variety of languages and backgrounds, people need to master a code of practice and certain social skills (2014: 61). In this context the social skills to be mastered are not principally a ‘full’ proficiency in English. Rather, they are constituted in, and constitute, the spatial repertoire of the market.
In another example of customer and trader deploying a communicative repertoire which did not depend on shared proficiency in a single language, a customer approached Bradley with the intention of buying a pig’s small intestine. You can view the interaction at the following link:

https://youtu.be/iea_QS4I0tK

[Bradley (BJ); first male customer (MC₁); second male customer (MC₂); female customer (FC)]

1. BJ  hello boss
2. MC₁  is this er pork?
3. BJ  pork, yea
4. MC₁  (xxxx) is it this erm
5. BJ  no no no you want the in- the small intestine don’t you, no no, you want that one but the small one
6. MC₁  goes long
7. BJ  yea, that goes long but not that one, not that one, no
8. MC₁  tomorrow?
9. BJ  no we don’t we can’t get it no more, no more, finished
10. MC₁  finished
11. BJ  goya? no
12. MC₂  (xxxx)
13. BJ  this one?
14. MC₂  (xxxx)
15. BJ  how much? all of it?
16. MC₂  give me one
17. FC  (xxxx)
18. BJ  nice one, yea
19. MC₂  yea nice
20. BJ  just one? or one more?
21. MC₂  no just one
22. BJ  are you sure? oh you want one as well, one each
23. MC₁  five kilos
24. BJ  five kilos

Here a customer approaches the stall and Bradley (BJ), the butcher’s assistant, realizes that the customer wants to buy pig’s small intestine. Bradley explains to the customer that although the stall once sold this item, they were no longer able to do so. Bradley and the customer negotiate mainly by means of graphic gestures which represent the large and small intestine. The customer initiates the interaction by representing the small intestine with a sign made by opening his arms wide, bringing his hands together in making the same sign, and opening his arms wide again.
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Customer requests ‘small intestine’ with a hand / arm gesture</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Bradley points to his own stomach to signify the small intestine</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Bradley makes an alternative sign for the small intestine</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Bradley makes a third sign for the small intestine</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Bradley mirrors the customer’s gesture</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Bradley points to the large intestine</td>
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In response, Bradley points to his own stomach to represent the intestine, and then points to the pig’s large intestine, which is displayed on the counter. With reference to the large intestine, Bradley makes a sign to represent ‘smaller’ with his finger and thumb, and repeats the sign of pointing to his own stomach to represent the intestine. He then makes a sign with his hands clasped to represent ‘the small one’. Next Bradley mimics the customer’s original gesture with arms apart to represent the small intestine, and points to the large intestine, saying ‘not that one’. Finally he makes a shrug with his hands and arms as he says ‘no more’. Although the customer was not successful in achieving his aim of purchasing the pig’s small intestine (and in fact the stall had recently been told it was no longer allowed to sell it except as dog food), this is not because the customer and the butcher do not share proficiency in a single language. In fact they are able to communicate quite well with their hands, making gestures which represent the objects about which they communicate. Sigrid Norris (2004) points out that commonly a participant in an interaction employs hand / arm gestures when speaking, and gesturing starts slightly earlier than the words expressing the same idea. Norris suggests that it is probably not useful to separate these kinds of gestures from the language with which they co-occur. Norris distinguishes between four types of gesture: iconic, metaphoric, deictic, and beat gestures. Iconic gestures depict pictorial content and mimic what the individual wants to communicate verbally. In Example 1 here the customer makes an iconic gesture to depict the long (although called, in English, ‘small’) intestine. Metaphoric gestures may also depict pictorial content, but they portray abstract ideas or categories. In Example 4 Bradley uses his finger and thumb to represent ‘small’, without making an iconic portrayal of the intestine. Deictic gestures often point to objects in the physical world, but they can also point to events in the past or future, or point to ideas and notions as if they had a physical location in the world. In Example 6 here we are firmly in the realm of the physical, as Bradley points to the large intestine on the counter. Beat gestures refer to the movement of hands/arms up and down, or back and forth. In Examples 7, 8, and 9 a customer indicates with a repeated beat gesture that he wants his pork cut in a particular way. Gesture was a very common feature of what we observed in the market-hall. Customers and traders pointed to produce, they held up fingers to refer to the number of pork chops required, or the amount in pounds a purchase would cost, they pointed to their own tongue if they referred to ox-tongue, and they raised a thumb to signify consensus or agreement. These were all frequent dimensions of the communicative repertoires in play in everyday encounters across the counter.
However, in *Example 1* here the customer is challenged to represent his meaning iconically because the item to which he refers is absent rather than present. Most gestures in the market refer to that which is evident on the stall, or at least close by. In this example the interaction refers on both sides to a piece of offal which is notable by its absence. It is for this reason that the customer and the trader are pressed into the creative deployment of “a continuum of iconic and metaphoric gestures” (Jaworski and Thurlow 2009: 254).

In these interactions the participants reach an understanding through consensus which is achieved at least partly (and perhaps mainly) by “extra verbal means” (Habermas 1984: 86). We saw repeatedly that gesture was a key means of communication in the market. Rymes points out that communicative repertoire goes beyond the linguistic to include the collection of ways individuals use not only language but other means of communication (gestures, dress, posture, accessories) to function in the multiple communities in which they participate (Rymes 2014). She asks ‘Why not build relationships on the basis of shared non-linguistic cues?’ We saw that in the market commercial transactions were based on precisely such means.

It is noticeable here that Bradley asks the second pair of customers: ‘goya?’ (turn 11). We heard this word deployed by the butchers on the stall on many occasions. When we asked Meiyen Chew what it meant, she said it was a word she had learned from her East European customers. She said it means ‘pig’s intestine’. She told us that East European customers particularly like the product, as they can stuff it with minced pork for deep frying. She said she didn’t know how to spell the word, but she shared it with Bradley and Kang and all of them used it, ‘just like those English or foreigners saying nihao, zaijian in Chinese, we just use it so the customers know we have that product’.

Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) found, in their research in markets and restaurants in Sydney, that while people engaged in ‘metrolinguistic practices’ as they went about their daily business, getting things done with whatever resources were available, there was also a strong current of conviviality, “of people celebrating the diverse environments in which they work” (2015: 90). Pennycook and Otsuji point out that although the interactions they observed were often characterized by convivial multilingualism, a more-or-less harmonious getting along together, such conviviality was often double-edged, “leading back to forms of exclusion and discrimination”. In what we saw in Birmingham market it would similarly be wrong to suggest that everything was always rosy. In fact both Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen spoke of the discrimination to which they had been subject in the process of trying to set up their business. Meiyen Chew complained that they had been bullied by other traders when they set up their stall, and this had resulted in a violent incident between Kang Chen and one of the other stall-holders:

> an old bloke was walking past by us just now, he’s the one who bullied us since we started. Kang even had a fight with him, holding a meat cleaver in his hand - if the other traders hadn’t stopped him

During our time observing in the markets the Chinese butcher’s stall was the victim of two thefts. The couple strongly suspected that other traders were the perpetrators. Kang Chen decided to install a closed circuit television system at the stall. Despite this, the stall-holders were again
victims of theft of two chopping-boards. This time the theft was caught on CCTV. In the following interaction Meiyen Chew views the CCTV footage at home with her parents:

1. Fa 弥你 Chuck, you saw him?
2. MYC 弥你, 偷我嘅呀 we saw him stealing from us
3. Fa 箇到個個人? you found the one?
4. MYC 箇到, 搞大件事, 抵死 we found him, and will make it an issue, he deserves it
5. Fa 唔値錢嘅, 偷嚟做乜鬼? if it’s not valuable, what for?
6. MYC 俾你睇, 三十鎊一隻 they’re thirty pounds each
7. Mo 偷幾隻? how many did he steal?
8. MYC 偷兩隻, 三十鎊一隻, 我哋買 he stole two, we bought them for thirty pounds each
9. Mo 本來有幾多隻? how many have you got?
10. MYC 我哋有幾多隻 we have a few
11. Fa 咁多點俾人偷? what time they were stolen?
12. MYC 寻日六点半啲啲, 佢咪落嚟 six thirty yesterday, la la la, he is coming down
13. Fa 俾你影到呀? you have him on video?
14. MYC 梗係, 我試過鏡頭, 冇影到就差咯 of course, I checked the camera, it would be bad if he is not videoed
15. Fa 包住面喎? was his face covered?
16. MYC 冇包住面呀 no, not covered
17. Mo 好在有个电眼仔 it’s good to have the camera
18. MYC 都好多野唔見開咯, 而家有証据咯. 有俾睇到, 呢个咪佢, 佢係度揀添呀, 揀
In this extended example it becomes clear that, despite the convivial discourse of the market hall which proposes that stall-holders are co-operative and helpful to each other, Meiyen Chew has cause to mistrust some of the other traders. In the discussion with her parents about the theft, Meiyen Chew seems to regard the monetary value of the stolen chopping boards as important, but she also takes it as a point of principle that the thief should not get away with the crime. The narrative of the theft of the chopping boards points to the intense competition in the market hall,
as traders try to get one up on their neighbours through what appear to be relatively petty crimes. Regardless of the counter-narrative which tells of conviviality and co-operation in the ‘happy family’ of market traders, it is a competitive, cut-throat business.

Meiyen Chew also said that they had been treated differently from other traders when they went to the wholesale market, as they were required to pay for cuts of meat and offal which were usually free of charge: ‘Those trotters were free at that time but they charged us, saying that we made money from them but to the other traders who were not Chinese they would give them free. Those traders really discriminated against us’. Meiyen Chew also told us that discriminatory practices were ongoing. She had strong views about Kang Chen’s attempts to get a discount from the supplier:

They will give Bradley a discount if he goes but never Kang. This is so racist you know, they only give discount to Brits but not us. Sometimes they even give a better price to those retailers, while despite being their long-term, regular customer we never get a discount. It’s their loss though as they don’t know how to do business. We won’t do business with them either. Kang really hates it and complains about them each time.

The manager of a Chinese café inside the market hall also spoke of racism and discrimination: ‘Some of the stall holders, to be honest, they are quite racist towards us ethnic minorities’. She said some of the other stall holders ‘are really mean and look down upon us a lot. Sometimes when you greet them they just totally blank you out’. She concluded that although locals were nice and friendly ‘being a foreign immigrant in this country sometimes it’s quite difficult if you want a better life’.

Pennycook and Otsuji (2015: 97) point out that their discussion of the everyday does not assume that “everydayness is free of discrimination, contestation or rubbing together that causes friction”. They acknowledge that it is precisely the everydayness of discriminatory discourse, and discriminatory practice, that makes it so pernicious. In Birmingham indoor market the same everyday practice may be either convivial or discriminatory, subject to its accent. We saw that the deployment of the greeting ‘nihao’ was done with a range of tones and accents. Whereas at times it was a cheery greeting from a customer to open communication, at other times it appeared to have discriminatory overtones. Here the greeting is shouted not by a customer, but by a young passer-by (PB) who does not stop at the stall:

1  PB  nihao! nihao!
2  KC  nihao!  [to BJ:] your brother coming, hehe

Kang Chen does not ignore the sarcastic greeting, but throws it back at the young man. He then says to Bradley ‘your brother coming’. It may be that the perpetrator of the faux Chinese greeting resembled Bradley physically. On another occasion when Yiran (YG), the Chinese student who was working part-time on the stall, greeted a customer (MC) with ‘nihao’ he engaged in a brief discussion of the customer’s proficiency in Chinese:
In response to Yiran’s repeated Chinese greeting the customer responds with the same greeting, but then asks Yiran why he doesn’t speak Spanish, asking this in both English and Spanish. Yiran retorts with ‘why not speak Chinese man?’, and the customer says he can speak Chinese. Yiran, unconvinced, makes fun of the customer’s Chinese proficiency. The discussion of languages acknowledges difference, and that difference once more becomes a site for convivial communication, and the shared conversation offers a moment of unity, if a contested unity. In our field notes we recorded further examples of contested instantiations of the greeting. In a first example, from Rachel’s field notes, the deployment of the Chinese greeting appears to be for the amusement of the speaker’s friends more than as phatic communication:

nihao! nihao! a group of five well-built Asian guys shouting greetings sounded like funny-toned Chinese walking past the stall without stopping. Brutal laughter exploded among them as they passed by

In another example, this time from Adrian’s field notes, Meiyen Chew responds differently from her partner to the Chinese greeting:

a couple of men of Asian appearance in black leather jackets appear. ‘Nihao’, says one. ‘Nihao’, replies KC, mimicking the man’s accent. The men examine the meat on offer. One of them now says ‘nihao’ to Meiyen Chew. She replies in kind, although with tolerance rather than the irony of her husband

Link, Gallo, and Wortham (2014) conducted ethnographic research in school settings on the US / Mexican border, and found that English-speaking African American students sometimes engaged in (what the researchers called) faux-Spanish – that is, deploying words which sounded like Spanish. The researchers found that the students’ imitation of their Spanish-speaking peers were instances of them “making sense of difference” (2014: 255) in their school and community. At first sight the deployment of ‘nihao’ as an opening gambit by customers who are not Chinese-speaking (and, often, appear not to be English-speaking) indexes conviviality and willingness to open up a space for communication. At times this appeared to be what was happening. At other times, however, the deployment of the Chinese greeting seemed to carry a more sinister, stylized, and mocking connotation. At times, in the markets, there were conflicts and contestations, arguments, and even fights. As we have seen, discrimination was not unknown. But the day-to-day practices of buying and selling in Birmingham indoor market were, as far as we could see during four months of observation, normally characterized by good humour, conviviality, generosity of spirit, and people’s willingness to get on with other people. The place was certainly superdiverse, with people of myriad national, educational and socio-economic backgrounds, with different legal statuses and biographical trajectories, coming together in zones of encounter
where social relations were rapidly formed, and just as rapidly moved on from. In the next section we examine how the heteroglossic repertoires of market protagonists were deployed in zones where these people came into contact.

Everyday encounters were not only between strangers in the public realm, however. Encounters between colleagues were a significant dimension of what we saw as we observed the butcher stall. At this time Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen had concerns about the health of their established assistant on the stall, Bradley. In the following interaction, recorded in the family home of Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew, Kang Chen explains to Meiyen Chew’s mother (Mo) and father (Fa) that he sent Bradley home early as he was unwell:

1 Mo 今晚早返
you came home early tonight

2 KC 唔駛車兩條友仔返去嗎，個又話肚痛，叫佢早返去碼，半个鐘返到
there was no need to drive the two guys home, one of them said he had a pain in the abdomen, so I told him to go home early, I drove him back for half an hour, half an hour to get back

3 Fa 冇開刀邊度得
it won’t be fixed without operation

4 Mo 食止痛葯
yes, he’s just taking pain killers

5 Fa 唔駛開刀
no operation?

6 KC 我嗰時都無開刀
I wasn’t operated on last time

7 Fa 有啲就要開刀
sometimes you need an operation

8 KC 網上有寫，如果死都有可能，會死人
I have seen an article on the internet that sometimes it can be fatal

9 Fa 爆就死人，方爆就唔會死人
it’s fatal if it bursts, otherwise it’s not fatal

The family becomes quite engaged in discussion of Bradley’s stomach complaint, which they take to be appendicitis. Meiyen Chew’s father appears to believe that surgery is the most appropriate course of action. Throughout the discourse of the family we heard scepticism about ‘Western’ medicine in relation to Chinese approaches to health and well-being. However, in this instance Kang Chen seems to counter his father-in-law’s view, saying that the last time he was ill himself he recovered without recourse to surgery.

The following day Kang Chen raised the question of Bradley’s condition again, this time with Meiyen Chew:
Kang Chen was clearly concerned about his colleague, with whom he had been working in close partnership for eighteen months. Meiyen Chew asserts that the reason for Bradley’s ill-health is his diet. When Kang Chen says ‘吓 < what?>’ she switches from Mandarin to Cantonese (at turn 6), as if to clarify her point. Indeed she does elaborate her point, offering a diagnosis as well as cause. Kang Chen comes to the defence of his work mate, countering Meiyen Chew’s argument by asking ‘他喝那个 juice 嗎 < does he drink juice?>’. In the minor domestic disagreement we can see Kang Chen’s loyalty to, and concern about, his valued colleague.

Discussion of Bradley’s stomach complaint was not limited to the immediate family, however, nor to face-to-face interaction. The everyday dynamics of diversity include not only encounters between strangers in superdiverse localities, but also connections between families and friends separated by thousands of miles. New technologies have a key role in this process of transnational communication. While KC regularly used QQ to talk to his mother in Fujian, Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew both used WeChat on their mobile phones to communicate with Kang Chen’s brother. In the interaction here Kang Chen asks his brother in China for advice about treatment of appendicitis:
Kang Chen asks his brother for advice about Bradley’s stomach problems. Although there may be commercial reasons why he does not want to lose his valued member of staff, Kang Chen here seems to demonstrate a genuine concern for his colleague. Kang Chen answers his brother’s question in the following sequence:

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Kang Chen appears to ask his brother for information from China because he does not fully trust or support ‘Western’ medicine. We encountered other examples of Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew not accepting the advice of Western doctors. Here Kang Chen appears to believe that Bradley has appendicitis, and should have an operation to cure him of the condition. Following his brother’s suggestion of keyhole surgery Kang Chen uses the technology to make a call to his brother, and they have a seven-minute conversation. Shortly after this Kang Chen’s brother sent him an internet link with information about the treatment of appendicitis in China.

Kang Chen’s attitude to his staff was also illustrated in his comments about another assistant butcher, Yiran. The Chinese student had caught the attention of the market stall-holder when he attracted the interest of young women customers.

1 KC 咁靚仔,呢啲蜜蜂咁多係正常,哈哈哈哈.. 我都以為係到好開嘅個女仔
he’s so good looking, no wonder there are so many bees. I thought it was the girl who was laughing loudly

2 MYC 我哋都無睇到
we didn’t see

3 KC 我都以為係個,到收尾寫電話號碼時我先知係佢我还是第一次見到
I thought it was her, then I knew it’s the other girl when they were writing their telephone numbers. The first time I have seen this

4 MYC 就喜歡他靚仔呀?
did you fancy his good looks?

5 KC 不是,見到真好啦. 第一次見到真的有女孩子問人家拿電話號碼, 她是見到他好啦, 其實說真的很多女孩子不怎麽喜歡在這種裏面上班, 在中國人眼裏面這種比較積極一點
no, just saw him and thought he is quite good. It’s the first time I have seen a girl go after a boy for telephone number, it’s just she fancies him. To be honest a lot
of girls don’t fancy guys working here. In the eyes of Chinese this is a comparatively aggressive type.

6 MYC 她可能看他帥啦, 没有问你你喜欢他甚麽?
she probably just fancies his good looks, did you ask why she fancies him?

7 KC: 比較靚仔啦, 看过去蛮老實, 蠻勤勞的肯在這裏上班
just that he’s quite good looking, he looks honest, quite hard working – willing to work here.

It was clear that Kang Chen valued colleagues who worked hard and supported the business. Kang Chen subsequently subjected Yiran to a certain amount of good-natured teasing about his fledgling relationship. He is interested that the young man attracts ‘so many bees’. Ultimately, however, what he valued about the student was that he was hard-working, and that he was willing to work on the butcher’s stall.

Shortly after Kang Chen recorded this interaction, Yiran Gu had an accident at work, damaging his hand with a knife to the extent that he required surgery to repair it. Kang Chen’s messages to Yiran Gu are at once expressions of his concern and attempts at convivial humour. The sequence of messages here begins on 11th November 2014, the morning after Yiran Gu had been taken to hospital with a severe cut to his hand:

Here the Chinese student is in touch with his employer through WeChat to let him know that he is being attended to at the hospital. Kang Chen had brought food to the hospital for the young man the previous evening. Two young women had accompanied Yiran Gu to the hospital, and this later became a source of interest and amusement for Kang Chen. The butcher appears to be concerned about his young colleague, asking what time he will have his operation to repair his hand. He is also interested in whether the young women stayed at the hospital with Yiran Gu.
overnight. In this short interaction Kang Chen is predominantly concerned for the health and well-being of Yiran Gu.

Shortly after this, however, Kang Chen adopts a more light-hearted, teasing tone, asking whether Yiran Gu’s new girl-friend has been to visit him. The student is willing to pick up the cue offered by his boss:

Kang Chen’s discourse is multivoiced, as he moves between, and integrates, concern about the seriousness of Yiran Gu’s injury, a teasing discourse which ironically proposes that his employee has a luxurious stay in hospital to look forward to, and a third discourse in which Kang Chen is eager for gossip about the student’s romantic engagement. The latter of these seems to dominate, as it is fertile ground for Kang Chen’s typically teasing interaction with the young man. Yiran Gu is willing to go along with the joke, representing his own laughter (‘haha’) and adding ‘my girl-friend is on her way’. Throughout his interactions with his boss Yiran Gu walked a line between accommodating Kang Chen’s teasing by entering into the narrative proposed by the older man, and at other times deflecting the humorous barbs. Here he plays along with Kang Chen’s line of questioning about his progress with his new ‘girl-friend’, saying ‘watch me try today’.

Kang Chen continues the thrust of gently mocking the student’s involvement with a young woman with reference to ‘Single Sticks day’. A recently-developed tradition, or custom (if practices and discourses developed in the last twenty-five years can be so described) in China is Singles Day, or Guang Gun Jie (光棍节), also called the Bare Sticks Festival, or Single Sticks day. This is celebrated on November 11th (11.11), with each number ‘1’ representing a single, unmarried person, or ‘bare stick’. Chinese bachelors are traditionally called ‘bare sticks’ or ‘bare branches’ because they have no offshoots or offspring yet (Shanghai Daily 11th November 2013 http://www.shanghaidaily.com/feature/Behind-the-bare-stick-festival/shdaily.shtml). On 11th November 2014 Kang Chen continued the WeChat interaction with Yiran Gu in the previous example:
In this interaction Kang Chen reminds Yiran Gu that it is Single Sticks day. In doing so he makes reference to the young man’s new potential relationship, and he responds, saying he is no longer single. At 13.35 Kang Chen asks Yiran Gu for news of the progress of the relationship. Receiving no answer, he asks again for updates at 16.03. However, at the forefront of the younger man’s mind is the operation from which he has just emerged, and he answers in terms of his health before offering a broadly positive account of his romantic liaison (‘I think we are getting on really well’).

Immediately following this, in another sequence of WeChat messages, Kang Chen teases Yiran Gu that he has forgotten his colleagues since he met his new girl-friend:
In this interaction Kang Chen again appears to articulate his concern for his young colleague, while at the same time teasing him about his relationship with his girlfriend. He accuses the student of neglecting his colleagues since he met his girl-friend, but Yiran Gu protests, asking Kang Chen for evidence. The butcher offers as proof the fact that Yiran Gu has not replied to WeChat messages. However, the student argues that he was on the operating table all afternoon, so was unable to reply. Kang Chen changes tack, asking Yiran Gu for details of his relationship: ‘have you touched her hand?’ He replies that he is on his way to see her, ‘getting ready to go to hers’. Kang Chen responds with typically direct banter, this time double-voiced, advising the young man ‘don’t lose your virginity’. The discourse here is reminiscent of the kind of banter and sexual teasing we often heard in the market. Dominated by male traders, especially butchers, the prevailing discourse of the market hall was gendered, forthright, and sometimes coarse. In the examples here, although Yiran Gu is in the hospital rather than the market, his relationship with Kang Chen mainly resides, and has been developed, at the butcher’s stall, and Kang Chen’s performance of a certain version of masculinity does not seem out of place.

Two days later, on Thursday 13th November, Kang Chen contacted Yiran Gu again and pursued a similar line of questioning, asking for a progress report on the young student’s relationship:

The series of messages from Kang Chen to his younger colleague moves interdiscursively between concern for the student’s health, and sexual teasing. In the first message here the two questions represent the two generic discourses, the first enquiring about the progress of recovery from Yiran Gu’s injury, the second directly referencing the younger man’s relationship with his girlfriend. In his message two days earlier Kang Chen had apparently counselled the young man, almost certainly with ironic intent, ‘don’t lose your virginity’. Here, though, he is anxious to know whether Yiran Gu has consummated the fledgling relationship. Yiran Gu’s answer is itself interdiscursive, responding briefly to both of Kang Chen’s questions: ‘not yet, I wanted it,
too’. From here Kang Chen moves into a slightly different mode, offering the student advice, and in doing so positioning himself as worldly-wise and experienced. We saw elsewhere, in audio-recordings of spoken interactions with his male colleagues on the butcher’s stall, that Kang Chen was more than willing to position himself in this way. Yiran Gu excuses his lack of progress in his romantic association with reference to his injury, saying ‘with the cast and bandage on it’s not easy to make a move’. However, Kang Chen does not accept this as a reason, now chastising the student through deployment of the vernacular (‘the cast is not on your dick’) and a ‘lips’ emoticon. Kang Chen takes up Yiran Gu’s reasoning (‘it’s not easy to make a move’) and repeats it (‘how comes it’s not easy?’), making an artistic representation of the younger man’s words, parodying and negatively evaluating his argument through repetition. In doing so Kang Chen again positions himself as a man of the world and a man of action. Tagg (2012) points out that repetition across text messages often indicates a texter’s evaluative stance. Kang Chen’s repetition of Yiran Gu’s ‘it’s not easy’ clearly indicates his evaluative towards the student’s argument. However, Yiran Gu does not seem convinced by his boss: while he concedes that Kang Chen’s logic is reasonable, he also argues that it sounds ‘weird’.

In this sequence of WeChat messages between Kang Chen and Yiran Gu we gain an insight into social relations between the proprietor of Hong Keen butcher’s stall and one of his young colleagues. The power hierarchy is never absent, but the boss is willing to flatten the asymmetry to some extent with playful, convivial banter about his employee’s relationship with a young woman. In the sequence of messages Kang Chen positions himself as a sexually experienced older man, knowledgeable about the ways of the world. In doing so he performs the highly gendered discourse of the market, inhabiting a particular, and prevailing, stereotype of masculinity. Yiran Gu moves in and out of this discourse, on the whole appearing unwilling to inhabit the same stereotype, but at times flirting with Kang Chen’s position. Yiran Gu’s discourse is more typically of the order of ‘I think we are getting on really well’, than Kang Chen’s direct focus on the sexual relationship. At the same time, the worldly-wise butcher sometimes betrays his softer side, expressing his concern for Yiran Gu’s health and well-being, and checking that he is on the way to recovery, but even then teasing him about having a luxurious stay in the hospital, which he likens to a ‘3-star hotel’. Never far away from these interactions between Yiran Gu and Kang Chen was (what in the West we would call) social class, or socio-economic and educational background, or cultural capital. Whereas the market trader was a migrant from a small village in rural Changle, Fujian, in the South of China, Yiran Gu was from Beijing. Kang Chen had arrived in the UK as an illegal immigrant, while Yiran Gu had arrived as an international student. Although he was affectionate towards the younger man, Kang Chen often made negative comments about Chinese students in the UK, characterizing them as wealthy and spoilt. As we saw elsewhere in audio-recorded material, Kang Chen was always ready to establish his identity as a hard-working market trader, to perform the forthright masculinity of the market hall, and to position himself as a worldly-wise working man. Yiran Gu, on the other hand, was a well-educated, softly-spoken, good-looking young student. Despite these differences, they seemed to rub along successfully in the parochial realm of the butcher’s market stall.

Wessendorf (2014) quotes Lyn Lofland (1998) to argue that it is important for researchers to examine not only public and semi-public settings in superdiverse neighbourhoods, but also the
private realm, which is characterised by relations with friends and kin. Encounters in the everyday lives of Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen included meetings with those they knew as acquaintances and / or as people with a particular service to offer. In the examples we present here we make visible discourse in relation to Meiyen Chew’s everyday encounters with an acquaintance who is also a customer, and a customer who is also a hairdresser. In the extended interaction that follows Meiyen Chew is meeting the husband of her friend, Evonne, who is due to celebrate her birthday. Meiyen Chew is providing the food for the celebratory meal, including beef and oysters. Meiyen Chew has promised to give Evonne’s husband a lift home, as she will be delivering the food order, but he is late, and Evonne is unable to make contact with him by phone:

Evonne seems to be embarrassed that her husband is late to meet Meiyen Chew. In the continuing sequence of messages she apologises to Meiyen Chew, and seems to be worried that Meiyen Chew has gone to this trouble for her:
Evonne complains to Meiyen Chew about her husband, but Meiyen Chew plays a mediating role, offering two possible explanations for the late arrival of her friend’s husband: perhaps Evonne neglected to tell him about the arrangement, or he is late because he is organizing a birthday surprise for his wife. The latter explanation appears to be unlikely, but Meiyen Chew offers it as a means of mitigating her friend’s anxiety and embarrassment. However, Evonne’s subsequent messages seem to represent increasing agitation and upset:

Meiyen Chew again plays the role of counsellor and supportive friend, telling Evonne not to worry, and to relax. In doing so she again seeks to mitigate her friend’s anxiety.

Evonne now discursively attempts to shift her position, claiming that her husband’s lateness is not typical, and that in fact this is the first time this has happened:

Again Meiyen Chew takes up an ameliorative position, counselling her friend to enjoy her birthday rather than worry too much about her husband. A little while later Meiyen Chew contacts Evonne again, and now the tone of the interaction has changed, and all seems to be well,
as Meiyen Chew reminds Evonne how to open oysters, and Evonne seems to be enjoying her celebrations:

The emoticons seem to represent enthusiasm for the beef provided by Meiyen Chew, and gratitude for her help. The evening has turned out well. Evonne enjoyed the food, and she thanks Meiyen Chew for providing it at cost price. In these messages no further reference is made to Evonne’s husband. Throughout these interactions Meiyen Chew’s discourse represents her as a supportive friend, and as someone who remains calm in a crisis.

Another short sequence of WeChat messages gives an insight into the everyday life of Meiyen Chew, as she contacts a hairdresser to make an appointment:

Meiyen Chew greets the hairdresser, May, with ‘hello’, and May responds with a ‘smiley-face’ emoticon, at this stage probably unaware who is contacting her. Meiyen Chew identifies herself...
with reference to her work at the butcher’s stall, perhaps because this is where she has previously met the hairdresser. This is one of many examples of how the butcher’s stall served as a meeting-place for Chinese people in Birmingham. May’s ‘I know’ seems to confirm that Meiyen Chew has previously spoken to the hairdresser about wanting to have her hair straightened. Meiyen Chew gives the hairdresser directions on public transport to the area of Birmingham where she lives, using Roman script for the name of the suburb (‘northfield’). Meiyen Chew then informs the hairdresser that her recently-born baby is a girl. In fact these messages were exchanged on 12th September, just two weeks after Meiyen Chew’s baby was born.

May suggests that Meiyen Chew should not have her hair straightened until she is out of her ‘yuezi’. In China this refers to the traditional custom of new mothers resting for a month at home following the birth of a child. May’s messages takes it for granted that Meiyen Chew is observing the traditional practice. As such it constitutes an ‘emblematic template’ (Blommaert and Varis 2013), indexing a particular set of shared values and assumptions. We should be careful not to interpret Meiyen Chew’s response (‘hehe’) as acceptance of such values and assumptions. The representation of laughter may as easily be intended to invoke disagreement as agreement, and may well indicate neither. However, the indexical appears to be deployed in the confident expectation of consent, and Meiyen Chew does appear to be in alignment with the hairdresser’s perspective in saying ‘then it will be October’. The hairdresser also comments on the gender of the baby, making a light-hearted comment that ‘you will be treated by her as she can cook’. As a response Meiyen Chew represents laughter, apparently sharing the joke. The interaction continues:
When Meiyen Chew asks May whether she has a job she responds with ‘hairdressing is my job’. Meiyen Chew may be slightly embarrassed that she has asked the question, which seems to almost disregard May’s employment, as she responds with ‘haha’. Just as we saw Kang Chen comment with a representation of laughter when he had forgotten a customer’s order, so Meiyen Chew’s representation of laughter here makes a metacomment on her slight faux pas. The hairdresser seeks to make light of the small misunderstanding, and in order to do so slightly mocks her own work, making a metacomment on her previous statement: ‘hairdressing at home, haha!’ In doing so she aligns herself with Meiyen Chew, and eases the potential tension of the interaction. To move the communication on Meiyen Chew asks how much the hairdresser charges. These interactions offer glimpses of the everyday life of Meiyen Chew as she interacts with friends, customers, and acquaintances. They also offer insight into beliefs and attitudes in circulation in these relationships.

In the public, parochial, and private realms, and across face-to-face interaction and digital means of communication, people engaged in everyday encounters recognize difference, live with difference, and respond to difference as an everyday, unremarkable phenomenon. However, as we have seen, this is not to say that difference is ignored. Rather, it appears that in superdiverse settings we acknowledge difference, comment on difference, and in doing so make available difference as a resource. When difference is acknowledged, shared, and made available it becomes a means for opening up spaces of communication, and creating the potential for unity.
6. Voice

As we have seen, the generally convivial environment of Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market was not always unproblematic for all individuals who came into contact with each other. In some cases there appeared to be a tension between the availability of semiotic resources and the social arena in which semiotic resources may be deployed – in Bourdieu’s (1991) terms, between *habitus* and *field*. Rachel Hu wrote the following note as part of her description of activity in the market:

A Chinese woman in her sixties walked up to Kang Chen, asking him where she can buy mutton. I realised she didn’t speak/read any English at all, otherwise she would have spotted the stall herself. Kang Chen stretched out his body above the counter trying to direct the woman to the mutton stall. The Chinese woman was still confused about where to find the right stall, as Kang Chen’s Mandarin wasn’t very easy to understand, with his strong Fujian accent.

At this time Kang Chen was wearing a digital audio-recording device, so we were able to listen to his interaction with the ‘Chinese woman’ (FC). You can listen to the interaction at the following link:


1 FC 咋,老板儿; 咋,老板儿,你那个有羊肉卖? 不知道唉.
hi boss, boss, do you sell lamb? I don’t know where to find it

2 KC 没有.
no, we don’t

3 KC 他们几家都有羊肉卖,你看一下, 那个比较红的那些,跟牛肉很像的, 红的那些; 你直走,走到最 后面那一家, 那种有中东人面孔那家,到那家卖羊肉, 那家会新鲜一点.啊?就是这条路直着 走, 靠那边, 啊.就是你看过去,我是中国人脸孔嘛
there are quite a few shops sell it, you have a look, it looks quite red, like beef, go straight down to the end of the aisle you will see one, its owner has a mid East Asian face, go and buy your mutton there, his is fresher, eh, just straight down the aisle, at the other side, eh, the other side, if you look, I am looking Chinese

4 “阿狸”人啊, 印度人啊, 不是这家, 是最后那家, a Cha, or Indian, not that one, that one at the end

5 FC 就叫 “inder” 啊, 啊, 谢谢
The Chinese woman approached Kang Chen because she viewed him as a potential source of support. Kang Chen is a rare Mandarin-speaking butcher in the market, and the woman approaches him because she is not familiar with the layout of the stalls. We saw on a number of occasions that Chinese customers would approach the butcher for help and advice about the market, and, on occasion, about other matters such as housing, schooling, and welfare services. In this brief interaction Kang Chen is typically helpful, pointing to the meat stall along the aisle, where the woman will be able to buy lamb. He recommends one stall in particular, where the stall-holders are of Pakistani heritage. In pointing out the stall Kang Chen refers to its owner with ‘a mid East Asian face’, and nominates him as a ‘Cha’. This is a discriminatory term used among some overseas Chinese to refer to people of Indian or Pakistani nationality / ethnicity. Wessendorf (2014) notes that in the parochial realm differences of origin, language, religion, and so on are rarely talked about, although they are acknowledged, for example by way of describing others according to their perceived ethnicity or national background. Here the reference to the stall-holder with ‘a mid East Asian face’, and the nomination ‘Cha’ may do more than represent the mutton butcher negatively, perhaps also aligning Kang Chen with the Chinese woman, as Kang Chen positions them as sharing the same (albeit discriminatory) values. However, Rachel’s field note observes that following the conversation the Chinese woman still appeared somewhat confused by Kang Chen’s directions, as ‘Kang Chen’s Mandarin wasn’t very easy to understand, with his strong Fujian accent’. The Chinese woman encounters the diversification of diversity in the markets, where it is not possible to straightforwardly predict the range and limits of speakers’ repertoires. Kang Chen is able to deploy linguistic resources including Mandarin, Cantonese, English, and Fuzhounese. But this does not mean that communication is therefore straightforward for speakers of these languages, as Kang Chen’s Fujian accent can be difficult to disentangle for those unfamiliar with it. One of the characteristics of the public realm (Wessendorf 2014) is that encounters are often fleeting, allowing little time for people to get used to each other’s ways of speaking. The assistant butcher, Bradley, had been working on the stall for eighteen months, and had little difficulty understanding Kang Chen’s Fujian-accented English. When we first started observing at the stall, it took several sessions to ‘tune in’ to his accent. The Chinese woman asking for directions to the mutton stall experiences something similar, and we become aware of the diversity within the category ‘Mandarin-speaking Chinese’ in Birmingham, which reflects the vast diversity of China.

Seven minutes later the woman returned to Kang Chen’s stall, apparently in some consternation following her encounter with the mutton butcher. Again Rachel’s field notes describe the ensuing scene, and Kang Chen continued to be audio-recorded. Rachel’s notes record her observation:

I saw the Chinese woman come back to the counter. She spoke to Kang Chen, her hands patting her leg as she did so. Kang Chen looked at her curiously, and laughed out loud at what she told him
Rachel noticed that when the Chinese woman returned to the stall she was indicating something with her hand, tapping one of her thighs with the open palm of her hand. This seemed to be a source of amusement for Kang Chen. We were unable to hear the conversation between Kang Chen and the woman at the time, but the audio-recording represented the interaction as follows. You can listen to the interaction at the following link:


1. FC  我费了好大力气买的，也不知道这个是不是羊肉。我费了好大力气买的，也不知道这个是不是羊肉。
   it took me so much effort to buy this, I’m still not sure if this is mutton, it took me so much energy to buy it, I’m still not sure if it’s mutton.

2. KC  啊？这个是羊肉来的，是羊肉来的。你费什么力气？你买东西么你费什么力气？
   ah? this is lamb, this is it, what effort did it cost you? you were just there shopping, what strength would you need to do that?

3. FC  这说不来呀，听不懂嘛我想说我就要那个腿儿。
   I don’t know how to say it and I don’t understand them, right, I wanted to say I want to buy leg of lamb.

4. KC  是羊肉来的，是羊肉，是羊肉来的。你是不是在最后那一家买的？
   yeah, it’s lamb, did you buy it from the one at the end of the aisle?

5. FC  是的，是的，我说那个羊脑袋呢不要，我要它身上那个肉。可他听不懂。我说不要那个脑袋。
   yes, yes, I said I didn’t want the sheep’s head, I wanted the meat on its body, but he didn’t get it, I said I didn’t want the sheep’s head.

6. KC  [to another customer:] right, boss?

7. FC  我说我要身上那个肉。要身上那个肉。哎呀，费了好大力儿，你知道！你这里没有羊肉卖嘛？
   I said I wanted the meat from the sheep’s body, the meat on its body, oh my! what an effort, you know (.) don’t you sell mutton here?

8. KC  啊？没有。我写那边，但我这里没有，看。不够位置，不够位置，不够位置放。
   ah? no my sign says so but I don’t sell it look not enough space I don’t have enough space for it not enough space to lay out the meat.
In her story about her attempts to buy lamb from the butcher at the mutton stall the woman narrates herself as powerless, and as voiceless. At the same time her narrating self is uncertain, and lacking confidence that her efforts have been entirely successful: ‘I’m still not sure if this is mutton’. Busch (2015) argues that changing location and language can be experienced as a hardship or as a source of ongoing emotional stress. She adds that the experience that one’s own linguistic repertoire no longer ‘fits’ is one that not only occurs in extreme situations, but is shared by all speakers when experiencing dislocation. Here the Chinese woman tells a story in which she has had to expend considerable effort and energy in attempting to buy lamb. In the woman’s account she had gone to the mutton stall and seen a sheep’s head, and, finding herself lacking voice to ask for lamb from the leg of the animal, had indicated her own leg. The Chinese woman’s narrated self is represented as voiceless through explicit meta-comments on her attempts to speak: ‘I don’t know how to say it’, ‘I wanted to say I want to buy leg of lamb’. She also refers to her failure to understand the butcher: ‘I don’t understand them’, and to the butcher’s failure to understand her: ‘he didn’t get it, I said I didn’t want the sheep’s head’. She also points out the frustration of her narrated self, saying ‘I wanted to say I want to buy leg of lamb’. Despite the description of her voicelessness in the interaction with the mutton butcher,
throughout the narrative the woman’s character is ascribed both an internal voice, and a voice in the interaction. The woman as narrator insists that the narrated woman ‘wanted to say I want to buy leg of lamb’, offering the audience of the story an insight into her frustration that she was not able to make herself understood. At the same time, however, the narrator deploys a ‘verb of saying’ (Wortham and Reyes 2015) to introduce the voice of the character of the Chinese woman, at turns 5, 7, and 11: ‘I said I didn’t want the sheep’s head, I wanted the meat on its body’, ‘I said I wanted the meat from the sheep’s body’, ‘I said it was the meat from its body that I wanted’. Although the Chinese woman as narrator does not make it explicit in her story that her narrated self is speaking Mandarin to the British-Pakistani butcher, Kang Chen understands this very well: ‘he can’t understand that, right?’. The narrated woman remains powerless and voiceless, and her narrating self remains frustrated and a little angry.

Rachel’s field note indicates that as she tells her story to Kang Chen ‘her hands [are] patting her leg’. The woman-as-narrator tells a story in which her narrated self deploys resources which are integral to the spatial repertoire of the market, gesturing to her own leg in her attempt to buy a leg of lamb. As we have seen, this feature of the spatial repertoire of the market is both common, and frequently a source of convivial and successful commercial interactions. However, in this case the bodily gesture reaps no reward. The Chinese woman appears to have successfully purchased the lamb she wanted, but there is a cost. Her narrating self feels at least disconcerted and frustrated, and her narrated self discomfited and confused by the sales interaction. Busch (2015) asks what discomfort or confusion ensues if one suddenly finds oneself not in a familiar chamber, but in an unknown space, and one becomes aware that one’s linguistic repertoire does not (completely) ‘fit’, that one has to deal with a diversity of languages. In Bakhtin’s terms, what ensues when “the ideological systems and approaches to the world that were indissolubly connected with these languages contradicted each other and in no way could live in peace and quiet with one another” (Bakhtin 1981:296). This appears to be the case here, as the woman as narrator repeatedly tells the same story that she wanted the meat from the body and not the head, and the woman as character repeatedly experiences incomprehension and voicelessness. Busch (2015) points out that a feeling often mentioned in biographies in connection with multilingualism is that of shame, arising because one has used a ‘wrong’ word, a ‘wrong’ tone, or is speaking with a ‘wrong’, out-of-place accent: “This is often described as feeling as though everyone is looking at you, or wishing the earth would swallow you up”. The purchase of the lamb carries a cost to the Chinese woman’s dignity, and this does not appear to be due only to the mismatch of comprehensible languages involved in the interaction.

The woman’s experience of the sales encounter is at least partly constituted through relations of gender. Watson (2006a: 18) points out that “relations of difference are always implicated in power”. Throughout our time in the markets we observed that an important dimension of the spatial repertoire of the environment was the performance of masculinity. This was most clearly evident in the part of the market devoted to meat sales, where a large majority of the butchers were men. In fact Kang Chen’s wife was a very rare example of a woman butcher in the entire market. Certainly the stall to which Kang Chen sent the Chinese woman was staffed exclusively by men. We recorded the public performance of masculinity in the often-aggressive ‘shout-outs’
of butchers, as they advertised their wares to potential customers. We also noticed the performance of masculinity in parochial and private realms, where we audio-recorded butchers making ‘back-stage’ comments and jokes steeped in particular performance of masculinity, and about relations between men and women. It is hardly possible to enter the space of the indoor market without a sense of this performance of masculinity. It is part of what the market is. A further social category of significance in the Chinese woman’s narrative is that of age. Although the woman makes no reference to her age, Rachel’s field notes categorise her as ‘A Chinese woman in her sixties’. This metacomment on the woman’s appearance (this must be about appearance at this stage, rather than actual age) offers an important context for the ensuing narrative. It is saying too much to argue that it is the woman’s age that causes her to feel the way she feels about her attempts at deploying her body as a resource in the sales interaction. However, we can say it is likely that the interaction may have had a different emotional outcome – for better or worse – if the woman had been forty years younger. On this same day Rachel managed to have a brief conversation with the Chinese woman, and recorded it in her field note diary. The woman said she was in the UK temporarily to support her grand-daughter, who was at medical school. She came regularly to visit, having brought up her grand-daughter herself:

Each time when she’s here she will cook three meals for her granddaughter, inviting her two other house mates to share the meals. They were studying in the same class with her granddaughter and she hopes her Chinese dishes will gain extra help from them to her granddaughter while she’s away.

The Chinese woman’s motives for her determination to buy a particular cut of meat become clearer in this context.

The Chinese-woman-as-narrator is not the only narrator in this interaction, however. Kang Chen recontextualises and re-tells her story on three occasions: twice to the Chinese woman herself (turns 10 and 12), and once to his assistant, Bradley (13). Furthermore, he makes an evaluative metacomment on his narrative at 15. In his first version of the story, at turn 10, Kang Chen says: ‘using your body language, using body language, he thought you were asking him if you were pretty or not, hahahaha’. He shows little sympathy for the narrated character of the Chinese woman, introducing a new dimension to the story that has until now been at most hinted at. He mocks the woman for ‘using body language’ in her attempts to communicate, despite, as we have seen, his own awareness and practice of the spatial repertoire of the market. His new story line introduces the voice of the mutton butcher, hitherto a character characterized by silence. Kang Chen’s version of the narrative ventriloquates him (Wortham and Reyes 2015), giving him voice (in the form of ‘thought’, and certainly voice in the literary sense in which Bakhtin developed the notion). The ventriloquated voice of the mutton butcher performs the kind of masculinity which characterizes the market: ‘he thought you were asking him if you were pretty’. The narrated self of Kang Chen aligns with the narrated self of the mutton butcher, and both position themselves as mocking the character of the Chinese woman. As we have seen, such a narrative can be analysed in terms of the relations of the narrator to the narrated characters, and in terms of the relations of the narrator to the interlocutor or audience of the story (Wortham and Reyes 2015). Here Kang Chen positions himself in a particular way through his re-contextualisation of the
story, deploying the narrative as a resource to ridicule the woman and align himself with the (putative) mutton butcher. At this point the Chinese woman may be regretting having returned to Kang Chen’s stall to tell him her tale.

Kang Chen’s second re-telling of the story shows a modicum of support for the woman, but concludes with the same kind of mockery:

he can’t understand that, right? you said you wanted the meat from its body, I know you said you want the meat from the body, and I would have just pointed at it for you, you said you wanted the meat from the body, he would have thought, hahaha, am I pretty, pretty, you are dead gorgeous! hahahaha!

Kang Chen criticizes the narrated woman for failing to realise that the mutton butcher would not be able to understand her request, which she made in Mandarin. In this second re-telling of the story Kang Chen recontextualises not only the narrative, but the Chinese woman’s words, holding them up for evaluation through repetition. On four occasions in her brief narrative the woman had said that she wanted the ‘meat from the body’. Kang Chen reiterates her story by repeating (versions of) ‘meat from the body’ three times. Here parody is at work (Bakhtin 1984), as Kang Chen creates a verbal representation of the Chinese woman’s words, and deploys them as a resource for mockery.

Kang Chen’s third re-telling of the story is delivered to his assistant, Bradley, as soon as the Chinese woman leaves the scene:

she’s say you get lamb, meat, she see the lamb head over there, being sold by the Asian men you got, you got any, any, any, say Chinese, yeah language and she go lamb I want here, I want here, I say is it somebody say like I’m I’m any pretty, like that, hahaha!

Bradley told us that he understood a few words of ‘Chinese’, and there was some evidence in our recordings that this was the case. However, it is relatively unlikely that he had understood the interaction between Kang Chen and the Chinese woman. It may also be the case that Kang Chen’s brief narrative account, delivered this time in English, was not comprehensible to Bradley, whose laughter may be merely an appropriate and timely response. Having said this, however, Kang Chen again manages to introduce a narrative which includes the voices of the Chinese woman as narrator, the Chinese woman as character, himself as character, and the mutton butcher as character. We can see this if we change the format of the transcript, adding line-breaks to slice the narrative into lines, in an approach which draws on Hymesian ethnopoetics (Hymes 2003):

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1  she’s say you get lamb meat
2  she see the lamb head over there
3  being sold by the Asian men
4  you got you got any any any
```
We have organized the lines in terms of intonation units. We are grateful to Zhu Hua for listening to the audio-recording of this narrative and pointing out that the prosodic patterns correspond closely to Chinese speech. We have divided the narrative into lines according to these prosodic contours. This is apparently “a story told with minimal linguistic resources” (Blommaert 2006: 182). Kang Chen re-tells the story in a mere forty-seven words, in a narrative which is probably incomprehensible without access to the other versions, but which creates a short drama and includes a cautionary tale. Blommaert and Dong Jie (2010: 76) point out that even though the language may be simple and plain, and despite massive amounts of ‘errors’ in the language, stories can be narratively complex and well-executed. We believe that presented in lines corresponding to its prosody Kang Chen’s ad hoc narrative is restored to something like its true form, as Dell Hymes (1981) restored Native stories in North America. Hymes (2003: 112) notes that in some traditional oral storytelling traditions narrative is “built on quoted speech ironically deployed”. Kang Chen’s story is built on the quoted speech of the woman, as he verbally represents and ridicules her words. The beginning of the story, ‘she’s say you get lamb meat’, probably refers to the Chinese woman’s initial approach to Kang Chen, asking him whether he sells lamb (this is clearly the case if we interpret ‘get’ as ‘got’). The next section of the story (line 2) takes us into the interaction between the Chinese woman and the mutton butcher, as she approaches his stall and sees a lamb head. In line 3 Kang Chen provides context, categorizing the traders as ‘Asian men’. In line 4 Kang Chen’s narrative gives the Chinese woman voice, deploying ventriloquation as a resource. In his English version of the story Kang Chen foregoes a verb of saying in this line, creating immediacy in the storytelling. In line 5 Kang Chen-as-narrator makes an evaluative metacomment on the Chinese woman as character, pointing out that she was speaking Chinese to a stall-holder who has no comprehension of that language. This line becomes clearer if we insert the omitted ‘in’ before ‘Chinese’. Line 6 continues to voice the woman’s character, but now in a way that sets up the joke, as Kang Chen says ‘I want here’, to relate that the woman had attempted to communicate her wish to buy leg of lamb by indicating her leg with her hand. In line 7 and 8 Kang Chen-as-narrator represents Kang Chen-as-character, giving his own character voice. Here he recontextualises his own joke, repeating it for the benefit of his audience, Bradley. There is more than one layer in play here, as Kang Chen-as-narrator-in-the-present voices Kang Chen-as-character interacting with the Chinese woman as both narrator and character. Furthermore, ‘I’m any pretty’ is multivoiced, as it is in the voice of (i) the Chinese woman as character, (ii) the ironic / mocking voice of the mutton butcher (‘somebody’), and (iii) the parodic voice of Kang Chen. Analysing Kang Chen’s narrative in sections based on Hymes’ approach to ethnopoetics allows us to see what at first sight looks like a disjointed and barely comprehensible account as a structured piece of impromptu storytelling.
Ethnopoetics allows us to transcend the typical range of perceived ‘meaningful’ features of stories by adding another layer of meaningful organisation: poetic structure (Blommaert 2006). Just as Habiba’s story in Blommaert’s (2006) study is characterized by problems with linguistic-communicative competence, so Kang Chen’s story is on first hearing incoherent, disjointed, and fragmented. However, just as Habiba had a well-developed narrative competence, so ethnopoetic analysis reveals that Kang Chen’s impromptu narrative is highly structured, and is presented as a mini-drama. To adapt Blommaert’s analysis, detecting this narrative competence and exposing it as a dimension of meaningful communicative behaviour produces another version of Kang Chen’s story told in a different voice: a more accessible, more understandable version. This is a judgment based on implicit, indexical patterns, not on explicit denotational and syntactic ones.

Hymes claims that such an approach to narrative “will add to understanding of language itself and contribute to the many fields of inquiry for which the use of language in telling stories is a part” (2003: viii). There are methodological and theoretical implications of this, proposed by Hymes (1981: 384) who, in relation to traditional oral narratives, insisted that we must work to make visible and audible “that something more” than is evident on first hearing. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) note that there have been few studies which have applied Hymesian ethnopoetics to everyday speech. However, they suggest that “ethnopoetics can be productively applied and extended to a variety of ordinary and institutional contexts for the analysis of narrative” (2012: 43). Blommaert (2006: 181) suggests that ethnopoetics “offers opportunities for analyzing voice”, and that it could be used for the analysis of different narratives, especially in so-called ‘applied’ areas such as police interviews, courtroom hearings, asylum interviews, and so on. We would add that it has potential to make audible the voices of speakers in everyday settings where the stakes are apparently not so high. An ethnopoetics approach can re-articulate the voices of those whose speech in the language of the narrative is heavily accented, hesitant, or lacking confidence. In so doing it has transformative potential.

Bradley responds with laughter, which may either indicate that he has understood the funny story, or that he understands that laughter is an appropriate response. He offers no further comment. Kang Chen, on the other hand, gives a final evaluative coda: ‘If you know how to say it, you just say any goat, lamb meat? yeah? that, that, that easy!’. In relating his second re-telling of the story Kang Chen had said to the Chinese woman that she should have pointed at the meat she wanted to buy. In doing so he was (in between mocking comments) educating her in the ways of the market’s spatial repertoire. Here, in her absence, he proposes that the most basic knowledge of English is enough to get by in the market.

Busch (2015) points out that the linguistic repertoire can be understood as a heteroglossic realm of constraints and potentialities: “different languages and ways of speaking come to the fore, then return to the background, they observe each other, keep their distance from each other, intervene or interweave into something new, but in one form or another they are always there”. In the superdiverse space of Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market, as elsewhere, the biographies (that is, the histories, the lived experiences) of individuals come into contact not only with the biographies of other individuals, but also with the spatial repertoire (that is, sedimented or
momentary language practices in a particular place at a particular time). We have seen that the
market is a place in which encounters are often ephemeral, even when they are serial, and
relationships are formed in brief interactions, usually between market traders and customers.
However, the fleeting nature of many interactions in the market does not mean that practices do
not sediment into registers, or norms, as they are repeated. We saw that elaborate performance,
including gesture and mime, was a feature of the spatial repertoire of the market, as people with
different proficiencies in different languages entertained themselves and each other. We also saw
convivial acknowledgement of difference, as interactants drew attention to each others’
languages and aligned themselves in relation to differences which at the same time diminished
difference. We saw people create points of communicative overlap, often through
metacommentary on appearance, language, and gesture. We saw mobile messaging deployed not
only for commercial purposes, but also to sustain the performance of masculine banter more
usually associated with the market stall. However, we also saw that the interaction of
biographical trajectories and spatial repertoires was not always a straightforward experience for
all concerned. When a speaker found herself without the linguistic capital to engage
communicatively with traders she fell back on gesture, but was constrained by powerful norms
relating to ideologies of gender and age, and experienced an everyday interaction as a loss of
dignity. Finally, we saw that an apparently incomprehensible mini-narrative told in English by a
butcher from Fujian, on closer inspection turned out to be a multi-layered, highly-structured, and
darkly humorous cautionary tale. This example suggests that in the fine-grain of communicative
interaction in the meat and fish market we can see a world of practices and ideologies which
reveal much about human communication in superdiverse cities.
7. Everyday Translanguaging

As we have seen, Rymes (2014) develops the term ‘communicative repertoire’ to refer to the collection of ways individuals use language and other means of communication to function effectively in the multiple communities in which they participate. Repertoire can include not only multiple languages, dialects, and registers in the institutionally defined sense, but also gesture, dress, posture, and even knowledge of communicative routines, familiarity with types of food or drink, and mass media references including phrases, dance moves, and recognizable intonation patterns that circulate via actors, musicians, and other superstars. A repertoire perspective recognizes that it is not possible to link types of communication with person-types. In fact the more widely circulated a communicative element is, the more highly diverse the interactions with it. Rymes argues that not only do we change languages and ways of speaking from activity to activity, we use bits and pieces of languages and ways of speaking to shift the way we talk within a single conversation or even within a single sentence. People’s communicative repertoires are expanding by necessity. But this growing embrace of multiple languages may also provide us with a means of finding connection across difference and developing more participatory sources of knowledge and validation. As we have seen in the market, in everyday encounters with diversity individuals stretch their repertoires to find points of overlap.

Jan Blommaert and Ad Backus (2013) point out that repertoires in a superdiverse world are records of mobility: of movement of people, language resources, social arenas, technologies of learning and learning environments. A relevant concept of repertoires needs to account for these patterns of mobility, for these patterns construct and constitute contemporary late-modern subjects. They propose that repertoires enable us to document in great detail the trajectories followed by people throughout their lives: the opportunities, constraints and inequalities they were facing, the learning environments they had access to (and those they did not have access to), their movement across physical and social space, their potential for voice in particular social arenas. Repertoires are indexical biographies, and analyzing repertoires amounts to analyzing the social and cultural itineraries followed by people, how they manoeuvred and navigated them, and how they placed themselves into the various social arenas they inhabited or visited in their lives. Busch (2015) also takes a biographical orientation to repertoire. She understands repertoire not as something that an individual possesses but as something formed and deployed in intersubjective processes located on the border between the self and the other. She focuses on the biographical dimension of the linguistic repertoire, to reconstruct how the repertoire develops and changes throughout life. Busch (2015) moves away from the idea that the repertoire is a set of competences, a kind of toolbox, from which we select the ‘right’ language, the ‘right code’ for each context or situation. The range of choices available to a speaking subject is not limited only by grammatical rules and knowledge of social conventions. Instead, particular languages or ways of speaking can have such strong emotional or linguistic-ideological connotations that they are unavailable or only partly available at particular moments. Our repertoire is not determined solely by the linguistic resources we have, but sometimes by those we do not have, and these can become noticeable in a given situation as a gap, a threat or a desire.
Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) understand repertoire as available resources at a point in time and space, including (e.g.) songs, snippets of diverse languages and the wider semiotic surrounds. They propose that by taking this approach we can start to envisage an interaction between the resources brought to the table by individual trajectories (with all the social, historical, political, economic, and cultural effects this may entail) and the resources at play in a particular place. Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) expand the notion of repertoire in relation to the more extensive dynamics between language and urban space (‘spatial repertoires’), which links the repertoires formed through individual life trajectories to the particular places in which these linguistic resources are deployed. Spatial repertoires draw on individual as well as other available resources, while individual repertoires contribute to and draw from spatial repertoires. Pennycook and Otsuji focus on understanding practices in place, those sedimented or momentary language practices in particular places at particular times.

Ofelia García and Li Wei (2014) take up and extend the notion of translanguaging as an approach which views language practices in multilingual contexts not as autonomous language systems, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to separate languages. For García and Li Wei the ‘trans’ prefix in ‘translanguaging’ refers to (i) a trans-system and trans-spaces, in which fluid practices go between and beyond socially constructed language systems, structures and practices; (ii) the trans-formative nature of translanguaging, as new configurations of language practices are generated, and orders of discourses shift and different voices come to the forefront; and (iii) the trans-disciplinary consequences of languaging analysis, providing a means of understanding not only language practices but also human sociality, human cognition and learning, social relations and social structures. In its original iteration the term ‘translanguaging’ referred to the use of more than one language simultaneously. However, García and Li Wei go beyond this understanding. In their view translanguaging does not refer to two separate languages nor to a synthesis of different language practices or to a hybrid mixture. Rather translanguaging refers to new language practices that make visible the complexity of language exchanges among people with different histories. García (2009) sees translanguaging practices not as marked or unusual, but rather taken as the normal mode of communication that characterizes communities throughout the world. Thus translanguaging is commonplace, and everyday.

Garçia and Li Wei (2014) view translanguaging as not only going between different linguistic structures, systems and modalities, but going beyond them. Going beyond language refers to transforming the present, to intervening by reinscribing our human, historical commonality in the act of languaging. Translanguaging “signals a trans-semiotic system with many meaning-making signs, primarily linguistic ones that combine to make up a person’s semiotic repertoire” (42). García and Li Wei conclude that “translanguaging enables us to imagine new ways of being and languaging so that we can begin to act differently upon the world”. A translanguaging repertoire incorporates biographies and learning trajectories; it includes aspects of communication not always thought of as ‘language’, including gesture, dress, humour, posture, and so on; it is a record of mobility and experience; it includes constraints, gaps and silences as well as potentialities; and it is responsive to the places in which, and the people with whom, semiotic resources may be deployed. García and Li Wei (2014) demonstrate how translanguaging is transformative in educational contexts in particular. In the remainder of this
section we will consider how translanguaging in practice may be transformative in the marketplace.

Translanguaging in practice

In the market hall there were many signs in Chinese script. Some of these were in Chinese and English, while others were in Chinese only.

Rachel spoke to the female, Indian-heritage stall holder (SH) at an ironmonger and general stores:

1  RH  I saw you have Chinese signage outside, where did you make it?
2  SH  the majority of my customers are Chinese, if it wasn’t for them I wouldn’t probably survive here, for that reason because the majority of them can’t speak English or can’t understand everything so for that reason I’ve stuck that sign there yes, it does help trust me it does help

3  RH  I speak Mandarin I can read that no problem
4  SH  can you read that? what does it say?

Here, as on many of the butchers and fishmonger stalls, the stall-holder does not know what her Chinese sign means, except that she believes that ‘it does help’. However, translanguaging signage was sometimes more complex than this. One of Adrian’s field notes included a photograph of a sign at the rear of a frozen meat stall near the market café. The sign advertises a product with the brand name ‘PLUVERA’. The sign also includes a line-drawing of a cooked chicken. The main slogan on the sign reads ‘POULES PLUVERA C’EST DELICIEUX’, with ‘PLUVERA’ inscribed in blue, and the other words in red. There is a symbol of unknown origin after the word ‘DELICIEUX’. It appears that ‘pluvera’ is a neologism, an invented word recontextualised from a Dutch phrase ‘PLUim
VEe-RAvels’ meaning ‘poultry from Ravels’. Ravels is a town (and a municipality) located in the Belgian province of Antwerp. ‘Pluvera’ is a trademark of N.V. Klaasen & Co, a poultry slaughterhouse in Ravels. Close by the sign in Birmingham market is a stall called ‘Remmison African Foods’. ‘Poules Pluvera’ are imported to the UK by traders with a focus on the African and African Caribbean market, including by Duud African Food, Bantuway Ltd., and Chez Chiyoka. The product is particularly marketed for Francophone African customers, especially the Congolese diaspora. It is also sold in African specialist stores in France, Germany, and beyond. What we have here is a sign which is apparently ‘in French’. However, the brand name is also ‘in Dutch’. At the same time we might say that it is ‘in code’. Although the sign is ‘in French’, it is French with an African accent, as those in the know are privy to the fact that this is a product for the African diaspora market. The sign reinscribes a history of mobility, taking in, at the very least, Kinshasha, Antwerp, and Birmingham. It is a record of mobility and experience, responsive to time and (dis-)location. It is a text with a narrative, or at least it is a text that prompts and suggests a narrative. It is a translanguageing text, not in one language or another, but constituted in histories of colonialism and post-colonialism, and in histories of migration and post-migration. It is a discourse in place, and a discourse out of place. It is an ideological text that does not apologise for not being (translated) ‘in English’. It is a text both at home and away from home in Birmingham indoor market.

Claims made by market traders about their communicative repertoires were sometimes unpredictable. The staff of an English butcher’s stall claimed to have learned some words of Polish and Chinese, and the manager of the shell fish stall similarly said that one of her staff had learned sufficient Chinese to communicate with customers, saying ‘he’s become quite fluent’. Bradley, the assistant butcher at Hong Keen, said he had learned some ‘basic Chinese words’

1. I understand I understand
2. I know some of the basic Chinese words anyway
3. so it’s not too bad
4. when I first started Mei was like
5. remember that one that one that one that one
6. and all the numbers as well
7. I’m trying but it’s quite easy now

When asked whether he could speak any Chinese, he said:

1. only like belly ribs as paigu/排骨, niunan/牛腩 < beef steak >
2. laoji/老鸡 < hen >, [Cantonese pronunciation:] laogei < hen >
3. some of the words I can’t pronounce
4. but when they say it I know what it is
5. it’s a bit easier
6. some of the customers just look at me like
7. yea you want that one
8. huh?
9. they’re just shocked that I know what they’re saying
In mini-narratives Bradley tells of his journey as a learner of ‘Chinese’. In the first narrative the chronotope shifts from a point in timespace when he ‘first started’ (in fact eighteen months earlier) to a chronotope of the present: ‘I’m trying but it’s quite easy now’. His confidence as a speaker of Chinese is less developed than his confidence with comprehension, and he emphasizes that he finds understanding the customers’ speech ‘a bit easier’. He ventriloquates his own character in a narrative set in the generalized present: ‘yes you want that one’. His ventriloquation of the customers (‘huh?’) articulates their bewilderment that this ‘English’ butcher’s assistant is able to understand them. The coda to the story (line 9) positions Bradley’s narrating and the narrated self alongside each other, “running in the same direction” (Vološinov 1973: 122). On one occasion we recorded Bradley singing to himself. We frequently observed that Bradley would sing when there was a quiet moment. At times he would intersperse his singing with serving customers. At other times he commented on his own singing. Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) note that singing was very much part of the spatial repertoire of restaurant kitchens, as songs were sometimes confined to people’s private realms, sometimes taken up and commented on. Here Bradley’s song included the Chinese words for ‘hen’ separately in Mandarin and Cantonese, without any ‘foreign tones’:

it’s cheap cheap cheap it’s cheaper than we wanted it to be [sings:]

老鸡/ laoji < hen > [in Cantonese:] laogei < hen > doo-doo

Here Bradley quite casually shuttles between languages, privately translanguaging as he rehearses his Chinese pronunciation. However, his translanguaging practice is not a matter merely of ‘Cantonese’, ‘Mandarin’, and ‘English’. His song also represents other aspects of his repertoire as a market trader, including ‘cheap cheap cheap’, and an orientation to ongoing contestation with customers over prices. Bradley’s translanguaging repertoire incorporates his biography and his learning trajectory: ‘it’s a bit easier now’.

It may have been his enthusiasm to learn a few words of different languages, or his willingness of to handle all parts of the meat and offal on sale that earned him the accolade from a neighbouring (Pakistani-heritage) fishmonger as ‘a different white man’. We recorded Kang Chen and the proprietor of the neighbouring fish stall (FM) engage in conversation about the fact that they are both currently short of staff. The fishmonger told us separately that his parents had migrated from Pakistan to the UK over forty years ago. One of the assistant butchers at Hong Keen (‘Mike’, a white British employee from Birmingham) had recently left the position. Also present are Bradley (BJ), and Meiyen Chew (MYC).

1  KC  say say say now you no staff mate
2  FM  where’d all your staff go?
3  KC  they want
4  FM  you sacked em ain’t you? he sacked em he said I’m don’t worry I take them on I sack them as well
5  KC  no he sack me no I’m sack him
6  FM  [to BJ:] what happened to him?
7  BJ  what Mike? He got another job
8  FM  have they?
The participants in this interaction already know each other, and they also know the linguistic repertoire of the workspace of the market-hall (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). Teasing and banter are de rigeur, the vernacular is frequently deployed, and there are norms, regularities, and expectations which will be commented upon if they are transgressed. Kang Chen comments to the fishmonger that his neighbour has no staff at the moment. He addresses his colleague as ‘mate’, creating a convivial access ritual which introduces the interaction. The fishmonger responds reciprocally, repeating the sense of Kang Chen’s comment but turning it into a question. In so doing he ratifies the “state of talk” (Goffman 1967: 34) – that is, both men declare themselves open to one another for purposes of spoken communication, and guarantee to maintain a flow of words. Both participants speak in raised tones, indexing ironic teasing. They are au fait with the discourse of stall-holders in the market-place. Both men expect the interaction to proceed through mockery and banter. Such perfunctory, brief “contact rituals” (Goffman 1987: 11) occurred frequently in the market.

Kang Chen attempts to respond to the fishmonger (turn 3) but is interrupted by the trader’s louder voice. The fishmonger gets into his stride now, teasing Kang Chen for being the kind of employer who mercilessly sacks his work force. In doing so the fishmonger adopts three discursive strategies in quick succession: a direct question (‘you sacked em ain’t you?’), a statement (‘he sacked em’), and a small story (‘he said I’m don’t worry I take them on I sack them as well’). In the small story (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008) the fishmonger ventriloquates the voice of the butcher in the fictionalized account of the events that led to Kang Chen losing his assistant. He attributes direct speech to the butcher, all the time maintaining his smiling, teasing voice. At turn 6 Kang Chen responds with banter of his own, saying ‘no he sack me no I’m sack him’, defending his position while also entering into the convivial sport. He argues that he did not sack the staff member, who left of his own accord. Now the fishmonger turns to the butcher’s other assistant, Bradley, for confirmation (7). Bradley is a local man from Birmingham, and he confirms Kang Chen’s story.

Kang Chen picks up the story once Bradley has ratified his account, saying ‘he just want do properly English meat butcher you know he don’t want do like intestine yaa yaa’. Kang Chen represents the voice of the departed assistant butcher indirectly, reporting what he wanted from the job, and what he did not want. Here ‘intestine’ is an indexical: as we have seen, on a number of occasions in our observations, and in the butchers’ narratives, it was clear that the pig’s intestine was particularly associated with Chinese and other South Asian customers. Kang Chen
adds the directly represented voice of his former assistant: ‘yaa yaa’. This direct speech is voiced in a louder, more stylized tone than the indirectly represented voice. It is generalized, and almost certainly an inaccurate representation of the assistant butcher (whom we observed on a number of occasions, and, although he frequently sang, we did not hear him give voice in the way represented by Kang Chen). ‘Yaa yaa’ here works as a symbolic representation of negative complaining, and of closed-mindedness. The fishmonger immediately picks up Kang Chen’s argument and elaborates upon it, offering negative evaluation of the dismissed assistant as he does so (turns 12-13). No longer teasing, he shifts register to an emphatic statement of his expectations of a butcher in the market, deploying the vernacular to emphasise his point. For this fishmonger there is no place on the market-stall for workers who refuse to ‘do fuckin intestines’. In supporting Kang Chen’s point the fishmonger overlaps with him, and inhabits the same ground (Rymes 2014). Stepping outside of comedy, the fishmonger is no less convivial for that. In a serious moment he supports the argument of his colleague, even though he frequently disagrees with him in non-serious moments.

At turn 14 the fishmonger repositions his role as comic, but pursues the argument that butchers should not be fussy about which parts of the animal they are required to handle, pointing to the long-standing assistant butcher, Bradley, and citing him as a model example: ‘he is a different white man’. For the fishmonger Bradley is the opposite of the assistant who could not handle the intestines. Meiyen Chew, listening all this time, expands the fishmonger’s point: ‘he’s an Asian man’. As Kang Chen laughs loudly the fishmonger reciprocates, saying ‘he’s a bit of Chinese, bit of Asian, everything, he don’t mind’. The three interactants attribute to Bradley an ethnicity (and, perhaps, race and nationality) which are based on his behaviour at work. Undoubtedly ‘a white man’ in appearance, Bradley becomes an honorary Chinese Asian in this moment. Although a joke, this also appears to be a compliment, coming from a Chinese Malaysian woman and a British Pakistani man. Kang Chen, still laughing at the entertainment provided by his wife and his neighbour, repeats the fishmonger’s phrase, ‘he don’t mind’. Kang Chen frequently repeated the words of those who joked with him, perhaps as a way of allowing him to join in with the banter without the need to contribute anything original. In the narrated event the phrase ‘he don’t mind’ compliments Bradley on his willingness to handle the pig’s intestine. But it does more than this. In the narrating event (Wortham & Reyes 2015) both participants’ deployment of ‘he don’t mind’ carries more weight, indexing an openness to difference (in taste, cuisine, and history) which is held up as a symbol, and “problems often assumed to be inevitable features of a clash of civilisations, cultures and outlooks melt away in the face of a sense of human sameness” (Gilroy 2006b). Bradley, both the butt of the joke and the hero of the story, is slightly abashed, and makes a stock response which closes the interaction: ‘as long as I put a smile on your face’. Blommaert and Backus (2011) refer to ‘superdiverse subjectivities’ – the subjectivities of people whose membership of social categories is dynamic, changeable and negotiable, and whose membership is at any time always a membership-by-degree and ratified by the judgments of others. In the example here it is unlikely that Bradley comes to view himself as ‘Chinese’, or ‘Asian’. However, the joke points to the changeable and negotiable nature of social categories. As they played around with ethnic, national, and cultural categories the market traders also played around with linguistic categories, deploying a vast array of signs in the process of commenting on, and acknowledging, difference.
Translanguaging refers to language practices that make visible the complexity of language exchanges among people with different histories. Translanguaging often goes beyond ‘languages’, and signals a trans-semiotic system with many meaning-making signs. We have seen that in the orders of discourse in the market place gesture and performance are commonplace. Rachel’s observational field notes make visible gesture as translanguaging practice:

A couple of Chinese women in their twenties come to the stall with toddlers sitting in their prams. They ask Kang Chen something and one of them walks to Bradley and says something to him. While she’s talking she reaches out her left hand in front of Bradley’s face, holding back three fingers and bending them towards her palm so only her thumb and the little finger are sticking out. This is the Chinese hand gesture for ‘six’, much simpler than the British way, as you only need one hand instead of two to indicate the number. ‘Six!’ I hear her say to Bradley in Mandarin, as if Bradley knows the meaning of her gesture. Bradley looks at her blandly, no question or anything; maybe he’s seen this before and there’s nothing he doesn’t understand about how much the woman wanted. He picks up six pieces of long, white, and greasy pig guts one by one and puts them in a plastic bag, weighs them and passes them over to the Chinese woman. ‘One ninety nine’, Bradley tells the woman, who hands him a five pound note, taking the change and leaving with her friend by her side.

In the everyday practice of the market gesture is deployed as a resource for making meaning, often when one or more of the participants in an interaction believes that speech alone will not adequately serve the communicative purpose. In this instance the customer may lack confidence and / or proficiency in English, so gestures with her hand. Her gesture is not common currency, or common ground. It makes little concession to apparent difference. The gesture is a translanguaging practice, a record of mobility, as the Chinese woman brings her semiotic sign to the Birmingham market, where gesture is a norm, but where this particular gesture counters that norm. Rachel’s field note indicates that Bradley takes the gesture in his stride, either having seen it before, or able to work out its meaning, or able to understand the spoken number (we recall that he said he was told by Meiyen Chew to learn ‘all the numbers’). Also of note here is the ‘voice’ of Rachel, the ethnographic researcher, as she comments that the woman’s gesture is ‘much simpler than the British way’. The description of the event makes a scale jump, from an interaction in a Birmingham market as a woman tries to buy pig’s guts, to an intercultural dialectic between histories of ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Britishness’. Rymes (2014: 122) points out that metacommentary signals an understanding of what a sign means “without necessarily arbitrarily systematizing communicative elements, but by pointing to that sign’s situated communicative value”. Rachel’s metapragmatic discourse (Silverstein 1993), or metasemantic discourse, makes clear the relevance of the Chinese woman’s hand gesture. In her metacommentary Rachel both aligns herself with the woman, and with a version of ‘Chineseness’ which is indexed by the hand gesture. Rachel’s comment on Bradley’s response (‘there’s nothing he doesn’t understand’) creates a space in her narrative for translanguaging to quietly succeed and transform. At the heart of the interaction is the question of ‘meaning’. On this occasion, as very often in the translation zones of butcher / customer encounters, translanguaging practice overcomes potential miscommunication.
We saw a related but quite different encounter when a Chinese man (MC) came to buy pork ribs and kidney from Kang Chen. The audio-recorded interaction was conducted entirely in Mandarin:

1. MC  do you have pork ribs? one jin
2. KC  one jin? is one pound OK?
3. MC  one pound will do (.) where’s the pigs’ kidney?
4. KC  pigs’ kidneys are over here pigs’ kidneys are over here (.) this one one pound fifty (.) two jin pork ribs (.) do you want anything else? all together six pounds fifty (2) thanks a lot

The customer asks for pork ribs measured as ‘one jin’, deploying a Chinese unit of measurement of weight which is today largely redundant even in China (it is also known as the ‘catty’ or ‘Chinese pound’). Kang Chen appears to recognise the unit of measurement, but asks ‘one pound OK?’, referring to a pound sterling rather than a pound in weight. The customer agrees. Although Kang Chen negotiated a position which moved away from dealing in the ‘jin’, by the end of the short interaction he sells the man ‘two jin pork ribs’, apparently accommodating to the customer.

In this example we experience translanguaging not between named ‘languages’, but between histories, biographies, and trajectories. There is more than one chronotope in play here. The customer’s deployment of ‘jin’ is an evaluative indexical (Wortham 2001: 73), indexing both the traditional and the Chinese. Kang Chen’s response, ‘one jin? is one pound OK?’, indexes the discourse of the market, and particularly of his stall; in short, of the here and now. Kang Chen typically dealt in the price rather than the weight of his produce when interacting with customers. But in the interaction he does not reject out of hand the customer’s indexical of other times and places. Rather, he returns to it, recontextualising the customer’s word and thus aligning himself with the customer. The recontextualisation is a translanguaging move. It transforms the interaction from one of mismatched (mis)communication to one in which the experiences, biographies, and histories of both protagonists may be acknowledged and valued.

As we have seen, communication across languages, registers, and multimodal repertoires was not universally successful in the indoor market. When miscommunication occurred it was not uncommon for the butchers, and Kang Chen in particular, to deploy metacommentary, stereotypes, stylization, and dramatic narrative as evaluative resources. At times we were able to listen in to Kang Chen’s telephone calls, which were usually interactions with local restaurants. On one occasion Kang Chen spoke on the phone to a customer from a Thai restaurant, and then as soon as he hung up he rehearsed a stylized version of the call, representing both his own voice and the voice of the caller on the other end of the line. All of the utterances were in ‘English’:

1. KC  hello? who’s speaking?
2. FC  (xxxx)
3. KC  urm this week no but next week
4. FC  next week?
5. KC  yeah
6. FC  urm all right then
7. KC  OK bye bye [phone call ends]
8. [represented voice of KC:] hello who’s speaking? hello?
We do not believe that Kang Chen had an audience for this evaluative outburst. Apparently irritated by the telephone call, he represented the interaction through metacommentary, the deployment of a stereotype, stylization, parody, and dramatic narrative. The brief interaction moves between chronotopes, and between narrated and narrating events. In the chronotope of lines 1-7 the initial interaction between the customer and the butcher occurs. At line 2 the customer probably asks whether Kang Chen can supply a certain amount of a particular product. He says he is not able to do so until next week, and the customer responds ‘next week?’ It is only when the call ends that Kang Chen moves into a new chronotope, in which he negatively represents the voice of the caller. In lines 8, 10, 12, and 14 Kang Chen voices himself as a character in the drama. At line 8 he repeats precisely his own utterance in the original call (line 1). The voice of his character is similar to Kang Chen’s usual voice, so we have described this as his ‘represented voice’. The voice of the customer, on the other hand, is ventriloquated by Kang Chen as deep, thick, slow, and as a considerable departure from the caller’s voice. We describe this as her ‘stylised voice’. Kang Chen plays both parts in the drama, deploying a parodic version of a way of speaking which marks the caller as being from a social group that typically speaks this way, or is believed to speak this way (Wortham 2001). In line 11 we have a clue that the caller was from one of the several Thai restaurants in the city centre. In the narrated event Kang Chen’s version of the customer’s voice indexes stupidity and slowness. In contrast, the voice of Kang Chen’s character indexes businesslike efficiency. In line 15 the chronotope shifts, as Kang Chen’s narrating voice adds an evaluation of the voice of the customer: ‘fuck! too loud!’.

In narrative analysis it is important to consider the narrating event as an interaction between the narrator and interlocutors. It may be that Kang Chen was aware that he was wearing the audio-recorder, and that we were his audience. It seems to us more likely that this narrative was a private response. What we can see here is a translanguaging event characterized by constraints, irritation (perhaps on both parts), and a degree of miscommunication. We also see an evaluative representation of that translanguaging event. Kang Chen’s dramatic narrative is a metacommentary which serves to make visible his irritation. Whereas the ‘pig’s kidneys’ translanguaging event was an interaction ‘in Mandarin’, we saw that it traversed histories and chronotopes. The phone call and its representation are ‘in English’, but move across biographical trajectories of mobility. In this instance translanguaging fails to transform the interaction. However, Kang Chen’s representation of the interaction is not without significance. In his stylization of the customer’s words he makes them half his and half the other person’s. In order to portray them and mock them he has to make them his own. In this sense the mini-drama he presents is a feature of his ideological becoming.

The butchers’ repertoires were deployed in the service of selling meat, and in the service of amusing themselves and others. In a final example an older African Caribbean woman (FC), a
regular customer known to the stall-holders, is buying chicken from Bradley (BJ), and has complained that the chickens on offer are ‘too skinny’:

1. BJ  they are the skinny ones blame the chicken not me they are on a diet
2. KC  skinny one’s good fat one no good hehe skinny one more taste
3. FC  come on I have to go home early
4. BJ  all right stop shouting
5. KC  haaa no no no one’s happy today hello how are you? I am just so so
6. FC  not too bad
7. KC  hehe not too bad only so so (. ) come on then another one OK just put it in the till twenty pounds skin off yea that’s it
8. BJ  [to FC:] twenty pounds (. ) [to KC:] yeah her roof broken all the water inside [to FC:] you choose yourself you never like the one I choose
9. FC  come on I’ve only got half an hour
10. KC  put it in the bag put it in the bag
11. [to MYC:] 她不喜欢因为鸡太瘦！< she doesn’t like it because it’s too skinny >
12. MYC  她要肥的，汁多的，像火鸡的那种。她今天听上去不开心，好像说是她家屋顶漏了。< she wants the fat juicy one she wants those like turkeys (3) she doesn’t sound happy today it sounds like her roof is leaking >
13. KC  什么？< what? >
14. MYC  她家屋顶漏了< her roof is leaking >。
15. KC  我们家的也漏，不过是楼顶的棉花把水吸走了。< ours the same it’s leaking but it was absorbed by the cotton wool there >
16. KC  [to BJ:] very angry today
17. BJ  her roof’s broken (2) all the water inside
18. KC  all the water inside [to FC:] you you you want some carry bag? you need some carry bag going home put all your money inside make sure it’s get wet hahahaha put all money inside yea
19. FC  [laughs] (xxxx)
20. KC  it’s all right just turn on the heater that might get rid of the water [to BJ:] it’s all right twenty-five
21. BJ  twenty-five is all right
22. FC  I shall love you and leave you
23. BJ  yes go for your chat and then love and leave them too
24. FC  (xxxx) happy day I am a young girl
25. BJ  oh happy birthday
26. FC  eighty-seven
27. KC  hello [wolf whistles] hello pretty lady you all right? hahaha
28. BJ  you going to the pub tonight then?
29. FC  no I don’t drink
30. BJ  you can still have a lager shandy ( ) lemonade
In this relatively extended interaction the customer and Bradley initially engage in what appears to be mock-irritation, as they negotiate over the quality of the chickens on offer. Bradley tries to make light of the woman’s complaint, joking ‘blame the chicken, not me, they are on a diet’. Kang Chen joins in with the topic, saying that skinny chickens have more taste than fat ones. When the woman displays mock (or possibly real, or perhaps both mock and real) irritation (line 4), Kang Chen comments ‘no-one’s happy today’. As if to re-start the sales interaction he says ‘hello, how are you, I am just so-so’, also introducing humour with the slightly off-key greeting. At this point (line 11) Kang Chen speaks to Meiyen Chew in Mandarin, typically seeking the private realm as a context in which he can (meta-) comment on the woman’s mood. Meiyen Chew tells him that the customer’s roof is leaking, and Bradley corroborates this. Kang Chen’s response, as so often, is to respond with a joke, loudly offering the woman a carrier bag to keep her money dry at home. The woman seems amused, and Kang Chen offers her a discount on her purchase (‘it’s all right twenty five’). When the woman announces that it is her eighty-seventh birthday, Kang Chen performs a highly stylized mock-flirtation, wolf-whistling and saying ‘hello pretty lady you all right?’. Bradley joins in with the mock-flirtation, offering to take the woman out for the evening to celebrate. Rachel’s field note of her observation of these events reads as follows:

all three of them were saying happy birthday to her, when she announced proudly that she’s eighty-seven today. ‘I’m still a young girl!’ the woman took a step back, sticking her hip out and putting one hand on it as if posing for a photographer. KC wolf-whistled at her: ‘hello, young lady!’ and the four of them laughed loudly, chatting among themselves that they should take her out tonight for celebration.
The customer is clearly a willing participant in the joke. What we can see in the field note, but not hear in the audio-recording, is the corporeal dimension of the convivial interaction, as the eighty-seven-year-old woman makes a stylized performance of a much younger woman. All of the participants appear to enjoy the deployment of this stereotype as a resource for humour and convivial entertainment. The woman takes her leave, saying she will see them next week. However, as soon as the customer leaves the stall both Kang Chen and Bradley represent her voice in stylized, evaluative metacommentary, parodying her voice, and making fun of her stated wish to get home in half an hour (lines 41-46).

In this interaction the several voices move not only across ‘languages’, but across genres and registers. Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew speak to each other in Mandarin in the main. The African Caribbean woman’s accent is both Jamaican and Brummy; Bradley’s accent is decidedly Brummy; Kang Chen has a broad Fujian accent when speaking English; and Meiyen Chew speaks English with an accent at once Chinese and Malaysian. But neither languages nor accents are the key dimensions of this interaction. Resources in play in the translanguaging event include convivial humour, market banter, metacommentary, stereotypes, performance, non-verbal signs, stylization, reported speech (voicing), narrative, and more besides. In considering this interaction we make visible dimensions of the ideological becoming of Kang Chen and (perhaps to a lesser extent) Meiyen Chew, as they explicitly appropriate the words of others, implicitly try out voices, and engage in evaluative metacommentary on other people’s words. In these ways they engage in dialogical processes by which they come to align with some voices, discourses and ways of being, and distance themselves from others (Rampton 2014: 276). In these ongoing processes they find a voice. Kang Chen repeats the words of the customer (‘not too bad’; ‘still half an hour’), and of Bradley (‘all the water inside’; ‘you sure?’). Kang Chen’s deployment of ‘just so so’ and ‘only so so’ is a recontextualisation of this customer’s usual response to the greeting ‘how are you?’. The customer came to the stall every Tuesday morning, and ‘so so’ was her typical response. Kang Chen takes her words and tries them out, prompting her to respond in typical fashion, and when she doesn’t do so (line 6) he both echoes her words in the present (‘not too bad’) and her words in the past (‘only so so’).

Kang Chen has learned the norms of market discourse, and is able to deploy humorous banter. In line 2 he quickly picks up Bradley’s joke and adds to it. As we saw on many other occasions, the two men bounce off each other like a comedy duo, picking up each others’ cues and elaborating on each others’ jokes. Normally Bradley is the straight man, and Kang Chen the clown. As soon as the eighty-seven-year old woman leaves the stall they both more or less collapse with laughter. Meiyen Chew doesn’t get the joke, asking Kang Chen ‘what’s so funny?’ . But for Kang Chen and Bradley it does not need explanation. Instead they jointly and simultaneously make a stylized representation of the customer, each of them mocking the fact that although she had said she had no time to chat, she nevertheless lingered at the stall. Each of them takes her words and recontextualises them, making an artistic representation of her words such that they are half hers and half theirs. Kang Chen takes the voice of the customer and creatively re-accents it, parodies it, and, just as he did with the voices of the older Chinese woman and the caller from the Thai restaurant, he evaluates a verbal performance by creating an artistic representation of that performance. Like Bakhtin’s sly and ill-disposed polemicist (1981: 340) he takes his customers’ words and reframes them as comical. His parodistic voice clashes with the represented voice of the customer, and in the process he finds his voice.
This interaction is one of many we observed which included movement across languages, but in which languages were by no means the most significant dimension of the translanguaging event. The translanguaging repertoire in play was a repertoire which incorporated biographies and learning trajectories; it included aspects of communication not always thought of as ‘language’, including performance, humour, mock-flirtation, wolf-whistling, and so on. The translanguaging event was a record of mobility and experience; it was responsive to the market-place in which, and the people with whom, it occurred. In all of these examples of translanguaging events, and in many more we observed in Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market, spaces for communication were opened up, and people made meanings in whatever way possible. The market was a place where this could happen. This was a place where communicative resources could be tried out in translanguaging spaces and events. It was a place where people made fun of each other, teased each other, and sometimes became irritated with each other. Fundamentally it was a place for buying and selling. And translanguaging was a means by which this was successfully and convivially managed.
8. Coda

Emergence and becoming are never finished. However we assimilate the words of others, re-accent them, add our evaluative tone, creatively develop them, make them our own – still the becoming goes on. During our time observing in the market we took brief glimpses of many people in the often-crowded hall. Some of them we saw from week to week as they visited the Chinese butcher to buy chickens’ feet, blood curd, or pigs’ hearts. Most of them, however, we would never see again. Each of them was on their own journey of becoming, assimilating voices, developing a changing ideological view of the world. We were fortunate that we were allowed to observe the traders at the Chinese butchers’ stall repeatedly and frequently. They gave us an insight into their journey, into their ideological becoming, that could not have been provided by other means. We observed speech events that were connected on pathways and trajectories that allowed us to make visible how they travelled from one to another and shaped not only subsequent events, but also ways of being. We were able to analyse discourse beyond the individual speech event and “capture the heterogeneity of relevant resources and study the contingent emergence of social actions” (Wortham and Reyes 2015: 182). We saw and heard in the butchers’ interactions in the market their humour, mickey taking, teasing, sales patter, clowning around, complaining, mocking, and much more. We saw and heard them engage in complex language exchanges with people who brought different histories and backgrounds to the interaction. We saw and heard communication that went beyond ‘languages’, as people made meaning by whatever means possible. We also saw that communicative practices were not universally successful, as exchanges and encounters were situated in unequal structures of power. We saw that the journey for Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew was not just about movement from one temporal frame and geographical location to another; not just another timespace. It was also about a biographical trajectory of learning through encounters with others, with their voices, and with their signs. It was about emergence and becoming, and about finding a voice.

Transcription conventions:

(xxxx) unclear speech
! animated tone or exclamation
(.) a brief interval within an utterance
(2) a brief interval within an utterance, in seconds
[word] paralinguistic features and situational descriptions
< > English translation of speech
References


