
A Posthumanist Linguistic Approach to Hard of Hearing Identities

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This study explores how different Hard of Hearing identities emerge in the conversation where multiple semiotic and linguistic resources are mutually recruited in a spatial repertoire. While the social implication of Hard of Hearing people is a group of ‘disabled people’ who should be encouraged to ‘overcome the disability’ (Christiansen 1991), Hard of Hearing people are still spoken language speakers. They have sociolinguistic life where language use is intertwined with their identity construction. Most of the sociolinguistic studies on people with hearing loss are centered around their use of signed language. Hard of Hearing people have been absent in sociolinguistic since the foundation of this subject. As a traditional object of speech-language pathological research, Hard of Hearing speakers have not been treated as legitimate social actors who manipulate sounds. In fact, Hard of Hearing people still use sounds, though in a different way due to their different bodies from those of hearing people.

It is highly possible that the inability (disability) of hearing scholars to imagine how Hard of Hearing speakers perceive sounds leads to the lack of an examination of Hard of Hearing sociolinguistic life. On the other hand, a high variability in sound perception between Hard of Hearing subjects also makes it difficult to allow Hard of Hearing researchers to write for other subjects based on their own experiences. Accordingly, a post-humanist approach that decentralizes the individual capacity is helpful for researchers regardless of audiological status to explore the sociolinguistic world of Hard of Hearing people (Pennycook 2018). In such an approach, repertoire analysis does not look at how semiotic and linguistic resources are allocated in personal cognitive system. Instead, adopting this approach shifts the focus to semiotic and linguistic resources in the space.

I conducted the fieldwork in Taipei, Taiwan in 2014. This study applies the posthumanist linguistic approach to analyze a conversation in which three Hard of Hearing women

talked about the differences between the cochlear implant and hearing aids to the hearing researcher. I will show how the tonal variation and code-switching emerge in the conversation in relation to the other semiotic resources such as hearing assistive devices and different human subjects there.