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Language Management in the Digital Era  
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Linguicism in the digital era:

A language management  
perspective

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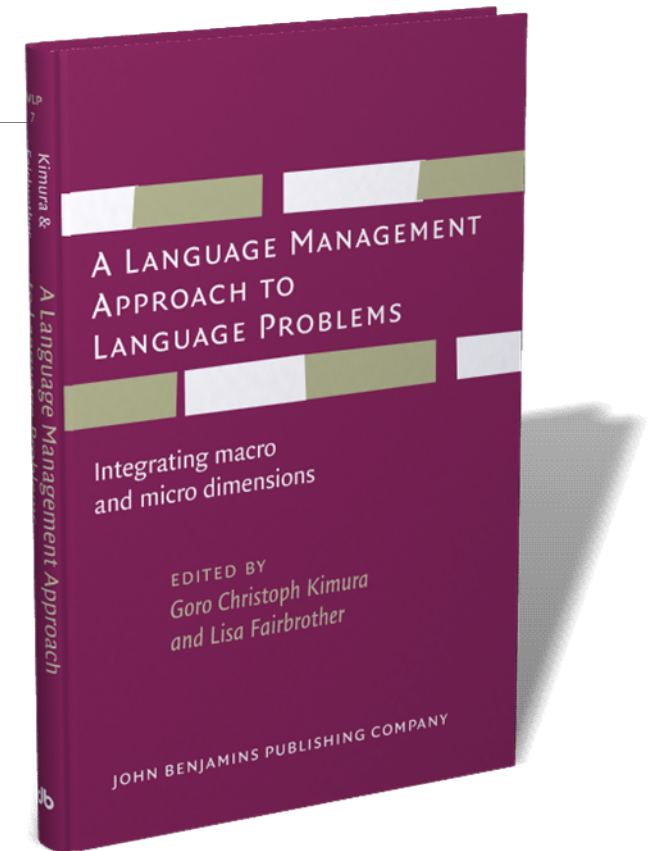
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# My inspiration for this topic

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“[T]he public engagement of researchers as an integral part of (application-oriented) research will hopefully contribute to changing the current status quo” (Kimura, 2020)

So, which language problems urgently need to be solved?



# And how do we know a language problem has been solved?

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*...any act of language planning should start with the consideration of language problems as they appear in discourse, and the planning process should not be considered complete until the removal of the problems is implemented in discourse*

(Neustupný, 1994: 50)

# Linguistic discrimination and linguicism

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*[L]inguicism is an umbrella concept that can characterise the full range of linguistic discrimination issues, including those relating to race, ethnicity, social class, language variation, marginalisation and injustice (Ngyuen & Hajek, 2022: 214)*

Linguicism was originally defined as:

*ideologies, structures and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, regulate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988: 13)*

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## Refined definition:

*ideologies or structures that effectuate, legitimate or reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (either material or non-material) along linguistic lines (Asensio, 2014: 142)*

**Groups => language and power**

# Different forms of linguisticism in the research (Nguyen & Hajek, 2022)

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1) Race-based concepts

2) **Language variation-based concepts**

# 1) Race-based concepts of linguicism

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Discrimination against one's language or language use because of one's race or racialized community (predominantly US research)

\*racialization = attaching racial meaning to a person or a group

## **1. Linguistic racism**

Original concept: Prejudicial attitudes that non-standard dialects, particularly those of racialized groups, are inferior to standard varieties (Tomlinson, 1975)

Later definitions: linguistic discrimination is used as a way of racializing the people being discriminated against (Ronkin & Karn, 1999). E.g. Mock Spanish

# 1) Race-based concepts of linguicism

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## **2. Raciolinguistics** (Flores & Rosa, 2015)

Focuses on the combination of linguistic ideologies and racialization

E.g. The concept of Standard English in US academic settings idealizes the language of White people and stigmatizes the non-White. As result, the accent, communication styles and vocabulary of some non-White academics and students will be considered illegitimate (Davis & Moore, 2014).

## 2) Language variation-based linguicism

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Linguistic discrimination based on differences in linguistic forms, elements, features or varieties.

Amongst speakers of the same language or between speakers of different languages.

### **1. accent discrimination** (Orelus, 2016, 2018)

Discrimination against someone's non-standard way of pronouncing words, and also towards their social class, national, regional and racial background.

## 2) Language variation-based linguicism

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### **2. Linguistic profiling** (Baugh, 2003)

Discrimination based on the language-based categorization of someone.

E.g. their way of speaking sounds uneducated, their writing looks non-native, **so** they won't get the job they interviewed for.

### **3. (Non)native-speakerism** (Holliday, 2015; Rivers, 2017)

Belief in the superiority of 'Native' English speaker teachers and the idealization of Western cultural norms and practices.

This results in linguistic discrimination against non-native speaker teachers.

## Translingual discrimination (Dovchin & Dryden, 2022)

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- “language-based discrimination **against transnational migrants**, whose sociolinguistic backgrounds and linguistic practices are displaced, subverted, and challenged” (Dovchin, 2022: 10)
- A shift in focus towards the problems faced by migrants

# Translingual name discrimination

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- **Translingual name discrimination:** “in which the transnational migrants’ social and **economic** opportunities are instantly subverted and their intrinsic qualities and skills are immediately reduced based on their birth name” (Dovchin, 2022: 12)
- **Translingual name microaggressions** (Dovchin, 2022): “the micro and subtle form of discriminatory practices against migrants’ birth name”[s], including the misspelling of names, which exclude certain birth names from the normative practices of the majority.
- This often results in ‘**renaming practices**’ (Dovchin, 2022), such as “adopting names that fit English mouths to pronounce and English ears to hear” (p.28). (See also Archakis, 2018; de Klerk, 2002; Xing, 2018)

# Linguicism relating to names

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People with racialized names [i.e. names assumed to be associated with a particular race] are less likely to be called for **employment interviews** (Betrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Pager & Western, 2012; Quillian et al., 2017).

Having a 'different' name can make you the target of **harassment and bullying** (Kuramoto et al., 2017).

The use (or expected use) of an English name by Chinese speakers can lead to feelings of **marginalization** of their Chinese identity (Xing, 2018).

References to 'foreign-sounding names' are used to **'Other' immigrants** as part of the discourse of 'new racism' (Clifton, 2013).

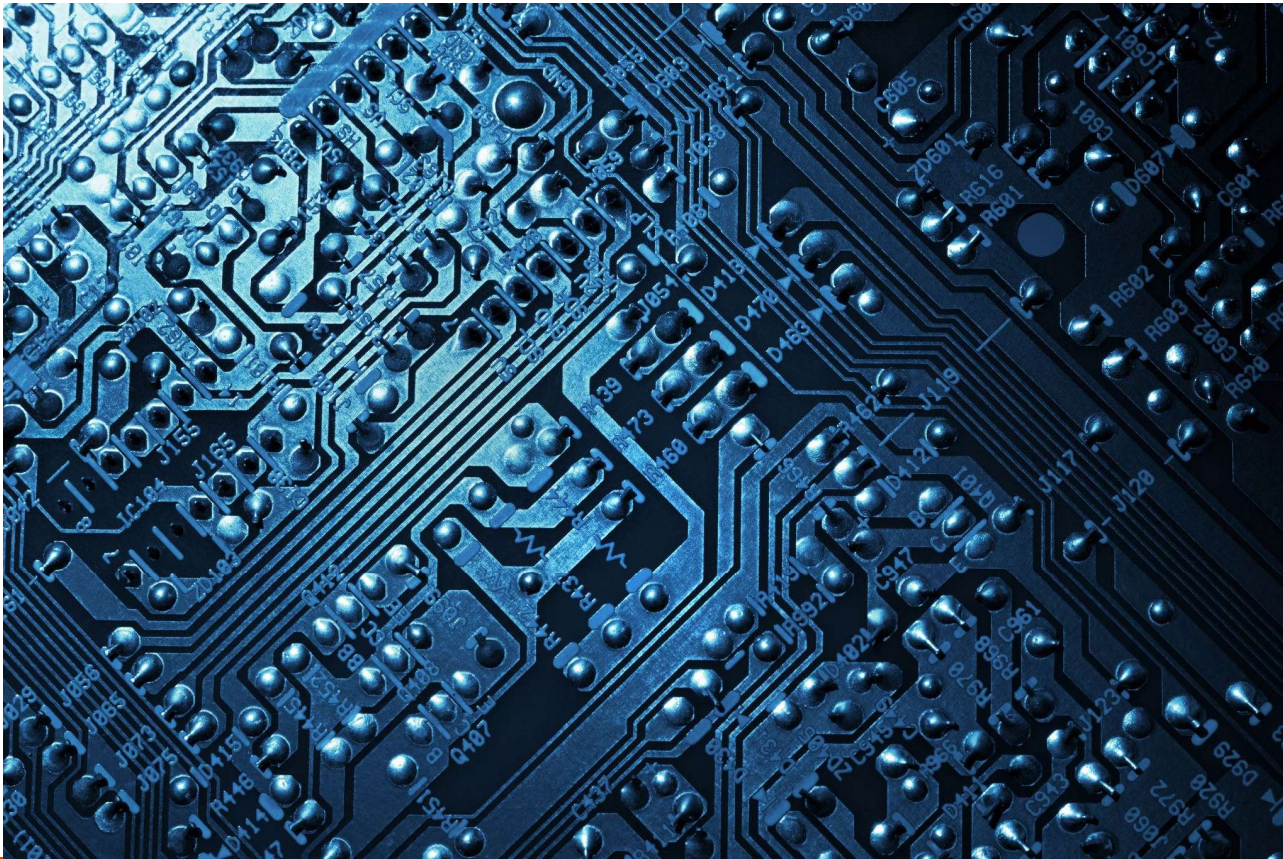
# The effects of linguicism

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“linguicism places individuals and groups at a subordinate (linguistic) position and **legitimizes the unequal allocation of social power and resources between them and the privileged people and groups**”  
(Nguyen & Hajek, 2022: 203)

As globalization and migration increase, particularly in societies facing labour shortages due to the aging population, these issues become even more important.

So, what about the digital era?



# Discrimination and technology

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Computer algorithms have been found to discriminate against different groups based on:

- Race (Angwin & Parris, 2016; Stewart, 2019)
- Gender (Lambrecht & Tucker, 2016; Datta et al., 2018)
- Sexual orientation (Guha et al., 2010; Griffin, 2024)

Regarding algorithmic content moderation on social media, ‘there is accumulating evidence of widespread (hetero) sexist, racist, classist, and other biases on content moderation’ (Griffin, 2024: 1267)

# Why does this happen?

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Algorithms are usually developed from training datasets, which themselves reflect social inequalities and human biases.

The training datasets are based on the past biased decisions made by human moderators, who were usually not trained or paid well and had to make quick judgements on the spot (Griffin, 2024).

# The starting point for my own research

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A common digital-related language problem in Japan that I frequently read about online (and experience personally!) relates to the inability to input 'non-standard' **names** on certain online digital forms, leading, in many cases, to the complete **refusal of service**.

This was never a problem in the past! But with the shift to paperless digital online transactions, these problems appear to be occurring more frequently but with few options for solutions.

# Digital name discrimination

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- Language filters on online gaming sites have been found to disallow certain names relating to “LGBT cultures” (Kelley, 2012).
- The computer software that a prestigious UK medical school had been using to aid their admissions procedures had been penalizing applicants with ‘non-Christian surnames’ (Rattansi, 2007).
- In 2015, Facebook cancelled the accounts of hundreds of North American Indigenous users because their algorithm failed to recognize their names as ‘real names’. Their names were flagged because they were composed of multiple words or had unusual capitalization (Miceli, Posada & Yang, 2022).

# A typical example

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I tried to buy a new SIM card from a very well known Japanese company

There weren't enough character spaces available for me to input my full name either in English or Japanese in the online application form (noted deviation)

I input part of my name and submitted digital copies of 2 types of photo ID (adjustment 1)

BUT my **application was rejected** because my inputted partial name and ID didn't match. I called the call centre to talk to a human to try to solve the problem (adjustment 2)

I was told very apologetically that I wouldn't be able to apply because my name couldn't be accepted by the online system and **there was no other way to apply**

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**Me:** ‘But this is discrimination, isn’t it?’

**Operator:** ‘We’re very sorry but it wasn’t intentional and there’s nothing we can do about it because it’s a problem with the system’.



# How does this relate to linguicism?

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People with non-standard names (including some Japanese nationals) may be **refused access to certain goods and services** just because of the different linguistic form of their names means they can't input it online.

With the shift to exclusively online services, there are often **no options provided to contact a human being** in order to solve these problems.

In some cases, humans have **rescinded all gatekeeping power to the digitalized system.**

# Data

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Survey of posts and comments on English-language online discussion forums/ SNS groups in Japan (*translingual safe space*: Dovchin, 2022).

Online and face-to-face interviews with people affected by these issues.

# The key LMT questions

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- 1) What deviations from norms are being noted? By whom?
- 2) How are deviations being evaluated? By whom?
- 3) What adjustment plans are being made? By whom?
- 4) What adjustment plans are being implemented? By whom?
- 5) What happens at the post-implementation stage? Who is/isn't doing it?
- 6) What macro and micro connections can we see?
- 7) Whose interests does this management serve?

# Noted deviations

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Type 1: Inputting problems on online digital forms

1) Certain characters used to represent non-Japanese names can't be used

a) The vowel-lengthening *nobashibo*

- フェアブラザー

b) Small-sized vowels

- フェアブラザー => フェアブラザー

c) The character for a 'v' sound ヴ

- Gavin: ガヴィン => ガビン (Gabin)

## 2) Being unable to input the correct character size (full-width versus half-width characters) or add spaces

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フェアブラザーリサ vs フェアブラザーリサ

## 3) Not being able to input one's full name because of limitations placed on the number of characters that can be inputted

- Lisa Fairb (online shopping sites)
- L Fairbrother (credit card)

## 4) Transliteration issues (Angermeyer, 2012)

- Priority given to the Japanese script, so the programme will not accept input of the original name in Roman letters, only the Japanese transliteration in *romaji*
  - フェアブラザー -> Feaburazaa

# Noted deviations

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Type 2: Inconsistent representation of names at different institutions

Different name representation=different person

**1) Having a name registered with different orthography at different institutions**

フ**エ**アブラザー vs フ**エ**アブラザー

**2) Having a name registered in a different script at different institutions**  
(script alternation: Angermeyer, 2012)

- *roman letters vs katakana*

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**3) Different institutions use different spacing conventions, particularly for middle names and double-barreled family names**

フェアブラザー リサ ヘレン

フェアブラザー リサヘレン

**4) Different institutions using different name order and name combinations**

*“I have had a nightmare getting a credit card in Japan because apparently some banks in the past have used my middle name, and some have not. Some have put my middle name at the end, and some have put it in the middle. Keep getting denied over it.”*

# Who does the noting?

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**\*Individual users**

**\*Some institutional representatives**

**\*Many computer programmers**

Falsehoods Programmers Believe About Names  
(Kalzumeus.com; Reddit r/programming)

Issues in other countries: capitalization, short names, etc.

# How are deviations evaluated?

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## General frustrations

*“Really stupid”*

*“It’s the bane of my existence”*

## Criticisms of the system as outdated

*“Your name is too long for our 1980s computer system. Sorry we cannot give you a bank account.”*

*“It’s hilarious. It’s so old school it’s ridiculous. Just take my money and shut up.”*

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## Mocking the inefficiency of the system (resisting marginalization)

*“What!?! You didn’t write your middle name? We had better ask three different managers to ask what to do in such a serious situation.”*

*“Good luck. I’ve heard similar stories and it usually ends up being a Kafkaesque nightmare to get it fixed”*

## Reassignment of blame

*“Its not the banks fault, it’s the restrictive website’s fault”*

# Online adjustment design suggestions

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## 1) Try to input your name in a different way

- *“Try with half-width katakana”*

## 2) Confront the responsible party directly

*“Call them”*

## 3) Give up and try a different company (avoidance)

- *“Just apply for Company Y credit card, it’s much simpler”*

## 4) Legally change your name (avoidance)

*Register an alias and use that for bank and card”*

*“You can change your name on your passport” !!*

# Institutional response ①

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**Attempt to solve the surface issue without addressing the underlying interface issue:**

- P: *“I called the bank and they asked me to **divide my middle name on first and last name and skip a letter**. They shall ask me to **send other documents later and I shall use the manual post way of payment not the bank one for now**. Also she mentioned **my procedures will take longer time and there is a possibility my application might not be processed because of the name thing**”*

## Institutional response ②

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A Peruvian customer at a well-known computer store brought all the necessary documentation to apply for a loan (incremental payment service).

The store was unable to input the customer's 4 names into the loan software after many attempts, even though he had all the right documentation with him that the staff could verify.

The customer's application was simply rejected because the system couldn't verify his name (**even though the human employees could!**).

- The store manager asked the loan company to fix the problem **but they refused**. Their response: "It's not a really a serious problem because **it's just a limited number of customers** that this happens to"



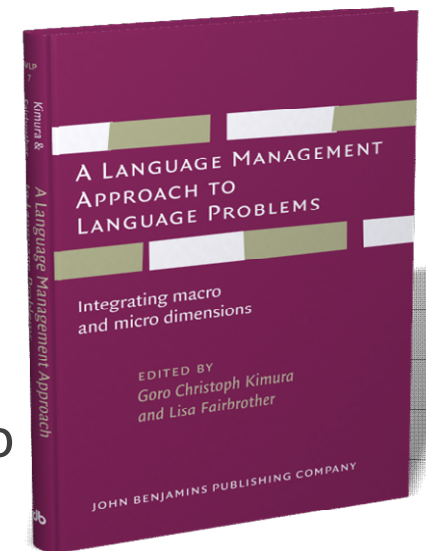
## **The intertwining macro and micro dimensions of language management**

# Macro and micro dimensions of management

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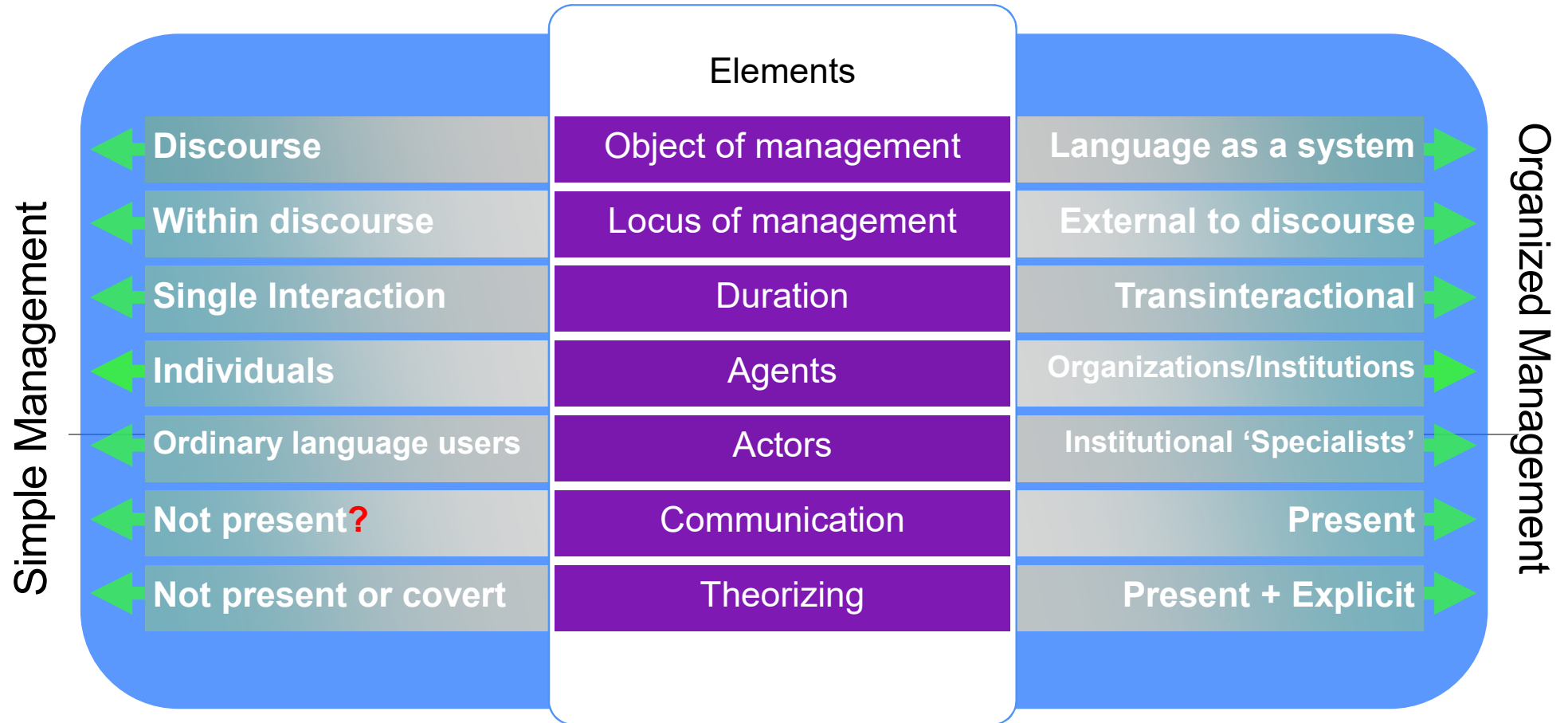
Rather than thinking of the macro and micro as different levels or layers, it's more useful to view the micro and macro as an intertwining continuum, with some 'behaviour toward language' being 'more macro-focused' and some being 'more micro-focused' (Kimura & Fairbrother, 2020)

Drawing on Neustupný's (1997) conceptualization of the macro and micro as 'continuous' and Nekvapil's (2012, 2016) list of characteristics of organized management, we devised the **micro/macro multidimensional continuum**.



# A micro/macro multidimensional continuum

(Adapted from Fairbrother & Kimura, 2022)



# 1) Object of management

## **Simple Management:** Discourse

\*attempts to input a name in different ways to fit the online digital form

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## **Organized Management:** Language as a system

\*some attempts by individual institutional staff to try to get around the digital restrictions

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# MISSING MANAGEMENT



# Missing management?

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- \* Inability/unwillingness of the institutions to find solutions to prevent name input problems
  
- \* Lack of solutions provided by computer programmers/ the people hiring the computer programmers

## 2) The locus of management

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### **SM: *within discourse***

Users struggling with the online forms/ negotiating with institutional staff/ writing comments on internet boards

### **OM: *external to discourse***

Missing management: Re-designing the institution's digital systems

Missing management: Introducing national standards across institutions

# 3) Duration of management

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## **SM: Occurring in single interactions**

- \*Each individual user's interactions with the digital online form
  - \*Each individual user's interactions with institutional representatives
  - \*Each individual user's comments on online forums and their responses
- =>The accumulation of single interactions = OM: Transinteractional

## **OM: Transinteractional**

- \*The repetition of these enquiries to institutional representatives
- \*The repetition of online complaints
- \*Presumably some institutions have already solved the inputting problems

## 4) Agents

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### **SM: Individuals**

They notice the issues and have to contact the institutions, or make pleas online, by themselves to find solutions

### **OM: Organizations/ Institutions**

They note the deviations but claim they are 'unable' to solve individual inputting problems. (It's the system's fault!)

## 4) Agents

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HOWEVER, institutions often request updates to their computer systems *without* specifying the real needs of their users.

They may blame it on the computer programmers but Miceli, Posada & Yang (2022: 10) “**see requesters as co-designers of data**, and not as mere consumers”. Their lack of sufficient pre-interaction management (Nekvapil & Sherman BEFORE requesting system updates does not absolve them of responsibility. So, ‘It’s not the bank’s fault’ really shouldn’t be accepted as an excuse.

# 5) Actors

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## **SM: Ordinary language users**

People who can't access online platforms and need to manage the language problems themselves by contacting the institutions and making complaints online.

## **OM: Institutional representatives (“specialists”)**

Some representatives may try their best to find solutions outside the digital online forms BUT individually they can't change the underlying digital system, they often aren't responsible for ordering new digital systems and they aren't responsible for policies of the whole organization.

**Missing management: coordination between specialists** within the organization who *can* fix the issues and prevent other issues from occurring

# 6) Communication about management

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## **SM: Present**

An individual writing a complaint in an online forum about their failed attempts to manage their problems with online digital forms could be seen as one type of simple management

An individual giving advice online about how to solve such problems

## **OM: Present**

\*Institutional responses and refusal of service

\*Attempts within organizations to communicate about the inputting issues and try to find solutions

# 7) Theorizing

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**SM: Not present**

Unless you are researching these issues!

**OM: Present in some of the more recent research on AI**

\*Miceli, Posada & Yang (2022) highlight the power asymmetries relating to data and systems and question 'how is AI shifting power?'

\*Philip, Irani & Dourish (2012) theorize 'Postcolonial computing'

\*D'Ignazio & Klein (2020) focus on 'data feminism' and conceptualize data science as a form of power, questioning 'data science by whom?' and 'data science for whom?'

# Whose interests does this management or 'missing' management serve?

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**The institutions**, which didn't plan for the actual range of customer names when setting up new systems and don't want to pay for whole new computer systems to rectify the problems. They can get away with not catering to the needs of a small minority of clients (especially if they are non-Japanese nationals). Some corporations may actually benefit from preserving social inequalities (Griffin, 2024).

**The computer programmers**, who want to avoid certain inputting problems, but also don't want to design whole new interfaces to fix a limited number of problems.

**The Japanese government?:** It aligns with the current government's official resistance to immigration? Pushing for equal access could be seen as a sign of weakness?

# A clear need for organized management

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Laws to make it illegal to deny equal access to services (currently only legally required for Japanese nationals). Strict regulations for institutions so that they keep open non-digital avenues for applicants with non-standard names

Diversity training for computer programmers AND the requesters of new digital systems, so that they are aware of the range of possibilities necessary when designing and requesting interfaces.

Standardized national or international data inputting systems that are particularly sensitive to name variation.

More education about the diversity within Japanese society... and beyond.

# Conclusions

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Whether intentional or not, restricting access to goods and services because of the linguistic form of ones name is clearly a case of linguicism.

Not providing a means to rectify such problems and leaving the whole burden of managing access to online services to the individual only compounds such discrimination.

Blaming such inequalities on the 'system' and removing the power to rectify problems from human actors is a dangerous path.

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With the rapid development of AI, we can predict that cases of technology-based linguisticism will only increase and we need to be developing more robust systems at the policy and programming levels to hold corporations, institutions and governments to account.

“[S]ociolinguistics needs to become much more part of the conversation around the development of digital technology” (Kelly-Holmes, 2022: 107). In particular, we need to be aware of the different forms that linguisticism can take and help organizations be more aware of these issues and find ways to help individual language users get solutions to their language problems.

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Hopefully this kind of research will provoke further investigations into issues of linguicism in the digital age, particularly in non-Western contexts outside the typical knowledge production “centres”, which “may contribute to shedding light on new linguicism issues that are not clearly observable in Western societies” (Nguyen & Hajek, 2022: 214).

Thank you for listening

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**謝謝!**

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