Linguistic diversity poses a significant but not insuperable obstacle to transnational flows of popular music in East Asia. This paper reviews strategies that are used to overcome language barriers, especially the use of English by mainstream artists. Although this strategy has met with some success, it can be problematic in that it involves the negotiation of new artist identities with audiences. This negotiation of identities is illustrated by an analysis of YouTube comments on two English-language music videos by established Asian-language singers – Tata Young’s ‘Sexy, Naughty, Bitchy’ and Utada Hikaru’s ‘Easy Breezy’, which indicates that language, ethnic and gender identities are all problematized when these singers choose to sing in English.

This presentation is based on a forthcoming paper in the journal Popular Music. As part of the presentation, I will outline how I designed the small-scale research project on which it is based and prepared the paper for publication.

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