



*Routledge Critical Studies in Multilingualism*

**LANGUAGE AND CULTURE  
ON THE MARGINS**  
**GLOBAL/LOCAL INTERACTIONS**

Edited by  
Sjaak Kroon and Jos Swanenberg



# Language and Culture on the Margins

This collection of twelve essays examines sociolinguistic phenomena in a wide variety of marginal environments, providing both an overview of globalization on the margins and a foundation for an expanded understanding of the processes of linguistic and cultural changes at work in these settings. Taking an expansive conceptual view of margins, the volume is organized in three parts, looking at examples of marginal spaces in the nation-state, in online environments, and in the peripheries of urban locations, globally to call attention to new and changing discursive genres, patterns, practices, and identities emerging in these spaces as a result of contemporary mobilities, the evolving global economy, and sociopolitical changes. With research previously confined to the study of globalization in urban areas, this volume opens the door for further research on the complex sociolinguistic processes resulting from globalization on the margins, making this an ideal resource for students and scholars in sociolinguistics, globalization and heritage studies, new media, anthropology and cultural studies.

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Jos Swanenberg



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# 1 Introduction

## Language and Culture on the Margins

*Sjaak Kroon and Jos Swanenberg*

### Globalization and Peripheries

Ongoing globalization processes are turning the world into a far more diverse place than it has ever been before. Apart from people and goods, languages and cultures are also crossing borders, thereby creating new superdiverse sociolinguistic environments in which new discursive genres and patterns are emerging, along with new linguistic and cultural practices and identities. These processes are not only at work in situations where people engage in conversations and in written communication in the real world but also in the virtual social environments of the online world where there appear to be no limits in terms of time and space.

Globalization revolves around and across scales in a specific time-space (Blommaert, 2010, 2015). Scales are generally defined in terms of geography, economics and social and institutional hierarchies. There are increasingly complex connections between local phenomena and phenomena occurring at higher, trans-local scale-levels, and the effects of such connections are evident at all scale-levels (Wang, et al., 2014).

Digitalization and globalization are closely intertwined (Castells, 2010). There are new affordances for the circulation of language resources and cultural artefacts (e.g. texts, still and moving images, musical forms etc.). This has increased the importance of language, culture and semiosis in the construction of lifestyles and identities, and in categorizing, distinguishing and positioning different selves. To build a fuller understanding of these complex and rapid processes of social change, and of the local dynamics of linguistic and cultural diversity, we need to pay close attention to locality, region or periphery in ongoing sociolinguistic research into the broader processes of globalization. This, we argue, is a crucial element of the task of forging a new sociolinguistics for our times.

This line of argument goes further than merely espousing the concept of ‘glocalization’. This concept was originally introduced as a marketing strategy in the world of international business (Robertson, 1995) and implied that there is increased uniformity and conformity in particular localities due to globalization processes. Instead, we argue that we need

to build an understanding of the immense diversity in various localities that are becoming part of global networks. The nature and scope of contemporary diversity has been described by some scholars as ‘superdiversity’ or ‘the diversification of diversity’ (e.g. Vertovec, 2007). In superdiverse settings, some local linguistic and cultural practices move to a trans-local scale-level (e.g. intense digital communication across new diaspora) but do not necessarily become global, while others remain local. There are also local interpretations, applications and adaptations of global processes and localized translocal forms of meaning-making and communicative practices (e.g. the many examples of ‘be like’ pages on Facebook, studied by Visser, Nortier, & Swanenberg, 2015).

In the course of the last decade or so, research on language, globalization and superdiversity (e.g. Arnaut, Blommaert, Rampton, & Spotti, 2016; Blommaert, Collins, & Slembrouck, 2005; Creese & Blackledge, 2018; Kern & Selting, 2011; Martin-Jones, Blackledge, & Creese, 2012) has addressed a wide variety of topics, such as the spread of (new varieties of) English all over the world; changes in linguistic landscapes; polylingualism, (trans)linguaging, transidiomaticity, code-switching and code-mixing; the emergence of new language varieties, new literacies and semiotic resources; language in popular culture, hip hop music and rap; language and new media and computer gaming. However, this research has been mainly concentrated in sites where these sociolinguistic phenomena and these processes of cultural change and creativity are highly visible: that is, in the vast contemporary metropolis with its dynamic and conspicuous social and linguistic diversity, its hypermobility and constant flux. However, new diversities, new mobilities, and new forms of Internet-based communication also constitute a key dimension of social life and social change on the margins of large urban centers and global cities, in the peripheral zones of the world, on the periphery of nation-states and in peripheral institutional spaces. We encounter the traces of globalization and features of superdiversity in unexpected places, literally, at the *margins*, far away from the well-known vibrant global centers. There is no reason to exclude these margins from analyses of globalization processes (see e.g. Thissen, 2018). Globalization is transforming the entire world system (Wallerstein, 2004). It is not only affecting the metropolitan centers of the world but it is also having an impact on the margins, may be in a different manner, including social spaces that are quite remotely situated with respect to metropolitan centers.

This book focuses on sociolinguistic phenomena occurring in marginal environments, within the wider context of globalization. It presents research carried out in a range of different marginal settings, focusing on polylingualism and situated language and literacy practices, on language, music and popular culture, on linguistic landscapes, on semiotic practices emerging in the context of new forms of economic activity and on the use of new media and communication technologies.



## Defining the ‘Margins’

The concept of ‘margins’ that is adopted in this volume is broadly defined (cf. Wang, et al., 2014). We are using it in terms that are synonymous with the notion of ‘peripheries’. In using these terms, we have in mind the small nations in the global south, the margins of large and rapidly growing cities in the global south (such as the townships in South Africa), the margins of nations in the global north (such as dialect or minority language areas), and the margins of the Internet (such as ‘underground’ websites or the dark web). At the same time, different aspects of marginality may be interwoven: people with their own distinct linguistic and cultural resources, living in geographical peripheries, may well be socially marginalized as well (e.g. the Sami in the northern regions of the Nordic countries).

Thus, our broad definition of margins includes a geographical aspect with various scales: the peripheries of the metropolis, the peripheries of the nation state, or the periphery of the new power blocks in today’s multipolar world. We also see geography as intersecting with political economy; thus geographical peripheries are often less privileged economically. This has social consequences: only those within the centers of our multipolar world benefit from economic globalization. The inequalities between centers and margins shape not only economic and social status but also cultural and linguistic practices. Moreover, there is unequal access to the material, cultural and linguistic resources that are available to those in the center (e.g. unequal access to the ‘legitimate language’ – Bourdieu, 1991), and hence, access to opportunities for mobility. Thus, in this volume, our focus is on the cultural, discursive and semiotic processes at work as a consequence of economic and social marginalization in geographical peripheries on various scales (see also Blommaert, 2010).

This volume incorporates examples from different marginal sites across the world and it provides vivid insights into people’s lived experiences of unequal access to resources and opportunities and on their understandings of the positioning. As Wang, et al. (2014, p. 36) have pointed out: ‘people experience a difference between center and periphery’ and ‘those inhabiting the (perceived) periphery feel marginalized economically, politically, culturally, and linguistically by the (perceived) center.’ Since language is a key resource for constructing and representing social identities, it is a key topic in the semiotic study of globalization on the margins. For instance, a national language is often imposed on speakers of nonstandard varieties or other languages (such as regional languages and the languages of minority groups of immigrant origin). Those who include such language resources in their communicative repertoires are negatively stereotyped as ‘uneducated’ and ‘backward’. At the same time, particular linguistic resources, such as nonstandard

varieties, minority languages or indigenous languages can serve as emblems of alternative values and as an imagined and cultivated form of unspoiled 'authenticity'. They can even be subject to commodification (Duchêne & Heller, 2007, 2012). This seems to be the case in many internationally funded projects that are aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage or endangered minority languages.

Margins are by no means isolated places that are characterized by stability. They are closely connected to the rest of the world, and similar processes of social change, ushered in by globalization, can be seen at work. These include: processes set in motion by contemporary mobilities, including outward migration that is oriented to large urban centers and, on occasion, inward migration (e.g. by those seeking work in rural areas) (e.g. Cabral & Martin-Jones, 2017). Margins are also caught up in globalized economic activities such as tourism (especially when local linguistic and cultural resources are commodified). In addition, political and economic changes, regional conflicts or other global processes have an influence on the linguistic and cultural landscapes of peripheral areas. And, last but not least, people on the periphery are linked to the rest of the world through the World Wide Web and the use of digital media such as mobile phones (e.g. the increasingly networked nature of communication between indigenous groups around the world).

Within the margins, specific centers can sometimes emerge. Geographical peripheries will have their own regionally central towns, although these towns will be considered peripheral from the perspective of larger cities within the geoeconomic center. In these cases, geographical and hierarchical scales are intertwined. Furthermore, projects of language conservation and revitalization within the periphery often involve the introduction of new linguistic norms and marginalized languages or dialects undergo standardization, and even commodification, as part of these projects (Lane, Costa, & De Korne, 2018; Wang, et al., 2014). Such projects are funded by regional governments and legitimized by international conventions on the preservation of cultural heritage. However, any project of this kind runs the risk of becoming prescriptive and normative. This inevitably leaves local speakers who do not conform to the newly introduced norms (twice) marginalized. In that way, a new center of symbolic power might arise within the periphery (Lane, et al., 2018).

Such forms of globalization on the margins trigger complex processes of sociolinguistic and cultural reordering and invite examination of emerging language and literacy practices. In-depth investigation of such practices can contribute to the development of a fuller, critical understanding of the processes of change occurring on the margins (in the past and the present). This kind of research allows us to compare and contrast the changes taking place on the margins with those being documented for metropolitan centers. The margins of the world system did

not appear just like that: they have histories, presents and futures. It is by considering factors of infrastructure and the way that they are shaping local sociocultural economies that we can begin to understand contemporary processes of inequality and marginalization.

## Overview of the Volume

This volume has been organized into three broad sections, bringing together chapters that foreground particular aspects of social, linguistic and cultural change associated with globalization on the margins. The first section is entitled: *Center-periphery dynamics in the discursive (re-)construction of nation-states*. It includes contributions by scholars working in the global south and in the global north and west. These contributions all focus on moments of social and political change within particular nation-states, and on linguistic, social, ideological and cultural changes resulting from centralized or decentralizing language regimes, or from new patterns of inward migration triggered by global changes.

The first chapter in this section is by Jan Blommaert. It focuses on national language policy in postcolonial Tanzania. Reviewing the research on language planning and policy in Tanzania, Blommaert notes that the main narrative that has been developed relates to the relative success of postcolonial language policy in establishing – from the center – a particular sociolinguistic order in which Kiswahili figures as the main emblem of nationhood. He also notes that one of the limitations of this research narrative is that the analytic focus is on ‘language’, which is seen as a bounded, countable object. He argues instead for a focus on language resources such as registers as a means of capturing the center-periphery dynamics at play in this postcolonial situation and the resistance that has emerged, on different scales, to the new sociolinguistic order. He indicates that the contemporary consequences of this language policy and ‘the polycentric system of competing registers’ can only be understood by employing a register-based approach.

The second chapter, by Zane Goebel, examines the social, cultural and linguistic changes taking place in the 21st century in Indonesia in the wake of the political shift in this nation-state toward decentralization and devolution of political power. Focusing on the formation of one new province – called Cirebon – through the merger of five districts, Goebel reveals the current tensions at play between centralization and fragmentation in this particular context. He also shows how local language varieties, of Sundanese and Javanese, are characterized in discussions of regional identity and of the content of local school curricula. In addition, he draws attention to new, smaller scale moves toward centralizing, standardizing and the forging of new norms for local language varieties and the debates generated by these moves.

The third chapter, by Sjaak Kroon, Jenny-Louise Van der Aa, and Yonas Mesfun Asfaha deals with Eritrea, a peripheral country in the Horn of Africa. It aims to show that in spite of its alleged international isolation and stagnating technological development, the people in Eritrea are digitally more connected than ever. This is shown by taking a look at English, one of the main drivers of globalization, as reflected in the linguistic landscape of Eritrea's capital Asmara, more specifically its main street Harnet Avenue. Longitudinal linguistic landscape data collected between 2001 and 2016 show a slow but sure development of digital affordances and infrastructures and witness a move from analogue text to a complex on/offline semiotics. This leads to the conclusion that a country's marginality and isolation does not necessarily prevent its inhabitants from participating digitally in globalization.

The second section of this volume is entitled: *Marginalized language and literacy resources online and in digital media*. This section includes four chapters. The first chapter, by Shaila Sultana, explores how young women in a peripheral South Asian country (Bangladesh) challenge the predefined gendered identity attributes in their transglossic language practices in virtual space. Based on the analysis of conversations on Facebook drawn from a three-month long ethnographic research project, Sultana shows that young women actively and reflexively take advantage of linguistic and cultural resources in virtual space. First, they challenge the accepted norm in relation to marriage, sex and the linguistic appropriacy and propriety expected from them as women in the Bangladeshi society. Second, they seem to be in control of their sexuality. They also enjoy a certain level of freedom from social and cultural boundaries when they disrupt the gendered norms. Thus, virtual space, with its immense multimodal potency, gives young women opportunities for newer forms of communication and novel ways of engaging in gender performativity. Nevertheless, these emerging new online voices are continually in tension with and confronted by the social and cultural ideologies and values that circulate in offline environments.

The second chapter, by Jos Swanenberg, deals with the role that digital media, such as YouTube, play in identification processes among young people in Noord-Brabant, a province in the central southern region of the Netherlands. His chapter draws on recent sociolinguistic research into the use of features of the local language variety (Brabantish). The data analysis focused on a series of video clips called *New Kids* that were recorded in a small hamlet in Noord-Brabant and that gained considerable popularity when the series was posted on YouTube. *New Kids* portrays stereotypical regional identities, antisocial attitudes and corresponding linguistic practices. Swanenberg's chapter draws attention to the processes of identification at work in this peripheral context, highlighting in particular the use of linguistic and cultural resources in the construction of stereotypes and, at the same time, in the construction of a sense of belonging and a sense of authenticity and heritage.

In the third chapter in this section, Fie Velghe reports on research that she carried out in a South African township (Wesbank), on the outskirts of Cape Town. She shows that the levels of poverty, unemployment and social marginalization in the township make it virtually impossible for local residents to gain access to literacy or to develop rudimentary literacy skills. In her chapter, Velghe argues that the high uptake of mobile phone technology in global south contexts such as this one can play a vital part in reaching those who do not have access to formal schooling and can offer an orientation to nonformal learning practices, out-of-school, even for those who are living at the very bottom of the income pyramid. The use of mobile technology can provide access to certain digital literacies and can open up opportunities for sustaining newly-acquired digital literacy skills. Velghe illustrates her argument with reference to the case of a 60-year-old woman (Sarah) who participated in her study and who described herself as 'illiterate', but who nevertheless learned to write and send text messages. Velghe recounts in detail the learning processes experienced by Sarah, along with the efforts she put into the acquisition and consolidation of these digital literacy skills.

The fourth chapter in this section is written by Luiz Paulo Moita-Lopes, Branca Falabella Fabrício and Thayse Figueira Guimarães. Their focus is on the digital literacy practices of a group of teenagers who frequent a cyber café in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and on the social practices that are bound up with their literacy practices. The cyber café (or 'lan house') was the main site for the research conducted by Moita-Lopes, et al. It is located in one of the poorer neighborhoods on the periphery of Rio de Janeiro. In this chapter, Moita-Lopes, et al. present the findings of the research that they conducted with this group of young people, drawing on audio recordings of their talk around computer screens. Their analysis highlights particular performativities relating to gender and sexualities and shows how these young people entextualize and recontextualize discourses that they encounter online. It also shows how different kinds of spatiotemporal scales are mobilized performatively. The authors argue that the young people's practices involve active engagement with globalization processes associated with 'critical positionings in timespace scales' while, at the same time, being positioned within the periphery. They also argue that close analysis of situated language and literacy practices in such peripheral contexts enable us to build an understanding of the intricate ways in which global and peripheral perspectives get interwoven.

The third and final section of this volume is entitled: *Language and semiosis in identification and commodification processes at work in marginal spaces*. The first chapter, by Petteri Laihonon and István Csernicskó, addresses language ideologies in a multilingual, marginal space caught between Western European visions of modernity and post-Soviet transition. The authors explore how language is conceptualized in the Transcarpathian Oblast of Ukraine, and why and how



some languages are used and others are absent in the realm of tourism. Tourism in the Transcarpathia region of Ukraine displays the region's complex and heterogeneous multilingualism along with the post-Soviet ideological tensions over Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism. Despite low numbers of registered speakers, Russian is still used as the instrumental lingua franca in the region, in interethnic communication and in communication with tourists from other parts of Ukraine and as a major digital language. However, in the case of a popular spa, which is located in a village with a Hungarian majority, Russian has been erased in favor of standard Ukrainian indicating a Ukrainian nation-building commitment. The use of Hungarian and occasional English can be seen to contribute to both linguistic authenticity and to constructing a western European image. The commodification of Hungarian, especially in symbols, for Ukrainian tourists by Ukrainian owners has been a source of some contestation by the local Hungarians, whose own village tourism network has targeted Hungarian heritage tourists from Hungary, thus combining Hungarian national pride and local profit in tourism.

The second chapter in this section, by Massimiliano Spotti, explores the semiosis of 'language display' in a local supermarket on the margins of life in Northern Finland – in the region associated with Sami cultural heritage and with the use of different varieties of the Sami language (a region sometimes referred to as Samiland). In his chapter, Spotti shows how 'language display' indexes the branding and upscaling of this supermarket beyond the local economy in which it is situated. However, the linguistic resources employed with a view to branding and upscaling do not conform to normative views of language. Spotti describes these local instances of 'language display' as 'semiotic products' of processes of 'super-vernacularization' (Blommaert & Rampton, 2016), that carry traces of 'divergent, multi-directional processes of globalization, de-globalization and re-globalization'. He also notes that one of the broader processes of globalization that has shaped local linguistic and semiotic practices, and the trend toward 'super-vernacularization' is the recent expansion of the international tourist industry in this region of Finland.

In the third chapter, Gregory Richardson takes us to the Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba, which is located just off the coast of Venezuela. He indicates that this small and densely populated island, on the periphery of the Americas and the Caribbean, became a destination for migration movements in the late 20th century – movements that were triggered by the development of the oil and tourism industries in the region. In this chapter, Richardson tracks linguistic and social changes that are taking place within this superdiverse island context by focusing on local performances of Calypso music. He points to an increasing trend in the production of lyrics for this music toward the blending of the forms of the Aruban Creole, known as Papiamentu, with linguistic resources from Spanish, Dutch and English. This cultural trend is

ridiculed by some sectors of the population and approved of by others. Richardson also notes that, in the debates that have surfaced around the language meshing and blending in these performances, there are recurring tropes related to authenticity, globalization and cultural change. This is yet another site, on the margins, where we see the dynamics of global/local interactions at work.

In the final chapter of this section, Xuan Wang writes about her research into instances of 'look-alike' language, in English, in local linguistic landscapes in Hubei Province, The People's Republic of China. This kind of language appears primarily in commercial environments in this primarily rural area of China. Due to globalization, English has accrued considerable symbolic value within the local linguistic market. Since it is a relatively rare commodity, English carries considerable social prestige and it is associated with mobility and global imagination. However, as Wang points out, this 'look-alike' language includes 'errors' (i.e. nonnormative language features) and 'inventions' (i.e. newly coined linguistic resources that are employed as brand names). She also argues that such 'look-alike' languages provide us with vital clues as we endeavor to understand the linguistic and cultural consequences of globalization and the global/local dynamics of the interactions that take place on the margins.

The eleven chapters and the three sections of this volume illuminate different aspects of the social, cultural and linguistic processes of change at work on the margins of the world system and they reveal the dynamics of global/local interactions that take place in very different kinds of marginal contexts. The themes that we have foregrounded in the three sections include: center/periphery dynamics on a national scale; the harnessing of the Internet and mobile technology by people positioned on the periphery, along with the opportunities this opens up for the use of local linguistic and literacy resources; and, the use of linguistic and semiotic resources in local processes of identification and commodification. As we have seen a recurring trope across many of the chapters is that of identity and, in particular, local discourses about belonging and authenticity.

There are also themes that cut across the chapters and across these three sections. They include the impact of transnational migration and particular population flows on language ideologies (e.g. in the case of Aruba). They also include the impact of top-down policies and forms of political change on language values and language change (e.g. the cases of political devolution in Indonesia and postcolonial language policy in Tanzania). In addition, we see the impact of global tourism and the shifting global economic order on the use of language resources in Aruba, in Northern Finland and in rural China.

In the research set out in these chapters, globalization processes are explored on different scales, in very different kinds of marginalized

spaces and they are tracked over different time frames. We are aware that the ways margins and centers are defined will always be directed by one's perspective and this may privilege a dominant 'western' view on center-margin constellations. This volume displays a wide variety of perspectives from various angles on margins, which continue to be defined by their related centers. We strongly agree with Richardson (in this volume) that '(...) precisely because of the historical undervaluing of certain regions through western prisms a concerted effort should be made to shed light on what Gayatri Spivak and other oriental and post-colonial scholars call subaltern narratives as much insight is to be gained from them'.

Moreover, different conceptual and methodological approaches have informed the studies presented here. Our aim in putting together this volume has been to highlight the need to pay close attention to the social, linguistic, cultural and semiotic processes at work on the margins (as well as in contemporary metropolitan centers) and to build an understanding of the nature and scope of these situated processes. We believe that, in pursuing this research trajectory, we can make a new contribution to the broader project of forging a new sociolinguistics of globalization. The research presented here offers new conceptual and methodological compasses for research on the margins and will, we hope, lead to the development of future complementary research in such contexts.

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## 2 Redefining the Sociolinguistic ‘local’ Examples from Tanzania

*Jan Blommaert*

### Introduction

In a visionary book, Arjun Appadurai (1996, p. 194) noted ‘new forms of disjuncture between spatial and virtual neighborhoods’, seriously complicating the actual meaning of a term such as ‘local practice’. This disjuncture, Appadurai argued with amazing foresight, would be an effect of the growth and development of a new infrastructure for globalization both in its hard and soft dimensions: the Internet. With equal lucidity and at the same moment in history, Manuel Castells (2010) predicted the development of a new type of social formation which he called ‘network’ and which was not constrained by the traditional boundaries of social groups. Castells, too, saw the Internet as the engine behind such far-reaching transformations in the sociocultural, political and economic order worldwide.

Appadurai and Castells made these claims while observing this global technological infrastructure in its infant stage. More than two decades later, and now living in what has effectively become a network society, one can only be amazed by the accuracy of their predictions, as well as by the very slow pace at which scientific disciplines devoted to humans and their societies have adjusted their gaze and frames of reference in addressing transformations predicted in the mid-1990s (see e.g. Eriksen, 2016). It is clear, for instance, that sociolinguistics has been quite slow in addressing globalization as a fundamental mechanism of sociolinguistic change (Blommaert, 2010; Coupland, 2003; Pennycook, 2007), and that the disjunctures between spatial and virtual neighborhoods anticipated by Appadurai – or rather, in an updated formulation, the complex intersections generated by spatial and virtual social timespaces – still await satisfactory analysis and theorization (cf. Blommaert, 2017; Blommaert & Rampton, 2016; Coupland, 2016; Varis, 2017;).

To be fair, the task is challenging, for sociolinguistics quite consistently relied on a particular imagination of timespace in analysis and theory. Such timespaces were ‘local’, meaning: they were enclosed and autonomous, allowing the analysis of clear sociolinguistic patterns *within* the specific timespace unit – the neighborhood, the village, the



city, the region, the nation-state. Observe that this imagination of the local fitted into a larger frame, that of the linguistic ‘synchrony’ as the canonical level of description and analysis in linguistics and its adjacent disciplines: time was stopped, and space was closed as well. And this imagination of the ‘synchrony’, then, provided clarity for another key concept: the speech community (cf. Rampton, 2009). Such communities, it was assumed, derived levels of stability and sharedness from their ‘local’ roots, which, in turn, allowed analysts to zoom in on the normative modes of social interaction, the forms of socioculturally relevant variation, the effects of institutionalization, and the dominant patterns of sociolinguistic change. This ‘sedentary’ logic was, of course, dislodged by ‘non-sedentary’ phenomena such as migration and the various forms of language contact it provoked. The timespace unit in which such forms of sociolinguistic complexity occurred, however, was not affected, and it is only with the rapid and pervasive spread of ‘virtual’ timespace that we are forced to address modes of social interaction developing in an unbounded, elastic and dynamic timespace not contained by the qualities we used to ascribe to the ‘local’ in research.

In what follows, I shall try to document the analytical complexities we have to face as soon as we engage with such new forms of timespace. My ambitions are modest: I merely intend to identify a number of inevitable ‘phenomenal’ features – what kinds of phenomena are we encountering? – and point in the direction of a particular analytical vocabulary that might be helpful in exercises of this kind. I shall do so by drawing on insights into the emerging Internet-and-mobile culture in Tanzania, and I have the advantage of a longitudinal perspective, having been involved in research there for over three decades now (for a survey see Blommaert, 2014). So let me first introduce some of the historical frame in which we need to set the discussion.

### **The Ups and Downs of Language Hierarchies in Tanzania**

Tanzania offers us fertile terrain for investigating the changes in what is ‘local’ due to globalization and its online infrastructure, for these forces appear to have comprehensively reshuffled the institutional sociolinguistic order, creating, so to speak, a ‘language policy from below’ defying the official one, and replacing a relatively stable sociolinguistic hierarchy by a more fragmented one. While I do not expect this development to be unique to Tanzania, the case has the advantage of being clear. Tanzania, we know, was often highlighted in the sociolinguistic literature of the 1960s and 1970s as a relatively rare instance of successful ‘demotic’ language planning. While most other recently decolonized countries had opted for a continuation of the colonial sociolinguistic order, with the language of the former colonial power (concretely: French,

English, Portuguese) as national or official language, the socialist rulers of Tanzania radically opted for Swahili as the language expressing the postcolonial identity of the country and its citizens, turning it into an exception to what was later defined as the postcolonial rule of ‘linguistic imperialism’ (Phillipson, 1992; see Blommaert, 2014 for details on the postcolonial history of Swahili).

Swahili (in a range of varieties) was already relatively widespread in the country at the time of independence, and its adoption as national language, to be used in almost every official domain, made it into a language the hegemonic position of which as ‘the language of everyone’ remained uncontested for decades. There was one crack in that hegemony though. English was not entirely eliminated; it was kept as the language of instruction of postprimary education. The reasons for this language-political anomaly are complex, and officially the argument was that Swahili needed, first, to be ‘developed’ to cope with the demands of scientific thought and progress. Concretely, this meant vocabulary development – a Sisyphean process not helped by a byzantine structure of official ratification. Pending the completion of that task, English remained the language of the – very small – national intelligentsia, as access to standard forms of English was almost entirely dependent on access (through demanding state exams) to secondary and tertiary education. And in that way, it retained covert prestige – a *lot* of prestige.

This, incidentally, is one of the ways in which we can define Tanzania as a ‘margin’: its endogenous symbolic resources were for a long time valued and hierarchically positioned with regard to an exogenous benchmark: the symbolic resources, i.e. English, of its former colonizing power. Its status as a sociopolitical system, likewise, was measured quite consistently against that of metropolitan sociopolitical systems. So while there are a range of ‘objective’ criteria for establishing ‘margins’ as opposed to ‘centers’ in the world system – GDP and poverty indexes, to name just those – ‘subjective’ ones also count. For decades, there was a strong self-defining tendency in the country as being ‘marginal’; and this imagination was shared by politicians who saw Swahili as ‘not yet ready’ to fulfill the functions of English, as well as by local rappers who nicknamed their country ‘Bongo’ and their hip-hop scene ‘Bongo Flava’ – the flavor of total marginalization.

Tanzania was long an example of what sociolinguists preferred as ‘local’: a state even officially devoted to self-reliance, nonalignment and autonomy, with an unchallenged government and a population often imagined as Swahili-speaking monoglot. Within such an imagined enclosed and self-contained unit, sociolinguistic reflections followed simple tracks, usually revolving around ‘Swahili versus English’ in education – a topic that dominated the literature on Tanzania for decades. Below the surface of that imagined ‘locality’, however, several very different processes were at work. First, there was a great deal of variation *within*

Swahili that was left unexplored even if it pointed toward existing and new inequalities within the imagined demotic sociolinguistic system. Second, there was the uneasy fact that most Tanzanians were *not* monolingual but at least bilingual, combining (varieties of) Swahili with (varieties of) ethnic languages such as KiSukuma or KiNyamwezi. The latter were very rarely drawn into the equation in Tanzania. Third, even if English was an active resource in just small segments of Tanzanian society, it carried tremendous language-ideological weight as the language indexing everything that was foreign, smart, desirable and exclusive (and *capitalist*) – it was, in other words, the undisputed sociolinguistic marker of elite status in a society that was self-proclaimed socialist and classless since 1967. Prestigious products (usually equivalent to overseas products) would be advertised in English, and prestigious people would be identifiable by the varieties of English they used (locally, particular ‘schooled’ varieties of English were seen as ‘standard’, in spite of distinct regional accents and Tanzanianisms) and the level of fluency in using it. The persistent refusal of the Tanzanian government to replace English by Swahili throughout the entire education system – and the persistent pointing, in motivating this anomaly, toward the *superiority* of English as a language of learning, undoubtedly contributed to this prestige.

The clear sociolinguistic patterns many sociolinguists believed to observe in Tanzania, thus, obscured a far more nuanced and fractured system in which the near-absence of English in Tanzania did not prevent a status hierarchy very similar to that in postcolonial countries where the former metropolitan language had been preserved as the language of the public sphere. Thus, in spite of massive amounts of lip service to it, Tanzania never really was the demotic sociolinguistic nation it was often perceived to be. Neither was it the enclosed and self-contained ‘local’ system many preferred to behold. While the dynamics of language variation within Swahili, and between Swahili and ethnic languages, were by and large (territorially) domestic forces, the prestige of English rested (like elsewhere) precisely on the *translocal*, international imageries it invoked.

At this point, we begin to see the contours of the problem I intend to more fully develop below. Yes, Tanzania was seen as a ‘local’ sociolinguistic arena, and most of the sociolinguistic literature would address it as such. But colonization had made that ‘local’ character very porous and elastic indeed, since an important part of how Tanzanians related to Swahili was determined by *translocal* linguistic ideologies firmly rooted in colonial (and postcolonial) realities. Such language-ideological imageries easily entered the country, even if until the early 1990s the communications and mass-media landscape in Tanzania was very poorly developed. Tanzania, one could say, was a switchboard between various subnational and supranational scale-levels (Blommaert, 2010, pp. 182–194), but in the pre-Internet era the connections between such

scale-levels were narrow and accessible for a privileged minority only. This would of course change when the Internet entered the country. And when I did the fieldwork from which I draw the observations below, in 2012, I was working in a very different society from the one in which I had landed in the mid-1980s.

### **Script Vernacularization: Intanet Bomba**

One of the most conspicuously different features of Dar es Salaam urban life these days is the generalized use of mobile phones. Like in other places in Africa (see Velghe, this volume), mobile phones solve a perennial problem: offering a means of long-distance communication cheaply and effectively, without requiring the massive investments required for landline networks. In the developing world, mobile phones represent a genuine revolution and are seen by influential policymakers as crucial tools for future economic, social and political development. In the words of a World Bank-related researcher,

Mobile telephones are revolutionizing the formative processes of economic development. These relatively cheap handheld personal communicators are empowering the most basic development agents, turning former functionaries reliant on erratic and remote external inputs into key decision makers with direct access to the facts they need.

(Lambert, 2009, p. 48)

New providers, consequently, are almost all located in the developing world (Lambert, 2009, p. 49; see also Juffermans, 2015), and the range of services they offer do not lack sophistication: m-banking can be found in several developing countries while it is still rare in Europe; job advertisements and access to social and administrative services are also offered via mobile phones in several countries, as well as cheap chat services (for the latter, see also Velghe, 2012, 2014). Another World Bank-connected researcher, Elisabeth Littlefield (2009, p. 50) thus reports:

The biggest success in customer adoption to date has been the M-PESA network in Kenya, which has reached more than 6.5 million customers in just over two years. It has become the preferred method for moving money for 50 percent of Kenyans.

In the next sentence, however, this optimism is instantly qualified:

However, fewer than 1 in 10 mobile phone banking customers are actually poor, new to banking, and doing anything more than payments and transfers. Most of the new offerings, especially when led

by existing banks, have served to provide more convenient bill payments for existing customers and to decongest branches.

The sophisticated m-services are thus hardly used by the poor people and largely an affair of the urban middle classes, including the lower middle class, as we shall see shortly.

The March 2012 statistics released by the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority reported almost 27 million subscriptions to mobile phone operators.<sup>1</sup> Against a population estimated to around 46 million, this number is impressive, but let us not forget that people sometimes have to take subscriptions from several providers to compensate for inadequate network coverage. Several such operators are active, with the global player Vodacom (locally nicknamed ‘Voda’) being the largest one, the state-run TTCL holding a middle position and the privately owned Benson being the smallest. Competition among the providers is fierce and has led to a steady decrease of the rates for using mobile phones.

Apart from basic services – calls and short message service (SMS) – the providers all offer mobile Internet services. These Internet services, however, are used by only a small minority of mobile phone subscribers. According to the business newspaper *The Citizen* in January 2012, about 11% of the Tanzanian population have access to Internet, 45% of whom – around 2 million – use mobile Internet.<sup>2</sup> Internet subscriptions – compared to basic mobile phone services – are still very expensive: an average domestic (landline) subscription from TTCL in Dar es Salaam cost 100,000 Tsh (around 50 Euro) per month in September 2012.<sup>3</sup>

We begin to understand that such figures point toward an elite, even if the term is used with some degree of elasticity here. We also understand that this elite is concentrated in the large urban areas, if for no other reason, then because of the fact that Internet requires electricity. And when it comes to electricity, the Energy and Water Utilities Regulatory Authority of Tanzania warns us that ‘[w]ith about 660,000 customers, electricity was available to only about 11% of the population by [the] first quarter of 2007, with more than 80% supplied in the urban areas’.<sup>4</sup> About nine out of ten Tanzanians have no access to a regular electricity supply, and that figure corresponds to more than 90% of the territory of the country. Access to the Internet is a rather exclusive feature of urban life in Tanzania, and new online-offline social space nexuses are confined to these areas.

The Internet also strongly plays into that urban life-world – even more: it has become an icon of the culture of urban life. And a key element of this culture is a new register of ‘cool’ Swahili. A new lexicon of terms referring to mobile phone and Internet use has emerged in no time, including terms such as ‘intanet’ itself, *kuperuzi* (to surf the Internet, from English ‘peruse’), *vocha* (voucher, i.e. a prepaid card), *bomba* (connection), *hudumu* (subscription), *mtandao* (network), *m-pesa* (mobile



'banking'), *kufuatilia* (to follow on Facebook or Twitter) as well as globally circulating loan codes such as SMS, PIN and MB all firmly entrenched now in the cool register of mobile connectivity, and new slang terms such as *mrembo wa Facebook* (Facebook darling – a woman attracting significant amounts of male attention on Facebook) are coined incessantly. Providers market their products under labels such as *ezy pesa* (easy money – a phone banking application) and *Epiq Nation* (an image slogan from the Zanzibar-based mobile services provider Zantel).

Publicity for mobile phone and mobile Internet providers – extraordinarily dense, testifying to the price wars among providers – shows happy young people. References are made to happiness and joy throughout, in slogans such as *Ongea kutwa nzima na cheka* (talk the whole day and laugh). We see a young man screaming with joy when opening his *Tigo Internet Mega Boksi* – a box containing applications for mobile Internet (Gmail, Facebook, Chrome, Firefox, etc.) from the Tigo provider. And young girls enthusiastically gazing at a smartphone are announced to be *wajanja wa kuperuzi* (expert Internet surfers). Those are happy, successful young people, and they are very much 'in the world'.

Not unlike what we encounter elsewhere in that world, mobile phone advertisements suggest success derived from global mobility; their appeal rests on the strong suggestion that purchasing this commodity enables one to break out of the local, so to speak. Zantel's Epiq Nation campaign, thus, showcases Mwisho Wampamba, a Tanzanian actor featuring in a popular South African TV series offered on commercial networks in Tanzania – an incorporation of the mobile, international, young, Tanzanian celebrity (see Figure 2.1). Large Vodacom and Epiq Nation campaign events feature Chidi Benz and Juma Nature AKA Kibla – Tanzanian hip-hop icons who attract audiences all over East Africa – and Epiq Nation sponsors a 'Bongo Stars Search' program, comparable to 'American Idol' or 'The X Factor' and aimed at recruiting future popular culture celebrities and setting new popular culture trends.

The exploitation of Tanzania's vibrant 'Bongo Flava' hip-hop scene in mobile phone marketing campaigns was already described by Christina Higgins (2013). Higgins observed that providers deployed the urban Swahili youth slang in their campaigns, for a variety of which Bongo Flava artists are the epigones; popular hip-hop song titles likewise found their way into marketing slogans, and a popular beer brand has '100% TZ FLAVA' printed on its bottles. Note, in passing, how the 'Bongo' term that used to carry dark stigma as an index of extreme marginality and poverty has been turned around, semiotically, in expressions such as 'Bongo Flava' and 'Bongo stars' to suggest, presently, a 'center in the margin': even in Bongoland, there can be global stars and cultural commodities.

The point Higgins made there, and which can be confirmed here, is that *the connection between popular culture and marketing moves*

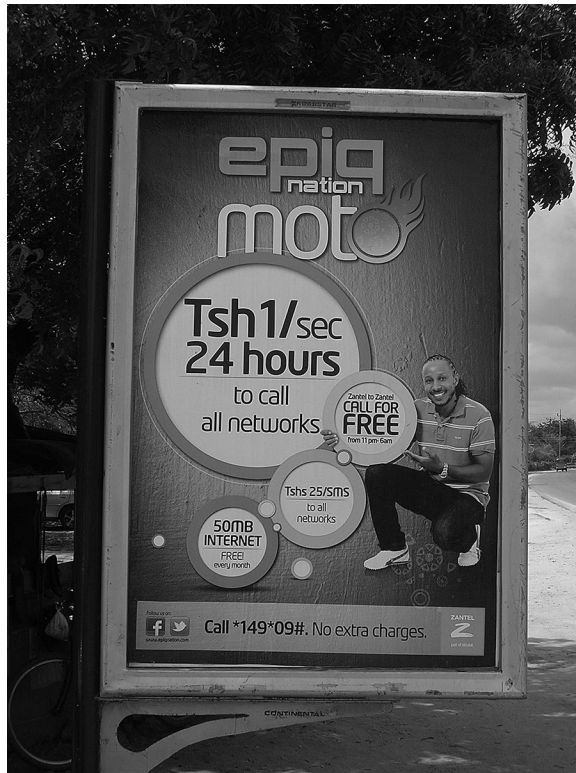


Figure 2.1 Epiq Nation billboard featuring Mwisho Wampamba, Masaki, Dar es Salaam (© Jan Blommaert).

*Swahili in a privileged position* vis-à-vis the young urban middle-class consumers targeted in campaigns. But it is not just *any* Swahili: it is the cool slangish Swahili characterizing local youth cultures in Tanzanian cities, driven by the new online infrastructures. The medium for such campaigns is thus not a language *per se*, but a specific register. The amount of code-mixing in publicity for mobile phone providers should already make clear that ‘language’ is not the best unit to describe what goes on. And in view of the argument we are building here, we can see how a fully globalized set of ‘scripts’ has entered the ‘local’ arena – the ‘local’ has effectively ceased to exist, one could say. But the actual way in which these scripts have entered the ‘local’ is through complex *vernacularization* (a term we shall have to qualify shortly), by mobilizing a ‘local’ sociolinguistic dynamic of register-formation in Swahili, not English, effectively reversing – when seen from the usual distance of language policy research – the existing sociolinguistic hierarchies.

The ‘global’ language English, once unchallenged in its symbolic predominance, has now been joined by ‘local’ forms of prestige-bearing ‘cool’ Swahili.

We are witnessing fully developed lifestyle branding targeting a young urban audience of consumers, and this fully developed form of branding follows global templates. Look at how the companies behind Epiq Nation announce their campaign:<sup>5</sup>

‘Etisalat Zantel’ has partnered with ‘Mobileru’ to offer ‘Epiq Nation’ the new youth lifestyle product which is much more than just great rates for mobile phones and Internet services.

‘Epiq Nation’ will provide the Tanzanian’s youth with unprecedented services where they can have access to exclusive deals, discounts, experiences and competitions. This offer aims at improving the lives of the youth in Tanzania and meets their hunger for new technologies and products.

The discourse is that of advanced consumerist marketing, and the approach is that of sophisticated branding strategies aimed at complementing the product (‘great rates for mobile phones and Internet services’) with an avalanche of ‘exclusive deals, discounts, experiences and competitions’, so as to shape entire identities and life projects centered around particular commodities (Blommaert & Varis, 2015). We see how mobile phones and Internet products are advertised in ways fully integrated in such global scenarios for branding and marketing.<sup>6</sup> Choosing Zantel’s Epiq Nation products is not just a choice for a particular product in a competitive market – it is a choice for a specific lifestyle, a self-imagined identity constructed through consumption. People who do so are not just *wateja* (customers), they are laughing and smiling, happy, young, affluent *wajanja wa uperuzi* (experts surfers) and, perhaps, *warembo wa Facebook* (Facebook darlings). Obviously, even if we are still engaging with Swahili, not much is left of the sociolinguistic ‘local’ here.

We have seen that providers target a young urban audience, and that they do so by means of complex campaigns turning commodities into lifestyle choices. Given the price of Internet subscriptions, the audience going for the full package is relatively restricted. And this is where we see that providers ‘open up’, so to speak, and attempt to bring their products to customers in less well-off areas of the cities, to the struggling urban lower middle classes who earn a modest salary but are nonetheless necessarily integrated in the networks of contemporary urban life. A taxi driver, for instance, needs a mobile phone to conduct his business because taxis operate on an individual lease basis and without a central radio dispatching system. The same goes for small traders and shopkeepers: contacts with customers and providers are all maintained through mobile phone communication. Even more: given the relatively

high cost of cross-network calls, these lower middle class people can be seen equipped with more than one handset, each of them connected to one provider network and all of them used to make network-internal calls. More affluent customers, less worried about the prohibitive costs of cross-network communication, typically have a single smartphone.

Mobile phones, subscription packages and prepaid cards are not just sold in hip downtown shops and malls; they are sold almost everywhere in the city. Small groceries, restaurants, post offices, bars, kiosks: one can read everywhere that *vocha* are available, and *vocha jumla* (every kind of prepaid card), followed by a list of brand names – ‘Voda’, Airtel, Tigo, what have you. Mobile phone provision stretches into the poorest corners of the city. Naturally, the cost of full subscription packages with mobile Internet access far exceeds the budgets of most people in such areas; what is effectively sold there are the cheapest prepaid cards, enough to make local calls and send some SMSs. But they can be found everywhere alongside other standard household products such as soap, maize flour, cooking oil, onions, fruit or water. Thus, while we can say that the spread, the availability, of mobile phones in Dar es Salaam is ‘democratic’, their distribution or accessibility – the specific ways in which they are being appropriated and used – is not democratic at all and follows clear class lines.

The democratic spread, nonetheless, necessitates an open format of marketing communication. A detailed look at Figure 2.2 below reveals something quite interesting, and in order to grasp its relevance, some explanation needs to be given about advertisement culture in Tanzania. To begin with, advertisement was a relatively rare thing in socialist Tanzania. The reason was quite simply that consumer commodities were rare in the days of *Kujitegemea* (economic self-reliance). One would see professional beer advertisements, some Pepsi publicity boards and some for other international products – more about that in a moment – but often, products were advertised by paintings on facades and fences, handcrafted by local professional sign writers. Commercial slogans did not circulate intensively, with perhaps the exception of a slogan for a local *pombe* (indigenous beer) called Chikubu. The slogan was *Tumia Chibuku, ni pombe bora* (use Chibuku, it’s excellent beer) and it was played before and after a popular humorist radio play that aired every night on Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam for years on end. Most people still know the slogan today, and note that the slogan was in Swahili.

Prestige products – a synonym, for decades, of products manufactured abroad in ‘the West’ – were almost invariably accompanied by English publicity items. Thus, in Figure 2.2, we see a small and older sign promoting Nivea cream with an English text, next to another one for Pepsi equally in English. Driving through Dar es Salaam, we still see English widely used whenever elite products are being promoted: hotels and spas, wines, brandies or whiskies, imported beers, some banking facilities,



Figure 2.2 Mikocheni village, Dar es Salaam (© Jan Blommaert).

insurance and so forth. But when it comes to that one commodity set emblematic of globalization, things are different. Mobile phone adverts are overwhelmingly *in Swahili*, and the English Nivea and Pepsi signs in Figure 2.2 are juxtaposed with several mobile phone advertisements, in Swahili.

Swahili has, thus, invaded a zone of prestige previously exclusively emblemized by English. Even when companies preferentially target the affluent Tanzanian yuppies, the new Swahili registers are used instead of or in conjunction with English (as e.g. in *Ezy Pesa*). Monolingual English mobile phone advertisement boards can be found, not by coincidence, in the vicinity of expensive shopping centers attracting a largely expatriate community of customers. Thus, the English Epiq Nation poster featuring Mwisho Wampamba (Figure 2.1) could be found near Shopper's Plaza, Masaki, a supermarket tailored to the demands of the international business and diplomatic community in Masaki, and incorporating a Subway sandwich shop on its premises.

The Mikocheni kiosk in Figure 2.2, thus, displays *two generations* of prestige products: an older one (Nivea cream) in English, dating to the times where 'international' was still generically a synonym for 'outside of Tanzania' and therefore 'in English'; and a new one (mobile phone services) in which global commodities have been converted into *local* status-hierarchical emblems – they have been 'reterritorialized' to adopt Higgins' (2013) terminology – and also distributed along a more fractured scale of prestige, in which some items are reserved for an affluent

elite, and thus, marketed in English, while other prestige-bearing items are more widely offered and marketed through new 'cool' Swahili registers. The use of mobile phones is a global status emblem cleverly and skillfully 'translated', so to speak, into a new local stratification of symbols and values. The cool Swahili register that accompanies and enacts it is the key to this practice, it defines and establishes its characteristics as part and parcel of cultural innovation locally, and it is no doubt also the key to the success of mobile phones in Dar es Salaam.

### **What Is Left of the 'local'?**

Such forms of localization, as we now know, are defining features of cultural globalization. They enact the 'vernacular globalization' that Appadurai (1996) already announced. But we begin to see the tremendous complexity captured by the terms 'vernacularization' and 'localization' when we recap and summarize the case of Tanzania as a sociolinguistic 'local'. Several facts, we have seen, prejudice and complicate simple distinctions between what is 'global' and 'local' (or 'exogenous' versus 'endogenous' in sociolinguistic terminology), what we call 'localization', and how we can see Tanzania (and perhaps any time-space unit in our types of research) as a 'local' arena. Let me go through some of these facts.

Tanzania, even in its 'self-reliant' heyday, was of course never truly 'local', as its colonial history bore down on postcolonial language hierarchies: English and Swahili were placed on a prestige scale in which the global predominance of (colonial and postcolonial) English was the benchmark. The recent insertion of that country in a global system of online and mobile communication was an effect of the post-1985 liberalization policies which, more than before, opened the doors of the country to outside influences and agency. More in particular, there was a reshuffling of the sociolinguistic hierarchy, in which English did not lose much of its prestige, but was now complemented by new, prestige-bearing 'cool' registers of Swahili. The latter, remarkably, developed around *global* commodities: the Internet and mobile communication itself, and a revived marketing and popular culture industry, based on global publicity templates, scaffolding it. An endogenous language, if you wish, came to index the prestige of exogenous commodities, and English is no longer the sole emblem of 'non-local' objects and values.

Such registers do not remain confined, of course, to marketing discourses, but emerge in very close synergy with existing popular culture agents. Interestingly, the emblematic expression of marginality, 'Bongo', became an index of this new 'global' dynamics and its prestige. From pointing downward, it became a pointer upward, to a much-desired and aspired-to range of prestige commodities, lifestyles and imagined identities.



All of the foregoing, we can say, is ‘vernacular globalization’. This process, however, comes with two important qualifications. One: it is heavily restricted to the urban centers of the country due to the unequal distribution of the online-offline infrastructures. In spite of its almost by definition translocal character, the vernacular globalization, thus, is an urban phenomenon. Second, this urban phenomenon is also not pan-urban but socioculturally *niched*, a feature of the restratification and specialization of the consumer market in urban Tanzania. We have seen that elite products such as imported luxury items, expensive hotels and resorts are still marketed through English (in ways hardly different from marketing in, say, Europe). The more widely accessible layer of prestige goods underneath this elite range – Internet and mobile phone items – is the space within which we see the new Swahili registers emerge and flourish.

Those who wish to use an older sociolinguistic-indexical order – that, for instance, characterizing the first decades after independence – to understand contemporary Tanzanian sociolinguistic processes are certain to leave the field confused and possibly even wrong-footed. For what has happened is a pretty comprehensive reshuffling of the sociolinguistic stratigraphy, largely due to – precisely – the facts of Internet-driven globalization. A distinct sociolinguistic universe has emerged: a highly fragmented and layered urban one in which distinctions between registers index sensitive social distinctions in positions and forms of access within a consumer market. Whatever we now call ‘local’ in research in that timespace arena needs to be qualified along those diacritics, I’m afraid. And whenever we locate Tanzania in the ‘margins’ of the world system, we should equally prepare ourselves for lengthy qualifications of what we exactly mean. For obvious reasons, the use of terms such as ‘glocalization’, while not unhelpful as a starting hypothesis, won’t help us to get away with it any longer, as soon as the job of analysis needs to be done.

In a recent book, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2016) argues that the ‘local’, in conditions of contemporary Internet-driven globalization, is a diffuse, unstable and scalar phenomenon, dislodging, in effect, the established ethnographic imagination of the ‘local’ as a site of autonomous and self-contained researchables. Eriksen points to a real problem and a real responsibility here. We all have been trained in traditions in which our ‘real’ objects – bits of language – were set in a ‘context’. The latter was relatively unimportant, just a quickly sketched timespace frame, and not enough care has gone in theorizing and methodologizing it. We pay the price for this oversight now, when online and offline nexuses preclude any simple determination of ‘local’ and ‘nonlocal’ elements as features of context – both are inevitably not just part of the same ‘context’, but *determine*, as such, the bits of language we examine. Let me underscore this for clarity’s sake: separating ‘text’ from ‘context’



excludes a fundamental feature of communication nowadays, that context *is* text, and more broadly, that society *is* language. Detaching both amounts to trying to extract the egg from the omelet. And it is (to use contemporary slang) ‘so twentieth century’.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

- 1 Data accessed through [www.tcra.go.tz/](http://www.tcra.go.tz/) on 12 September 2012.
- 2 See the report on <http://thecitizen.co.tz/business/-/18518-number-of-tanzania-internet-users-is-5m>.
- 3 I am grateful to Els Vandemoortele for granting me this glimpse of her household budget.
- 4 Data accessed through [www.ewura.com/electricity.html](http://www.ewura.com/electricity.html) on 12 September 2012.
- 5 Retrieved from [http://campaign.dubib.com/news/10450\\_epiq-nation#.UFBhcKRdNHg](http://campaign.dubib.com/news/10450_epiq-nation#.UFBhcKRdNHg), accessed 12 September 2012.
- 6 The fully globalized nature of marketing templates in Tanzania can also be judged from the extraordinarily frequent use of the greatest myth of global consumerist marketing: the suggestion that certain things are ‘free of charge’. The Swahili word *bure* (gratis, free of charge) occurs in every second advertisement, suggesting that a certain amount of prepaid airtime, SMSes or download Megabites is ‘free’ when you purchase certain package formulas. Things are usually not ‘free’ when you have to pay for them, of course.

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# 3 Reterritorialization and the Construction of Margins and Centers through Imitation in Indonesia

*Zane Goebel*

## Introduction

One starting point for this chapter is the observation that centers and peripheries are never fixed, but rather in constant flux (Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013, pp. 1–2). Another starting point is Agha's (2015) observation that the terms 'margin' and 'center' are words that act like deictics, such as 'I' and 'you', 'here' and 'there', 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow'. Deictics are words whose meaning changes according to who says them, where, to whom, when, for what purposes and so on. Just as yesterday's tomorrow is today, in ongoing discourses, one person's margin can be another's center. Terms such as 'margin' and 'center' thus act like deictics in interaction. This has implications for our analysis of margins and centers and our use of these terms in the analysis of what might be categorized as marginal or central (Agha, 2015). In short, these terms are 'shifters' (Silverstein, 1976) in scale-making projects whereby what is a margin or center or what is marginal or global emerges through ongoing discursive activity (Agha, 2015; Carr & Lempert, 2016).

At the same time, the discursive construction of a margin or a center relies upon being able to invoke associations that are timespace-dependent. For example, in Indonesia, margins have historically been associated or 'enregistered' (Agha, 2007) with ruralness, backwardness, ethnicity, underdevelopment, ethnic language and so on, while centers have been associated with provincial capitals and the nation's capital, Jakarta. When fragments of the enregistered semiotic configuration are imitated in subsequent discourse, they can invoke the whole configuration. Thus, speaking of an underdeveloped area in Indonesia can also invoke ideas about ethnicity, ethnic languages, backwardness and so on. In this case, underdevelopment acts as a type of 'scalar shifter' (Goebel, Cole, & Manns, 2016) that invokes all of these associations.

In this chapter, I draw upon the above insights to examine one of hundreds of endeavors to establish new political and administrative units by splitting up or merging existing units (i.e. reterritorialization) that have been occurring in Indonesia since 1999. I use data from an ongoing research project that has a growing database of around fifty online

newspaper stories and blogs that report some of the discursive moves of a number of interest groups. I argue for a different approach to globalization, centers and margins – one that focuses on semiosis – by demonstrating how these discursive moves construct centers and margins as part of arguments justifying reterritorialization and how these are connected with semiotic configurations commonly referred to as ethnicity, centers and margins in globalization discourse.

I start by looking at discussions about globalization and semiosis, before then looking at how this relates to matters of political enfranchisement whereby processes of enregisterment have privileged particular politicizable perspectives about language and culture. After looking at how neoliberal ideas of good governance and development have been enregistered within certain timespaces outside of Indonesia, I then introduce Indonesia with reference to four processes of enregisterment as they relate to margins and centers, ethnolinguistic identity, development, and good governance. In my following analysis of online stories, I examine how these ideas about good governance, development, and ethnicity receive uptake by politicians, bureaucrats, and activists as they attempt to redefine margins and centers in one region of Indonesia, Cirebon.

### **Globalization and Semiosis**

In its process-oriented nominal form, ‘globalization’ refers to space-time compression, rapid mobility of people, ideas, and things, the diversification of diversity, and ongoing capitalist expansion projects (Blommaert, 2010; Harvey, 1989, 2005; Tsing, 2005). All of these processes can be seen as processes of imitation of one type or another and ultimately cultural reproduction or ‘semiosis’. In its discursive form, imitation often involves replication of a semiotic fragment of prior discourse as well as an evaluation of this fragment (e.g. Agha, 2007; Lempert, 2014). For example, fragments of someone’s prior practice can be replicated and evaluated in everyday conversational narrative (Ochs & Capps, 2001). A similar phenomenon can be found by examining letters to the editor, and discussions on social media sites, although the participation framework is different to that found in everyday conversation because it is a one-to-many participation framework (Agha, 2007). Whichever participation framework imitation occurs in, the result (fragment plus commentary), is a new semiotic configuration.

The subsequent imitations of these configurations are mediated by a host of other complex commentaries and evaluations that are occurring at other scales. At the same time, chains of such reflexive policing also help to enregister socially valued semiotic configurations through comparisons of nonnormative behaviors with normative ones (Agha, 2007). The longevity of all types of semiotic configurations relies upon

the replication of fragments of their scale-constrained semiotic whole and evaluations of these fragments in another timespace. Longevity is a product of participation frameworks (e.g. the one-to-many participation framework of a school classroom or the one-to-one participation framework of an intimate conversation). The longevity of these ‘infrastructures for imitation’ and the semiotic configurations that are imitated within them is also a matter of their social value, which is often underscored by a powerful actor (the nation or another institution within the nation) or authoritative figures, such as presidents, prime ministers, politicians, celebrities, sports stars and so on (Agha, 2007).

### **Linguistic Enfranchisement**

As one example of enregisterment, linguistic enfranchisement (LE) can be thought of as the process that politically privileges and values one semiotic configuration over another (Goebel, Jukes, & Morin, 2017). LE mediates future instances of semiosis by providing a political base that engenders subsequent evaluations, such as claims about language and cultural rights. While it is the large one-to-many participation frameworks of school classrooms, bureaucracies, the media, and the complex responses to the forms of language used within them that help produce and circulate or imitate a semiotic configuration commonly referred to as ‘standard languages’ (e.g. Agha, 2007), this process has its genesis in much smaller-scale activities. A nice example of LE is the case of one semiotic configuration referred to as ‘French’ in Canada.

As Heller (2011) points out, in Canada, economic inequality between English and French speakers resulted in a series of small-scale movements lobbying for French language rights in some schools and other organizations. Over time, these small-scale entities became aware of other such entities, enabling larger-scale lobbying and language rights activities. This fragmented small-scale phenomenon about language rights continued to be imitated, becoming a more widely recognized configuration that helped increase the social value of a particular variety of French spoken by a particular segment of French Canadian society. In doing so, a particular variety of French was becoming associated with a particular group of people and a particular territory. These processes resulted in pride in Canadian French, Canadian French-ness and the territories that were populated by these social types. This process led to calls for autonomy, with decentralization a common solution in Canada, as elsewhere in the world (Goebel, et al., 2017, pp. 3–4). In short, this series of imitations privileging a particular semiotic configuration enfranchised those who could comprehend and used elements from this semiotic configuration, or more precisely ‘semiotic register’ (Agha, 2007).

## Neoliberalism, Development and Good Governance

Neoliberal projects and their connection to discourses of good governance is one well-researched area of globalization studies (e.g. Cameron, 2000; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Tsing, 2005). While there are many variations in what constitutes a neoliberal project, one of the ideological underpinnings of neoliberalism relates to the utmost importance of the market and the idea that giving market free rein will result in the social good of all, while also ensuring individual freedom (Harvey, 2005). A common feature of neoliberal projects is the attempt to place all social life within a market framework whereby every social activity can be counted, audited, put in competition with other social activities and financialized (e.g. Cameron, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Heller & Duchêne, 2012).

One area of social life that has received sustained attention within neoliberal projects is (good) governance of nation-states and all of the large and small institutions found within them (e.g. Cameron, 2000; Harvey, 2005). Engaging in good governance means that an institution, and the individuals who constitute it, are self-disciplining in ways that make them more effective and efficient in all of their endeavors. The effective, efficient and incorruptible individual is better able to give service to others and becomes a developed subject who is eminently prepared to deal with global free-market competition and contribute to the development of their nation.

Since the early 1980s, neoliberal ideas about development and good governance have been enregistered via two infrastructures of imitation: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Harvey, 2005, p. 29). These two 'central' institutions 'helped' countries in the 'margins' who were having difficulties in servicing debts. These institutions helped these countries (typically those categorized as 'developing countries') by assisting them to reschedule their debts in return for 'market freeing' activities, such as cuts in welfare expenditure, more flexible labor markets laws, privatization, good governance initiatives within the bureaucracy and so on (e.g. Harvey, 2005). Since the late 1990s, the IMF and the World Bank have continued to engage in what Ferguson and Gupta (2002, p. 990) have eloquently summarized as attempts at 'transnational governmentality' through the setting up of infrastructures for imitation (e.g. non-governmental organizations (NGOs)) within these 'developing' countries that facilitate the imitation of ideas about good governance.

## Indonesian Nation Building

Indonesia has been engaged in a series of nation (re)building efforts since winning its fight for independence from its former Dutch colonial rulers in 1949. These efforts have been intimately connected to other countries'

governments, global corporations, non-government organizations and political movements who all try to engage in transnational governmentality of one kind or another. The period 1949 to 1965 was one characterized by constant moves to form and keep together a unitary state that was dispersed over more than 17,000 islands. Despite being a massively diverse nation with a Moslem majority, Indonesia chose to be a secular nation that recognized all of the major world religions that were practiced within its political boundaries (Vickers, 2005). Even so, there was regular separatist conflict based on religious grounds.

With between 400 and 1000 ethnolinguistic groups in Indonesia (a number that fluctuated under successive regime's efforts to manage diversity), ethnic allegiances not only cross-cut religious ones but they also cross-cut local and global political allegiances (Coppel, 1983; Liddle, 1970). On the one hand, ethnic allegiances helped to create and/or fuel separatism resulting in very early discussions about parliamentary representation, 'centers' and 'peripheries', and decentralization (Dick, 2002a; Elson, 2008; Hedman, 2008; Kahin, 1970 [1952]; Legge, 1961). On the other hand, links between religion, political persuasion and countries promoting communism and capitalism often ended in major violent struggles (Cribb, 1990; Elson, 2008; Vickers, 2005).

By 1965, communism had lost out to capitalism and after massive bloodletting, Indonesia rejoined the international community. In particular, it welcomed development aid from the IMF and the World Bank in exchange for a staunchly anti-communist regime (Elson, 2008; Vickers, 2005). These funds along with funds from booming oil industry in the early 1970s helped funding major nation-building projects, including schools, universities, hospitals and transportation and telecommunication infrastructures (Bjork, 2005; Dick, 2002b; Kitley, 2000). As Heryanto (1995), Errington (1998), and others point out, through imitations in multiple timespaces, this period became the era of development where Indonesia became one of many margins to be developed by neoliberal centers located elsewhere. During this period, the extent to which Indonesia embraced global ideas about developmentalism can be seen in how these ideas were imitated within societal discourses. For example, the New Order also referred to themselves as a 'Development Order', the president as 'Father of Development', successive cabinets as 'Development Cabinets', political parties and their factions as 'Development' oriented parties and so on (Heryanto, 1995, pp. 8–9).

The one-to-many participation frameworks of schools, radio, television and newspapers were especially important for managing and imitating semiotic configurations of territory and ethnolinguistic personhood. Imitating much older local ideas about the spatialization of nation-states (Anderson, 1972) that had been mixed with European ideas about nations and governance (Errington, 2001), school lessons territorialized Indonesia vertically into administrative hierarchies and horizontally into provinces, provincial city centers and rural underdeveloped peripheries



(Parker, 2002). Similar discourses permeated the bureaucracy, and ideas of center and periphery became associated with and through discourses of development and underdevelopment (Heryanto, 1995; Lenhart, 1997; Sullivan, 1992).

During the development era, ideologies about ethnolinguistic personhood strongly imitated those from the colonial era onward, helping construct ethnicity as a semiotic configuration that included language practices, group and territory, which often corresponded to provincial and district boundaries. In the early 1990s, perceptive television producers responded to changes in the television market by producing niche ethnolinguistic material for an ethnolinguistic market (Goebel, 2008; Kitley, 2000; Loven, 2008). These practices helped to further solidify ideologies about ethnolinguistic boundaries.

While investment in infrastructures for imitation helped to solidify ethnic boundaries, the ongoing development project that was *leitmotiv* of the Indonesian nation had created major societal inequalities (Heryanto, 1995; Vickers, 2005). These inequalities, worldwide pushes for free trade and human rights, together with a host of other interconnected events, forced President Soeharto to resign in May 1998 (Hedman, 2008; Vickers, 2005). Very soon after Soeharto's resignation, media censorship laws began to be ignored, allowing increased reportage about ongoing conflicts, calls for independence by regions outside of Java, as well as criticisms of the government and the bureaucracy (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003; Bourchier, 2000). With Soeharto gone, the vast patronage networks that had been set up during his reign unraveled, resulting in many local struggles for power and resources, which were also linked with calls for independence (e.g. Bourchier, 2000; Hadiz, 2010). These ongoing discourses were also very much about contesting and redefining boundaries (national, provincial, district, ethnic), margins (the underdeveloped under-resourced areas outside of Java) and the center, such as the major cities within Java.

During Indonesia's first democratic elections in 44 years, Indonesia also introduced two new laws, Laws 22 and 25 in May 1999 (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003). These laws devolved political and fiscal powers to cities and districts. Law 25/1999 related to a new system of fiscal arrangements whereby districts and cities were to receive a much larger share of revenues earned within their borders (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003, p. 3). Law 22/1999 devolved political authority to these districts and cities in the areas of education, health, environment, labor, public works and natural resource management (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003, p. 3).

Big bang decentralization and democratization had many unintended consequences. One of these was the imitation of fragments of semiotic configurations that invoked ethnolinguistic identity, place and margin as a way of justifying claims to decentralize and split former provinces or districts (Davidson & Henley, 2007). This atomization of territory

via the imitation of semiotic fragments relating to language practices, custom, tradition and culture was common to the extent that by mid-2003, the number of districts had gone from 360 to 416 and the number of provinces had increased from 27 to 30 (Jones, 2004). By early 2007, this number had increased to 487 districts (Bunte, 2009, p. 116). This territorial fragmentation continued after this period (Aspinall, 2011), but by 2009, the central government had legislated a moratorium on the formation of new districts and provinces (Anonymous, 2009b).

While much of the territorial fragmentation occurred outside of Indonesia's most populous island, Java, there were some notable exceptions. For example, Quinn (2003) points out that the Javanese-speaking province, Banten (see Figure 3.1), which was originally part of the province of Sundanese-speaking West Java, was able to successfully make the case for a new province and officially became one in 2000. Justifications for a new province were based on claims of religious, linguistic and cultural differences, economic grounds and claims of political underrepresentation at the provincial level. In a sense, those involved were using ideas about language, culture and territory, established during the New Order period, as scalar shifters to invoke difference and justify reterritorialization. In this case, a variety of Javanese that was claimed to be the

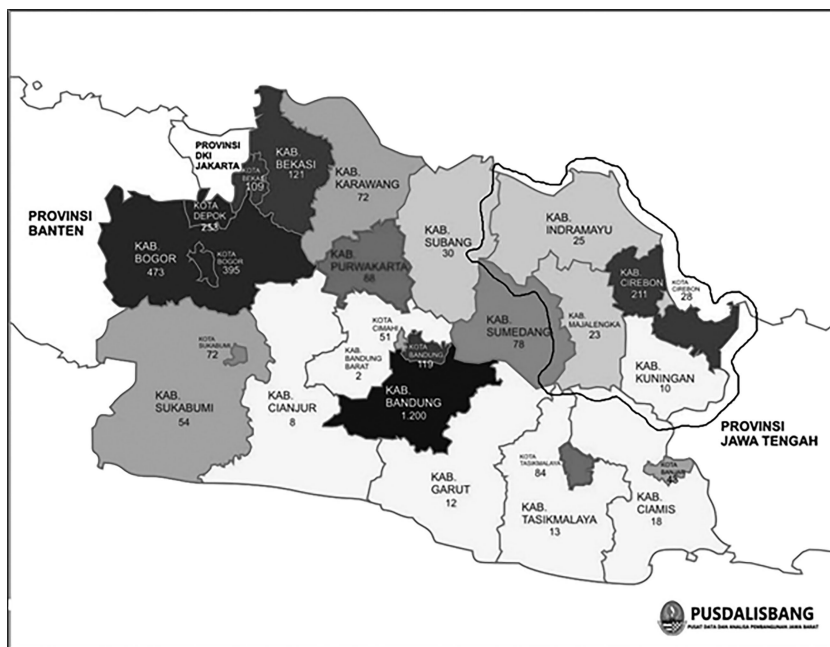


Figure 3.1 West Java and the five regencies under investigation (adapted from Pusat Data dan Analisa Pembangunan Jawa Barat, 2011; KAB = Regency).

dominant language of Banten was compared with Sundanese ethnicity (language practices, ethnic group and territory) that was regimented during the New Order.

Put another way, the linguistic enfranchisement of a population of Sundanese speakers via mass schooling, the media, language policy and other discourses of difference not only helped Sundanese identify as belonging to a particular ethnolinguistic community anchored to a particular territory but it also provided the semiotic resources for others to use when claiming difference. As Quinn (2003) points out, this successful reterritorialization attracted attention from other areas within West Java, especially Cirebon located on the North coast, which was well known for having a variety of Javanese as a common language rather than Sundanese found in the inland areas. Before looking at whether and to what extent these differences resulted in further fragmentation, it is important to zoom out a little to look at other related events, in this case, the blossoming business of good governance.

At around the same time that decentralization laws were introduced in 1999, two laws relating to good governance and anti-corruption were also introduced (Assegaf, 2002, p. 127). The World Bank too was pushing this agenda within the Indonesian bureaucracy (Private Sector Development Unit East Asia and Pacific Region, 2001, p. i). These ideas were also imitated by representatives from foreign aid organizations, who were embedded within the Indonesian bureaucracy (e.g. the account offered in Brietzke, 2002), and later by ministerial reports and policy documents (e.g. Lindsey, 2002; McLeod & MacIntyre, 2007; Menteri Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara, 2002, p. 1; Rohdewohld, 2003). By 2003, ideas around good governance began to be imitated on a large scale in Indonesian mass media, including local provincial newspapers (Goebel, 2017). The primary concern of these stories revolved around the lack of efficient and accountable public servants, their need to be politically neutral, their propensity to be involved in corruption and collusion, and how all this related to development. As with the enregisterment of the semiotic constellation associated with development (*pembangunan*) in the 1980–1995 period (Heryanto, 1995), subsequent years can be seen as an imitation of these ideas, but with a revised focus on the idea of good governance. As we will see shortly, many of these practices and concerns have been imitated and mixed with commentaries about ethnolinguistic identity in mass-mediated discussions about reterritorialization.

### Scalar Shifters and the Creation of Margins and Centers

The examples of discursive semiosis that I look at below are drawn from a relatively small database of online newspaper reports and blogs that an Indonesian research assistant and I started to gather in 2014. We initially

started by focusing on a combination of a few Indonesian keywords (*pe-mekaran* ‘reterritorialization’, *provinsi* ‘province’ and Cirebon). These keywords had come from my reading of two blogs (Setiawan, 2012; Sutrisman, 2013) about the city and district of Cirebon, which is located on the North coast of West Java (see Figure 3.1). Quantitatively, this material is very small with only around 50 entries, as well as two Facebook pages, which I will not consider here. This small number of stories and social media commentary is an indication of the limited imitation of arguments around reterritorialization, and indeed, ultimately, the proposed reterritorialization received no wider uptake by those who could make it a reality. Even so, an analysis of these stories provides insights into how global ideas about development, good governance and ethnicity are connected to ideas of margins and centers and how these semiotic configurations are used as scalar shifters in discourses of reterritorialization.

Some of the most common scalar shifters used across these stories were configurations that linked reterritorialization with underdevelopment, ethnolinguistic identity, certain groups of actors and service to the people. Each of these configurations was an imitation from a previous timespace. In the period 2008 to 2010, two main groups used these shifters. One group sought to form a breakaway province out of five existing regencies, namely, Cirebon city and the regencies of Cirebon, Indramayu, Majelengka and Kuningan (see Figure 3.1). This group used reasons such as historical continuity with older kingdoms, cultural and linguistic sameness, regional development and better service to the public. Another group sought to split the regency of Cirebon in two as a way of encouraging development and better service to the public.

Excerpt 3.1 is the first story from my database. It is not the origin of this separatist discourse with some reports citing 1999 and even earlier (Das, 2009b). Even so, we have to start somewhere, and I have chosen 2008 as my starting point. This particular story provides an account of a mass demonstration where demonstrators are demanding the formation of a new province that would consist of five areas, Cirebon city and the regencies of Cirebon, Indramaya, Majelengka, and Kuningan (regularly referred to with the acronym ‘Ciayumajakuning’). In Excerpt 3.1, the 8000 demonstrators are divided into a number of groups of actors. A number of fragments here are imitated in future commentaries. I indicate imitation of just words and phrases with a single underline. The Indonesian transcripts can be found in the appendix. Note too that many of the newspaper reports have no identified author or only have a person’s initials. In these cases, I use ‘anonymous’, and provide the full details in the list of references.

There are several points to note when examining Excerpt 3.1. There is the reason given for the need for a new breakaway province, namely,

*Excerpt 3.1 Underdevelopment as a reason for reterritorialization*

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1 Around 8000 people from a number of community organizations  
2 declared the Province of Cirebon as separating from West Java on Wednesday (6/2)  
3 at Indramayu  
4 Province. This declaration was carried out in front of the Losarang  
5 Middle High  
6 School, Indramayu ...The respective community representatives  
7 include the ward  
8 and neighborhood forum of Indramayu, Asyhadatain Regional  
9 Village  
10 Representative, Regional Village Representative for Wanaha  
11 Indonesian Farming  
12 Community, KNPI, and Pancasila Youth engaged in loud orations  
13 along the road  
14 holding banners that noted their support for the creation of the  
15 Province of Cirebon.  
16 In their orations, they noted their disappointment with development in  
17 the Pantura  
18 region, which was evaluated as slow and an example of a lack of  
19 attention by [the]  
20 West Java [provincial government] compared with development in the  
21 Priyangan  
22 area.  
23 The head of the Regional Peoples Representative for Indramayu  
24 Regency, Hasyim  
25 Junaedi was present and in a provocative manner declared the  
26 formation of the  
27 Province of Cirebon.  
28 “The people of Pantura who are constituted by five areas, namely  
29 Cirebon city and the  
30 regencies of Cirebon, Indramayu, Majelengka, and Kuningan, declare  
31 that we are  
32 ready to separate from West Java to form the Cirebon Province,” he  
33 said.  
34 They named this action as the Pantura Community Congress who also  
35 agreed to form  
36 the Supporters Front for the Formation of Cirebon Province (FP3C),  
37 although they are  
38 still awaiting support from other areas...  
39 “The holding of this Pantura Community Congress is evidence of a  
40 strong community  
41 wish to push for a new province and this must be responded to  
42 positively so that  
43 enthusiasm to develop this area can be encouraged,” said Arief who is  
44 also the prince  
45 of the Cirebon Kasepuhan Kingdom.

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Source: Anonymous, 2008.

the lack of concern by the provincial capital about the slowness and lack of development in this area when compared with the interior (lines 9–12 and 23–24). In this case, lack of development when compared to the interior starts to construct the five areas as marginal in comparison to a center (the interior). At the same, these comments construct a new center, the proposed Province of Cirebon. Note too that those with authority are often quoted (lines 16–18 and 22–24). The authoritative figures included the two *Dewan Perwakilan Daerah* (DPD), who are part of a new (since 2004) group of elected officials representing local constituents at the national level, and two members of the *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah* (DPRD) who are locally elected parliamentarians sitting on a regency or city level parliamentary seat (in this case for Indramayu and Cirebon). One of the DPD members, Arief Natadiningrat, was also the prince of the Cirebon Kasupuhan Kingdom. Development too, is something that the whole population of *Pantura* does not enjoy (lines 9–10). As a whole, this text creates a semiotic configuration that associates ideas around centers, margins, hubs, (under)development and reterritorialization. The imitation of parts of this configuration can subsequently engender a scalar shift that invokes the whole configuration.

On 30 March 2008, a blogger republished an analysis of the issue of the formation of a new province of Cirebon ([elgibrany.wordpress.com](http://elgibrany.wordpress.com), 31 March 2008). In the discussion before that found in Excerpt 3.2, the authors of the story represented in this blog pointed to a connection with a political contest for the governorship of West Java where the Regent of Indramayu, Uruanti Syafiuddin, sought nomination for this post from his party (GOLKAR). His efforts were frustrated after GOLKAR only chose a vice-governor candidate, Danny Setiwan, as part of its coalition building efforts with other parties. This decision was greeted with demonstrations by Syafiuddin's supporters in Indramayu. Ultimately, Syafiuddin joined forces with the regent of Cirebon, Dedi Supardi. They subsequently formed a caucus and ran a congress for the coastal region, which sought to stop this region from being marginalized (*dinomordu-akan* literally 'to be put in second place').

The blog explains that as Syafiuddin and his sympathizers' cause gained momentum, they got support from various areas of the community including students, artists, and numerous types of authoritative figures, including academics, religious leaders, the mayor of Cirebon and the Prince of the Cirebon Kasepuhan Kingdom, Arief Natadiningrat. The reasons for a new province were many and contested. One group argued that projected district taxation income would enable a new province, while others were concerned about whether the new province would have enough income to enhance the welfare of the community (in contrast to a handful of local politicians), or engender development and the equitable redistribution of resources. Inability to correct the unequitable redistribution of resources, the underdevelopment of Cirebon and cultural difference were

## Excerpt 3.2 Distinguishing cultures and reterritorialization

- 
- 1 According to him [the Dean called Imam], cultural differences between
  - 2 areas may
  - 3 become the foundation of [the proposed] Pantura Province or Cirebon
  - 4 Province hides
  - 5 the potential of a split that would be hard to reunite.
  - 6 “For example, Ciayumajakuning [acronym for the five regions], it is
  - 7 certain that not
  - 8 all areas will accept this idea. Kuningan and Majalengka are going to
  - 9 opt out. The
  - 10 areas covered by these two regencies are clearly of Sundanese culture,”
  - 11 he said.
  - 12 Another obstacle, which according to him will be a problem that will
  - 13 be difficult to
  - 14 solve is the lack of legislative support that would be the foundation of
  - 15 the new
  - 16 province. According to Imam’s analysis, the wish to form a new
  - 17 province only
  - 18 represents the wishes of a handful of people and is without explicit
  - 19 support from
  - 20 either the community or the legislature.
  - 21 If we invoke the problem of unequal development, which is experienced
  - 22 by the
  - 23 Cirebon area, or like marginalization, according to Imam this is caused
  - 24 by the system
  - 25 of government at all levels, which have been formed on an unstable
  - 26 platform.
- 

Source: elgibrany.wordpress.com, 31 March 2008.

other reasons given by another authoritative figure, the Dean of a local university (see Excerpt 3.2).

The import of Excerpt 3.2, and the text as a whole, is how the constantly emerging semiotic configuration about reterritorialization is now associated with cultural difference (lines 1–6), development (lines 12–13) and marginalization (line 13). Cultural difference is interesting here too because Sundanese culture is part of an older semiotic configuration that is tightly associated with language and which emanates from another scale, in this case, a European center from colonial times. The cited author appears sufficiently linguistically enfranchised to be able to use this ideology in defense of his position on reterritorialization. Put slightly differently, Sundanese-ness acts as scalar shifter that invokes cultural and linguistic difference. In Excerpt 3.2, there is also an imitation of *dinomorduakan* that was mentioned earlier in the text (not reproduced here), but this time it manifests as the word *dianaktirikan*, literally ‘to be treated like a step child’, but this can also be interpreted as ‘mistreated like a step child’ or ‘marginalized’. Thus, marginalization becomes relinked with reterritorialization, culture, language and development.



With no further uptake of the story in 2008, we need to move forward to a story published on 7 February 2009. This one appeared in the online newspaper, *Pikiran Rakyat*, and reported that the Committee for the formation of the Province of Cirebon (P3C) was going to declare a new province of Cirebon in reaction to the recent government moratorium on reterritorialization. This committee, along with another, the *Panitia Persiapan Pembentukan Provinsi Cirebon* (P4C) (The committee for the preparation of the formation of the Cirebon Province), were the formalized imitations of the *Front Pendukung Pembentukan Propinsi Cirebon* (The supporters front for the formation of the Cirebon Province) cited in Excerpt 3.1 (line 20). The DPD noted in Excerpt 3.1 were not mentioned, but the DPRD Indramayu was cited as a supporter. There were also new supporters mentioned. These included members of the Village Body Association from Cirebon (BPD), two regents, the Regents of Indramayu and Cirebon, the Indramayu local parliament and the Mayor of Cirebon city (Das, 2009b). Unlike the 2008 story, this one provided no reference to lack of development compared to the interior. A month later, an online newspaper reported on the actual declaration of a new province (Excerpt 3.3). This declaration was made by the chair of P3C, Nana Sudiana, in a hotel in Cirebon in front of thousands of supporters.

In Excerpt 3.3, many of the actors from the two previous stories were involved (Excerpts 3.1 and 3.2). This included members of the P3C, local members of parliament from the regencies of Cirebon, Indramayu and Majalengka, as well as a parliamentary representative from the city of Cirebon (lines 1–2, 5, 9–10 and 12–13). Ideas around (under)development found in Excerpt 3.1 are imitated too (lines 7–8 and 10–11). Importantly, we also see other forms of authority and justification being constructed, in this case, with reference to a recent law about the requirements for reterritorialization (lines 13–14, 16–17 and 19–20), which includes population density, economic ability, overall wellness of the community, art, culture, and law (lines 20–22). The old information (reterritorialization, development and underdevelopment, and actors), together with this new information helps to reform an emerging semiotic configuration that justifies reterritorialization in this timespace.

In the two hours that followed, three further stories appeared in *Tempo*, *Liputan6* and *Pikiran Rakyat* (Bog/Antara, 2009; Das, 2009a; Ivansyah, 2009). Collectively, they imitated semiotic fragments from previous stories, including information about reterritorialization and actors, development, the law, art, culture and the historical case. They also socially identified, by name, some of these actors, while noting some new ones. These commentaries also listed some significant others who were not present, including the Regents (*Bupati*) and Mayors (*Wali Kota*) of the regions in question, and the invited governor of West Java.

One day later, another online newspaper imitated the story from 8 March 2009 (Anonymous, 2009a). Reterritorialization and historical

*Excerpt 3.3* Imitating discourses of underdevelopment and relinking them to law and culture

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1 The head of the Regional Peoples Representative for Indramayu  
2 Province, Hasyim  
3 Junaedi said in his short opening address that the community of  
4 Indramayu Regency  
5 had for the last six months voiced the importance of autonomy, that is,  
6 the formation  
7 of Cirebon Province.  
8 At the same time, M Iqbal (a [member] of the Regional Peoples  
9 Representative for  
10 Majalengka Province), noted, in the name of Majalengka community  
11 figures, that the  
12 formation of Cirebon province was for the speeding up of community  
13 welfare in  
14 Ciayumajakuning.  
15 Similarly, the head of the Regional Peoples Representative for Cirebon  
16 Regency, Haji  
17 Tasiya Soemardi, recommended the formation of the Cirebon province  
18 as a way to  
19 develop the community and to speed up development.  
20 At the same time, the head of Committee for the Formation of the  
21 Province of  
22 Cirebon (P3C), Nana Sudiana, said to reporters that all the  
23 requirements for the  
24 formation of the Cirebon province had been met.  
25 “In accordance to the stages [noted in the regulations] after the  
26 [national] Presidential  
27 elections [we] will be a province (Cirebon Province – editor) because all the  
28 requirements of the government regulation number 78 issued in 2007  
29 have already  
30 been met,” he said.  
31 According to him, the study of all angles, which are requirement of  
32 government  
33 regulation number 78, 2007, has already been done. Among other  
34 things population  
35 [density], economic viability, welfare, art, culture, law and all the way  
36 to organizing  
37 the offices... He added that preparation for the formation of Cirebon  
38 province has  
39 been ongoing since 2004.

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Source: Bambang, 2009.

precedent were imitated, as was the nonattendance of the current heads of each area (the mayor of Cirebon and the Regents of Cirebon, Indramayu, Majalengka and Kuningan). The story named the actors present, including all the DPRD figures, the ex-vice-mayor of Cirebon, the ex-area Secretary of Cirebon and members of P3C and P4C, while adding that there were other important local personalities (*tokoh masyarakat*). The story also imitated previous fragments about the five regions economic ability, while contrasting this with the case of Banten (see discussion in previous

section). Discourse relating to the reterritorialization of Cirebon received no further uptake until 11 August 2009, when a blogger, Eko Risanto, imitated fragments from all of the prior stories, while adding a whole host of new ones (Excerpt 3.4).

In Excerpt 3.4, we see the start of the explicit discursive construction of centers (*pusat*) and its relationship with development and unequal

*Excerpt 3.4* Blogging about reterritorialization

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1 The Northern coastal community of West Java, which consists of  
2 Cirebon,  
3 Indramayu, Majalengka and Kuningan (Ciyumajakuning), have  
4 declared the  
5 formation of the Cirebon Province. They seek autonomy and separation  
6 from the  
7 home Province of West Java. Apart from a historical precedent, the  
8 community feels  
9 there is an imbalance in the development pie especially the money  
10 contributed to the  
11 center by the region.  
12 While the amount that comes back to the region is insignificant. At the  
13 very least,  
14 there are five reasons why Cirebon is ready to become a province.  
15 First, West Java is still too vast with a large population....Now, with  
16 the total  
17 population of Cirebon area 3 or Ciyumajakuning (Cirebon,  
18 Indramayu, Majalengka,  
19 Kuningan) the population totals 8.5 million people....  
20 Second, the economic potential of the area of Ciyumajakuning is very  
21 high and can  
22 attract many more investors. The third [reason], from a historical  
23 perspective, is  
24 because Cirebon was an Islamic Kingdom that was sovereign and  
25 powerful.  
26 Fourth, there is an imbalance in development in West Java, which is  
27 more centralized  
28 in Bandung and its surrounds. Fifth, there is momentum in the people's  
29 mobilization  
30 regarding their disappointment with not having a local figure from  
31 Ciyumajakuning,  
32 who can [politically] lead at the West Java provincial level.  
33 Apart from that, it is clear that the Ciyumajakuning region has  
34 infrastructures that  
35 would be very supportive. From the perspective of natural resources,  
36 this area has a  
37 big ocean, with rich resources yet to be extracted. In addition, there is  
38 oil, sugar, and  
39 rice storage facilities in Indramayu.  
40 The local representative for the national parliament Prince Arief  
41 Natadiningrat...pointed out that to date development had been  
42 centered in the  
43 Bandung area and its surrounds.

(Continued)

- 26 As a result, Bandung functions not just as a center of government, but  
 27 also a center of  
 28 culture, education, industry, and trade...  
 29 “This practice is as if all functions are desired by the center, and other  
 areas like  
 30 Cirebon aren’t given a share,” said Prince Arief....It is also the same  
 with culture.  
 31 Sundanese culture including Sundanese language have been given a  
 special place, in  
 32 the end Cirebon cultural specialists pushed for recognition of Cirebon  
language as a  
 33 regional language of West Java and then struggled until the appearance  
 of a Local  
Government Regulation about Regional Languages.

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Source: <http://ekorisanto.blogspot.com.au>, 11 August 2009.

redistribution of finances (lines 4–6). This implies the five regions are currently marginal, while solidifying earlier ideas around underdevelopment of these presupposed margins. Like the prior stories, this blog refers to a number of authoritative voices through quotation and the display of pictures of some of the actors. As the blog proceeds, we see that the voice of the prince and DPD member fleshes out the semiotic constituents of a center by including governance, culture, education, industry and trade (lines 25–27), followed shortly by language (lines 29–33), and later, customary law (*adat*). In the rest of the blog, there is also imitation of discourses around reterritorialization law, income potential from taxation, historical antecedents and the first mentions of a new province helping to bring efficient public services closer to the people. There is also the first mention of the problem of broken infrastructure that cannot be fixed locally because of the need to be handled by the center. In 2009, there were no further newspaper reports about the reterritorialization noted above.

In 2010, reterritorialization again was reported as an issue with imitations from the past acting as scalar shifters. I will just summarize these commentaries. In June 2010, reterritorialization was reported as being contested at the local level in two articles (Das, 2010; Ivansyah, 2010). In contrast to past stories, however, now reterritorialization was about splitting the regency of Cirebon into two regencies. The story invoked the 2007 law on reterritorialization and democratic processes rather than demonstrations. It also pointed out that one group justified reterritorialization because of the underdevelopment of the Eastern areas, and the large distance those in the East had to travel when needing to interact with the local government to organize identity cards, banking, birth and funeral reporting, business reporting and so on (Das, 2010). Another group argued that reterritorialization would unfairly redistribute revenues to those who did not earn it (Ivansyah, 2010). Just as importantly,

it was pointed out that there was a tendency for development efforts to be focused in the West (Ivansyah, 2010). In short, these discourses were now constructing new margins and centers, with West Cirebon now a center rather than Bandung (Excerpt 3.4) and the East a marginal and underdeveloped region.

In September, *Viva* news reported a story about a group of twenty-five supporters of the formation of a new province of Cirebon (from the regencies of Cirebon, Indramayu, Majalengka and Kuningan) who arrived at the DPRD office in Bandung to re-air their aspirations for reterritorialization (Amri, 2010a). This time, they met representatives of the head of Commission A within the DPRD, which is responsible for working on issues of reterritorialization within the province of West Java. Among the actors was the president of P3C, Nana Sudiana who gave three reasons justifying reterritorialization. These were: (1) the three-year claim for reterritorialization; (2) the majority of the population in the five areas were for the reterritorialization; and (3) the governor and vice-governor of West Java had promised, during their election campaign, to help with the formation of a new province of Cirebon. The economic basis of these claims mentioned in the previous years were further fleshed out with reference to actual income figures (Amri, 2010a). In this case, areas that had previously been cast as margins were now to become a new center of economic power.

Five days later, the same reporter and newspaper published a story reporting on the opinion of a member of the local Cirebon City DPRD (Amri, 2010b). In this case, M. Aidin Tamin – the secretary of Commission 4, which deals with reterritorialization at the local level – gave three reasons why reterritorialization was not possible. These were: (1) there had been no official request; (2) there needed to be five areas before a new province could be formed, and that to his knowledge the five areas in question had not agreed to reterritorialization; and (3) that it was not possible from an economic perspective to become an independent province. The result of such a move would be a reduction in the well-being of the newly formed community rather than the desired improvements (Amri, 2010b). In short, the same economic grounds used in earlier reports to justify the formation of a new center were now used to construct the hypothetical new province as engendering further hardship or marginalization for its community.

Two further stories were published in December 2010, but neither were about a new province (Anonymous, 2010; Fikri, 2010). Instead, there were two stories about the splitting of Cirebon regency into two new regencies. These stories reported about a demonstration by a group of twenty-five men, led by Dade Mustofa, a member of a committee for the creation of a West Cirebon regency. This group marched for seven days to the capital city of Bandung to meet with the governor of the province, Ahmad Heryawan, and ask that Cirebon Regency be

split into two new regencies, East and West Cirebon. The reasons given for demanding a split were that this was a historical issue where access to public services was difficult. For example, those in the east had to travel 45 kilometers to the West whenever they needed to organize anything requiring the help of the local government. Other reasons given included economic preparedness and the need to speed up efforts relating to community well-being, as well as the development of infrastructure and improvement of public services (Anonymous, 2010; Fikri, 2010). In short, imitation of fragments of past semiotic configurations continued to be used to justify or contest centers and margins with ideas from elsewhere such as (under)development, ethnicity and good governance being invoked in the process.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the discursive construction of margins and centers by those residing in the margins of one Indonesian province. My data consisted of online newspaper and blog commentaries published between 2008 and 2010. My analysis of this material drew on concepts used in the study of semiosis, especially imitation, enregisterment, and semiotic register. More specifically, I examined how elements of semiotic registers of development, good governance and ethnic languages emanating from a semiotic configuration commonly referred to as ‘center’ in globalization discourse (e.g. Europe in colonial times, the World Bank and the IMF) were imitated in the ‘margins’. I also explored how these ideas figured in the construction of a new semiotic configuration associated with discourses of reterritorialization. I use scare quotes around center and margin because these terms act like deictics in ongoing discourse in a way that invites us to ask: ‘Place X is a margin or a center from whose perspective?’

In examining how imitation figured in the formation of semiotic configurations in particular Indonesian timespaces, I pointed to how this process produced scalar shifters that could be used in subsequent imitations to invoke their past indexical associations, while helping to formulate a new semiotic configuration. While the process noun ‘globalization’ continues to be used as a descriptor and object of analysis, the continual and often miniscule changes in semiotic configurations created by imitation suggest that framing our analysis of globalization as an analysis of enregisterment may remind us that the process noun ‘globalization’ cannot describe nor analyze the phenomena we are trying to understand (Agha, 2015). In my data, there were no mentions of globalization, yet fragments of ‘registers of globalization’ were crucial in the discursive construction of margins and centers. In short, focusing on imitation, actors and participation frameworks (i.e. enregisterment) may provide us with an alternate and nuanced approach to understanding connections between discourses of globalization, marginalization and centralization.

## Appendix

### *Excerpt 3.1* Underdevelopment as a reason for reterritorialization

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- 1 Sekitar 8.000 orang dari sejumlah organisasi kemasyarakatan (ormas) di Kabupaten Indramayu, Rabu
  - 2 (6/2), mendeklarasikan Provinsi Cirebon yang terpisah dari Jawa Barat. Deklarasi dilakukan di depan
  - 3 SMP Losarang, Indramayu ....Masing-masing perwakilan massa seperti Forum RT/RW se-Indramayu,
  - 4 DPD Asyhadatain, DPD Wahana Masyarakat Tani Indonesia ....., KNPI, dan Pemuda
  - 5 Pancasila melakukan orasi di pinggir jalan dengan pengeras suara dan bentangan spanduk yang
  - 6 menyatakan dukungan atas pembentukan Propinsi Cirebon....
  - 7 Dalam orasinya, mereka mengaku kecewa dengan pembangunan di Pantura yang dinilai lambat dan
  - 8 kurangnya perhatian Jawa Barat dibanding pembangunan di wilayah Priangan.
  - 9 Ketua DPRD Kabupaten Indramayu Hasyim Junaedi juga hadir dan membacakan deklarasi
  - 10 pembentukan propinsi Cirebon dengan berapi-api....
  - 11 “Rakyat Pantura yang terdiri dari lima wilayah yaitu Kota dan Kabupaten Cirebon, Kabupaten
  - 12 Indramayu, Kabupaten Majalengka dan Kabupaten Kuningan menyatakan siap berpisah dari Jawa
  - 13 Barat untuk membentuk Propinsi Cirebon,” katanya ....
  - 14 Mereka menamakan aksi itu sebagai Kongres Rakyat Pantura yang sepakat membentuk Front
  - 15 Pendukung Pembentukan Propinsi Cirebon (FP3C), namun personilnya masih menunggu dukungan
  - 16 dari daerah lain....
  - 17 “Adanya kongres rakyat Pantura itu merupakan bukti adanya keinginan kuat masyarakat untuk lebih maju
  - 18 dengan propinsi baru dan ini harus direspon positif sehingga semangat membangun daerah ini
  - 19 bisa terus digelorakan,” kata Arief yang juga putra mahkota Keraton Kasepuhan Cirebon.
- 

Source: Anonymous, 2008.

### *Excerpt 3.2* Distinguishing cultures and reterritorialization

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- 1 Menurutny, perbedaan kultur antara wilayah yang mungkin menjadi cikal bakal Provinsi Pantura atau
- 2 Provinsi Cirebon menyimpan potensi perpecahan yang sulit disatukan.
- 3 “Misalnya, Ciayumajakuning, pasti tidak akan semua wilayah menerima gagasan itu. Kuningan dan
- 4 Majalengka akan menolak. Wilayah kedua kabupaten tersebut jelas kulturnya Sunda,” katanya.
- 5 Pembatas lain yang menurutnya juga jadi kendala yang sulit ditembus yakni tidak adanya dukungan

(Continued)



- 6 dari legislatif dari wilayah yang bisa menjadi cikal bakal provinsi baru itu. Sejauh pengamatan Imam,
- 7 keinginan mendirikan provinsi baru hanya keinginan segelintir orang saja tanpa dukungan yang nyata
- 8 baik dari masyarakat maupun legislatif....
- 9 Kalau menyangkut soal porsi pembangunan yang tidak merata, yang dirasakan wilayah Cirebon seperti
- 10 dianaktirikan, menurut Imam, sebenarnya hal itu lebih dikarenakan sistem pemerintahan di semua
- 11 tingkatan, yang memang dibangun di atas fondasi yang rapuh.

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Source: elgibrany.wordpress.com, 30 March 2008.

*Excerpt 3.3* Imitating discourses of underdevelopment and relinking them to law and culture

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- 1 Ketua DPRD Indramayu Hasjim Juniadi dalam sambutan singkatnya mengatakan, masyarakat
- 2 Kabupaten Indramayu sudah enam bulan menyatakan pentingnya kemandirian, yakni membentuk
- 3 provinsi Cirebon....
- 4 Sementara M Iqbal (DPRD Majalengka) atas nama tokoh masyarakat Majalengka mengatakan,
- 5 pembentukan provinsi Cirebon adalah untuk mempercepat
- 6 kesejahteraan masyarakat di wilayah
- 7 Ciayumajakuning ....
- 8 Begitu juga Ketua DPRD Kabupaten Cirebon H. Tasiya Soemardi yang merekomendasikan
- 9 pembentukan provinsi Cirebon demi kemajuan masyarakat dan mempercepat pembangunan....
- 10 Sementara itu, Ketua Presidium Panitia Pembentukan Provinsi Cirebon (P3C) Nana Sudiana kepada
- 11 wartawan mengatakan, segala persyaratan pembentukan provinsi Cirebon sudah terpenuhi....
- 12 “Sesuai tahapan setelah Pemilu Presiden, sudah jadi provinsi (Provinsi Cirebon: Red) karena segala
- 13 persyaratan sesuai PP 78 tahun 2007 sudah terpenuhi,” katanya....
- 14 Menurut dia, kajian berbagai aspek sesuai yang dipersyaratkan oleh PP 78 tahun 2007 telah
- 15 dilaksanakan, antara lain penduduk, kemampuan ekonomi, kesejahteraan, seni budaya, hukum sampai
- 16 pada tata ruang....
- 17 Ditambahkannya, persiapan pembentukan provinsi Cirebon sudah sejak 2004.

---

Source: Bambang, 2009.

Excerpt 3.4 Blogging about reterritorialization

---

- 1 Masyarakat pantai utara Jawa Barat yang terdiri dari Cirebon,
- 2 Indramayu, Majalengka dan Kuningan
- 3 (Ciayumajakuning), mendeklarasikan berdirinya Propinsi Cirebon.
- 4 Mereka ingin mandiri dan berpisah
- 5 dari induknya Provinsi Jawa Barat. Selain kesadaran historis,
- 6 masyarakat di sana merasakan tak
- 7 seimbang antara kue pembangunan dengan sumbangsih keuangan
- 8 yang disetor wilayahnya ke
- 9 pusat.
- 10 Sedangkan yang kembali ke daerah tidak signifikan.... Setidaknya ada
- 11 lima alasan mengapa Cirebon
- 12 layak menjadi propvnsi.
- 13 Pertama, Jawa Barat masih terlalu luas dengan jumlah penduduk yang
- 14 besar...Kini, dengan jumlah
- 15 penduduk wilayah III Cirebon atau Ciayumajakuning (Cirebon,
- 16 Indramayu, Majalengka, Kuningan)
- 17 mencapai jumlah 8,5 juta jiwa....
- 18 Kedua, potensi ekonomi wilayah Ciayumajakuning sangat tinggi dan
- 19 bisa menarik investor lebih
- 20 banyak lagi. Ketiga, melihat segi historis karena pernah menjadi
- 21 Kesultanan Cirebon yang berdaulat
- 22 dan berjaya.
- 23 Keempat, adanya ketidakseimbangan pembangunan di Jawa Barat yang
- 24 lebih terpusat di Bandung dan
- 25 sekitarnya. Kelima, adanya momentum gerakan warga yang merasa
- 26 kecewa karena tidak ada figur dari
- 27 wilayah Ciayumajakuning yang bisa tampil sebagai pimpinan di tingkat
- 28 Jabar. ....
- 17 Selain itu, tentu saja kawasan Ciayumajakuning telah memiliki
- 18 infrastruktur yang sangat mendukung.
- 19 .... Dari segi sumber daya alam, kawasan ini memiliki laut yang
- 20 panjang, dengan kekayaannya yang
- 21 masih belum tergali. Selain itu, juga ada sumber minyak, gula dan
- 22 lumbungnya beras (Indramayu)....
- 23 Anggota Dewan Perwakilan Daerah (DPD) RI PRA Arief Natadiningrat
- 24 .... mengungkapkan bila
- 25 selama ini pembangunan hanya terpusat di wilayah Bandung dan
- 26 sekitarnya.
- 27 Akibatnya, fungsi Bandung tidak hanya sebagai pusat pemerintahan,
- 28 tetapi juga sebagai pusat budaya,
- 29 pendidikan, industri, dan perdagangan....
- 30 “Hal ini seolah-olah semua fungsi ingin diambil pusat dan daerah lain
- 31 seperti Cirebon tidak diberi
- 32 porsi,” tutur Pangeran Arief....Demikian juga masalah budaya. Budaya
- 33 Sunda termasuk bahasa Sunda
- 34 mendapat tempat khusus, sebelum akhirnya budayawan Cirebon
- 35 mendesak adanya pengakuan bahasa
- 36 Cirebon sebagai bahasa daerah Jawa Barat yang kemudian berujung
- 37 pada munculnya Perda Bahasa
- 38 Daerah.

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## 4 English in Asmara as a Changing Reflection of Online Globalization

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### An Internet Café in Asmara as a Vignette of Globalization

In a typical Internet Café and WiFi access point in Asmara, the capital city and center of Eritrea, a small country in the Horn of Africa, young people on a daily basis log into Facebook, Yahoo, Google, etc. and exchange text and voice messages. The old PCs that were used to access online material when Internet Cafés first appeared in the late 1990s are now mostly replaced by smart phones, i-Pads and laptops brought along by customers. People sit in comfortable sofas across large rooms and flow out onto the streets, 50–100 meters in the café’s surrounding, standing, sitting on a bike or inside a car, making use of WiFi and Internet access. There are two, three assistants collecting the 10–20 Nakfa (0.75–1.00 USD) per hour fee, providing some technical assistance and taking care of older customers who use voice messaging to connect with their children or spouses abroad. These centers are famous for their long hours of service, some working for about eighteen hours per day. Internet service is provided most prominently by the state-owned Eritrea Telecommunication Services Corporation (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1 Internet Café price list, Asmara 2016.

Stepping outside the Internet Café onto the streets of Asmara, one can see that the linguistic landscape of the city also reflects this particular phenomenon of globalization showing many written signs and symbols advertising the availability of Internet and WiFi access points. Buildings, at the same time, still carry the old trilingual (Tigrinya, Arabic and English) official nameplates of the institutions hosted there; and around small businesses, on information boards and on walls we see examples of multilingual grassroots literacy, displaying printed and handwritten texts and graffiti. The signs of globalization in the linguistic landscape, mainly using English, are however increasingly prominent and blend with traditional literacies forming a diverse ensemble of semiotic signs reflecting at the same time marginality and globalization in Asmara.

In globalized times, the side effects of complex international politics have created an interesting phenomenon, now known as superdiversity. Coined more than ten years ago by Vertovec (2006), the term initially drew together insights from the sociology of migration, in which the so-called diversification of diversity became central, and from studies on digital culture, increasingly highlighting issues, problems and affordances of (worldwide) online access. It is this last factor that is of specific importance to us here, as the digital aspect of globalization and its affordances is the central focus of this chapter. It is also a well-known fact that globalization, especially in marginal areas, in many cases goes together with unequal participation (Wang, et al., 2014) in offline as well as online contexts (Castells, 2010). Apart from an observed slower, less advanced and less democratic development of technological infrastructures needed for online participation there is also the phenomenon of governments that as part of what can be considered a form of isolation politics put restrictions on global Internet access of their citizens, as happens e.g. in North Korea, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and China, to name just a few, albeit in very different ways in each country.<sup>1</sup> There Internet access is cut off relatively often and people's online activities are strictly monitored and controlled by the state. Many have likened Eritrea with at least the first country, North Korea. Its recent history of international isolation combined with, what is reported by many, as a large outmigration of citizens from within its borders (Van Reisen, Estefanos, & Rijken, 2012) would suggest a backlash in connectivity, a slower or no technological and economic growth and a tightening control of government on online activities. However, nothing seems to be less true. In this chapter, we will aim to show that in spite of its alleged international isolation and stagnating technological development, the people in Eritrea are digitally quite well connected and the country shows a slow but sure development of digital affordances and infrastructures and witnesses a move from analogue text to a complex on/offline semiotics. We will investigate this development by mainly taking a look at English, one of the main drivers of globalization (Pennycook, 1994, 2010), as reflected

in the linguistic landscape of Eritrea's capital Asmara, more specifically its main shopping street Harnet Avenue. In doing so, our central question will be what the patterned use of English tells us about the above-mentioned issues. By means of longitudinal linguistic landscaping, we will sketch the development of English in Asmara over the last 12 years.

### Accidental Linguistic Landscape Experiences in Eritrea

When visiting Eritrea for the first time in 2001 at the occasion of an international conference commemorating the tenth anniversary of the independence of Eritrea,<sup>2</sup> linguistic landscaping was not yet established as a separate line of research in sociolinguistics. Although Landry and Bourhis' seminal paper on linguistic landscapes dates back to 1997 (Landry & Bourhis, 1997), it was only in 2003 that Scollon and Wong-Scollon called for 'progressively more acute analyses of the ways in which places in time and space come to have subjective meanings for the humans who live and act within them' (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2003, p. 12). The collections of linguistic landscape studies by Gorter (2006), Shohamy and Gorter (2008) and Shohamy, Ben-Rafael and Barni (2010) can be considered an answer to the Scollons's plea.

In hindsight, the pictures taken in Asmara during the 2001 conference did, in addition to touristic urban and rural landscapes, also show some semiotic signs, such as the five meters high monument of the sandals worn by Eritrean freedom fighters in the war against Ethiopia, placed in Shida Square as a symbol of Eritrea's freedom, and a socialist realism painting in the conference center showing a group of heavily armed Eritrean freedom fighters having a joint meal in the field – images celebrating victory and independence (see Figure 4.2). Consciously taken linguistic landscape pictures were still missing then.

This changed during a 2005 research visit<sup>3</sup> when some non-systematic linguistic landscape pictures were made in Asmara. These included an Italian sign *Attenti al cane* (beware of the dog) at private premises, a bilingual Tigrinya Italian sign *Macelleria* (butcher's shop), an official bilingual Tigrinya and English sign *Public Library*, a trilingual Tigrinya, Arabic and English street name sign *Harnet Ave*, an apparently old Italian sign *Divieto d'affissione*, forbidding people to stick bills on the wall, and a trilingual advertisement for the *Asmara School of Languages* (see Figure 4.3).

Also without these pictures being taken specifically to do linguistic landscaping, they provide us with what has been called by Blommaert (2013, p. 2) a 'first-line sociolinguistic diagnostic' of this particular area reflecting the presence of Italian as the old colonial language and the combined use of Tigrinya, Arabic and English as the postindependence working languages of the government. The other officially recognized languages in Eritrea, i.e. Tigre (just like Tigrinya written in Ge'ez script),



*Figure 4.2* Painting, Asmara 2001.



*Figure 4.3* Collage of signs, Asmara 2005.

Afar, Saho, Bilen, Bidhaawyeet, Kunama and Nara (all written in Latin alphabet) were not represented in the pictures. Still, as a consequence of Eritrea's language and education policy that recognizes the equality of all Eritrean languages, all nine Eritrean languages were at the time (and still are) used as languages of instruction and taught as school subjects in primary education and they were also employed to produce daily radio programs by the state broadcast media (Asfaha, 2009a). Language equality in education, in other words, apparently doesn't imply the languages' written use in public space. As Asfaha (2009a, p. 24), reporting

on a number of field trips all over the country, put it: 'Although the larger rural parts of Eritrea are not visibly rich in written language, the major urban centres share a better public print atmosphere with street signs, names of businesses and public offices written in three languages (Tigrinya, Arabic and English) and three scripts (Ge'ez, Arabic and Latin alphabet). A similar mix of languages and scripts is usually applied to produce handwritten signs, announcements and graffiti on notice boards and walls'. By way of summary, we can say that the accidentally found linguistic landscapes above reflect the image of the new independent state and its colonial heritage.

Before going into a more systematic analysis of Asmara's linguistic landscape over time, let us first discuss some of the ins and outs of linguistic landscaping as a branch of sociolinguistics.

### **Linguistic Landscaping**

In much of the earlier research on linguistic landscaping, the focus has been heavily on counting the numbers of languages and language combinations or other semiotic signs that could be found in a specific public space either referring to sociolinguistic usages or to other sociocultural indices (Juffermans, 2015). From approaches to multilingualism, counting the number of street sign languages, home languages and so on, to superdiversity, describing multilingual interaction and a more integrated semiotic picture, linguistic landscaping has evolved into a possibility to thoroughly produce 'thick descriptions', echoing an anthropological methodology as coined in Blommaert (2013) and further developed in Blommaert and Maly (2016). We would like to propose here, in accordance with the move to a more ethnographic linguistic landscape approach, the following three propositions. In line with Blommaert (2013), we see linguistic landscaping first of all as a first-line sociolinguistic diagnostic of a particular area, in our case, Harnet Avenue in downtown Asmara. It can provide us with an image of the sociolinguistic regime in that area, including what language or languages are used, in what combinations and configurations, in what form (standardized vs. grassroots) and using what media (billboards, sign, notes, graffiti, etc.). Such regimes, in the case of Eritrea, can be connected to the country's language and language-in-education policies. These were established after independence and first of all stipulate the equality of all nine Eritrean languages, the use of Tigrinya and Arabic as the working languages of the government, the principle of mother tongue education, i.e. the freedom of choice on the side of the parents to send their children to a school that uses the home language of the child as a language of instruction, and the use of English as a general working language and as a language of instruction as of middle school (year six).

A second main characteristic of linguistic landscaping as we see it is its potential to give a historical dimension to sociolinguistic analysis. Linguistic landscape data not only reflect contemporary language regimes but they also include traces or remnants of earlier episodes in which the sociolinguistic fabric of society looked totally different and the ensemble of languages in public space was a reflection of the historical whereabouts of the country. In Asmara, this is, for example, visible in Italian, English and some damaged and painted-over texts in Amharic, referring to the period of Italian colonization (1889–1941), British protectorate (1941–1952) and Ethiopian rule over Eritrea (1962–1991). By studying the linguistic landscape in a historical perspective, we can better understand societal developments and transformations that shape a country's image.

Finally, we think it is important to stress here that linguistic landscape data are naturalistic data, i.e. they are not indirectly constructed or gathered by using questionnaires or surveys but exist and can be directly observed in real life. Applying an ethnographic approach in collecting and analyzing naturalistic linguistic landscape data as advocated by Blommaert and Maly (2016), includes dealing with the intentions of the producer or sender of a specific sign, the uptake of that sign by its intended – or not intended – audience or receiver and the position of the sign within the totality of the multilayered sociolinguistic environment where it is located. In other words, how signs are positioned and how particular resources are used to shape these signs in patterned ways, gives as a truly 'historical' insight, going beyond merely counting and without necessarily having to go into classic ethnographic tenets such as interviewing, deep hanging out and so on. The history of signs is observable in their patternedness. Signs, in other words, point toward the past, i.e. to their origins, conditions and modes of production, toward the future, i.e. to their audiences and uptake, and toward the present, i.e. to the sociolinguistic context or emplacement in which they are located. By using these three axes or arrows (backward, forward and sideways) it is possible to understand the social function and semiotic scope of public signs.

Before we illustrate the historical possibilities that linguistic landscaping offers, we need to take on board a sketch of the sociohistorical position of the object of our study: English in Eritrea.

## **English in Eritrea**

Eritrea was under Italian, British and Ethiopian control for almost a century until 1991, when the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the main group fighting Ethiopia for the independence of the country, finally gained control of the territory and, with UN support in 1993, declared it sovereign. Immediately, the government started to implement many of its social policies formulated partly already during the independence movement. One of these is the multilingual education policy (Asfaha,

2015). Under this policy, all nine languages of the country are the media of instruction in the first five years of education in respective regions where they are spoken. In middle school (starting year six) and in subsequent secondary and higher-level education, the medium of instruction is English. To prepare children for English medium education, it is provided as a subject during the five years of primary education. The role of English in education in Eritrea is very important as learners' ability to progress in their education is dependent on their ability to master the language.

English was introduced into Eritrea by the British military administration (1941–1952). During this period, English was adopted as the language of education in all post-primary and higher education (Wright, 2002). It has maintained this central role in post-primary education in the country ever since. English, described by Woldemikael (2003, p. 123) as 'a neutral language without a strong social or political base in Eritrea', serves in international business and communication of public institutions (such as Ministries), big commercial enterprises (such as banks, insurance, retail, etc. companies) and multinationals (such as construction, mining, etc. companies). Outside these and outside educational settings, there is little occasion to speak, use or even encounter English in a social setting (Walter & Davis, 2005).

Therefore, despite the ostensible absence of statements on official language(s) in policy documents, in practice, public, commercial and educational institutions operate or are expected to operate in English. In private or state-owned commercial enterprises, memos, letters, operational manuals, proposals, financial statements, etc. and in educational settings textbooks and teacher guides are all prepared in English. However, interactions of civil servants with the public and in-house communications of public offices are mainly conducted in Tigrinya, one of the two working languages of the government (the other being Arabic). Rules, regulations and proclamations from government offices are usually printed in Tigrinya, Arabic and English. Despite this institutional support to the use of English, low levels of proficiency are a concern, particularly in the education sector (Walter & Davis, 2005).

## **Linguistic Landscape Research in Asmara**

### *The 2009 Study: 'English makes us look good'*

The visibility of English in the linguistic landscape of Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea, has been investigated for the first time in 2009 when two Tilburg University MA students examined the signs in the city's main street Harnet Avenue (De Poorter, 2016; Vormeer, 2011).<sup>4</sup> In her analysis of 361 signs including nameplates, writings on information boards, wall/window paintings, posters, etc., De Poorter (2016) found that English-only signs accounted for about 30% of the total number of signs collected. Similarly, in Vormeer's (2011) study, about 40% of the



202 signs collected were in English only. Both studies have found that above 75% of all collected signs in the surveyed street contain English language. In official public signs, such as name plates of ministries, other public institutions and street names, we generally see the fixed order of Tigrinya, Arabic and English reflecting Eritrea's post-independence language policy (Figure 4.4).

English is also found in places for tourists and foreign visitors like hotels, bars, restaurants, travel agencies and cinemas, as well as in shops that sell leisure products like music and movie DVDs and CDs. A collage of shop signs can be found in Figure 4.5. They all combine Tigrinya, Arabic and English, and therefore, have local as well as foreign customers as their audience.



Figure 4.4 Name plate Harnet Avenue, Asmara 2009.



Figure 4.5 Collage of signs in Harnet Avenue, Asmara 2009.

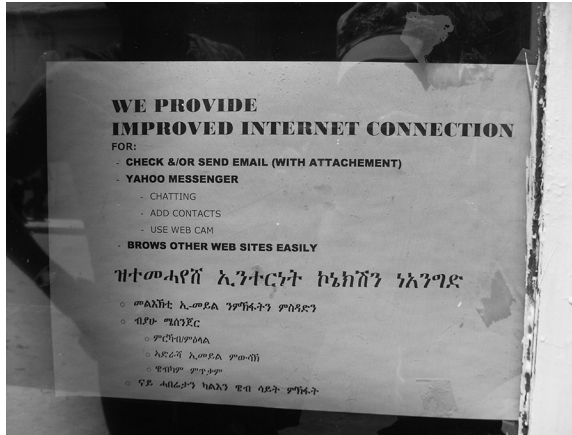


Figure 4.6 Internet advertisement, Asmara 2009.

English in commercial signs is mainly found in relation to technical equipment like computers, printers, cartridges and PC programs. An interesting internet advertisement in English and Tigrinya can be seen in Figure 4.6.

Not only does it say that ‘improved internet connection’ is provided, it also spells out in verbatim text what can be done on the internet: checking and sending email messages (with attachment), using Yahoo messenger for chatting, adding contacts and using the web cam and browsing other websites easily. The explicitness of this advertisement, basically explaining the obvious, is a clear reflection of an early phase of digitalization in which customers still need a lot of explanation.

In addition, De Poorter’s analysis revealed the ‘grassroots’ nature of the English language used in producing these signs, showing deviations from standards in spelling, word choice, grammar, etc. Some examples here are the ‘extra’ *A lapizma* to a meal of *Chips* and *Hamberger* (sic) on the American Bar menu, referring in a more or less Italianized or Frenchized spelling to ‘à la Bismarck’, i.e. the German cuisine specialty of having a fried egg on top of a meal and *Riffil ink* (*Cartilage*) referring in phonetic transcription to ‘Refill ink Cartridges’ on a commercial sign. As such phonetic spellings did not seem to hamper communication, the value of English in these multilingual signs, was assumed to establish a symbolic association to the prestige of this global language. Like the manager of the Pizza and Spaghetti House, an Italian restaurant in the center of Asmara, in an interview said ‘English makes us look good’ (Asfaha, 2009b, p. 217; see also Vormeer, 2011, p. 46).

Eritrea’s recent diplomatic and political history may bear the responsibility for at least some of the visibility of English signs in Asmara. During

the 1990s, after Eritrea's formal independence, expatriate communities gradually increased in numbers as foreign missions, aid agencies and multilateral organizations were opening offices in the capital. Immediately after the country's border war with Ethiopia ended in 2000, a contingent of UN peacekeepers from, initially, mainly European countries descended on Asmara. These surges in expatriate community numbers may have initiated the overreliance on English in the linguistic landscape in Asmara. With the closure of the UN peacekeeping mission and subsequent diplomatic isolation of the country and departure of some foreign missions, development aid agencies and NGOs, the visibility of English might be expected to have declined. However, as we will see, recent 2016 linguistic landscape data of the same main street in Asmara revealed the visibility of English again and the emergence of multimodal symbols of globalization, in particular, symbols associated with Internet. Nonetheless, as Vormeer (2011) clearly stated, the applicability of these findings from the main street in Asmara to the rest of the city and the country and their strength to explain recent national issues has to be further studied. In addition, the implications of the high visibility of English in the streets to classroom language instruction in Eritrean schools have to be further examined (Asfaha, 2009a).

### *The 2016 Study: @*

Bearing in mind Blommaert's (2013) plea for including a historical dimension in sociolinguistic research, we decided to go back to the field for another round of data collection in Harnet Avenue.<sup>5</sup> This would permit us to establish a longitudinal perspective on the linguistic landscape comparing 2009 and 2016 data of the same street. Our preliminary expectations when embarking on this study were closely related to contemporary developments in Eritrea. Central to these expectations was the international isolation of the country and allegations of human rights violations, and as a result, large numbers of its citizens seeking asylum in countries all over the world (UN CoIE, 2015, 2016) and, on the other hand, the diminishing numbers of foreigners – be it tourists, businessmen, representatives of NGOs, international agencies and foreign governments – visiting and staying in the country. We expected that less international travel, contact and presence of foreigners in Eritrea would have sociolinguistic consequences, i.e. a diminishing presence or even vanishing of English in the country's linguistic landscape.

Our findings, however, did not confirm our expectations. We still found the 'old' official English in trilingual signs referring to, for example, governmental institutions. We also still found tourist English in restaurants, bars and shops. This shows that fixed and official linguistic landscapes are rather robust and stable phenomena that do not necessarily show a one to one relationship with societal transformations but

might reflect a ‘historical’ state of affairs, i.e. in the case of Harnet Avenue, the reflection of an earlier presence of a substantial international clientele. Without paying attention to the backward axis in linguistic landscaping, such petrified or fossilized signs might give a wrong impression of the actual sociolinguistic situation in an area. Compare the Indonesian border signs dating back to the period of Indonesian occupation that can still be found in Timor-Leste’s District of Lautém but that meanwhile became obsolete (Da Conceição Savio, 2015).

What we also still found in Harnet Avenue was commercial English (and Tigrinya), at first sight still mainly referring to computer-related technical equipment, just like in the 2009 study (see Figure 4.7).

A closer look, however, at these signs showed that they clearly underwent a change of focus. We found quite some Internet-related advertisements in English that reflect a further refinement of global Internet infrastructures. It’s no longer a matter of advertising technical equipment or using extensive and wordy advertisements to explain, for example, what can be done with specific software such as ‘Word’ or ‘Office’. In addition to hardware and software advertisements, the focus now seems to be on what we would suggest to call symbolware, i.e. the use of international logos and icons to refer to products like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Google. Also free video, call and chat services like Viber, Imo, Tango and Messenger are prominently advertised with mainly their logos and/or names (Figure 4.8).

Such products apparently no longer need lengthy explanations in Tigrinya or English since they are now a well-known part of a no longer



Figure 4.7 Technical equipment, movies and songs, Asmara 2016.



Figure 4.8 Symbolware, Asmara 2016.

nichified, much more accessible new market that is inhabited by a new audience, i.e. Eritrean citizens wanting to connect to the outside world (including the worldwide Eritrean diaspora) through the Internet. What we see here is that Eritrea's offline isolation leads to a globalization of online infrastructures through which people from the margins of East Africa manage to become globally connected.

This is very nicely shown in the iconic picture in Figure 4.9 that kind of reflects all the above considerations.

Figure 4.9 represents a very interesting ensemble of signs. First of all, in the middle, we see a sign pointing at the Internet Café on the first floor. The signs only says *Internet Café Esrom* with an arrow pointing at the first floor of the building where the balcony has the same sign (not really visible here). The building also hosts a pension – *Imberemi Pension* – with a name plate above the entrance door in Arabic, Tigrinya and English; note that this is not the usual order of the languages on public signs. Just below the balcony, we see the *Aljewbar* gold and silver workshop with a mainly Arabic and Tigrinya name plate. At the right side of the building is a traditional 'notice board' with Tigrinya heading, full of handwritten and printed notes, obituaries and little advertisements, mainly in Tigrinya. The façade of this building is a clear example of the multilayeredness of the linguistic landscape in Asmara: traditional Tigrinya-only grassroots literacy products on a public notice board, bilingual Arabic and Tigrinya and trilingual Tigrinya, Arabic and English signs go together with an English-only sign with a big @ as its most prominent feature. The façade combines old and new and represents a variety of historically determined layers of literacy that all fulfill the semiotic ambitions of their producers and their intended audiences. The



Figure 4.9 Internet Café, Asmara 2016.

visitors of Esrom Internet Café constitute an audience that doesn't need extensive explanation nor trilingual signs. The combined use of Tigrinya, Arabic and English makes clear where we are, i.e. in a marginal place in Africa. The @, on the other hand, is enough to communicate what this place is all about: being online connected to places that are hard to reach offline – unless one chooses to travel outside. The fact that Esrom Internet Café in Asmara is on Facebook<sup>6</sup> shows that globalization on the margins is not only a matter of individual aspiration but also of institutional investment and entrepreneurship opening digital pathways to the world.

## Conclusion

Our historical journey through Asmara's linguistic landscape gives rise to a number of conclusions. First of all, we think to have shown the usefulness of including a historical dimension in linguistic landscaping. It enabled us to engage in what could be called an archaeology of signs, i.e. getting access to historically consecutive layers of semiotics that refer to specific stages in Eritrea's history. This includes signs that originated from specific historical epochs with specific language policies. All these signs together now constitute the multilayered linguistic landscape of Asmara. It comes as no surprise that in this landscape we find petrified or fossilized signs as well as signs that still are in different stages of physical erosion. A second historical aspect relates to the patternedness of



the semiotic resources that can be found on a growing number of signs. Icons like the Facebook, Google, Imo and WhatsApp logos encapsulate meanings that before had to be written out in verbatim text. Taken as resources, composed together in one sign, these images represent a globalized digital narrative. Throughout time and space, these re-composed signs represent different historical patterns of digital development in Asmara, with English hinging along to fill the gaps the symbolware still leaves.

Our linguistic landscape analysis further made clear that the specific local consequences and features of globalization are developing in a stochastic way. In other words, adding specific elements from globalization does not necessarily lead to a predictable outcome. In an internationally isolated country like Eritrea, one would probably expect limited digital access and low online participation of Eritrean citizens. What we however found is a rather stable Internet that is not visibly censored by the government, that is financially affordable and that is moreover broadly advertised. This means that a country's marginality and isolation not necessarily prevent its inhabitants from digitally participating in globalization phenomena. The main difference between the 2009 and 2016 linguistic landscape signs that invite people to go online is that in 2009, the possibilities of the digital revolution still needed extensive explanation and information, whereas for the 2016 audience, a simple @ is enough to advertise Internet access.

## Notes

- 1 See: [www.theguardian.com/technology/datablog/2012/apr/16/internet-censorship-country-list](http://www.theguardian.com/technology/datablog/2012/apr/16/internet-censorship-country-list).
- 2 At this conference Sjaak Kroon and Chefena Hailemariam presented a paper on multilingualism and language policy in Eritrea as part of Hailemariam's PhD research (see Hailemariam, 2002; Hailemariam, Kroon & Walters, 1999). The pictures were taken by Kroon.
- 3 The visit took place as part of Yonas Mesfun Asfaha's PhD research on literacy acquisition in multilingual Eritrea (see Asfaha, 2009a). The pictures were taken by Kroon.
- 4 We want to thank Debbie de Poorter and Marijke Vormeer for making their data available for this chapter.
- 5 The 2016 data were collected by Yonas Mesfun Asfaha.
- 6 See: [www.facebook.com/Esrom-Internet-Cafe-267821446924166/](http://www.facebook.com/Esrom-Internet-Cafe-267821446924166/).

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# 5 Gender Performativity in Virtual Space

## Transglossic Language Practices of Young Women in Bangladesh

*Shaila Sultana*

### **Virtual Space: A New Platform for Negotiation of Identity<sup>1</sup>**

Virtual space seems to provide a unique platform for socially, culturally and politically marginalized segments of society worldwide to engage in alternative discourses and to negotiate different facets of identification. There are studies that show how virtual space is used for raising new voices and negotiation of identities. With reference to a study done with young women Internet users in Mumbai, India, Bhattacharjya and Ganesh (2011) showed that Indian women tend to use the Internet for their own pleasure, challenging the ‘monolithic and vague notions of Indian culture and Indian femininity’ (Bhattacharjya & Ganesh, 2011, p. 107). In the context of Bangladesh, as in countries like India, South Africa, Brazil, Lebanon and the United States (Kee, 2011), virtual space provides Bangladeshis, specifically those who do not conform to heteronormative sexuality, a ‘critical space’ where they have the freedom of going beyond the socially and culturally accepted sexual orientation. Karim (2014, p. 72) stated,

women seem to be in the process of using the virtual world to push the existing boundaries of cultural and social barriers that are otherwise imposed on them. Just as within ‘real life’, public spaces, pockets of privacy can be created to express and practice variant sexualities within the virtual world.

However, the studies mentioned above do not look into the micro-dimension of gender practices in the South Asian context, missing out on opportunities to explore how gender is negotiated in day-to-day conversations and how it emerges in the spatial realities of individual women’s life. Specifically, in the context of Bangladesh, there is no research on how gender is realized discursively in the crux of spatial realities.

This observation became even more relevant when I carried out the research that I present in this chapter and identified distinct differences in

the language practices of a group of young university women<sup>2</sup> in face-to-face and virtual conversations among their friends. Their language usage reflected gender-differentiated linguistic behavior and nonconforming gender performances. In face-to-face conversations among friends, the subjects approximated Standard Colloquial Bangla (SCB)<sup>3</sup> in terms of phonological, morphological, syntactical and suprasegmental features; they did not use slang or taboo expressions; their lexical choices and topics of discussions conformed to the politeness and refinement expected from women in any social contexts in Bangladesh. In contrast, in virtual spaces – their Facebook accounts, to be precise – their language and topics of discussion differed from their linguistic self-representation in face-to-face interaction.

The freedom that young women experience and enjoy in virtual spaces in terms of language and self-representation needs to be understood against the backdrop of the broader social context of Bangladesh: in general, women are discriminated against in the household based on existing sociocultural practices, norms and values (Sultana & Zulkefli, 2012); women are raised in a strictly heteronormative sociocultural structure that controls sexualities in a gendered way (Karim, 2012); women and their experiences of gender and sexualities and discourses about sexualities are influenced predominantly by a Bengali-Muslim religious framework along with other major religions, practiced in the context of Bangladesh (Karim, 2012); they are suppressed in their development, which includes freedom of choice and speech; they are hindered by patriarchal capitalism (Kalam, 2014); they are symbols of sexual passivity represented in the discourses of Bangladeshi nationalism where the nation is symbolized as mother (Khandoker, 2014).

Due to the nature of this wider social context, and due to the gap in the existing research in South Asia related to the micro-dimension of gendered communicative practices, I undertook an ethnographic study of communication in face-to-face interaction and in virtual spaces, involving 29 young Bangladeshi women. The general research question that I addressed was: what role does virtual space play in the young Bangladeshi women's use of language and gender performativity? I also addressed three specific research questions:

- Which linguistic and cultural resources do they use in virtual spaces?
- Do they use these resources for gendered performativity?
- If yes, in what ways do they do so?

In this chapter, I show what these socially and culturally marginalized Bangladeshi young women were actually doing with the linguistic and cultural resources that were locally and globally available to them in

virtual spaces. Communication in virtual spaces was perceived as marginal in their day-to-day life, but my aim was to throw light on the discursive and semiotic practices they engaged in when performing their imagined gender identities.

### **Language and Gender: Going beyond the Post-Structural and Post-Colonial Turn**

Post-structuralist approaches to language and identity have effectively unraveled the complexities, the multiplicity and flexibility in identity. In the words of Pavlenko and Blackledge, identities are negotiated

at the interstices of multiple axes, such as age, race, class, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitical locale, institutional affiliation, and social status, whereby each aspect of identity redefines and modifies all others.

(Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 16)

To illustrate such processes: two Laotian American teenage girls in a multiracial Californian High School negotiated their identities with African American Vernacular English and youth slang – the most powerful languages on campus (Bucholtz, 2004). A middle-class European American boy at a Californian high school aligned himself with black youth culture and used elements from African American Vernacular English in his speech to negotiate a particular kind of masculine identity (Bucholtz, 1999). These examples indicate that identities are not always pre-given based on individuals' ethnicity, nationality, gender, class and social and cultural backgrounds; identities are discursively constructed and emergent in linguistic and social practices, driven by perceived hierarchies of popularity and prestige for urban youths (Eckert, 1989; Ibrahim, 2003); identities, in fact, are 'unstable, fluid, and fragmented' (Omoniyi & White, 2006, p. 3).

In recent times, research has started looking into other forms of semiosis affecting identity. It is not only the language but also a vast range of semiotic resources available in space that make negotiation of identity meaningful and multifaceted. The semiotization of space, for instance, serves specific purposes for language and gender studies: the intricate relationship between language, gender and space becomes pertinent since gender is spatially bound. The discursive contexts – various sites of home, workplace, cities or regionalized nations – are

embodied sites of textual inscription which had very real consequences for women and men, shaping their identities and social relations.

(Johnson, 2008, p. 563)

With reference to her own experiences as transgender in different public and private spaces, such as streets, transportation facilities and elevators, home and so on, Doan (2010, p. 648) identified that the ‘ubiquitous nature of this heteronormative gender tyranny is deeply interlinked with specifics of space’. Thus, analyzing language and gender with reference to space creates opportunities to see how gender emerges in the intersection where language interacts with spatial realities. This also reconfirms that space is an ‘ideological, lived, and subjective one’ and ‘intimately tied to lived experiences’ (Warf & Arias, 2009, p. 4).

There is duality in space. Language and identity constitute space and, simultaneously, space is constituted by language and identity (Löv, 2008). It is not only space that impacts on individual language and gender attributes but it is also space that is appropriated and reconfigured by individuals in their language and negotiation of gender attributes (Lefebvre, 1991). That is why the affordances of space differ from person to person, depending on how it is interpreted, appropriated and semiotically recreated for individual benefit (Rechniewski, 2007). This realization is significant, since it invites inquiry into the ways virtual space is reinvented and recreated as a set of linguistic and cultural resources that allow young women to emerge with various identity attributes.

The political notion of space dovetails with the notion of ‘third space’ – a term referring to the social, political and economic struggles that occur at the margin, periphery, exterior or border as a protest against the dominant order. Since Bhabha defined ‘third space’ with reference to postcolonial experiences, its relevance for work on Bangladesh is evident. Bhabha identified ‘third space’ as the

in-between space which provides the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood, singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation.

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 2)

His ‘third space’ disrupts the accepted cultural representation of ‘colonial subjects’ and questions the pre-given and genealogical representation of individuals. Note that in this theoretical move, Bhabha privileged the spatial realization of postcolonial identity rather than the temporal identity that refers to the colonial past. In a similar vein, Pennycook (2007, p. 43) stated that we should shift our attention ‘from a temporal to a more spatial domain’ allowing a richer and more precise understanding of language and gender in the contemporary world. Attention to space in applied linguistics research is also finely attuned with the recent postmodern feminist approaches to language, gender and sexuality studies, suggesting we go beyond the essentialist understanding and foundationalist categories of language and identity. Challenging the binary disposition of men and women, Butler (1988), one of the proponents of postmodern

feminism, identified gender as a performative set of acts that acquires meaning because of its iterative reenactment in diverse social, cultural and historical contexts. Gender as performed thus does not see it as a pre-given biological or social feature. Neither is it considered as an autonomous performance, in which individuals have complete freedom to show agency over the social and cultural norms and choose their desirable identity attributes. By contrast, gender performativity is governed by certain gendered norms sedimented through repeated social, cultural and historical practices.

Nevertheless, individuals do have a measure of control over which identity attributes they want to perform in a given moment. With reference to the survival strategies used by homeless women in the street for protecting themselves from criminal victimization, it was shown that their gendered performativity depended on situations, contexts and interlocutors. In addition, Huey and Berndt (2008, p. 183) stated that performativity

allows room for individual agency, but an agency that is always negotiated in relation to the categories created as ontological realities – gender, race, sexuality, and so on.

This resonates with, Pennycook (2004), who considered performativity as a way of looking at the production of identity in the ‘doing’. This view implies an alternative for poststructuralist understandings of language and identity. It is an epistemological shift in the way the ‘sense of being’ is conceptualized in the context of Bangladesh – from ‘being’ with reference to abstract notions such as language, culture and gender, to ‘being’ as ‘doing’.

In sum, gender is performed and ‘done’ in acts developing in a frame of social, cultural, ideological and historical expected norms of gender identities and gendered behaviors. And exploring language and gender with a focus on space enables a more subtle understanding of how gender is performed amidst the realities of both the public and private spaces.

## **Research Design**

In 2011, 29 research participants were observed outside the classroom in the student cafeteria and lounges, university clubs and favorite hangouts in a university in Bangladesh. Their face-to-face conversations within their peer groups in different social situations were recorded. I spent extended time with the research participants on campus and conducted in-depth interviews. These semi-structured interviews included questions about the academic, individual and social functions and significance of different languages and popular culture in the women’s lives. These questions, which were addressed to the participants in two or



three consecutive sessions of about one hour long, brought out participants' experiences, stories, opinions and feelings about languages, genres of popular culture and their demographic locations, educational backgrounds, socioeconomic conditions and affiliations with specific groups on campus and in the virtual space. Thus, the close observation of participants, informal discussions with them, and in-depth interviews allowed a kaleidoscopic understanding of their language practices and performances of identity.

The participants also gave me access to their Facebook accounts, from which their virtual conversations could be observed and collected. To gather data, a 'virtual ethnographic method' (Androutsopoulos, 2011) was used. It is an ethnographic analytic framework that specifically looks at the behaviors of online users in a natural and unobtrusive manner. For understanding the data on Facebook, participants' use of English, Bangla and other additional languages, manipulation of signs, symbols and multimodal materials on the virtual space were observed. The multimodal resources of popular culture, such as photos, links to music, music player, links to blog entry, embedded videos and so on add to the meaning-making of language (Androutsopoulos, 2011).

In what follows, I shall focus on the language practices of two specific research participants, Ria and Toma, and their friends. The participants were students and Teaching Assistants (TA) in the English department. Ria and Toma had studied at English-medium schools in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, and in Dubai, a city in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), respectively. Ria was born and brought up in Dhaka, whereas Toma lived in Dubai for four years at a young age, because her father had worked in the Bangladesh Embassy. They came from affluent families and belonged to the upper echelon of society. I selected their Facebook conversations since their conversations represented everyday language practices of highly skilled young women on virtual space, and were multimodal. Hence, these conversations allowed better understanding of the semiotic construction of virtual spaces through linguistic and cultural resources by young women participants in the research. Some students who engaged in conversations with them and did not, strictly speaking, participate in the research, nonetheless gave me permission to use their dialogues; they are presented with the initials of their names, such as SS or LSR.

I viewed language as transglossic, which is an extension of Bakhtin's (1981) heteroglossia (see also Dovchin, Pennycook, & Sultana, 2018; Sultana, 2015; Sultana, Dovchin, & Pennycook, 2015). Transglossia underscores the importance of 'voices' and the way voices engender new meanings. Transglossia indicates that the relationship of language and identity as propounded in a poststructuralist approach may be extended in two ways: first, by exploring voices; second, by incorporating spatial dynamics into the interpretations and analysis of data. Transglossia is about codes, modes, genres and stylization and how they make meanings

and emerge anew in constant mixing, blending and borrowing; transglossia is also about voices and the social intentionalities circulated from the past to the present. The concept of transglossia explores language practices not so much through separate linguistic codes (though they remain significant for understanding the nature of language practices), but rather by unveiling the voices of the young adults and unzipping the complexities of meanings. In addition, transglossia allows looking at identity as negotiated not necessarily through a choice of certain languages, but through a combination of linguistic/cultural codes, modes and genres within and across languages, and through a constant blending of linguistic and cultural resources that young adults have localized and appropriated in their engagement with both local and translocal environments.

Transglossia integrates spatial dynamics into the interpretation of linguistic phenomena. As Blommaert, Collins and Slembrouck (2005, p. 206) identified, 'focusing on space inserts language into semiotic complexes, including participation frames, topics, genres of discourse, material and symbolic resources, and so forth.' Similarly, transglossia, because of its specific focus on intentions and meanings in voices, addresses the spaces from where the voices are borrowed and reincarnated, with new meanings, in a newer space. Transglossia, because of its constant reference to the trajectories of voices from the past to present, to the social and historical association of voices, and to the changes brought to the voices because of their situated use, is more effective in unraveling the influence of space – that is, how space brings changes to the intentions and meanings of voices. Consequently, transglossia increases the possibility of understanding gender identity as a complex process occurring in the nexus of all these social dynamics within space. That is why a paradigmatic shift toward transglossia has become more of a necessity in research on linguistic and cultural practices based on a poststructuralist approach.

Language practices of young women were explored from the perspective of a *transglossic framework* (Dovchin, Pennycook, & Sultana, 2018; Sultana, 2015; Sultana, et al., 2015). The framework analyses language through *contextual* (physical location and participants), *pretextual* (historical trajectory of texts), *subtextual* (ideologies mobilized by the texts), *intertextual* (meanings that occur across texts) and *post-textual interpretations* (the ways texts are read, interpreted, resisted and appropriated). The micro- and macro-analysis of Facebook conversations through a transglossic framework, which is complemented by the participants' own opinions (post-textual interpretation) derived through Facebook messenger conversations with the participants, seems to give more in-depth understanding of young adults' language practices, and ensures the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Because of my interest in *voices*, I always had to look beyond the linguistic features, even though these features were an important object

of the research. I had the participants' dialogues and I looked for the multiple divergent *voices* underlying their dialogues (see also Pavlenko, 2007). With careful analysis, I showed degrees of diversity and complexity in their voices not always evident in the linguistic features of their language practices. I also explored how young adults' recycled linguistic and semiotic resources from popular culture, and brought several voices into one single utterance with intertextual and subtextual references mobilized by the resources, with specific attention to the role played by the virtual space in the process. In contextualizing the record I was working on, I had to bring in the descriptive account of space and my field notes, which captured my 'deepening local knowledge, emerging sensitivities, and evolving substantive concerns and theoretical insights' (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2007, p. 355).

### Gender Performativity in Virtual Space: Resources from Films

Ria is in her twenties – the expected age of marriage, as per the societal norm in Bangladesh. Ria is annoyed, since she has repeatedly been asked about marriage by her extended family members and acquaintances. These voices remind her of the societal expectations in relation to marriage in the Bangladeshi society. On many occasions, she shares her feelings about such issues in Facebook status updates. Some of these are lighthearted, with Ria evoking the *ghotok* (matchmaker) in everyone, referring to the common practice of family members and relatives discussing prospective marriage proposals and actively looking for an eligible groom for her. Some status updates report her frustration, leading her to avoid extended family dinners; in some others, Ria displays her anger, verging on violence, when she is repeatedly pestered about possible marriage plans (Extract 5.1).

These status updates, on the one hand, indicate the social and cultural practices in relation to marriage of young women in Bangladesh and young women's ambivalence about the issue. The updates, on the other hand, indicate how young women use the virtual space to vent their frustrations and anger by means of the linguistic and cultural resources available in virtual space.

Extract 5.1 shows how Ria feels when she frequently faces questions from relatives and extended family members about the prospect of marriage. In the context of Bangladesh, family members play an active role in matrimonial issues and they usually work as matchmakers. Line 1, *yes, just go ahead and ask!*, sets the tone of the status and it is followed by an image (a meme, in fact) of a fictional character, Mabel Madea Simmons performed by Tyle Perry in the film *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*. Here in the image, Tyle Perry, dressed as a woman character, Madea, is holding her 'Glock' handgun. Among the possessions of Madea, the

Extract 5.1 Language guide: English – regular font; Bangla – *italic*

## Facebook Status

1	Ria	yes, just go ahead and ask!	
2	Ria	[Meme with the text:] Ask me again when I'm getting married	
3	SS	Just ask them back why (on earth) they got/ getting married. Simpal	Just ask them back why (on earth) they got/ getting married. Simple
4	Ria	Lol	
5	Luna	kobe biye korbi, Ria?	When are you getting married, Ria?
6	Ria	<i>Harami</i> ....“next year”	Bastard....“next year”
7	Luna	<i>harami</i> month next year, gotcha. which month is <i>harami</i> month again?	Bastard month next year, gotcha. which month is bastard month again?
8	AO	I need that gun too!!	I need that gun too!!

handgun has a specific role. Whenever she feels vulnerable, insecure and threatened or in danger, she brings out the gun and uses it to intimidate and threaten others. With an *intertextual reference* to the use of the handgun in the film, Ria shows that she is in a similar situation and she is ready to fire the gun to those family members and acquaintances who harass her by asking questions about marriage. Thus, her status, *yes, just go ahead and ask!*, gets intensified by the image, since it reflects her intentions and desires.

The meme uploaded in line 2 *pretextually* reinforces what Ria has said in line 1. Madea is loading her gun, as if she intends to use it soon. Here, Ria's selection of the photo of Madea and choice of words engraved, *ask me when I'm getting married*, are purposive. Madea is abusive, scornful and insolent; she is apt at using slangs and vulgar words; she is capable of destroying household properties with a chainsaw; she randomly indulges in physical violence, such as burning others with cigarette stubs, throttling, strangulating and choking others with her elbows; and she fires the handgun if she feels like intimidating others. With this *intertextual reference* to Madea and her (popularly known) character features, Ria indicates that she is ready to threaten the people around her with physical violence. The photo thus in fact helps Ria to contextualize what she feels inside.

In lines 3–9, Ria and her friends engage in teasing and leg-pulling about marriage. For example, in line 3, her friend suggests her asking the interfering relatives a rhetorical question, not normally posed by a young woman to anyone senior in age or social and kinship status. This is audacious and socially unacceptable. However, she expects that this will stop the nagging of interfering family members and relatives. In line 5,

Luna takes up the ‘voice’ of family members and relatives and repeats the question that has infuriated Ria in the first place. Line 5 *subtextually* refers to the ideologies inherent in the voice that is usually addressed to young women only. The rendition of a gender-specific question to Ria makes her call Luna a *barami* (bastard) in line 6 that Luna intentionally pretends not to understand. Ria also puts her answer, *next year*, within quotation marks, as if she wants to distance herself from it, indicating it is someone else’s answer. In line 7, Luna calls the month *barami* and keeps on asking the same question. In line 8, another friend shows her solidarity with Ria with a *contextual reference* to the meme, claiming that she needs the handgun too. This indicates that Ria’s friends who are of the same age are victims of a similar kind of social harassment.

In this extract, Ria uses multiple modes of communication afforded by the virtual space and comes up with a novel *transmodal* communication (operating across different modalities). The meaning-making process does not occur linguistically only but also through the complex mixture of various other modes, and in their *intertextual relations*. With appropriate use of the typically online genre of memes, and with a seamless movement from the visual to the written, Ria and her friends transcend the affordance of the written mode in virtual space and show the momentary dynamic of identity performance within the *contextual, intertextual* and *subtextual meanings*. An array of semiotic resources orchestrated together renders their language practices in the virtual space ‘transmodal’, and a new kind of sociosemiotics emerges. Thus, in their performance, Ria and her friends increase the meaning-making potentiality of the virtual space – the ‘intertextual’ interface where the separate code, mode, and genre no longer produce separate meanings as they are transmodally entangled.

The extract also demonstrates that Ria uses the virtual space as a site of resistance to the dominant culture with global linguistic and cultural resources. The meaning of the space also gets refigured in her use of various local and global resources, extending its possibilities by the presence of geographically dispersed global cultural materials. The simultaneous use of a variety of modes shows that Ria uses the virtual space as trans-semiotic space, which allow her to show her stance against the social norms and perform liberated women identity attributes, not conforming to the social expectations in terms of marriage.

### **Gender Performativity: Resources from TV Serials**

Similar to Extract 5.1 given above, Extract 5.2 also shows that virtual space is constructed with multimodal resources along with linguistic resources, such as quotes and dialogues from the media (Androutsopoulos, 2011). With a combination of visual images and quotes, Toma and her friends use the affordances of virtual space to share their opinions about women’s superiority in comparison with men.

*Facebook Conversation*

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- 1 Toma All my girlfriends are such cunts! :D  
Ria Hussain Sasha, Luna Ahmed, and LSR.  
[Picture with the text:] CUNT. Considered to be the most vile, obscene and vulgar ‘swear word’ in the English language, the word ‘Cunt’ in the vernacular means vagina. As if that is not indication enough why it is considered so vile a term in the vagina-hating Patriarchy, the word itself was originally a term of respect and reverence for a powerful, spiritually enlightened woman.  
‘Cunt’ derives from ‘Kunda’ or ‘Cunti’, the Oriental Great Goddess. She was the Great Yoni (vagina) of the Universe, where all life came from and to where all life returned for renewal. From this same name the words country, kin and kind came from.
- 2 LSR Awesome. I love being one. This is why this is a better insult:  
[Picture with the text:] I’d call you a cunt, but you lack warmth and depth.
- 3 Ria Seen and laughed at this before... *ki* [so] creative
- 4 Toma LMFAO ((laughing my fucking ass off))!! Also, the famous lines by Betty White “Why do people say ‘grow some balls’? Balls are weak and sensitive. If you wanna be tough, grow a vagina. Those things can take a pounding”.
- 5 Luna hahahaha, good one
- 

In line 1, Toma claims that *All my girlfriends are such cunts!* She is keenly aware of the social and cultural implication of the term, and hence, supports it with a direct quotation from the media. In line 1, she borrows the voice of the TV character Barney Stinson from the comedy series *How I Met your Mother*. With *intertextual reference* to the etymology of the word, she proclaims herself and her friends as ‘enlightened women’. Thus, a derogatory term becomes indirectly empowering, since it allows her to express her strengths as a woman. In line 2, Toma’s friend glorifies the characteristics of a ‘cunt’ by adding positive attributes to it. While she identifies the emotional strengths of women, such as warmth and depth, in line 5, Toma comments on the strengths and courage of women compared to men with the quotation by Betty White. Their choice of voices and covert meanings reflects their agency in how they see themselves in comparison with men. With the use of globally available resources, they share their own aspirations and display their pride to be women who are no less superior than men. These borrowed voices also show their overt stance about women, with a proper integration of language, quotations and images. Thus, Toma and her friends use specific forms of voice articulating multimodal and multi-layered stances – ‘an act of self-representation and social judgement’

(Thurlow & Jaworski, 2011, p. 245). Here the globally available linguistic and cultural resources play a vital role for them.

With the interactional use of similar kinds of linguistic and cultural resources in line 1, 2 and 4, Toma and her friends perform a collective gendered identity. The photographs and quotations in relation to 'cunt' and women/men dynamics, they create a 'state of held-togetherness' or collective attachment that is best represented in the German word *Zusammenhang* (Schatzki, 1996). Schatzki (1996, p. 116) identified that mutual intelligibility in language use is important for a sense of belongingness and 'dispersed and integrative practices'. These young women similarly express their solidarity, performing group identity as women as opposed to men with these resources.

The image of Barney and his comment, and the other quotations with images, serve various other purposes. First, these comments work as a prompt to start a conversation around a taboo expression. Embedded in these quotes are not only 'texts within texts', but voices saturated with social and historical meanings. These dialogues of young women in Bangladesh are the 'mosaic of quotations, an absorption, and transformation of another text' (Kristeva, 1969, as cited in Lesic-Thomas, 2005, p. 1). They *transtextualize* (deploying a range of meaning-making practices across discourses) the linguistic resources, bringing the social, cultural, and ideological conflicts inherent in the term to the fore. They claim themselves to be 'cunts', and proclaim all the strong character attributes associated with the word, going against the social and cultural sensitivity. By contrast, as their discourse hinges on multimodal resources, they can also maintain a desired ('ironic') distance, showing that the taboo was originally held by someone else. In other words, they can hedge their way into a conversation that is too provocative for them to pursue in unmediated ways, not missing the opportunity to engage in 'envoicing' (see also Canagarajah, 2013).

Consequently, they implicitly involve themselves in identity claims. To repeat what was mentioned earlier, the social system in Bangladesh privileges 'masculinity over femininity (...) suppresses female sexual expressions beyond marital norms' (Karim, 2014, p. 57). Nevertheless, within their own personal but shared virtual space, these young women can afford voice to express their sexuality and engage in identity performances around an issue that they find relevant to their interests. They transgress their linguistic and cultural boundaries in a spatially confined act of liberation when they engage in this conversation regarding 'cunt' – a transgressive act that promotes knowledge that 'confront[s] relations of power – dominion, disparity, difference and desire' (Pennycook, 2007, p. 56). The flexibility of virtual space, and their access to global resources, create opportunities for them to create 'ruptures in ordinary life, imaginary realms, polyphonic representations' (Defert, 1997, as cited in Johnson, 2006, p. 87).



Toma and her friends use the virtual space to disrupt the boundaries and expected differences along gender lines. For them,

transgression is not merely, therefore, an act of going against what is accepted, of testing the possibilities of difference, but is also an exploration of boundaries of thought.

(Pennycook, 2007, p. 42)

It seems easier for them to explore the boundaries in virtual space, which is apparently flexible and fluid and boundless, where they may challenge the structure and norms. Toma considers herself transformed because of her being located in the global culture. She is in the middle of 'fixity', i.e. place, tradition, heritage, authenticity, roots and so on, and of fluidity, i.e. the dynamics of scapes. In different sessions of interviews and focus group discussions, Toma mentioned her conflicted feelings in terms of gender identity, stating that she finds greater affinity with the woman persona portrayed in Western media.

While Toma and her friends constitute the space with linguistic and cultural resources, the multimodal symbolic and material artefacts such as images and quotes play a mediating role between language and space. These artefacts, derived from various popular-cultural sources, help Toma and her friends in the act of semiotizing space, as well as in engaging in language practices and in the positioning of self, by taking a specific stance. These artefacts are powerful factors in shaping the meaning of space. Suspending the normative conventions, they make the virtual space a site of social, cultural and aesthetic practices (Leppänen, Pitkänen-Huhta, Piirainen-Marsh, Nikula, & Peuronen, 2009). Here, Facebook is the 'multipurpose discursive space where different types of social relationships and discourse activities are acted out' (Androustopoulos, 2011, p. 287). It is a space in which new ways of expressing views and affinities, of affirming and rejecting moral stances, and presenting identity are invented (Jones, Schieffelin, & Smith, 2011). In addition, as Jones, et al. (2011) mentioned with reference to virtual space, it provides opportunities for presenting new ways of identity, as observed here in the interactions between Toma and her friends. The virtual space thus ensures multidimensional experiences and, consequently, broader scope for gender performativity in a globalized world.

Toma is aware that 'cunt' is a taboo expression even in the Western world, let alone in Bangladesh. As Toma's Facebook account is restricted to her friends (who are mainly young adults like her), she can afford to be more adventurous about how she wants to present herself, and how she wants to be judged by others. The specific contextual features of virtual space make it possible to use the space according to her desire; consequently, space emerges in the ways she engages in language practices *in* her and *with* her, through multimodal symbolic and material artefacts.

While defining the meaning potentiality of space, she also shows that she belongs to a de-territorialized fluid space that can be enriched with resources beyond the national border. She is physically and firmly located in Bangladesh, but she seems to have crossed local boundaries and acquired fluidity through her boundless mobility in translocal ‘mediascapes’ (see also Appadurai, 2000; Hannigan, 2002). Because the virtual space is flexible in terms of how individuals can exist in fully disembodied text mode (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008), Toma creates an embodied space with multimodal settings from where she can engage in acts of self-empowerment and self-representation in the spirit of liberal feminism.

### Gender Performativity: Resources from Technology

Extract 5.3 shows how virtual space creates opportunities for young women to express their sexuality using resources from a ‘technoscape’. While Ria has this conversation with her friend, Tahmina, about a possible virtual sexual encounter, she recreates a liberated space for herself in which she can converse about the possibility of online sex as well show her preferences for homosexuality, even though it is mere performance.

The extract is stylized and is predominantly written in English. With the stylized English, Ria aligns her language with the Internet language – showing herself as someone acquainted with youth media discourses (see also Sultana, 2014a, 2014b, 2016). Here Ria uses a variety of stylization in English orthography, some of which reflect the features of Internet English, for example, in line 1, *I’unno* (you know), in line 5, *dhartz* and *tru*, and *sayin* in line 7. Her deliberate appropriation of orthography and insertion of ‘a’ before ‘tru’ is idiosyncratic to herself, such as *saax*, *skyfe* and *walso*. She also uses \* to show the action of the word following the norm of Facebook. That’s why she can make the ‘lusty look’ (in line 5)

*Extract 5.3* Language guide: English – regular font; Bangla – *italic*

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*Facebook conversation*

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1	Ria	Tahmina,... I’unno ... <i>tomar shathe saax korbo skyfe!</i> (I want to do sex with you on skype)
2	Tahmina	i don’t think they have captured all 5 senses with this one (skype). so don’t get your hopes up high :p
3	Ria	:(sigh... damn proxemics! oh oh oh!
4	Tahmina	you can always try;)
5	Ria	hehe dhartz a tru! (that’s true) :p *lusty look*
6	Tahmina	*shrug* <i>ami to ar</i> fast ob all <i>na</i> , looks <i>diye ki labh</i> . (I am not the first one to have sex with you, what’s use of the look)
7	Ria	heh! dhartz <i>walso a tru</i> ;) but girl on girl action can be ummm... motivational for some people! *shrugs* jast sayin’

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and ‘shrug’ and lexical choices in order to express her desire to have *sax* (sex) on the *skyfe* (skype) with her friend. Ria’s friend, Tahmina also opts for the same stylization; *first of all* hence is *fast ob all* in line 6. With a specific word, such as *proxemics*, she shows herself as an advanced speaker of English and student of the English department who is aware of the study of proxemics in linguistics – a type of analysis that deals with the distances in spaces that people naturally maintain in various social and interpersonal situations in spatial arrangements depending on the degree of intimacy and norms and values of a society and culture.

In line 1 and 7, Ria also performs an identity of someone who is liberated in terms of sexual orientation. While in the society it is taboo to mention ‘sex’ or discuss about sex openly, she challenges that expectation by mentioning it on Facebook. She also shows her intention to have a non-heteronormative relationship (Tahmina is a female) openly in line 1 and mentions ‘girl on girl action’ as motivational in line 7, even though she seems to do it for the sake of conversation. Thus, her apparent desire to have sex with a woman on skype creates a startling effect. Nevertheless, she right away gives up the idea by writing – *just sayin*. In other words, she distances herself, showing that she has not meant to have ‘sex’ on skype, but ‘just says it’ for no particular reason. Thus, even though she flouts the conventional gendered roles linguistically in the virtual space, her overall performance cannot challenge the societal norms altogether. Hence, when her friend states that Ria’s sexual encounters with her would not be the first one, she right away gives up the idea and shows her indifference with the action of ‘shrugs’.

In a restricting and conservative society like Bangladesh, these young women seem to find sexual expressions covertly attractive because these expressions allow them to defy linguistic and social conventions of Bangladeshi society. They tend to use the virtual space as a way to push the existing sexual boundaries otherwise imposed on them in the heteropatriarchal society of Bangladesh. This conforms to the postmodern interpretation of gender, as we have seen above, according to which, gender is no longer a ‘personal, unidimensional, or bipolar category’, but a ‘fluid, cultural construction by social actors who use language to “do gender”’ (Kiesling, 2001, p. 250). Ria and her friends talk about imagined sexual encounters in the virtual space because it is ‘a radical creative space’. In this space, identity is constructed by young women themselves, not determined by their age, gender and role in the society. They break away from the traditional role of women – unimaginable in the broader context of Bangladesh.

However, it is only in the virtual space where she openly expresses her attitude to homosexuality in her stylization. It should be noted that the constitution of Bangladesh sees it as a punishable crime; the major religions consider it as ‘sinful’; and social and cultural norms and values condemn it as unacceptable. ‘Under heteronormativity, it is “deviances”

from heterosexuality that are most feared and, therefore, strictly monitored' (Karim, 2014, pp. 57–58). It is in the virtual space Ria and her friend seem to flout these religious, and social and cultural norms. They somewhat take advantage of the clandestine environment of the virtual space to come to terms with different norms of sexualities.

The extract also indicates the necessity of looking for small moments of transgression and understanding how young women, within their small space, 'confront relations of power-dominion, disparity, difference and desire' (Pennycook, 2007, p. 56). Hence, Warf and Arias (2009, p. 5) stated,

cyberspace has been instrumental to the production of complex, fragmented, jumbled spaces of postmodernity (...) Rather than a fixed, unified identity that lies at the core of the modern self, for example, there are grounds for arguing many people, hooked into different locales via the internet, consist of multiple, shifting even contradictory 'selves' who lie at the changing intersections of different language games.

The conversation between Ria and her friend shows that their virtual space and its realization are discursively constructed and sustained in discourses (Pennycook, 2010). They also spatialize and sculpt their own identity (Flanagan, 2000; Sultana, Dovchin, & Pennycook, 2013) according to their preferred culture and lifestyle.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have addressed the micro dynamics of social, cultural, ideological and spatial realization of gender in virtual space in Bangladesh. With various forms of linguistic and cultural resources, young women perform alternative social roles individually and collectively and minimize the possibility of being marginalized for their sexual orientation. They use the virtual space to 'create alternate, spatialized narratives' (Flanagan, 2000, p. 75). Within the conflicted societal practices that constrain and marginalize them in their lifestyle and choices, Facebook is the interstice where these young women challenge prescribed gender norms and navigate their ways to different ways of presenting and performing themselves. Facebook becomes the active locus for flouting the rules set by society-at-large. This indicates that there are multiple communities of resistance, and virtual space is one of the sites for creating such communities for young women. They liberate themselves from the bonds and shackles of social ties that strictly prohibit women from a freer lifestyle. Through their practices within the virtual space and in their attempt to perform 'liberated woman' identity, these young

women create their own sense of self. It is the space that constitutes and is constituted by their identification. Soja (1996, p. 97) has described this deliberate choice of space as the 'political and geographical act of *choosing marginality*'.

The layered structure of virtual space, the dynamic use of global resources by the younger generations in Bangladesh, and the permeability of one culture by other cultures show the underlying complexities of globalization. A marginalized segment of a marginal country within the marginal space negotiate their sense of being. They are 'transformed, individually, collectively' and 'affirm and sustain' their subjectivity through their use of linguistic and cultural resources and their practices in virtual space (hooks, 1990, p. 153). Here it should be mentioned that these young women's 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1991), impacts on the use of these resources and is closely tied up with their advanced competence in English, which is again determined by their English-medium education. In other words, their 'symbolic capital' gives them the opportunity to negate their marginality as a woman in the Bangladeshi society in the virtual space. They may have limited choices as women in society, but they have an advantageous position within the same society because of their privileged life trajectories. This indicates the underlying complexities of globalization that impacts on individual life in different capacities (see also Blommaert, 2015). That is why Canagarajah (2007, p. 98) has mentioned that a new kind of sociolinguistics is needed that 'treats human agency, contextuality, diversity, indeterminacy, and multimodality as the norm'.

The virtual space seems to work as a *third space* for these young women – 'a location of radical openness and possibility' (hooks, 1990, p. 153). It can be concluded that these young women renegotiate the peripheral position of their gender in the third space, which is, in turn, peripheral compared to the pervasive public space that encompasses them. However, the peripheral and private virtual space becomes the site of authentication.

In the process, centres are constructed as predictable and unremarkable, whereas peripheries are seen as different, exotic, and other-worldly. The centre-periphery tension together with reconfigurations and mobilization of linguistic resources has led to novel types of diversity and tensions in peripheral sites (...), with several contradictions and complexities which can then result in creative crossing.

(Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013, p. 7)

In other words, virtual space is a significant locus for these women's sense of being, and based on its role in their lives, the perceived, or

commonsense, traditional dichotomous relationships such as center/periphery or top/bottom or public/private may be questioned. Virtual space can be both peripheral and central; individual locatedness in society can be simultaneously marginal and central; globalization can be both subjugating and empowering.

The fluid relationship between space and gender is again intricately intertwined with individual life trajectories. These young women long for dynamic and organic ways of being, promised in the present and in the future. Because of their mobility in virtual space and their engagement with different time and space beyond their immediate boundaries of Bangladesh, the bounded and segmented time of local and national space becomes just one dimension of the multifaceted time and space they experience in their day-to-day lives. They come to terms with the varied identity repertoire collected from multiple temporalities and spatialities within the social and cultural realities of their life in Bangladesh. I therefore suggest taking the discussion on language and identity in applied linguistics beyond the poststructuralist and post-colonial turn and drawing attention to the spatial realities in addition to the historical events of individual life.

I have also shown that transglossia of these young women is not about tokenistic border crossing. It is a deeply reflexive act of denial and affirmation that increases the scope of individual language and gender performativity. For example, when they break the norms of gender in their transglossic practices in the virtual space, they are aware of the extent to which they can bend the normativity of being a woman in Bangladesh (see also Sultana, 2014a). Everyday acts of linguistic transgression thus open windows for understanding young adults' denial, the affirmation of linguistic and social boundaries, and the subtle understanding of the complexities involved in the process. I have shown that bringing transgression in language and gender performativity within the crux of space does not minimize the urgency and reality of issues of power, struggle, disparity and inequality caused by postcolonial politics and gender or language differences (see also Jenks, 2003). Instead, as I have shown, transgression explored through a transglossic framework creates opportunities to look at the realities, boundaries and structures, as young women engage with them in different spaces, both public and private, in their day-to-day lives.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter was first presented at the 18th World Congress of Applied Linguistics held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 23–28 July 2017.
- 2 Even though the term 'women', 'young adults' and 'young generations' are used throughout the chapter, these terms refer to the view promoted by postmodernists like Weedon (1997, p. 178) who stipulated, with reference to gender, race, and class that 'their meaning is plural, historically and socially specific'.

- 3 *Chalitbangla* is called Standard Colloquial Bangla (SCB) in academic discourse in Bangladesh. When SCB is ‘respected by all as an elegant form of speech’ (Dil, 1986, p. 452), Bangladeshis learn Standard Bangla (SB) through formal education as a compulsory subject (similar to English) from primary to higher secondary levels.

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## 6 The Language and Culture of *New Kids*

### Appreciation of and Familiarity with Online Brabantish Identities

*Jos Swanenberg*

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I will describe how the main characters of a Dutch TV series ‘New Kids’ from the peripheral village of Maaskantje in the Province of Noord-Brabant represent the margins of Dutch society. This will be done by an in-depth analysis of the language they use and the culture they portray in their performance. Furthermore, I will show how a clearly locally bound phenomenon reaches other places in the world, and as such, becomes part of a global subculture of connoisseurs.

The margins in this chapter are cultural margins that are built upon the geographical and social positioning of people impersonated by the main characters in *New Kids*. Their language behavior (mainly the use of local dialect) is perhaps the most remarkable feature that brings together the geographical and the social aspect of the culture they portray.

Dialect provides localized linguistic elements as resources from which people may draw when performing a certain local identity. Language then is a practice (cf. ‘*linguaging*’; Jørgensen, 2008) and localness is enacted and created in performances of dialect that is regarded as distinctive for a certain place. In this way, the local is produced through language. Localness as such, among many other features of course, is part of the process of defining and negotiating various identity categories in society. The use of linguistic features is associated with common-sense identity categories via the construction of interactional stance (Jaspers, 2017). Thus, linguistic elements are indexical of particular social categories, and may subsequently be involved in processes of enregisterment (Agha, 2007; Cornips, De Rooij, Stengs, & Thissen, 2016).

Language is always tied to the context in which it is used, and as a consequence, it is always local (Pennycook, 2010). This is especially true for the specific context that is central in this contribution: the stereotypical portrayal of a group of youngsters in a hamlet in the Dutch countryside, and the accompanying cultural and linguistic behavioral script (Blommaert, 2016). A behavioral script is a sequence of behaviors that fits a certain context, in this case, behavior that is expected

for people as portrayed in *New Kids*. The image of the youngsters is based on assumptions of shared knowledge about the characteristics of their identities, on identification of the ‘self’ vs. the ‘other’ and ‘us’ vs. ‘them’, but also ‘here’ vs. ‘elsewhere’. In this process of identifying the ‘self’ vs. the ‘other’, characteristics of the opposite party will be mocked, while the own features will be cherished, or even used as treasured insider’s knowledge. This type of bimodal behavior is shown by Taeldeman (2003) for shibboleths: a local dialect feature that potentially hinders efficient communication on a translocal level and can be cherished as a vital ingredient for linguistic local identification. This awareness adds to the importance of locality or region within the processes of cultural identification. Yet, the series *New Kids* is also an excellent example of a mediated performance that, thanks to the Internet, reaches far beyond the borders of the local culture it portrays.

### Who Are the New Kids?

In 2007, a television series, called *New Kids* appeared on the weblog *Flabber* as a sequence of online sketches. The first seven episodes of *New Kids on the Block* (as it was initially named, with a wink to the American boyband from the late 1980s and early 1990s) were extremely popular. YouTube was the second digital channel via which *New Kids* reached its audience. The second season of *New Kids* in 2008 was broadcasted on 101 TV, the digital youth channel of the Dutch broadcast company BNN as well as on Comedy Central, another digital broadcasting channel (Latour, 2011). Clearly, the popularity of these ‘comedy clips’ blossomed by the infrastructure of the Internet. It is typically a media product that thrived through the hyperdynamic layer of the transfer of information, knowledge and communication the Internet has provided us with.

The clips feature five antisocial young men living their alcoholic, welfare-dependent, worrisome lives in a small neighborhood, *Maaskantje*, in the southern Dutch province of Noord-Brabant. Their mark is a constant, extreme use of vulgar dialect, replete with an abundant use of foul language. The five actors playing the main characters in *New Kids* are originally from the region and speak the local Brabantish dialect. The vernacular they use is not a deep, traditional dialect that is hard to understand by outsiders, but rather a levelled variety (Swanenberg & Van Hout, 2013), recognizable and easy to devour by speakers of Dutch from other areas. Youngsters from all over the country identify with this linguistic and cultural behavior, probably often-times ironically, e.g. by imitating it in other contexts (Figure 6.1).

Visually, the group displays a terrible understanding of fashion sense. Much of the humor in the series is derived from the absurdity of the characters’ lack of intelligence or even common sense. Furthermore, we see the Opel Manta as a symbol of status – apparently the highest point you



Figure 6.1 The New Kids crew (screenshot trailer clip New Kids Turbo).

can reach in society is to own a green Opel Manta – we see junk food, loads of cheap beer from a German supermarket known as a low-budget shop, as well as the growing and smoking of marihuana. Although most of the characters have a job, none of them appear particularly adept or engaged, which suits their antisocial and immature mentality.

Maaskantje's distinctly rustic and pleasant appearance as a traditional village is juxtaposed by the actions of the group, who indulge in the 'Happy Hardcore' culture, which reached its peak of popularity in the 1990s, the time the actors themselves were adolescents. Leerssen (1996) used the term *anderstijdig* (literally 'from another time') for this phenomenon, which could be best translated as 'outdated'. This term can be understood as appreciating and denigrating at the same time. People from marginal areas may approach this as nostalgia, as authentic, valuing traditions, not participating in normalized, mainstream society. But others can regard a lifestyle that is *anderstijdig* as foolish, backward, uncivilized or naïve (Leerssen, 1996, p. 47).

The hamlet Maaskantje in Noord-Brabant really exists, although when New Kids started, Dutch media, as for example the national newspaper *de Volkskrant*, spoke of a fictitious hamlet. This is understandable, since the place is hardly visible. Maaskantje is an enclave in another small village, Den Dungen, near the city of 's-Hertogenbosch. But the inhabitants soon learnt that the fans of New Kids knew where to find Maaskantje. The hamlet was overrun by New Kids' fans visiting sites where clips were shot. Even now, years later, it is visited by groups of fans who grab public space objects such as traffic signs as a souvenir. Especially the blue-and-white sign indicating Maaskantje's 'city limits' are popular souvenirs. The provincial broadcasting service Omroep Brabant on 10 December 2016 still reported that one of these signs was stolen – for the 15th time in a row from that particular place (Figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2 Maaskantje ‘city limits’ (© Judith Pennings).

The success of New Kids thus turned Maaskantje into a very popular tourist site. Not only the products of New Kids but also other Maaskantje-related items became valuable, contributing to a commodification of heritage culture. Soon one could buy fake street signs from Maaskantje at the local gas station, as well as T-shirts and mugs with pictures of New Kids. In the cafeteria, one could buy a special New Kids snack, the *knoepert*. This word belongs to the regional vernacular and it may denote anything that is large in its kind, like a whopper. The *knoepert* is 170 grams of meat on a stick and in the first four weeks after its launch, it sold 100,000 pieces (Latour, 2011). For the inhabitants of little, quiet Maaskantje, New Kids brought a lot of bustle, which must have amazed them, but also helped local shopkeepers to earn some extra money.

One of the popular soundtracks of the series, *Broodje Bakpao*, co-produced by the rappers from The Opposites and rapper Gers Pardoel, reached first place in the Dutch Single Top 100, and third place in the Flemish Ultratop 50. New Kids gained even more fame when the movie *New Kids Turbo* was released in 2011. It became a hype of epic proportions. The movie, as well as some of the earlier clips, featured Happy Hardcore-DJ Paul Elstak and iconic artists from the Brabant region, such as Karin Bruers from Tilburg, Theo Maassen from Eindhoven and the Aruban hip-hop artist Fresku, also from Eindhoven. *New Kids Turbo* not only appeared in cinemas in the Netherlands but also in Belgium,



Germany and Austria. In the German version, the actors dubbed the German voices themselves. Therefore, the German texts are not 100% correct, but this was considered extra funny, and as a consequence, the German version of the movie also appeared in cinemas in the Netherlands. *New Kids Turbo* became a huge success with more than a million visitors in the Netherlands.

In this movie, the main characters in New Kids accidentally start a revolution in the whole of Noord-Brabant. As a consequence, everywhere in Brabant subversive adolescents start riots and provoke the establishment and the police cannot stop it. So, the Ministry of Defense decides to drop a bomb on Maaskantje, but accidentally it falls on the neighboring town of Schijndel.

This action has a deeper layer, since Maaskantje and Schijndel are known as old rivals. Like everywhere else also, in this region, towns and cities have ancient rivalries with their neighbors (Rooijackers, 2003). My mother-in-law was born and raised in Maaskantje and I still hear her say: *Schijndel? Zelfs de wind van Schijndel deugt nog nie* (Schijndel? Even the wind from Schijndel is no good). These rivalries between neighboring villages are based on a fostered sense of belonging to a locality that is experienced as different from the next locality, the so-called folklore of small differences (Verhoeven, 1993). The bomb on Schijndel is a typical example of how the creators of *New Kids Turbo* play with local traditional culture and its authenticity, give it new meaning and send it to the world via digital media, as a side effect making Maaskantje a world-famous location that attracts international tourists.

In this claim for autonomy and anti-authority, New Kids is identified with Maaskantje and the place-name becomes a desirable label, as shown by the souvenir-stealing of street signs. In December 2011, another New Kids movie was released, *New Kids Nitro*, where again the rivalry between Maaskantje and Schijndel is an important topic, until a third party appears and the two neighboring villages join forces against that party: the Province of Friesland in the North of the Netherlands. But then, unexpectedly, four months later, the New Kids team decided to stop. So, in March 2012, the New Kids' adventures came to an end.

All in all, the characters of New Kids are based on exaggerated stereotyping, as to be expected in absurdist, humorous, ironical tales, and the stereotyping is so recognizable that it may be the key to the success of the series, along with the fascination the public seems to have for anti-social, marginal behavior; a fascination for the margins or edges of society and its rules and values (Wagemakers, 2017, pp. 96–99).

In the following section, I will first introduce Brabantish, the language variety that is used in New Kids, then I will present and analyze a sample of the language of New Kids, as well as samples of language use by others who are inspired by New Kids, and finally, I will describe how this local linguistic and cultural behavior represents the margins.

## What Is Brabantish?

The language used in *New Kids* is Brabantish, a variety of the mid-south of the Netherlands that is part of a larger Brabantish dialect area, the southern border of which is in Belgium. This variety is usually considered a continuum of local dialects and regional varieties that came into existence due to an ongoing dialect levelling process. Before that, local dialects were the mother tongue for the majority of the population and standard Dutch mainly was learnt through education. In this originally diglossic situation, local dialects and standard Dutch each had their own domain of informal and formal use, respectively. However, the area shows a diaglossia-situation since the 1970s (cf. Auer, 2005). This diaglossic situation represents a continuum of language with more and language with less regional features, such as accent and vocabulary. Therefore, the language use in *New Kids* is easily understandable for speakers of Dutch from other areas. In the past, but also in the new situation of diaglossia, the dialects have a low overt prestige, but, at the same time, a higher covert prestige, tied to solidarity, local identities and cultural heritage. Brabantish as an ideological category is a language in the margins; it is regionally, socially and culturally confined and has no official status.

Also, the Province of Noord-Brabant itself can be seen as a periphery. First of all, it is a geographical periphery as it borders to Belgium in the south and is clearly separated from the center of the Netherlands by the Dutch river area (*beneden de grote rivieren*, ‘beneath the great rivers’, a common cliché referring to the south). Secondly, it is also a cultural margin, since it is often looked upon as different from the rest of the Netherlands in terms of its mentality, religion, culture, lifestyle, economy and language.

The boorish, backward and antisocial characters of *New Kids* are linked to stereotypical notions about rural, uncivilized, dialect speaking Brabant. On the other hand, Brabant has urbanized over the last centuries, far more than other peripheral provinces in the Netherlands, and recently has become associated with economic prosperity but also with drug-related criminality (Wagemakers, 2017, pp. 28–30). And indeed, one of the main characters in *New Kids* grows marihuana in his attic.

Within the Netherlands, for many people, *New Kids* still presents and confirms an impression of Brabant as an imagined, culturally marginal area. Both the setting in Maaskantje and the use of local dialect situates *New Kids* in this specific, Brabantish context.

In the language of the *New Kids* characters, Brabantish features can be clearly recognized and labeled. These features make their speech indexical for people who speak Brabantish. Shibboleths, as for example, the soft *g* (a voiced velar fricative consonant) and specific verb-pronoun forms for second person singular (*hedde gij* vs. *heb jij*, ‘have you’) among

many other features, are strong markers of Brabantish identity (Hagen, 1987), as they have become semiotically associated with this local identity (Johnstone & Kiesling, 2008). Shibboleths are remarkable linguistic forms that have become enregistered, to use Agha's (2007, p. 81) concept, i.e. that have become recognized as belonging to a distinct, differentially valorized semiotic register. As such, they have an added value in social and regional identity construction. Through this knowledge, the importance of locality and region within the processes of cultural identification comes into being by the behavioral scripts of New Kids (Blommaert, 2016). In these behavioral scripts, language plays an important role. The dialect that is used in New Kids is emblematic for Brabantish identity and is given voice through staged performances online, on TV and in movies.

### New Kids Talk

Language is a particularly distinct feature of the characters of New Kids. As said, the language spoken in New Kids is a regional variety that can be placed within the continuum of local dialects and standard Dutch. More specifically it is a northeastern variant of Brabantish, quite close to the city dialect of the provincial capital 's-Hertogenbosch as spoken by younger generations. Various expressions and words index their speech as Brabantish, and in this section, I will take a closer look at how this indexical way of speaking works in (a transcript of) a New Kids clip.

*Transcript 6.1* New Kids on the Block, Episode 'Chinees' (posted on YouTube on 23 February 2010; translation JS)

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The main characters of New Kids are hanging out and Richard orders Chinese food by mobile phone. Robbie is fooling around with a moped.

Gerrie: *laomij anders ekkes spolle, jonge*

(let me play (make a mess) for a while, man)

Chinees: *23 euro alsjeblieft*

(23 euro please)

Richard: *hee, ik heb geen geld bij, jonge. Hedde gij geld bij, Robbie?*

(hey, I don't have any money on me, man. Do you have money, Robbie?)

Robbie: *'k heb ook geen geld*

(I don't have any money either)

Chinees: *godverdomme*

(goddammit)

He starts packing in.

Robbie: *nimde da nou ammel weer mee?*

(are you taking everything with you?)

(Continued)

Richard: en dan, he? Zeker weggooië. *Kende't* net zo goed an  
 ons geve, **jonge**  
 (and now? Surely you will throw it by the thrash! Might as well  
 give it to us)

Chinees: *moe* gewoon betale  
 (just need to pay, man)

Robbie: **jonge, kut**, gewoon hier late, da etc, **jonge**  
 (man, cunt, leave it here, the food, man)

Gerrie: hee, *gij* kunt zeker gin wheelie, of wel?  
 (hey, surely you can't do a wheelie, or can you?)

Chinees: wel, **jonge**  
 (yes, man)

Gerrie: n-*damoetendoen* dan  
 (you must do it then (well, show us then))

The Chinese boy does a wheelie on his moped, falls upon a garden fence and is speared: immediate death. Robbie walks to the bloody accident scene... and picks up the food. He peeks at the order in the bag.

Robbie: *hettie d'r* **godverdomme** mihoen bij gedaon, die **kut**  
 (he put noodles in it, goddammit, that cunt)

In transcript 6.1, **bold** refers to foul language and rude talk; underlined refers to vernacular phonology (contractions, deletions of sounds etc.) and *italics* refer to dialect morphology and syntax (inflection, inversion/deletion of words etc.).

Some of the features give this particular vernacular used in the episode a recognizable Brabantish flavor. We find this, for instance, in *hedde*, *lulde*, *nimde*, *moete*. These are grammatical forms consisting of a verb in the second person and a pronoun, in inversion (e.g. in interrogative sentences). The pronoun is enclitic (attached to the verb), and if the subject is stressed, the pronoun will also appear in its full form (subject doubling). The form *hedde* would be 'heb je' in Dutch, meaning 'have you', and *hedde gij* would be 'heb jij' meaning 'have you' with stress on the subject 'you'. Other features that are indexical of Brabantish are t-deletion (*da* for 'dat', meaning 'that'), diminutives with k (*ekkes* for 'eventjes' meaning 'a little while') and the absence of the reflexive pronoun (*ik heb geen geld bij* for 'ik heb geen geld bij me', meaning 'I don't have any money on me').

This transcript also shows features of the speech in New Kids clips that are indexical for youngsters hanging out on street corners, i.e. a street speech style often associated with lower class. The language used in New Kids not only reflects this social category but also constructs social meaning. The way the five main characters interact with each

other or with other characters, is rough and insolent, as they use cuss words to address their interlocutors, mostly *kut* and *jonge*. In the entry on New Kids in the English version of Wikipedia, it says *kut* in English is ‘cunt’, but it should be noted that in Dutch, this word doesn’t carry the same severity as it does in English, although it is nevertheless considered crude.

In this way, the speech in New Kids is indexical for street talk as well as for Brabantish dialects, giving a twofold marginalized disposition to the characters in New Kids. Thus, the dialect features mark the characters in New Kids as speakers of Brabantish but also index a certain type of Brabander stylistically. New Kids is not about Brabanders in general, but about a particular aspect of the regional identity (cf. Eckert, 2012, p. 88), which is not only recognizable and familiar within the context of Brabant. This is accomplished through a combination of features, such as entourage, behavior, clothing, etc., and also, as shown, through language use. It portrays an anti-authority ‘vernacular culture’ (Cheshire, 1982, p. 97) on the basis of practices that are familiar to the public: swearing, refusing to pay for an order, resisting legitimate fashion, and behaving foolishly, violently or aggressively.

## Talk Like New Kids

How did the adventures of New Kids influence audiences in their everyday life? In this section, I will show various cases where the spread of the New Kids culture is visible, i.e. in a recording of a conversation and in a writing assignment, collected from adolescents in the same area (the east of Noord-Brabant: the village of Mill and the town of Helmond), as well as in the online world.

Transcript 6.2 is from conversations of teenagers we recorded in Mill, a small village in Brabant (Mutsaers & Swanenberg, 2012). New Kids inspired three of our male respondents (all of local descent) to reflect upon the terms of abuse *kut* and *mongool* (‘mongol’) with a remarkable plural *mongols* (standard Dutch: *mongolen*).

In transcript 6.2, **bold** refers to foul language and rude talk and underlined refers to vernacular phonology.

These young adolescents from Mill speak a regional vernacular with dialect features. They are discussing derogatory terms that are ‘fashionable nowadays’. The word *kut* is used as a swear word in contexts where the most adequate translation in English would be ‘shit’ or ‘fuck’, and also as a term for abuse addressing a person, in English ‘cunt’. It was already well known before New Kids as it figures in local jokes like: ‘How does an inhabitant from ’s-Hertogenbosch say “have a nice weekend”? “See you on Monday, cunt” (*tot de maondag kut*)’. The other

Transcript 6.2 Conversation by three secondary school students in Mill,  
a village in Noord-Brabant (translation JS)

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- Ken: **kut**, da's tegenwoordig in hèn.  
(cunt, that's fashionable nowadays, isn't it)
- Ton: nee joh, nee nee.  
(no, man, no no)
- Ken: je mag alleen met **kut** schelden als je er ooit één  
in je mond hebt gehad.  
(you can only cuss with 'cunt' if you have had one in your mouth)
- Mart: ik doe da altied  
(I do that all the time)
- Ton: en **mongol** heb je tegenwoordig hèn **mongol**  
(and mongol you have nowadays, hey, mongol)
- Ken: ja maar die lopen er ook echt rond hier af en toe, ik zit hier ook  
me-twee van die **mongols** aan tafel.  
(yes, but they actually walk around here every now and then; I'm  
also sitting at this table with two mongols)
- Mart: ho-is.  
(hold on)
- Ken: twee van die **vetbere**, die doen alt zo netjes.  
(you two grease bears, always behaving so neatly)
- 

derogatory term, *mongol*, however, is a, to my knowledge, new phonological variant that came into use because of the New Kids clips. It comes with an alternative pronunciation of Dutch *mongool*, which itself has a history of being used as a term of abuse (originally referring to a person with Down syndrome). This pronunciation has stress on the first syllable instead of the second syllable and has a plosive /g/ (pronounced as in English *guy* or French *garçon*) instead of a fricative /g/; the latter is typical for Dutch. In this way, this variant resembles its English counterpart 'mongol'. Moreover, the phonological pattern thus becomes similar to that in Dutch words that take their plurals in /s/, e.g. *lepels* (spoons). The plural used by one of the adolescents in Mill is *mongols*, whereas Dutch has *mongolen*.

The interlocutors not only are aware of the habits in New Kids but they also jokingly engage in calling each other by the terms of abuse they are discussing, just like the way characters in New Kids address their interlocutors.

Transcript 6.3 is a 'free writing' assignment, collected by Emmie Hoebens, a teacher at a secondary school in Helmond (Hoebens, Swanenberg, & Kroon, 2012). In free writing, spelling is not important as long as the story is told well. The assignment is used to stimulate students who experience an anxiety to write in class. A 15-year-old third grade student wrote the following text.

In the above text, **bold** refers to 'street speech style' lexicon and *italics* refers to dialect morphology and syntax.

Transcript 6.3 Free writing assignment (translation JS)

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Jaro kwam op zaterdag morgen naar mij toe **gewielied**. Gij vroeg of ik mee ging **wielien**, en ik ging mee **wielien**. Toen kwamen we ian **zommel** (homo) en nick **atje** (autist) tegen, ze hadden ruzie met een chinese **boy**. Dus wij michel **fixe** (regelen), dus kwam michel aan **gewielied**. En had nog wat vrienden mee genomen. En de chinese had ook wat **kongfu boy**'s mee genomen. Dus toen er zoon chinese aan kwam zij jaro *gij kunt zeker geen wielie!* Hij zij jawel **jonge**, toen zij ik *moete doen* dan.

Jaro came cycling to my house one Saturday morning. He asked me to go cycling with him, so I went cycling. Then we met Ian Zommel (gay) and Nick Atje (autistic), they were having a row with a Chinese boy. So, we fixed (arranged for) Michel, so Michel came cycling. And he brought some friends. And the Chinese also brought some Kung Fu boys. So, when such a Chinese came up, Jaro said: You surely can't do a wheelie! He said: Yeah man, then I said: then you must do it.

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Words that do not belong to the standard language are either English (*fixe* derived from 'to fix'; *boy*'s; *wielie*, spelling variety of a loanword, 'wheelie', derived from 'wheel'), or Brabantish dialect (*gij*, *moete* instead of 'jij', 'moet je'). The nicknames of Nick and Ian are explained by the author of the assignment-text, in brackets; they are a diminutive of an abbreviation (*atje* 'autist') and a borrowing from Moroccan Arabic (*zommel* for a homosexual, especially used as a pejorative, meaning 'sucker').

The author inserts small bits and pieces of other registers in his informal Dutch vernacular, in this way, voicing identity fitting a typical 'street youths situation', using linguistic resources and features from a variety of repertoires, leading to a very complex piece of writing. This typical street youth's situation, however, in the last two lines of the text, turns out to be inspired by the New Kids clip described above, with the Chinese boy who is delivering Chinese food on his moped, and is then challenged to perform a wheelie.

Transcripts 6.2 and 6.3 show an imitation of the local language specific to New Kids, but in completely different contexts. Still, the imitations fit these new contexts, as they are adequate to the situations of use. What is said, and how it is said, is only comprehensible to those who are familiar with the productions of New Kids. They make sense, in other words, on the basis of shared knowledge.

As said, New Kids started as online sketches, then became a television series (Comedy Central has broadcasted the series in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Sweden and Russia), followed by two cinema productions, and thus, became even larger. The hype around



New Kids ended shortly after their highest point of fame, when in December 2011, their second movie was released. In March 2012, the New Kids-actors officially ended their adventures, but was that the end of New Kids?

Not completely. Quotes from New Kids also reached the international public via Twitter. In January 2011, in the context of a huge fire in a factory in Moerdijk, also in Noord-Brabant, one of the typical utterances by one of the characters in New Kids was spread globally via Twitter, *Zonne grote vuurbal jonguh, bam!* (Such a huge fireball, man, boom!). The utterance was the Number One Trending Topic on Twitter worldwide, and it was picked up in the United States, where the ironical comment on the accident in the factory was considered typical for the sobriety of the Dutch. Americans would immediately think of a terrorist attack but the Dutch started joking around, as stated in one of the comments on Twitter.

Note that this quote again has a dialect feature, the demonstrative pronoun *zonne* has a suffix (instead of standard Dutch *zo'n*, that lacks the suffix -e). It indicates the masculine gender of the noun 'fireball', indexing Brabantish dialect, since Standard Dutch does not have these masculine gender markers.

The quote stayed popular for quite a while on Twitter. On 4 June 2014, there was another big fire in Moerdijk, and the quote popped up again on Twitter. And on 14 June 2014 there was a comment on a thunderstorm: *Die bliksem is ergens hier ingeslagen zag ik ZONNE GROTE VUURBAL JONGUH* (that lightning has hit somewhere here, I saw, such a huge fireball, man). The old local dialects in Brabant may be fading, but new (online) communities give dialect features a new 'raison d'être', as shown by the emergence of new shibboleths such as *zonne grote vuurbal jonguh*.

The regional, national and international fandom for New Kids, a typically local product, shows how marginality can be something that appeals beyond the margins; it does so through behavior that is recognized and familiar, and linguistically and culturally associated to certain stereotypical notions.

## Representing the Margins

New Kids represents the margins in its characters' linguistic and cultural behavior. These margins can be described in two different perspectives. First, Maaskantje represents the countryside in the periphery of the Netherlands, as opposed to the metropolitan central area, the so-called *Randstad*, including the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht. This is portrayed with a green scenery, the only building in sight is the catholic church, a butterfly flits through the display, a cow

moos and a rooster crows. The lovely rustic countryside is part of the imagined space of Brabant, traditionally an agricultural province with a negative side as well, since its inhabitants are stereotypically thought of as backward and boorish. The imagined space is based on handed down and shared knowledge of the past of Brabant. By using elements such as scenery, fashion, behavior and dialect, *New Kids* is experienced as authentic and familiar to the viewers.

Thus, the setting seems a geographical and economic margin of the country, which is, moreover, well known to be different from the center and north of the country because of its dialect, religion and mentality (Brabantish, catholic, easy-going and exuberant). But, soon enough, the appearance of the *New Kids*-characters with their unpolished looks and behavior takes away our attention from this lovely scenery to extremely cynical satire.

Here we arrive at the second perspective of the margins of *New Kids*: they are antisocial. The main characters in *New Kids* are like white trash or chavs, they binge-drink cheap beer and eat junk food on the street, they grow and smoke marihuana, they drive vulgar cars (Opel Manta) and they look like Happy Hardcore-fans from the 1990s when it comes to hairdo and clothing, such as tracksuits. This behavioral script indexes the stereotypical character of the 'country-side chav'. The main characters in *New Kids* are maladjusted and do not fit in; they represent the margins of society. This aspect of the media productions turned out to be very appealing to (even global) audiences.

Why do people like to watch antisocial behavior? The public is simply fascinated by it. Before *New Kids*, Dutch television had other popular series on antisocial people, e.g. *Flodder*, *De Tokkies*, *Oh Oh Cherso* and some of the characters from the comedy sketch show *Toren C*. Other examples are *Shameless* and *Little Britain* (with its character Vicky Pollard) in the United Kingdom. Apparently, people start to feel better by watching less socially successful people: it makes them curious about another subculture, which is very different, maladjusted and dangerous (accidents and fights in the *New Kids*-clips are extremely violent). Furthermore, all these characters are fictitious; they portray an 'over the top' version of antisocial people for humorous reasons and their conduct is scripted.

Thus, the performance of *New Kids* addresses a twofold identity: regional and social, which share that both are marginal. The type of characters in *New Kids*, chavs, is contrasted against the 'proper' white middle-class individual. Chavs are regarded as esthetically and morally inferior and they trigger reactions of disgust. They are not only poor in terms of money, but, more importantly, their taste is looked down upon as they wear sports clothes and binge drink on cheap lager from cans.

Chavs are perceived as ignorant, aggressive and violent (Wagemakers, 2017, p. 97).

These two perspectives come together in the language used in New Kids: it is unmistakably Brabantish and linked to the countryside because of its dialect features, and at the same time, it is vulgar because of the foul language, harsh jokes and cuss words. In this way, it suits to challenge the establishment, as New Kids is part of an anti-authorities and anti-mainstream culture (mainstream culture is supposed to come from the *grachtengordel*, the ring of canals in the center of Amsterdam, the core of the *Randstad*, the metropolitan area in the west of the Netherlands). Rooijackers (2014, p. 402) argues that New Kids represents ‘the real Brabant that is tired of the disdain and condescending attitudes of the mainstream bourgeoisie, although it is probably not so much the Brabantish bourgeois culture but a more general ‘correct’ behavior New Kids is rebelling against. Again, language use plays an important role. In a cultural environment where standard language has overt prestige, vernaculars prove usable for flagging nonconformism.

Thus, the dialect is to be regarded as local languaging, indexing regional identity as well as indexing social identity (Pennycook, 2010). Both perspectives are present in the language and culture of New Kids. Here linguistic variables function as shibboleths, indexing social meanings. These social types are enregistered categories of speakers, the countryside chavs from Brabant, which are marked by these indexicals (Eckert, 2008). The behavioral scripts with alcohol, soft drugs, hardcore music, clothing, haircuts and language use fit the social type of the lower-class adolescents from Brabant. With this performance, New Kids strongly confirms identification processes. In media performances, especially satirical ones, exaggeration is important and valued. The acceptance and the significance of New Kids and the marginal culture it portrays, becomes enlarged through all the different manners and media the New Kids material is spread, offline and online (Johnstone, 2011).

To me, coming from a neighboring hamlet only five kilometers further east, the characters in New Kids are slightly embarrassing with their cruel acts and foul language in a dialect so similar to my own dialect. Simultaneously, the humor is based on self-mockery as the actors belong to the local community themselves, which makes it (more) acceptable to that community. If the popularity of the sketches derived only from ridiculing Brabant, a foreign success would have been highly unlikely as people from outside of the Netherlands are hardly familiar with these regional differences in language and culture. However, the sketches transcended Dutch borders easily (Wagemakers, 2017, pp. 95–96). Performances such as these can mean different things to

different audiences (Johnstone, 2011). While viewers from other parts of the Netherlands will recognize New Kids as Brabantish, since the shibboleths are familiar to them, to viewers from Germany, Russia or other parts of the world, New Kids may not be geographically identifiable, but the main characters will be recognized as chavs from the countryside. So, while localness is of central concern, most of these local aspects actually coincide with social aspects, in the case of New Kids, with white trash behavior.

## **Conclusion**

In the story of New Kids, as we have seen, marginality is a twofold phenomenon. I do not mean to propose a new concept here, but I have tried to understand in what way the margins are playing a role in this specific cultural expression by analyzing their language and image. Through the vernacular used in New Kids part of its audience may experience recognition and a sense of belonging, to this region and its culture, although of course New Kids portrays it through violent, absurd satire. Certain features that belong to a repertoire of local culture and traditional dialect are celebrated in movie clips that subsequently are spread on a larger, transnational scale. The appeal to transnational viewers is possible by the recognition and familiarity of behavior, fashion, music and language. That certain knowledge is shared by artists and audiences, making fans feel included. They place themselves in a social, marginal context through stylistic practice (Eckert, 2012). Thus, a local identity is claimed by the characters in New Kids and their followers by roughening the authentic use of the local culture and vernacular. Identification with a place helps ‘keeping it real’; although New Kids is too absurdly funny and violent to be credulous, the entourage of the clips looks authentic enough to believe this could happen somewhere in the neighborhood. Through authentication, the margins have re-imagined themselves. Thus, the idea of authenticity of the performance is strengthened through identification with local culture, while the absurdity of the humor and violence, at the same time, denies this authenticity.

New Kids started out solely on digital media, they became famous through that digital infrastructure of globalization and means of inter-scale virtual mobility. In this way, they accomplished to transfer local language and culture and that transfer has become transnational. Exposure to popular media here provokes the transformation of local dialects, in such a way that the culture they portray is still experienced as familiar, ‘belonging to your own neighborhood’ while they have been infused with new indexical orders of belonging, ownership and legitimate usage (Wang, et al., 2014). As such, the (local) cultural and language behavior

of the characters in *New Kids* is shared with the (translocal) audience via the Internet, connecting ‘big translocal things and their interactions with the small local ones’ (Blommaert, 2017, p. 65).

The margins are represented in the *New Kids*-productions as the countryside in The Netherlands. To fans from the region this representation will be recognizable as a reference to their own region, to fans from other regions in The Netherlands, it will be recognizable as the representation of the periphery of their country, and to fans from other countries, it will be recognizable as the representation of cultural margins in their own society. Thus, even when one is unfamiliar with Dutch culture and language, *New Kids* is recognizable and funny, since many of the features of the margins are universally known. This makes the local performance suitable for a global audience.

*New Kids* plays with the dichotomy between the urban and the peripheral, an ideological division between two meanings that are experienced as opposites. The dichotomy between the urban and the peripheral in The Netherlands is geographical (the *landrand*, the border region denoting the provinces that border on Germany or Belgium opposite to the central *Randstad*) and cultural at the same time. This makes the center-periphery dichotomy *New Kids* portrays, a dichotomy of urban centers vs. countryside, mainstream vs. subculture, establishment vs. rebellion, standard language vs. dialect, sense of fashion vs. bad taste, decency vs. vulgarity, sincerity vs. humor and idiocy and arrogance vs. self-mockery.

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# 7 Literacy Acquisition and Mobile Phones in a South African Township

## The Story of Sarah

*Fie Velghe*

### Introduction

According to Blommaert (2005, p. 255) people never learn ‘a language’, but ‘specific and specialized bits of language, sufficient to grant them “voice” and to make themselves understood by others’. People thus ‘gather *things they need* in order to be seen by others as “normal” understandable social beings’ (Blommaert & Backus, 2013, p. 28) or in order to have a ‘voice’ in specific contexts, specific time frames and with specific interlocutors. Learning processes of languages ‘develop in a variety of learning environments and through a variety of learning modes, ranging from regimented and uniform learning modes characterizing schools and other formal learning environments, to fleeting and ephemeral “encounters” with language in informal learning environments’ (Blommaert & Velghe, 2014, p. 138).

The explosive spread of mobile phones all around the world has created new hopes as to how the handsets could transform the fortunes of the poor living in developing countries (Sey, 2011), in the so-called peripheral zones of the world. According to Donner (2008), the mobile phone’s portability, simplicity and affordability makes it a natural fit for education initiatives in places where PCs and Internet connectivity may be rare. In this chapter, we will look at how mobile phones can play a unique role in reaching those who are outside the scope of formal or institutionalized schooling and open doors to out-of-school learning practices for people positioned on the periphery. The uptake of the mobile phone has made certain forms of literacy and the possibility of practicing (newly) acquired literacy skills more accessible and appealing to a vast amount of poor, marginalized and – very often uneducated – people.

In a community like Wesbank, my research site, poverty, inequality and social marginalization turn various forms of literacies into rare commodities. The unequal access to the material, cultural and linguistic resources available to those in the center creates unequal access to ‘legitimate language’ (Bourdieu, 1991) opportunities for mobility, and hence, ‘voice’. The uptake of the mobile phone, however, has created highly instructive and motivating informal learning environments and

'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999), and can, as we will see in this chapter, instigate an often unprecedented literacy enthusiasm among even those who regard themselves as 'illiterate'.<sup>1</sup> The learning, as we will see, is a locally grounded set of practices that are highly defined and constrained by the social contexts in which they develop, and can thus, not be seen as detached from its social, cultural and historical 'habitat', and from the concrete human relationships and social structures in which it takes place (Freire, 1993).

Let us start by preparing the canvas and provide some background information on Wesbank and the research methodologies. After that, we will turn to the story of Sarah, and look at how she had to embark upon really hard labor in order to get her voice heard.<sup>2</sup>

## Background to Research

Wesbank is situated on the dry and sandy *Cape Flats*, the so-called dumping grounds of apartheid, 27 kilometers out of the center of Cape Town and surrounded by many other apartheid townships. Wesbank is by all standards a peripheral community (Blommaert, Muyllaert, Huysmans & Dyers, 2005), secluded and bordered by a highway, two very busy municipal roads and a wetland nature reserve, and located 12 kilometers away from the closest job and shop opportunities.

Wesbank was built in 1999 as part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), a South African socioeconomic policy framework that the first democratic government in South Africa implemented after the abolition of apartheid in 1994 to tackle the economic, spatial and racial legacies of the passed era and to improve government services and basic living conditions for the poor.

Wesbank was the first postapartheid housing project that was intended to give home to deprived people, irrespective of color and descent, and thus, not segregated along racial lines. The community had to give home to 29,000 residents in 5,149 houses. The actual number of residents in Wesbank is estimated to be much higher, as extended families live together on one plot, and people have built shacks in the backyards of the RDP-houses. Unemployment rates in the community are immense, although no recent figures are available. Basic service delivery is minimal. Gangsterism and crime rates are high, while the police station responsible for the area is about eight kilometers away.

The data for this chapter draw on three extensive ethnographic fieldwork periods in the community of Wesbank, between January 2011 and June 2013, with a special focus on mobile phone use and literacy among middle-aged women. The study included in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 25 women, all between 40 and 65 years old. As much time as possible was spent in the community, pursuing a maximum participant observation. Daily observations of female behavior, literacy classes for adults, family situations, cell phone use and informal conversations were

written down in a fieldwork diary, to further support the qualitative and quantitative data. Other data are text messages received from residents, screenshots of digital conversation and pictures.

## **Introducing Sarah**

I met Sarah<sup>3</sup> during the last weeks of my second fieldwork period in 2012. At the time I met her, she was 59 years old and she had just started following basic literacy courses organized in the High School of Wesbank. Sarah's mother did not want Sarah to go to school since she had to work on the farm and look after her two half-brothers. Sarah never had another opportunity to attend school until she reached the age of 56, when she started following courses for the first time. She dropped out very soon, however, and was giving it a second try three years later, the moment I met her for the first time. Sarah regarded herself as 'illiterate', saying she was not able to read and write at all.

Sarah was living in a 'wendy house'<sup>4</sup> in someone's backyard, together with her second husband, who was a pastor of an apostolic church congregation. Sarah had two sons, a daughter and a step-daughter from her husband's first marriage. Her two youngest sons were gang members and had been sentenced to prison. Sarah and her husband lived from two disability grants they both had been eligible for. This was not sufficient to survive, so they were selling sweets, lollies, fish and chips and grilled chicken to generate some extra income.

Most of Sarah's leisure time (and monthly income too) was devoted to church activities. By the time of my third fieldwork visit in 2013, Sarah and her husband had decided to start their own church division in the community. Instead of always just being the 'pastor's wife', she suddenly played an active role and had to engage in 'literacy events', such as keeping financial records of the congregations. For Sarah, keeping those records was but one of the many literate activities she engaged in. Nonetheless, she still regarded herself as 'illiterate'.

## **First Encounter with Sarah: In Search for Help**

Even though I had met Sarah during my first fieldwork period in Wesbank, and had assisted her in showing how to send a text message and an MMS (multimedia message), I mainly started spending a lot of time with her during my third and last fieldwork period in Wesbank. The basic literacy courses that she had been following when I met her the first time, had stopped after four months. But Sarah had not been very happy or satisfied with the classes anyway. She was of the opinion that she was not really 'learning' anything, or at least not something that was 'useful' to her. She complained about the fact she always had to write (read: copy), without really knowing what she was writing. She told it like this: 'You know, my hand can write, my hand knows how to write

but it does not matter if you write and write but you don't know what you are writing all the time.'

Her comment 'my hand can write' refers to the 'embodiment' or 'en-skilment' (Blommaert, 2013) of writing, the capacity of fulfilling the kinesic skills needed for writing and literacy. What she was lacking apart from that, was a whole set of other specific resources of the 'sub-molecular structure of writing' (Blommaert, 2013, p. 1), such as linguistic, semantic, pragmatic and metapragmatic ones. What Sarah wanted to learn were the functional or instrumental literacy skills we mentioned above. She wanted to learn how to read more fluently, so she could use those skills in daily life. What Sarah was learning during 'formal' schooling did not articulate at all with the existing literacy practices needed in any other domain in Sarah's life nor with any of the specific reasons she had for wanting to attend the classes.

## Hard Labor: Sarah and Literacy

### *First Visit: Learning How to Text*

In the course of the eight months I had not seen her between my two fieldwork periods, Sarah had lost all the skills we had practiced previously. She was only using her phone to make and receive phone calls and send PCMs (please call me messages). According to herself, the phasing out of the basic literacy courses had taken away the incentive to write on her mobile phone. She was very interested in learning how to write and send text messages again, but she was afraid that she would not be able to exploit the acquired skills since she would not know what and how to write and eventually lose the interest and skill again, as had happened before. We made the agreement that we would go through the entire sending process again, and then have weekly 'meetings' to practice. During these meetings we would compose sentences she could then copy and use in SMSs. For the next weeks, we gathered once or twice a week as we had agreed upon.

After I had showed her again how to compose a text message and send it off to someone in her contact list or by entering a telephone number, we immediately started with what she would later call 'her first lesson'. The first sentence that Sarah asked me to write down was a 'practical' or 'micro-coordination' (Ling & Yittri, 2002) text message to her husband, saying *Kan jy nie daar by Katriena omgaan nie om te kyk of sy by die huis is nie?* (Can't you pass by at Katriena's to see whether she is at home?). From that moment, we always operated as follows: I wrote the sentence Sarah dictated to me down in capital letters in my notebook. She then took the notebook in her one hand, tried to read the sentence again out loud, after which she copied it (in lower case letters) onto her phone, using the ABC-keypad on her handset. After completion, she read the sentence again, this time reading it from her handset, after

which she, depending on whether or not she had airtime, sent it off to someone in the contact list stored on her phone.

Typing the first sentence went very slowly. Although she knew the letters of the alphabet, she did not have an active knowledge of the sequences of the letters in the alphabet, so it always took her a while to find the right letter on the keypad. She could easily recognize and name separate letters, however, and had difficulties mainly with reading words and sentences. The longer the word, the more difficult it became.

After finishing writing the first text message to her husband, Sarah realized she could use this text message on other occasions as well, by simply changing the name 'Katriena' into another name.

The second SMS Sarah wanted to compose was practically and religiously oriented. Sarah and her husband were planning to organize a tea party at their house for all their fellow church members, so she wanted to compose a text message to invite them. After that, Sarah said not to have inspiration for a third SMS. I gave her a suggestion and after I had written down the text message *Hallo, hoe gaan dit? Ek dink nogal aan jou vandag. Ek hoop alles gaan goed* (Hello, how are you? I'm thinking of you a lot today. I hope all is well), Sarah was very enthusiastic, realizing that she could use this text message for many different addressees. When I hesitated whether *vandag* (today) in Afrikaans was written with one or two a's (as in Dutch), Sarah took the pen and notebook out of my hands and said: 'But "*vandag*" is also in the Bible, so I know', and wrote *vandag* in its correct spelling. After having done that, she clapped her hands in total contentment, saying: 'You see I can do something!'

That the Bible and her Christian faith more generally were a big incentive for Sarah to engage in or pursue literacy events and practices recurred in many talks I had with her. She explained that she often copied sentences from the Bible onto paper, in order to fully understand what she was reading or hearing. She would then copy the sentence from the Bible with a pen on paper and then read the whole sentence or passage again.

Just before my departure that day, she thanked me and commented: 'This is almost like writing,' referring to the text messages she had been reading and typing on her handset. Having done research among American teenagers, Lenhart, Arafah, Smith, and Macgill (2008) concluded that most of them indeed do not think of their electronic or digital communication as 'real' writing or reading.

### ***Second Visit: The Bible as a Learning Tool***

When I called Sarah in the morning to ask whether or not she was at home for me to pass by, she replied very enthusiastically: 'I am waiting for you, I have news for you!' My previous visit had been almost a week ago. On the night of my first visit she had tried to send one of the SMSs we had practiced to her children, but she had failed. She then had decided

to let it rest for the weekend and only had tried it again the day before I came to visit her for the second time. She eventually had been able to go through the whole process, and had sent the *Hallo hoe gaan dit? Ek dink nogal aan jou. Ek hoop alles gaan goed* message to her daughter and her stepdaughter. Assuming that Sarah would not be able to read a received text message, they had both called her instead of texting back.

We went through all the steps of sending a text message again. The first new text message she wanted me to write down that day was meant for a fellow church member who had just lost her husband. While she was explaining that to me, she suddenly realized she could also use the *Hallo hoe gaan dit? Ek dink nogal aan jou. Ek hoop alles gaan goed* message we had practiced the week before. She just wanted to add her surname preceded by ‘sister’, the title people use to address fellow, female church members, in order to give the SMS a more ‘formal’ character. The writing of her surname went very quickly, and after thinking out loud: ‘Sister sister sister is with an S an I an S, how do you write sister?’ she decided that ‘sis’ instead of ‘sister’ would do as well. Shortly after sending the SMS, Sarah received an answer from the lady. She tried to read the text message on her own, but had to ask for my help for certain words.

The actual typing on her handset already went much quicker, she more easily could find the letters on the keypad and she already mastered much better the motor skills needed to type. Whenever she still did type a mistake because she was hitting the keys too hasty, she always knew exactly how many letters to erase, often without looking at the template. This proves that she was well aware of the words she was writing and capable of dissecting the words into smaller syllables or separate letters. Very often when she discovered she had written a mistake or had been writing too fast without paying enough attention, she exclaimed: ‘I’m just too excited!’

After practicing the use and placement of punctuation marks in the sentences, Sarah took her Bible to show me the sentence she had been reading that same morning. She read the sentence out loud, while moving her index finger along the words she was reading. The reading of the sentence *Laat jou weg aan die Here oor en vertrou op hom en hy sal dit uitvoer* (Commit your way to the Lord; Trust him and he shall bring it to pass; Psalm 37:5) went fluently, mainly because she knew that Bible verse by heart. After reading it, she commented that she also could have used that verse to send to the lady who had lost her husband, or that she could use it when she needed to hearten someone. She commented:

I think I’m gonna send her [the widow] a message again. Then I must just say hello I pray for you read this scripture then I just ... *Hallo ek bid vir jou vandag. Lees Psalm 37:5* (Hello I pray for you today. Read Psalm 37:5) and so on.

(Extract from encounter with Sarah, Wesbank, 2013)

After having said that, I wrote down the sentences *Hello ek bid vir jou vandag. Lees Psalm...* and *Ek het iets vir jou vir die dag, lees ...* (I have something for you for the day, read ...), so Sarah just had to add the Bible verse or scripture she wanted to share with the addressee.

Sarah's Bible was a coloring book: she had highlighted a countless number of passages and verses with a bright marker. She knew exactly where to look for certain passages she wanted to read for me and did not have any difficulties making sense of the structure of the Bible. 'Known' passages were read very fast, because she actually knew them by heart. She was, however, always indicating with her finger which word she was reading. This combination of reciting passages Sarah knew by heart and trying to 'read' them by following the words with her index finger was good practice for her literacy skills.

Sarah said not to have inspiration for new text messages that day. We read the text messages from the previous week again, after which she said she would read those texts over and over again in order to learn and practice the new words. Eventually, she asked me to write a reminder regarding a tea party to be organized at her place. She only wanted to send the SMS a week later, but then she could 'practice' writing and typing of the sentence already. While she was dictating, she suddenly realized that she would be able to use parts of this SMS to create other text messages, such as *geniet die dag* (enjoy your day). This made her think of other 'basic' words she wanted me to write down, for her to combine or add to other text messages. She wanted to get *dankie* (thank you), *asseblief* (please) and *(onthou) ek is (baie) lief vir jou* ((remember) I love you (very much)).

That day, Sarah very suddenly brought an end to our encounter, saying that she had enough 'homework' now for the whole week. Before I left that day she checked the balance on her phone and was very enthusiastic when she discovered that after sending four text messages that morning, she only had spent two rand, whereas with a total of five rand 'you can only talk to one and a half person'.

### *Third Visit: 'One step forward' – Writing a Letter*

When I arrived at Sarah's place, quite early in the morning, she was already busy with what she called 'her homework'. Having woken up very early in the morning, she said that she had been writing ever since. The writing and reading on her cell phone, the basic 'phatic' sentences that we had been writing down and practicing had given her the incentive, self-confidence and courage to try to write a letter to one of her sons in prison. She had started writing the letter that same morning before I arrived and had gotten quite far already. I asked her to read the letter out loud for me. Having read the salutation 'Hallo David' she paused and said: 'That's right no, this is how a letter starts, *ne?*' proud about the fact that she was 'literate' enough to structure a 'good' letter.



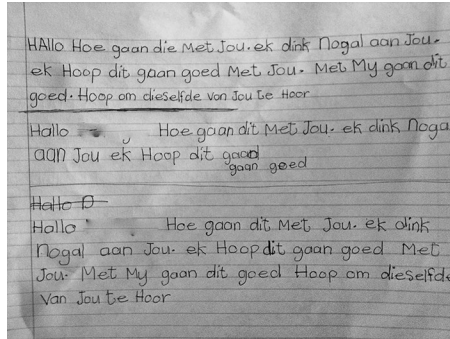


Figure 7.1 Writing and rewriting sentences.

The sentences she had written down so far were a combination of the words and sentences we had been writing down for text message use. As you can see in Figure 7.1, she had been writing and rewriting her sentences a couple of times, according to her ‘to practice’ the sentences before she would write the definite letter. She had a clear idea of what she wanted to do that day during my presence: writing down new sentences that she could use in the letter, and that she could eventually maybe also use for text messages. The following hour she was dictating sentences and words that she would be able to use in the letter to her son.

Sarah typed all the sentences I had written down for the letter out on her cell phone. She did this not only to practice her motor skills on her device but also to try and memorize and ‘understand’ the words. After typing the new sentences of the day, she sighed and said it was enough ‘homework’ for the day, adding: ‘But that will help a lot. It DID help me look what I’m busy doing now, I’m busy writing a LETTER now and I’m sending text messages since last week.’ She wanted to write more sentences for the letter during my next visit.

Sarah thus had been very ‘busy’ with literacy practices since my previous visit. She had not only started writing the letter to her son, but had been copying the sentences I had written down on loose papers into her own notebook (see Figure 7.2). The notebook was a book she had previously been using for the literacy classes, but that she now had given a new purpose.

Besides copying, Sarah had also written quite a number of text messages. The text messages she had been sending had all been addressed to her children. To her daughter she had sent *Hallo Tania, ek is lief vir jou* (Hello Tania, I love you). Her youngest daughter had received *Hallo Nadia die hrere is baie lief vir jou* (Hello Nadia the lord loves you very much). Sarah had mistakenly written ‘here’ as ‘hrere’, something her daughter had mocked. The mistake irritated Sarah so much that weeks later, during my seventh visit to her place, she asked whether it

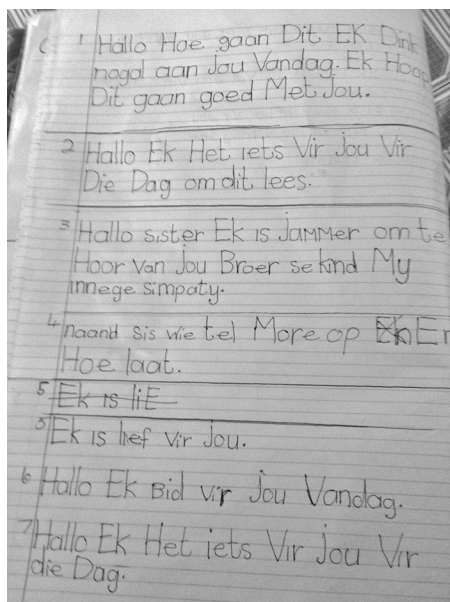


Figure 7.2 Copying sentences in the notebook.

was possible to correct that mistake in the message stored in her sent folder. When I explained her it was impossible to make changes to sent messages in the sent folder, she decided to erase the message at once.

To her eldest son, she had sent *Hallo hoe gaan dit met jou ek is lief vir jou* (Hello how are you I love you). She also had sent a Bible scripture to the woman who had lost her husband. One night, when she could not sleep, she had tried to read the Bible, after which she copied a sentence that she really liked onto her phone and sent it off as a text message to her daughter.

Her stepdaughter, daughter and son all replied, this time with a text message. She had not read all the received text messages by herself though, but had asked her husband for assistance where needed.

Sarah finished 'the lesson' that day by suddenly telling me 'her brain was too tired'. Since she had been writing and reading since that morning, she needed a break, for only to continue with the letter the next day or at night when she would not be able to sleep. Before I left, she still said the following:

It's hard to learn but when you finish and you look at it THEN it's then it's excited. Like like um yesterday not yesterday the day before I was writing that message to D [her son] and he write back to me and IT FEELS SO NICE just to but because sometimes I never got enough airtime and I think of all the kids and I can't call all of

them sometimes you don't like to speak as well then you can just / on SUNDAY this message I did send for Nadia [her daughter] on Sunday this one like this one I couldn't sleep on Sunday night so I was just thinking and I send her this one *ja* [yes] this one I was sending a quarter past three that is in Johannes I KNOW the scriptures so she's also *mos* [a very common stop word in Afrikaans, implies that what is said is well-known or self-evident] converted so I was reading here I was reading the Bible and I thought let me send this.

(Extract of encounter with Sarah, Wesbank, 2013)

#### *Fourth Visit: No Time for Texting*

When I arrived at Sarah's house for my fourth visit, it was really busy there. It had been raining for the whole day and the 'wendy house' did not seem to be waterproof. Sarah said to be embarrassed having to welcome me in a leaking house with buckets scattered all over the place, catching the raindrops falling from the ceiling. A female neighbor was present to help Sarah to cook fish and chips and chicken and the next day the tea party for her church congregation would take place at her house, so Sarah still had to bake cakes for her guests. Although she clearly did not have a lot of time, Sarah did want to show me the progress of the letter she had been writing to her son in prison (see Figure 7.3). The letter had become much longer than the version of the previous week. Her husband had been willing to help her out and he had written down the sentences she had dictated. She had been copying her husband's draft for the past two days already, but had not finalized it yet. She was very unhappy about the crossing outs and the mistakes in the final version, but she thought rewriting the whole letter would be too much work. She had bought blue stationery in the closest town near Wesbank and when I complimented her about that, she answered: 'Yes, nice *ne* [common Afrikaans word, meaning 'isn't it'], for a real letter.'

#### *Fifth Visit: No Money for Texting*

When I went to visit Sarah for the fifth time, she immediately told me that for the past week she had not had airtime, so she had not been able to practice and write text messages. She reassured me that she still knew how to go through the whole typing and sending process on her handset. She had moreover finished and sent off the letter to her son in prison. Asked whether she at least had read the text messages I had sent her as 'homework', she told me that 'her brain was so tired' and that she had asked her husband for help.

She did, however, have inspiration for new text messages, asking me to write down a sentence she could send to the same lady whose husband had died. The lady's nephew had now been shot dead in Wesbank and

1-3-2013  
 STRAAT 86  
 WESBANK  
 7580

Hallo My Seun Hoe gaan dit  
 Met Jou. EK dink nogal aan Jou. EK Hoop  
 dit gaan goed met Jou. met my gaan dit  
 goed Hoop om dieselfde Van Jou. te Hoor  
 Dit gaan goed met die familie Die  
 Kleinkinders gaan goed Skod Hulle sê  
 ek moet al Hulle liefde Stuur. EK wil net  
 vir Jou. Sê EK maak nou weer  
 Besigheid met vis en chips en hoender  
 as jy my Baie mis kyk net na  
 AS jy my Baie mis kyk na die foto.  
 AS ek vir jou mis kyk ek net na jou  
 foto. EK wil net vir jou sê Dis Deur  
 die genade van die Here Vat EK nog  
 Deweeg. alle ere kon EK aan Die Here  
 toe Swaar. AS EK die Here nie aan My  
 kant gehad gehad het. nie sou EK nie al  
 die dinge kon gedoen het. Moet nooit  
 die

Figure 7.3 The letter so Sarah's son.

she wanted to send the following to the lady: *Ek is jammer om te hoor van jou broer se kind* (I'm sorry to hear about your brother's child), later adding 'hello sister' in the beginning of the text message. The second text message she wanted me to write down was intended for her daughter. When she started to dictate the sentence to me, she suddenly switched to English – our main language of interaction – as follows: *Hallo Nicky, hoe gaan dit?* (how are you?) I just want to know um um *wag Engels* (wait English). She burst into laughter when she realized she was dictating to me in English. The idea of texting her children in English was hilarious to her; she told me they would think 'she was totally going crazy now'.

Two hours after I had left her house that day, I received a phone call: I had taken my notebook with all the templates in it with me, instead of ripping the page out of my notebook as I usually did. She really wanted to start with 'her homework' and was happy to hear I was still in Wesbank, so I could return immediately to give her the paper.

When I wrote her a text message two days later, saying *Sarah, hallo, hoe gaan dit? Ek hoop alles gaan goed! Ek is by die huis om te werk. Geniet die dag!* (Sarah, hello, how are you? I hope all is well! I'm at home to work. Enjoy your day!), I received an answer within 20 minutes, saying *Hallo fieke dit gaan goed. Dankie vir die boodskap* (Hello Fieke I'm fine. Thanks for the message).

*Last Visits: Preparing for Goodbye*

When I arrived at Sarah's place for my sixth visit, she was already waiting for me in her chair with her notebook on her lap. She had copied all the sentences from the previous visits into her own notebook and was rereading all of them. She immediately had a new question for me, wanting to learn how to save contacts on her phone. The process of saving contacts was learned quite quickly, after which she took her little paper address book and stored a lot of the numbers on her phone.

Because she had not had a lot of money for buying airtime recently, she had not sent a lot of text messages, except the ones we had prepared for her stepdaughter and the one for the lady who had lost her nephew. Sarah and her husband were preparing for an Easter trip with their church congregation and the total costs of the trip were amounting to the exact amount of their monthly disability grant. Sarah and her husband also had received the news that they had been granted an RDP full-subsidy house in Warrenton, the birthplace of Sarah's husband, a small town in the Northern Cape province of South Africa, more than 1000 kilometers from Cape Town. After receiving the news, she had sent a text message to her daughter, stepdaughter and her son, to inform them about the news. Her husband had helped her compose the text message. The fact that Sarah decided to send a text message to her children to communicate such life-changing and big news says something about how highly she estimated the new communication channel she recently had discovered.

Meeting Sarah after she received this big news became really difficult. When I wanted to visit her after my two weeks of Easter holiday, during which she sent me a *mis jou* (miss you) message, the visit was cancelled because Sarah was lying ill in bed. During my eighth visit, several friends and neighbors came to visit Sarah, because they all had heard about the news that she was moving. When I told her we should write letters to each other after she had moved, she told me she had wanted to ask me whether we could continue text messaging each other, so she could continue practicing. Because of her illness and all the fuss about the move, she had not been texting or reading at all. She still wanted to have another 'lesson' before she would leave. She told me she had forgotten how to save a number in the contact list of her phone. When I went to visit her for the ninth time, however, after making an appointment, she was again too busy with the move and had visitors over from church. She said that her 'head was too full' to learn new things because there were too many things on her mind.

We never managed to meet again. I promised her to write her a letter as soon as possible, from the moment she would text me her new address, which she only did after I had texted her a reminder. Shortly after that, I left Cape Town for Belgium, but I still received one text message from Sarah before I left, saying *Hi Fieke hoe gaan dit met jou*

*jy is baie stil laat my weet hoe met jou :-D* (Hi Fieke, how are you you are very quiet let me know how with you [sic] :-D). Apparently she had discovered how to send emoticons (:-D on a mobile phone shows a happy laughing emoticon), something I had never showed her. In the text message she had sent me with her address, she included the same emoticon.

## **Identity Formation**

Sarah's literacy learning processes was accompanied by the formation of new identity repertoires. Sarah had regarded herself as 'illiterate' for her entire life. The acquired skill of writing text messages – however scaffolded by myself, her husband, the Bible and her notebook – and the suddenly emerging possibilities to be in contact with the world outside her home through the deployment of literacy amazed her immensely and induced comments such as 'look what I can do now!' on several occasions. The way she had been perceiving herself had suddenly changed; having regarded herself as 'illiterate' for her entire life, she suddenly saw herself as capable of pursuing and taking part in literacy events. Suddenly, she possessed resources that could give her 'voice' and the possibility to 'link up' with people in her social network through ways she had never been able to deploy before. This change in self-perception prompted her to challenge herself and learn even more. As we had discussed, she started to read the Bible more often, started transcribing oral texts onto paper and gained enough self-confidence to write a letter to her imprisoned son.

The perception others within her network had of her also changed. While her children answered her first text messages with a phone call, treating her text messages as a sort of PCM message, they eventually started to reply with text messages, as if they suddenly started having confidence in the capability of their mother to read and write. After sending her first text message to her son (*Hallo hoe gaan dit met jou ek is lief vir jou*, Hello how are you I love you), Sarah's son immediately replied with the following: *Wie skryf op my ma se foon. Sy like nie mense moet krap nie* (Who's writing on my mother's phone. She doesn't like it when people snoop [in her phone]). To her son, it did not even seem an option that the message came from his mother herself. Assisted by a sister from the church who was visiting her at that moment, Sarah managed to read the message from her son and replied *dit kom van mammie* (this is from mommy), after which her son still called her to double check, still in disbelief.

Her children eventually got so excited about their mother's progress that Sarah's daughter even asked her when she would create a Facebook account. They told Sarah that she now had to learn 'how to write the words short', referring to textpeak. Sarah's husband seemed to become more willing to help her when she asked for help, as if he finally gained confidence in her writing and reading capabilities. During the weeks I was visiting them, he helped her write a couple of text messages, and wrote down some of the dictated sentences for the letter to Sarah's son.



Sarah laughed off her daughter's comments about the Facebook account and writing textspeak, expressing a meta-identity awareness of different identity roles and repertoires attached to platforms such as Facebook and language registers such as textspeak. Seeing herself as an 'illiterate' and 'old' lady, the thought of becoming part of those 'youth' and 'literate' environments was hilarious to her. When Sarah started to dictate the text message she wanted to send to her daughter and realized she was dictating parts of it in English (see above), she burst into laughter. Writing in English was a funny and impossible idea for Sarah, since it did not fit her identity of being an older, Afrikaans-speaking, 'illiterate' woman and the image her children had of her. Writing in English would make her children think 'she was totally going crazy', since (written) English was usually not part of the language repertoire of an Afrikaans-speaking retired woman. Writing text messages in Afrikaans was already a big enough step to take, and already shifted her repertoires, producing 'social and cultural meanings of the self' and contributing 'to the potential to perform certain social roles, inhabit certain identities and be seen in a particular way by others' (Blommaert & Backus, 2013). Suddenly she was able to communicate through writing, not only with a pen on paper but also by using her mobile phone.

### **To Be Literate or Not, That's the Question**

Sarah's strategies to mask and master her 'illiteracy' can be seen as a proof of the fact that concepts such as 'literate' and 'illiterate' are often used as stereotypes. They are inaccurate and far too narrow to describe the various strategies people use to deal with 'literacy events' (Dyers & Slemming, 2014). Language and literacy are not abstract, technical and measurable, but always 'in practice' and socially embedded.

While dominant voices might label people like Sarah as 'illiterate', 'ethnographic and literacy-sensitive observation on the ground' may indicate 'a rich variety of practices' (Street, 2001, p. 6). Regarded by herself and by her immediate environment as a totally 'illiterate' person, Sarah actually managed to learn how to (partly) read her mobile phone and managed to obtain a 'voice', firstly by literally sending off her voice in MMS messages, and later on by combining the basic literacy skills she had learned through formal schooling with informal learning strategies. Her literacy might be scaffolded by others or 'proximate' (Chipchase, 2008) and her voice very fragile, muffled and inaudible for many people. The very first messages she sent did not exceed mere phatic, noninformational communication (Miller, 2008) and her creativity in using and combining the *passé-partout* SMS phrases we prepared together had its limitations, but through trial and error and hard labor Sarah managed to be 'out there' and to apply her newly acquired and fragile basic literacy skills and her motivation and enthusiasm to learn even more. Within the course of eight months, her interest in 'getting as much out of her device as possible' had



motivated her to engage in many different literacy practices, something she had never done before in her life. According to Donner, Gitau and Marsden (2011), the simple knowledge that one has the possibility or ability to learn something new on a mobile phone is empowering in itself.

Learning and knowledge incited a growth in self-confidence and made Sarah, and most of the other women I interacted with, reflect on what else they wanted to learn and practice. Immediate detectable livelihood benefits (such as the relative financial benefits of SMS versus voice call or MMS, Mxit<sup>5</sup> chat messages versus SMS, accessing the Internet on a mobile phone versus travelling to the closest cybercafé, the safety networks created through phatic communication, etc.) and media ideologies (Gershon, 2010) are other fertile incentives that incite interested and motivated learners to listen, look and learn, as we have seen throughout this chapter.

As I mentioned above, mobile literacy acquisition could play a unique role in reaching those who are outside the scope of formal and institutionalized schooling and who live in peripheral and marginal communities such as Wesbank, where macro-contextual circumstances turn various forms of literacies into rare commodities, making literacy stimulation in out-of-school contexts almost nonexistent. 'The learning that happens in informal settings is a side effect of everyday life and social activity, rather than an explicit instructional agenda' (Ito, et al., 2010) and adults need to see an immediate livelihood benefit from literacy to keep the motivation to obtain and maintain literacy skills (Oxenham, Diallo, Katahoire, Petkova-Mwangi, & Sall, 2002). The mobile phone has become a learning tool, nourishing learning practices, and in an unprecedented way, urging women to explore and learn and challenge themselves. However limited their 'voice' and however scaffolded their literacy practices may be, the mobile phone offers them a platform to practice and learn, to create new identity repertoires and to remain 'literacy-active'.

Several projects that have used the mobile phone and SMS as a medium to practice and maintain acquired literacy skills through the mutual stimulation of formal literacy courses and informal mobile phone learning have proven to be very successful (the 'JOKKO initiative' in Senegal, the 'Project ABC' in Niger and Pakistan for example). The enthusiasm and eagerness to learn on and through a mobile phone, the progress made, and the importance attached to being regarded as competent and literate in a literacy-poor environment, makes one optimistic about the opportunities the uptake of mobile phones can bring to informal (language) learning and literacy acquisition, maintenance and stimulation.

By looking at some very contextualized and 'small' learning moments, we have observed highly functional 'signs of learning' (Kress, 2013), even though, as we have seen, the *access* to the required resources is often severely constrained and the *outcome* of the learning was sometimes

very embryonic, influent, rigid, vulnerable and scaffolded by others. This so-called trivial, ordinary and easily overlooked learning is in its essence a very important aspect of learning to further focus upon.

A pedagogical theory focusing on such informal learning taking place within an uncontrollable environment is wanting. What does it mean, however, when big and important parts of the (language and literacy) learning in the periphery happen on the streets and in very informal, local and context-specific settings, guided by peers and *scaffolders* instead of by ‘official’ teachers and tutors in school settings? With an ever-growing uptake of ICTs and a globalizing world in which access to formal education is in reality only for the privileged few, informal learning processes are the most accessible, fruitful and democratic ways of learning for the majority of the people living on the margins. For those in the periphery, informal learning, dissectible into very small and locally contextualized signs of learning is often the only mode of learning affordable and accessible to them. Without this pedagogy – consisting of small building blocks of learning originating from informal learning environments and moments – many people in the margins would be condemned to illiteracy and would be regarded and/or regard themselves as ‘not educationable’.

We thus need to rely on the narratives of the marginalized people themselves when we want a finger on the pulse of the general learning environment and the literacy learning practices there within (Hernandez-Zamora, 2010). The results drawn from observations of signs of learning and the narratives surrounding it, can be regarded as descriptions of *ethno-pedagogies*. In a peripheral setting, ethno-pedagogies are then context-specific pedagogies that are highly influenced and constrained by socioecological realities and by the (non)availability of infrastructure and resources that characterize this periphery, which all together can be regarded as the ecology of learning.

By looking at to what Kress (2013) refers to as ‘signs of learning’ – the specific moments during which people like Sarah in this chapter learn something for the very first time – and thus, giving a very detailed, local and anecdotic ethnographic description of this ‘very first time learning’, we actually have ended up describing the *genesis* of learning. It is only by giving detailed and anecdotic accounts of very local, human processes of learning (as opposed to mechanical and political description of learning), that one is able to investigate the local processes of learning, taking into account the entire ecology of a place. This ecology influences, or, to be more precise, actually *is* the learning environment.

As a consequence, standard measures and research instruments and questions, used for pedagogical research on *the learning of learning* within schools and other formal settings, are often not applicable when we look at informal learning practices in the margins. This necessitates

an ethnographic approach to learning: a coherent learning theory that enables us to analyze informal learning processes such as the ones described in this chapter. These analyses are then descriptions of ethno-pedagogies.

## Notes

- 1 Being aware of the complex and contested nature of terms such as 'literate' and 'illiterate', quotation marks will be used throughout this chapter. What can be regarded as 'literate' in one context or place, can be regarded as 'illiterate' in other settings, often running parallel to center/periphery dynamics. A generally accepted definition of what it means to be 'literate', 'low literate' or 'illiterate' is thus, as a consequence, impossible to make and would always be contestable.
- 2 A very short version of this chapter has been published in Velghe (2013, 2014).
- 3 To safeguard the anonymity of the participants in the research, the names of the residents are all fictional.
- 4 In a South African context a 'wendy house' refers to a wooden (contemporary) house built by low-income earners, often erected in the backyard of residential premises. Corrugated iron structures are called shacks.
- 5 At the time of the research Mxit was a very popular and cheap mobile instant messaging programme used on mobile phones, and comparable to computer-based instant messaging programmes such as MSN messenger, or later, WhatsApp.

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# 8 Scaling Queer Performativities of Genders and Sexualities in the Periphery of Rio de Janeiro in Digital and Face-to-Face Semiotic Encounters

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## Introduction

Following quite recent developments in media and digital technologies, more and more interaction, communication, socialization, intersubjectivity and access to the rapid flows of globalization involve the use of all sorts of gadgets and resources such as computers, smart phones, MSN, etc. However, connecting with the benefits of technological advancement and engaging in digital experiences may be hindered in the so-called periphery. Such difficulty was dealt with in Brazil through the proliferation of lanhouses – types of cybercafés that now offer digital services mostly in underprivileged areas of a city.<sup>1</sup> This means that nowadays, lanhouses, in general, cater to those who cannot access the Internet from their homes or smart phones. In the light of this Brazilian phenomenon, this chapter explores the semantic effects on people’s lives of digital semiotic practices carried out in a specific lanhouse, located in a marginal district of the city of Rio de Janeiro in a small business center, away from well-off neighborhoods. In particular, it seeks to observe locally occasioned queer performativities of genders and sexualities, that is, we follow the theoretical view that genders and sexualities are not given before discourse and, as such, they come about performatively. By drawing on a scale-sensitive approach (Carr & Lempert, 2016), this chapter probes into how ‘identity’ meanings performed in the here-and-now of interaction entextualize (simultaneously repeat and alter) solidified discourses produced beyond the local context of their performance.

The focused local-global phenomenon illustrates how capitalist forces – in a world that is an immense bazaar – have transgressed the center/periphery division, finding ways of overcoming the problem of access. Lanhouses have given a unique contribution to digital inclusion in Brazil. Their great boom was in the 2000s when 50% of Internet access in the country was made through lanhouses and when there were more than three million lanhouses

in Brazil (Lemos, 2007). An interesting feature of lanhouses is related to the role they played both as sites for entertainment through computer games and for socialization, influencing the dynamics of social life by providing access to translocal discourses in the web. Nevertheless, they are now virtually restricted to the poorest areas since digital access has rapidly grown in Brazil.

In general, lanhouses have now been transformed into shops for printing documents and computer repair (Tavares, 2015). A quick Google search for lanhouses in the densely-populated Copacabana (a middle- and lower-middle class borough in the city of Rio) in January 2017 lists not more than eight lanhouses. In the poor areas, nevertheless, they are often the only means of general access to the Internet and are still used as places for youth socialization and entertainment; such is the case of the lanhouse studied in this chapter. Lanhouses are in general poorly furnished with a few computers, but above all, packed with people playing collective video games, using the social networks and MSN Messenger, and socializing at very low cost.

Lanhouses may therefore be understood as a new kind of ‘socio-space of interactivity and sociability, which shapes a new social reality into a new space of relationship’ (Santos Filho, 2006, p. 3). Such socio-space of interaction accounts for the new dynamics of globalized social life that is more and more constructed by the flows of semiotic digital practices. Social life is being produced beyond the usual well-defined or conventional meanings about who we are at schools, churches and families. In the lanhouse, because of the continual mobility of translocal meanings, there is more room for contradiction and for the enactment of creative and alternative performances of who we can be or become.

The narratives that constitute gender and sexuality performativities in the aforementioned lanhouse in Rio de Janeiro constitute the central focus of this study, concentrating on a group of habitués. This group included females and males who could have access to the cyber world in the lanhouse through a very low rate charged per hour (0.70 USD) and who often used it as a socialization arena. At weekends, the front-desk attendant frequently organized what they called ‘the night turn’: a sort of nightclub event from Saturday 11:00 pm until Sunday morning with special computer use fee deals, dance, drinks and food. Their get-together produced social occasions in which digital and face-to-face encounters got entangled, promoting different socialization practices, other than playing network games on the Internet. Connecting people, making friends, dating, sharing, gossiping, listening to music, dancing, singing, experiencing desire and so forth are examples of some of the actions performed in such ephemeral meetings. Despite their fleetingness, through repetition across several semiotic events, they created a sense of bonding.

In the following section, we start by exploring meaning-making in the contemporary world, a scenario in which cosmopolitanism-from-above and cosmopolitanism-from-below intersect. We then introduce

a semiotic-scalar view of discourse that may account for intensified text mobility intertwining micro and macro domains through different scaling processes.

As one of the central features of the interactions in the lanhouse in focus is the particular semiotic mobilization of a sense of gender and sexuality performativities about who participants are amidst the translocal meanings they experience there, we proceed by arguing that such performativities are better explained if understood through queer theories and scaling processes when participants make recourse to narrative performances.

Finally, we analyze ethnographically generated data (through participant observation, interviews and audio-recorded interactions), which is a crucial mode of sociolinguistic investigation because of the access it provides to meaning-making in practice. To zoom in on the data, we concentrate on narrative performances and scaling activity that call into question habitual genders and sexualities performativities and vigilance techniques of 'identity' borders. In so doing, we show how social life is scaled in 'the periphery of globalization' or in a cosmopolitanism-from-below process, an analytical move that reconstructs the center-periphery dynamics in a non-dichotomous light.

### **Toward a Semiotic-Scalar View of Discourse in Globalized Times**

Globalization and the profusion of contradictory meanings it produces have helped to question long-established traditional certainties about social life in many quarters by drawing attention to different ways of living, of being human, of desiring, etc. (Appadurai, 2001; Bauman, 1998). In such a world, local life is said to be constantly under attack by cosmopolitanism-from-above since interaction with multiple discourses on the web may transform local discourses by making one live across different timespace scales in a translocal world. Contrastively, it has been argued (Santos, 2000; Sousa Santos, 2008) that the voices of those in the so-called periphery of our cities are the ones that could present unique insights and agency from the perceived margins of globalization, where translocality is more and more lived intensely through what may be called cosmopolitanism-from-below. To investigate possible semantic effects of globalization on the lives of 'periphery-situated' people, we make recourse to a semiotic-scalar view of discourse which, problematizing cemented binary oppositions, conceives discourse activity in a rather dynamic light, more in tune with the hasty rhythm of globalized exchanges.

In spite of our stated focus on 'identity' borders and, in fact, on translocal meanings (i.e. a border-crossing view of meaning construction), it goes without saying that periphery, as many other concepts in our extremely mobile world, is a term that is associated with the side of the border one inhabits, and the perspectives, discourses, levels of



awareness, understanding and agency such location may engender. Such perimeters are not fixed, though, and are most prone to change in our rapid times. One may be in the periphery of the world, for instance, and be actively involved with globalization processes, which are typical of central positionings. This kind of transit involves coming across a plethora of texts, discourses and sociohistorical repertoires whose uptake by social actors demands multidimensional semantic processes a traditional view of language cannot grasp. Ideas of mental decodification, linearity, transparency, neutrality, and universality – underlying Saussurean-based linguistic ideologies, for example – do not account for interaction fluxes by and large, let alone intensified contact with others (people, places, ideas, concepts, etc.). The frantic pace of contemporary life indeed disturbs generalizing remarks about language and communication attached to senses of inertia, immobility and abstraction.

Meaning effects are never linear, internal or neutral. Quite to the contrary, they orient to belief systems and, in that condition, are always evaluative, stratified and ideological, being materially crafted by the dialogue between slow historicity and the momentary historicity of interaction – interlaced contextual features according to a Bakhtinian approach (Bakhtin, 1981). Therefore, the production and understanding of specific kinds of social subjects, social positions, social voices, hierarchies, valorizing systems, actions and meanings have to do with ‘locally enacted’ historically loaded semiotic resources (Blommaert, 2015, p. 107), a situated scalar endeavor. That is to say that contexts are multilayered, simultaneously local and translocal, and always in progress. They are concrete semiotic achievements, not givens, fashioned through amalgamated signs, texts, and discourses whose shape is continuously malleable, and therefore, unpredictable. Perceived stability would thus be a transient effect.

Seen from this angle, the distinction between center and periphery can thus be said to be a contextualizing move that involves different senses of scale and aspects of social life, such as space, time, comparison, evaluation, politics, power and so forth. Space and time are fundamental contextualizing categories in an era in which senses of location and temporality change rapidly at the speed of a computer key. So are comparison, contrast and ranking systems – familiar procedures in forging sense-making. In this connection, we believe that the distinction between periphery and center – as a scale-making resource – functions in similar ways as other dichotomous tropes: local/global, macro/micro, male/female and heterosexual/homosexual, among many others. This categorizing is metaphorical, and as such, does scale work in that it is ‘inherently comparative (...) and relational’ (Carr & Lempert, 2016, pp. 17–18). Scaling analogizes, perspectivizes, categorizes and evaluates, forging perception in particular ways. The latter, when iterated over time and persisting in the form of re-entextualizations, may crystallize specific views, producing the all-encompassing concepts that

orient social actors and construct specific viewpoints on people, contexts and events among which lie 'identity' labels (cultural, gendered and sexual, for example). Nevertheless, as entextualization encompasses both decontextualization and recontextualization in a new communicative environment (Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Blommaert & Rampton, 2016; Silverstein & Urban, 1996), it always enhances some level of transformation responding to aspects of novel circumstances (i.e. new interlocutors, signs, co-texts etc.). Put differently, contexts cannot be taken for granted or ontologized; neither can scales.

Besides being simultaneously semiotic and discursive practices, contextualization and scaling activities are the outcome of indexical rather than referential actions. The linguistic and nonlinguistic signs they mobilize do not refer to objects in the world; they refer to chained textual actions that index sociohistorical meanings intertwined with ideological belief systems. This is why, analytically, it is possible to project a nexus – an indexical one – between the resources employed at any moment of a particular performance, sociohistorical voices and stratification, therefore connecting personhood, timespace and value dimensions (Blommaert & De Fina, 2016). Approached from this viewpoint, what is recognizable as a bounded entity we are used to naming 'identity' is in fact played out and intrinsically shaped by scalar, and, contextual, organization (Carr & Lempert, 2016), a process in which contingency, chance and stabilities intersect.

In a reckless world in which frames of reference no longer hold true, we believe we need to observe how scales materialize in situated semiotic practices at large, especially when confronted with the evanescence and dispersal characterizing 'identity' enactments and entextualization processes on the crossroads of face-to-face and web encounters. As stated above, we have tackled this goal by electing a specific angle of observation: the negotiation of gender and sexuality performativities in narrative actions. In the remainder of this chapter we approach this both theoretically and analytically, by articulating a performative and a scalar view of 'identity'.

## **Scaling Gender and Sexuality Performativities**

The view of gender and sexuality as performativity revolutionized theoretical approaches to 'identity' at the same time that it had a tremendous impact on traditional feminist theories and political activism. Based, among other authors, on Austin's theory of speech act as action and Derrida's proposal that language use is always performative, Butler (1990) argues that gender/sexuality is likewise something we do in the world through discourse. When we do gender/sexuality, we describe who we are when doing it, bringing about particular performative meaning effects about 'who we are'. What is interesting in this perspective is that 'there is no "being" behind doing' (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 45) but textual reflexes of bodily discursive actions.

The doer, so to speak, comes about performatively in the very process of doing gender and sexuality corporally discursively. The relevance of this kind of theorizing is that it did away with any sense of ‘identity’ reality at the core of well-known binary constructions – men and women, homosexual and heterosexual, for example. It is easy to understand, therefore, how such a perspective threatened (and still does!) essentialist ideas about who we are, particularly biological deterministic views and political essentialist activist movements (traditional feminist movements, for example). What a performativity proposal does is to argue for political activism that does not affirm any clear grounds for what/who we are, indicating that we are always enacting otherness<sup>2</sup> here and now.

That is not to say, as Butler (1990) reminds us, that we do not act under socially sanctioned regulatory frames but that these frames can be in principle flouted since they vary in time and space – although one may have to account for possible local meaning expectations. It is in the doing that performativity effects count as particular genders and sexualities. However, in spite of their dynamic facet, the repetition/iteration of these performativity effects end up constructing a sense of substance (a result of what was referred to above as meaning crystallization) to what is in fact fiction.

Such a theoretical position has informed queer theories (e.g. Halberstam, 2011; Sullivan, 2003), which challenge the omnipresent so-called ‘heterosexual matrix’ (Butler, 1990, p. 5) against which our genders and sexualities have been historically and institutionally evaluated and surveilled. Dissidence from this matrix brings about a symbolic order, which understands life as continually in the making performatively, not only transgressing given sexual and gender binarisms perceived as static but also prompting us to doubt any solidified binary understanding of who we are. Queer theorizing thus opens the ground for actually inventing novel meaning effects about who we can be. Accordingly, queer theories have also drawn attention to how gender and sexuality have to be considered intersectionally with race, social class, nationality, ethnicity, etc. (Barnard, 2002), which makes our performativities even more unstable.

Such instability is further enhanced when we understand that the narrative performances through which we mobilize the potentially infinite discursive effects about who we are or can be depend on how others will make sense of our stories. Although narrative research has traditionally explored the role that more canonical narratives in interaction have in constructing who we are (e.g. Thornborrow & Coates, 2005), more contemporary research (Georgakopoulou, 2007) has further emphasized this role of narratives by drawing attention to how ‘small narratives’ in interaction organize the meanings about who we are here and now.

In this chapter, as above discussed, we also want to argue that such meanings are scaled when we frictionally operate on micro (local) and macro (historical-ideological) levels. This operation may be a way of understanding how we do our genders and sexualities by forging particular

sign arrangements. We scale meanings by contextually indexing comparisons, evaluations, time, space, positionings, predications etc., which makes it possible to account for a scalar view of gender and sexuality performativities. In our times of accelerated meanings in flux, it is paramount that in sociolinguistic research, we understand language as a scale-making semiotic resource, whose meaning-effects are contingent and continually in the making. This is a way of theoretically accounting for both scale semiotic theory and gender and sexuality performativities within the same framework. In the next section, we use this perspective to analyze how participants in the lanhouse do gender and sexuality performativities.

### **Gender and Sexuality Performativities in the ‘Periphery’**

In line with the theories discussed above, we approach data generated ethnographically by Thayse Guimarães in 2009, in a seven-month fieldwork period in the lanhouse in focus (Guimarães, 2009). She spent a total of 52 hours there, observing sixteen habitués who had finished secondary education or were about to leave elementary education in state schools in Rio de Janeiro and who identified themselves with a variety of gender/sexual performativities (bisexual, gay, lesbian and heterosexual). Their age range was quite wide (from 15 to 29). Due to the scope of the present chapter, in the data analyses below, we will concentrate on the performances of only four participants: Douglas (20, male, bisexual, secondary school graduate), Mara, Fábía and Mila (15, females, heterosexual, still finishing elementary school). Although they have been or are still being educated in Rio de Janeiro state schools, which have been for a long time now generally associated with low educational results and have normally catered for the poor, it is noteworthy how the participants use the lanhouse as a cosmopolitan socialization arena for access to discourses that are not usually at their disposal in their everyday institutional lives (school, family, religion etc.) on the margins.

Our analytical aim is to generate insights into how participants scale genders and sexualities in (trans)local narrative performances. We start by considering narrative performances which, through scaling work, question the coherence between gender and sexuality. We then tackle small stories that shake calcified views of femininities and vigilance strategies concerning the transit between gender borders. We pay close attention to entextualization-in-interaction, i.e. the repetition of resources and the indexical meanings they afford, a process in which habitual ‘identity’ claims and more creative self-and-other ascriptions cohabit.

### **Boys Will Be Boys?**

The first two sets of data below are part of an interview conducted in the lanhouse by Thayse Guimaraes with Douglas, one of the habitués.

They constitute Douglas' narrative performance for Thayse, in which Douglas brings his gender/sexuality performativities into being. He engages himself with a scale exercise in which he, by reflexively entextualizing category-bound practices (concerning masculinity), simultaneously reenacts and breaks traditional expectations between gender and sexuality. In his recontextualized performances, a body gendered in a particular way does not have to follow a given sexual trajectory. Such a body, always engaged in repetition-transformation, may inaugurate novel routes when enacting sexuality: a perspective that is quite in line with queer theorizing as stated above and which is quite contrary to traditional discourse effects about what bodies can bring about.

*Sequence 8.1*<sup>3</sup> 'We start relationships here'

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- 01 Douglas Many things go on in this lanhouse! Li::ke many people start  
 02 relationships in this lanhouse.  
 03 Thayse Do you [know...  
 04 Douglas [This week we've met a boy here in the lanhouse. It's juicy  
 05 gossip,right! @@@ He::y guys edit that!@@@ We met here  
 and he  
 06 kinda hit on me, but nothing came of it... we always meet  
 people  
 07 here! We start relationships here, we make friends here... I've  
 08 dated a girl here, once. I was re [turning from school...  
 09 Thayse [a girl?  
 10 Douglas A girl! I was returning from school... I was at the lanhouse, I  
 11 was on the Internet. I wasn't even looking at her! I don't like  
 12 *amapoas* at all! *Amapoa* means woman in ['Brazilian  
 Portuguese'] gay  
 13 talk, you know. The thing is the girl was nice and stuff...  
 and  
 14 she added me to MSN... she li::ke glanced at my computer  
 screen,  
 15 you know, and then added me! And then we started to get  
 to know  
 16 each other and then started texting. So I thought li::ke she's  
 17 nice and cute. Soon afterwards we started dating... we  
 dated. The  
 18 problem was she was a regular here at the lanhouse, you  
 know?! So  
 19 it didn't work cause when I was with her I tried not to camp it  
 20 up, you know?! LIKE A FAGGOT! (...) in the lanhouse (...)  
 we play  
 21 Beyonce:, we dance... we play Cristina Aguilera...we sing::  
 then  
 22 it didn't work@@@ our affair came to an end..@@@ we split  
 up.  
 23 Thayse When did that happen? Has it been long?  
 24 Douglas It's been like 2 years... I guess! (...)
-

The first scale work that is actually pervading the entire narrative is space. Space is carved by indexes such as 'here' and 'the lanhouse' (repeated several times) that construct the lanhouse in opposition to the outside world ('school' and other places) as a social arena in which the queer sexualities Douglas enacts manage to bypass social control. The lanhouse is further scaled in terms of the social actions that qualify this space: 'Many things go on in this lanhouse' (line 1), 'Many people start relationships in this lanhouse' (lines 01–02), 'We always meet people here' (lines 06–07), 'we make friends here' (line 07). With the further scale of quantity embedded in these social actions, the lanhouse is scaled up. Thaise is then oriented to the plurality of events (i.e. the grandeur of events) in the lanhouse.

Douglas starts then by entextualizing his narrative around two different poles of his sexual attraction: a boy and a girl. This sexual mobility that queers his performativities is brought into the story world right from the beginning and will continue until the next section when the narrative comes to the end. He qualifies rather emphatically his telling about his first pole – the boy who 'kinda hit on him' – as 'juicy gossip' (lines 04–05). The use of the Portuguese word for 'juicy gossip', i.e. *bafão*, a Brazilian Portuguese gay slang item for 'gay gossip', positions Douglas as a member of the 'gay community' since he is familiar with an emic sign. Laughter here also indexes his awareness of the use of the slang term for 'gay gossiping'. Further, when he jokingly and emphatically asks for the gossip to be edited (line 05), he is bringing to bear his metapragmatic awareness of the interview genre in which he is engaged. He is as such predicating the very communicative event in which his performativities are enacted. Next, however, Douglas disruptively moves to a different pole: 'I have dated a girl here, once' (line 07–08). Therefore, the sexual world he scales around himself oscillates around sexual desire that does not have a definite and clear direction. Such alternation scaling takes Thaise by surprise, which is indexed by her questioning him ('a girl?', line 09) and by interrupting the flow of Douglas's speech. Douglas also brings up a time scale, by projecting backward the time when he dated the girl ('once', line 08), which he will confirm further along ('It's been like 2 years... I guess!', line 24). Douglas's narrative performance suggests a chronotopic vision of sexuality, one that is dependent on interactional encounters in particular timespace configurations rather than on essential constituents of the body.

Douglas goes on telling the story by confirming he dated a girl 'at the lanhouse' (line 10), indexing the same space scale as above. Next, however, he brings in a further space scale by placing himself on the fluid Internet world ('I was on the Internet', line 11) when the girl saw him. He organizes the way he met the girl by qualifying himself as someone who was picked up by the girl: 'I wasn't even looking at her!' This is so because '[He] [does]n't like *amapoas* at all! *Amapoa* means woman

in [Brazilian Portuguese] gay talk, you know.’ (lines 12–13). Again he positions himself as someone who is a member of the ‘gay community’ by using an emic term, orienting as such the interviewer to his seesaw sexuality. He goes on categorizing the girl ‘as nice and stuff’, which is a scale he uses to present the reason why he accepted to date her. This categorizing is again repeated further along in the narrative (‘So I thought li::ke she’s nice and cute’, lines 16–17) so as to fashion this other pole of his performativity. He goes on describing the digital world in/through which they met (‘she li::ke glanced at my computer screen, you know, and then added me!’ and ‘then started texting’, line 16). Such a description qualifies and organizes such elements of their translocal lifeworlds in the periphery.

Douglas moves on to explain to Thayse the reason why their dating came to an end. He signals that when he was with her he tried not ‘to camp it up’, but because she was a ‘regular in the lanhouse’, it was impossible not to be ‘A FAGGOT’ in this context (lines 18–20). He again positions himself as gay by using emic signals (‘to camp it up’ and ‘A FAGGOT’), which do not seem to produce the meaning effects they would have outside the lanhouse since ‘in the lanhouse (...) we play Beyonce::, we dance... we play Cristina Aguilera...we sing:: then it didn’t work@@@’ (lines 20–22). Douglas re-entextualizes gay diva discourses about Beyonce and Cristina Aguilera, predicating himself as someone who is familiar with these translocal discourses about the gay dance scenes that reverberate in the lanhouse among the habitués. Laughter indexes his awareness of the unusualness of dating a woman and being ‘a faggot’, probably for Thayse. In other words, he signals his consciousness of the fluid scale forging his gender/sexuality performativities.

Sequence 8.2 closes the narrative when Thayse asks Douglas to evaluate how the lanhouse habitués reacted to his girlfriend (line 29). He replies that they did not say anything to her, implying perhaps that they did not find his oscillatory sexuality uncommon, since it was not the target of nasty remarks or gossip. The lanhouse is thus scaled up as a

*Sequence 8.2* ‘Oh boy, fuck! I’m gonna cheat on her with her cousin?’

- 
- |    |         |   |
|----|---------|---|
| 29 | Thayse  | But have the people over here at the lanhouse said anything to her? |
| 30 | Douglas | No:: but there was a cousin of hers who was gay too! He used to     |
| 31 |         | come over here and then there was a thing going on between the two  |
| 32 |         | of us. I thought like Oh boy, fuck! I’m gonna cheat on her with     |
| 33 |         | her cousin? No, I can’t, you know?! Then... I think he ended up     |
| 34 |         | mentioning it to her. Of course he told her! “Oh boy, that          |
| 35 |         | boyfriend of yours was having eyes for me and stuff”. But we are    |
| 36 |         | friends nowadays. Our affair didn’t work out!                       |
| 37 | Thayse  | She was not bothered, right?  |
| 38 | Douglas | No::  |
-



more cosmopolitan place, in the sense that it seems to be projected as a less parochial context where people mind their own businesses. Douglas embeds another narrative event into the story he is telling which again brings up the repetitive variation of his fancying another boy while still dating the girl (lines 30–32). The only difference is that this time the boy was the girl’s cousin. Douglas indicates that the cousin ended up telling her about their possible affair. He actually quotes the cousin’s words (‘Oh boy, that boyfriend of yours was having eyes for me and stuff’, lines 34–35), which adds epistemic access to his narrative performance. Further, Douglas replies to Thayse that the girl was not bothered by that event and that they are friends now (lines 37–38). Again the lanhouse habitués are forged out as living their sexualities in a continual becoming. He does so through scale work that finds no coherence between gender and sexuality, and thus, is quite distant from the so-called ‘heterosexual matrix’, above mentioned.

### Girls Will Be Girls?

In this section, we turn to talk that puts at stake the so-called gender order. The conversation entextualized below, and organized in three consecutive sequences, was recorded inside the lanhouse, when a group of three girls (Mara, Flávia and Mila) was chatting about information that kept popping up on Orkut<sup>4</sup> pages – theirs and other people’s. The central axis of analysis is talk triggered by fleeting texts on the computer screen and the scalar intersubjective work they occasion.

Differently from Douglas’ more prototypical narrative above, Mara’s first utterance in line 01 (‘I guess I’m going to delete this’) frames a small story constituted by the projection of temporally ordered future actions (Georgakopoulou, 2007); she is going to delete the message in her Orkut profile, look for another message, and substitute the old one. These

#### *Sequence 8.3* ‘As if I were a well-behaved girl!’

- 
- |    |        |  |
|----|--------|--|
|    |        | (referring to the message on her Orkut profile) <sup>5</sup>       |
| 01 | Mara   | I guess I’m going to delete this “good girls cry, good girls don’t |
| 02 |        | say four-letter-words, and whatnot” I’m gonna delete that!         |
| 03 | Flávia | Why?   |
| 04 | Mara   | As if I were a well-behaved girl!                                  |
| 05 | Girls  | @@@  |
| 06 | Flávia | INDEED!<br>(addressing Mila)                                       |
| 07 | Mara   | This is way too well behaved! Try to help me find something more   |
| 08 |        | interesting in another profile... LOOK that one is awesome: “if    |
| 09 |        | we end up apart from each other, I don’t give a damn!”             |
| 10 | Flávia | You say it! hu:: that one seems interesting-that one seems         |
|    |        | cooler.  |
| 11 |        | Did you like it??  |
-

projections invoke different ‘bids for co-construction’ (Georgakopoulou, 2007, p. 49), direct and indirect ones. The former is signaled by Mara’s sharing the first projected action with the girls (lines 01–02), whereas the latter (lines 07–08) is indicated by a straightforward request for co-participation (‘Try to help me find something more interesting in another profile’).

In her proposal, Mara entextualizes a recurrent gendered plot (‘good girls cry, good girls don’t say four-letter-words, and whatnot’). The scheme is so well known through historical iteration that mentioning only two of its constitutive elements is enough for the girls to recognize the gender matrix it indexes and all the other elliptical don’ts and must-haves, the use of ‘whatnot’ implies. However constant this kind of narrative may be, there is a call for its renarrativization in the interactional moment, as Mara seems not to identify with it anymore. Such a disidentification move – justified in line 04 through a reflexive comment (‘As if I were a well-behaved girl!’) and ratified by the group (lines 05–06) – orients the gender performances at play, away from the familiar plotline mentioned above. This is accomplished by the entextualization of another small story in line 09 (‘if we end up apart from each other, I don’t give a damn!’), which scorns both romantic narratives and the expected melancholy and suffering following heartbreaks. In the projected version, performances of disappointment and despair turn into sheer indifference, creating a new perspective on *lovelorn*.

The scale work embedded in such co-constructed performativities is noteworthy as it displays intense relational procedures. Firstly, the storytelling venture triggered by Mara’s Orkut profile – the opening page of many social platforms in which identity labor is central – was dependent on self-other dialogue. Secondly, the kind of identity-alterity contact the girls engaged in dealt with different timespace dimensions, interlacing shared historically gendered plots and more challenging ones, negotiated in the here-and-now of interaction. These macro-micro plots, as repertoires in friction, were weft by comparisons whose threads produced the rejection of persistent gendered discourses and regulatory conventions, like the one Mara’s original profile indexed. Finally, the fact that the intersubjective reconstruction was predicated positively by different evaluative-comparative signs (‘awesome’, ‘interesting’, ‘cooler’) and expressions (‘You say it!’) also helped the group to put forward new meaning effects with troubling potential. In the development of the conversation, this confronting performance is recontextualized in face of usual ‘border-crossing’ control strategies.

Flávia’s mother calls while the girls keep interacting with different Orkut profiles and the messages left there. Mara’s strong negative reaction to it (‘TURN OFF THAT PHONE!’), emphasized in different ways (by the use of the imperative form, the increase in tone of voice and the deictic ‘that’), brings about a sequence of chained stories materialized in scalar activities based on the contrast between the lanhouse and their

## Sequence 8.4 'No way I'll keep chatting on MSN at home like that!'

- 
- (addressing Flávia)
- 20 Mara Check what they're saying... TURN OFF THAT PHONE!
- 21 Flávia I have to talk to my [mom...]
- 22 Mara [It's like that now, your mother keeps
- 23 calling you!
- 24 Flávia She's on my tail! I guess she thinks I::'m hiding something from
- 25 her... Last week, she fucking kept checking who I was texting on
- 26 MSN. I'm lucky that she doesn't understand very well what I
- write!
- 27 Mara What a pain! Next she'll show up here!
- 28 Flávia No-no:: here is OK!
- 29 Mila My mom is also a little para [noid like that! @@@
- 30 Mara [NO WAY I'LL KEEP CHATTING ON MSN AT
- 31 HOME LIKE THAT! It doesn't work, I'd rather do it here! My
- brother
- 32 has already read my MSN chats several times. And he-he is a
- 33 snitch, he's told my mother that I was going out with Fábio...
- 34 that's why I'm not inviting you over to my house, you-know
- cause
- 35 if we are on the Internet my mother won't stop nagging us.
- 36 Flávia Yeah my brother is like that too. FUNNY, ISN'T IT?! As to my
- 37 brother my mother-my mother doesn't give a damn!
- 

homes. On the one hand, the family scale invokes the realm of normativity and regulation – social phenomena indexed by the use of deontic modality ('I have to talk to my mom...'), by signs indicating repetitive activity and performances ('It's like that now, your mother keeps calling you!' and 'She's on my tail!'), and by the recontextualization of two surveillance narrative (lines 24–26 and 30–35). All these elements compose a somber scenario of confinement and control. The lanhouse domain, quite on the contrary, suggests liberation, circulation and trespassing.

The construction of scalar distinctions between the home and the lanhouse becomes even more concrete in the stories narrated by Flávia and Mara. Developing similar themes (rule-breaking), they project defiant performances that recontextualize both patrolling routines at home ('she fucking kept checking who I was texting on MSN' and 'My brother has already read my MSN chats several times. And he-he is a snitch, he's told my mother that I was going out with Fábio') and their cunning violation ('she doesn't understand very well what I write!' and 'NO WAY I'LL KEEP CHATTING ON MSN AT HOME LIKE THAT! It doesn't work, I'd rather do it here!'). The analogies set in motion in the very creation of scalar perspective ('My mom is also a little paranoid like that!' and 'Yeah my brother is like that too') indicate the sharedness and recognition – an important facet of conjointly produced narrative performances (Georgakopoulou, 2007) – of a solidified patriarchal ideology according to which (1) gender boundaries should be obeyed and protected from transgressions by a more empowered family member (mother or brother in the

case at hand) and (2) males are ‘free’ whereas females have to undergo constant scrutiny. However, by mode of comparison, the girls semiotize the lanhouse as a different context, one in which they can come up against these ideological orientations, in spite of their sociocultural recurrence over time. This scaling technique delineating two distinct areas in the same neighborhood is indexed by the negative language predicating life in the ‘domestic enclave’ (‘What a pain!/my mother won’t stop nagging us’) and the assertive repetition of the deictic ‘here’ (‘Next she’ll show up here!, here is OK!’ and ‘I’d rather do it here’), indicating a sort of ‘free’ zone. As scalar claims act performatively, the cartographic metaphor the home/the lanhouse projects the girls as agentive subjects that find a region, so to speak, where the constancy of the ‘system’ can be hacked.

### **Some Musings on the Center-Periphery Binary**

The narrative performances in the stories above presented gender displays of masculinity and femininity that blurred scalar distinctions between well-bounded gender/sexuality territories. They indicated that although the lanhouse habitués are well aware of traditional social rules and socially stratified meanings, they were able to perform scalar confrontational stances and juxtapose typified voices and contrasting ones.

Another feature that deserved our analytical attention was the semiotic-scalar labor projecting the home/the school and the lanhouse as metaphorically contrasting environments of either incarcerating or liberating social experiences. This view of the lanhouse as a site for semiotic practices in which meaning mobility is intensified by rapid entextualizations/recontextualization of discourses, which are indexically pointed to by bringing micro and macro meaning-making phenomena into friction, has offered glimpses to the pragmatic functioning of the dynamic scaling activities participants rely on to construct meaning and more fluid ‘identity’ performativities.

Hence, we bring this chapter to an end by resorting to a scalarly inspired projection. The type of interpretative network and sociality constructed in the lanhouse in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro around computer screens may be said to be similar to the network Ginzburg (1976/1987) describes in relation to how a windmill in the 16th century was able to build a singular cosmivision, which defied many of the general crystallized religious presuppositions and performativities in vogue then. Such cosmivision was derived from his semiotic life around the few books which then made the circulation of specific discourses possible in his community. The complex scaling processes (temporal, spatial, categorical, qualifying, positional, quantifying, cartographic, etc.) around computer screens ‘lanhousers’ (or contemporary ‘lanmillers’) set in motion produce singular insights that destabilize solidly perceived grounds, which index the possibility of scalar mobility regardless

of where one is, whether in a central or peripheral location – a binary our study depicted as entwined social spheres, in a reciprocal rather than contrastive relationship.

## Appendix 1: Transcription conventions

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()	transcriber comment
[	simultaneous / overlapping talk
<u>underline</u>	emphatic stress
CAPS	loudness
,	continuous intonation
.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
!	end of intonation unit
:	lengthened sound
-	abrupt breaks
@@@	laughs
...	hesitation
(...)	edited text

---

## Appendix 2: Data

### Sequence 8.1 ‘A gente começa relacionamento aqui’

---

- Douglas Muitas coisas acontecem nessa Lan House! Tipo:: muitas pessoas começam relacionamento nessa Lan House.
- Thayse Você conhe[ce...
- Douglas [Essa semana nós conhecemos um garoto aqui na Lan House. É bafão, viu! @@@ Aí:: edita isso, tá gente!@@@ Nós conhecemos aqui e ele ficou meio que sinalizando algo,mas não deu em nada... a gente sempre conhece pessoas aqui! A gente começa relacionamento aqui, a gente começa amizade aqui... eu já namorei uma menina aqui, uma vez. Eu tava vol[tando da escola...
- Thayse [Uma menina?
- Douglas Uma menina! Eu tava voltando da escola... eu tava na Lan House, tava na Internet.Eu nem tava olhando para ela! Eu não gosto de amapoa mesmo! Amapoa é mulher na linguagem dos veados, tá? Só que a garota era legal e tal... e ela me adicionou no MSN... olhou assim:: para minha tela discretamente, né! Aí e tal, me adicionou! Aí começamos a pegar amizade e daí começamos a fazer contato. Aí eu pensei assim: pô:: ela é legal e bonitinha. Logo depois, começamos a namorar... eu namorei com ela. Só que ela frequentava muito a Lan House aqui, sabe?! Aí não dava muito certo, porque quando eu tava com ela eu tentava não dá pinta, né?! DE VEADO!(...) eu tô na Lan House (...) a gente bota o cd da Beyonce::, a gente dança... a gente bota o cd da Cristina Aguilera... a gente canta:: aí não deu muito certo @@@ a gente terminou... @@@ acabamos nos separando!
- Thayse Quando isso aconteceu? Tem muito tempo?
- Douglas Tem uns dois anos... eu acho!(...)
-

*Sequence 8.2* ‘Porra, caraca! Vou trair ela com o primo dela?’

---

Thayse Mas as pessoas aqui da Lan comentaram alguma coisa para ela?  
Douglas Não:: mas tinha um primo dela que era gay também! Ele frequentava aqui, aí começou a rolar alguma coisa entre eu e ele. Assim... eu pensei assim: Porra, caraca! Vou trair ela com o primo dela? Não, não posso, entendeu?! Aí... mas acho que ele acabou comentando alguma coisa para ela. Claro que ele falou pra ela! “Pô cara, aquele seu namorado estava me olhando assim, coisa e tal”. Só que hoje em dia a gente é amigo. Nada a ver!

Thayse Ela não se importou, não, né!  
Douglas Não::

---

*Sequence 8.3* ‘Até parece que sou boa menina’

---

Mara (referindo-se a mensagem no seu perfil do Orkut)  
Acho que vou tirar isso daqui “boas meninas choram, boas meninas não fala palavrão, etc e tal” Vou tirar isso!

Flávia Por quê?  
Mara Até parece que sou boa menina!  
Meninas @@@  
Flávia FATO!  
Mara (dirigindo-se à Mila)  
Isso tá muito comportadinho! Vê se me ajuda a encontrar algo mais interessante em outro perfil... OLHA esse que show: “se no fim não estivermos juntos, dane-se!”

Flávia Fala aí! Hum::, parece interessante esse- esse parece mais legal. Você gostou?  
Mila Olha isso aqui! (apontando para o computador) Elas estão brigando pelo topo dele!  
Flávia O quê?  
Mila Olha! As meninas estão brigando pelo topo do namorado daquela menina que te falei...Olha! estão se xingando! Parecem que disputam o carinho!

---

*Sequence 8.4* ‘Tá maluco que fico conversando no MSN assim lá em casa!’

---

Mara (dirigindo-se a Flávia)  
Olha só o que elas estão falando... LARGA ESSE TELEFONE!

Flávia Preciso falar com minha [mãe...  
Mara [Agora é assim, sua mãe toda hora fica te ligando!  
Flávia Ela tá no meu pé! Acho que ela pensa que tô:: escondendo alguma coisa dela... Pô:: semana passada, toda hora ia ver com quem tava conversando no MSN. Sorte é que ela não entende muito bem o que escrevo!

Mara Pô que saco! Daqui a pouco vai querer vir aqui também!  
Flávia Não-Não:: aqui tá tudo bem!  
Mila Minha mãe também tem umas paranói[as dessa! @@@  
Mara [EH:: TÁ MALUCO QUE FICO  
CONVERSANDO NO MSN ASSIM LÁ EM CASA! Nem dá, prefiro aqui! Meu irmão já leu meu histórico do MSN várias vezes. E ele-ele é muito dedo duro, contou para minha mãe que eu tava saindo com o Fábio... por isso nem tô chamando vocês, pra gente ir lá em casa. Sabe-sabe, porque se a gente tiver na Internet minha mãe vai ficar toda hora me perturbando.

Flávia É:: meu irmão também é assim. ENGRAÇADO, NÉ?! Com meu irmão minha mãe- minha mãe nem liga!

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## Notes

- 1 Lanhouses (local area networks) were first popular in Asia before they became quite a phenomenon in Brazil in the richest urban areas although now they are very popular in the favelas or poorer neighbourhoods (Lemos & Martini, 2009).
- 2 We are not claiming that in many circumstances essentialism does not play a strategic role in defending particular ways of being (such as LGBTQIA and blacks and their intersectionalities) which have been historically facing social injustice or physical attack in a persistent modernity which has hidden alterities. We are however arguing for the need of considering the political gains of thinking otherwise along the lines of a view of the social world which is anti-essentialist, always performatively constructed and enacted here and now in a continual process of becoming.
- 3 The notations used to indicate prosody and paralanguage were adapted from Atkinson and Heritage (1984) and can be found in Appendix 1. The original data in Portuguese can be found in Appendix 2.
- 4 Orkut was a social network created by Orkut Büyükkökten (a Google former software engineer) in 2004. It was very popular both in Brazil and India, but was shut down by Google in 2014. Orkut profile archives are however still available (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orkut>, accessed in June, 2017).
- 5 'Profile' was the initial page of Orkut in which registered users fill in information concerning three categories: social/ professional/ personal.

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# 9 Expanding Marginality

## Linguascaping a Transcarpathian Spa in South-Western Ukraine

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### Introduction

According to Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes (2013, pp. 3–4), peripheral areas with distance to the power and economic centers and nonstandard and anti-normative phenomena can become centralized in certain areas such as in tourism, which can also benefit from their particular local cultural politics and policies that at times go against established norms. This chapter examines how multiple language ideologies are displayed through the ‘linguascape’ (Heller, Jaworski, & Thurlow, 2014, p. 432) of a contemporary multilingual tourist attraction in a peripheral region of Ukraine. That is, we explore how language is conceptualized in the Transcarpathian Oblast of Ukraine, and why and how some languages are used and others are absent in the realm of tourism and how these processes contribute to the escaping of the region’s marginality.

The Transcarpathian Oblast (Закарпатська область, also ‘Zakarpattia’ or ‘Zapakarpattya’) is the most western administrative region of Ukraine, bordering Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania (see Figure 9.1). The oblast has a population of nearly 1.2 million inhabitants, and it is bordered by the Carpathian Mountains to the northeast, and the Tisza River to the south. The mountains, rivers (e.g. the source of the Tisza), lakes, old castles and spas made the region a tourist destination as early as the 19th century.

From the early 20th century to the present day, Transcarpathia has belonged to several states. With each change of state affiliation, the status of what counts as a minority and a majority language has also changed (see Csernicskó & Laihonen, 2016). Transcarpathia is also often mentioned as a region that is ‘unusual within Ukraine, with relatively high percentages of ethnic minorities who speak their eponymous language’ (Dickinson, 2010, p. 53). Among the regions of Ukraine, Transcarpathia is peripheral (see Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013) from several viewpoints. To begin with, it has remained largely unknown and essentially invisible for sociolinguistics. Beyond the general trend in current research to focus on metropolises, it is still peculiar, for instance, that Pavlenko



Figure 9.1 Transcarpathia in Ukraine (© István D. Molnár, [www.naturalearthdata.com](http://www.naturalearthdata.com)).

(e.g. 2008, 2009) in her works often deals with different Ukrainian regions and cities, yet Transcarpathia is never mentioned. This may be regarded as evidence that Transcarpathia does not fit the general models of explanation of the post-Soviet space, or Ukraine either.

This chapter looks at language ideologies in a multilingual space presently caught between Western European visions of modernity and post-Soviet transition. Language ideologies typically serve the interests of certain groups, whereas other groups get marginalized by dominant language ideologies (Kroskrity, 2000). Transcarpathia has throughout its history played the role of a tiny geographical periphery of empires and nation states. Distant capitals (Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Moscow and Kyiv) have all drawn their language policies on the languages in education and administration in Transcarpathia (see Csernicsekó & Laihonen, 2016 for details). Such policies have their foundation on national principles, which most often give little respect to local perspectives and sociolinguistic realities. Batt (2002, p. 157) summarizes the economic perspective on Transcarpathia as follows: ‘[I]t has always been the most remote, inaccessible, economically backward region of whatever state it has belonged to.’ Politically, the region has had little say to its affairs or national matters either, even though the dominant powers have all recognized the region’s particularity around European historical turning points (1918–1919, 1938–1940, 1991–1992) by promising autonomy for the region; however it has never been put into practice (Magocsi, 2015).

From the viewpoint of its hybrid linguistic formation (Csernicsekó & Laihonen, 2016; Dickinson, 2010), the speakers of different vernaculars in Transcarpathia have been marginalized, on the one hand, by what

Pennycook (2012, p. 18) has called the western European ‘normative vision of modernity’ where purity and coherence are expected from ‘nations, languages and cultures’. On the other hand, taking a post-Soviet perspective, Bilaniuk (in Dickinson, 2010, p. 54) describes the legacy of Soviet language ideology as an emphasis on purity and correctness in language perhaps driven by the ideology of imposing a strong central authority on the peoples and languages of the former Eastern Bloc, but without the emphasis of official monolingualism typical for Western Europe. The language spoken by the majority of the inhabitants is named Rusyn in other countries, where it has been officially recognized as a minority language (e.g. in Slovakia, Hungary and Poland), but in Transcarpathia, it has been officially categorized as dialectal Ukrainian since 1946.

Everyday language use in Transcarpathia is often devalued by speakers of standard Ukrainian and Rusyn speakers alike as ‘bad’ Ukrainian, consisting of isolated peripheral dialects ‘mixed’ with Hungarian, Polish and German expressions (e.g. Dickinson, 2010). In other words, Transcarpathia is a cultural and linguistic periphery both for its numerous minorities (e.g. Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Germans etc.) and its majority population, Rusyn, whose language and ethnicity has been integrated into Ukrainian after World War II. The concept of ‘superdiversity’ (Vertovec, 2010) has not yet been systematically applied to regions that belonged to the former Soviet Union. Due to its historical development, Transcarpathia has always been characterized by a high amount of diversity and it is nowadays certainly participating in processes of globalization. In this chapter, we will, however, mainly focus on digital forms of complexity that accompany Transcarpathian processes.

Thurlow and Jaworski (2010, p. 130) state that ‘tourism is de facto a quintessentially semiotic industry – a site of fierce cultural and symbolic production’. The study of language ideologies in touristic materials can shed light to why some languages are displayed, used in different functions or commodified (see Heller, Pujolar, & Duchêne, 2014) and why others have been removed (see Pavlenko, 2008) from different touristic spaces. Finally, the processes of change in language ideologies (see Silverstein, 1979) accompany most important political, cultural and economic transformations, such as the breakup of the Soviet Union and recent developments in contemporary Ukraine.

Peripheries often have the potentiality to move to focus with changes in perspective (Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013). In this chapter, we first look at contemporary representations of and discourses on Transcarpathia and its linguistic situation to show how the apparently ‘peripheral multilingualism’ (Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013, p. 6), that is, non-standard, devalued and deemed useless linguistic repertoires and practices, can be revalued and commodified in tourism as a cultural asset. Then we situate our study within current theories and sociolinguistic

methods of analyzing the intersection of language and tourism. In the empirical section, we ask how language is conceptualized in Transcarpathia through its representations both generally and specifically. For the latter, we consider the case of one tourist attraction, a recently designed and developed hot springs spa resort and hotel. In the final section, we discuss the implications of the findings for local inhabitants and their linguistic repertoires as well as to the opportunities and challenges for their linguistic practices to be revalued as valuable and useful.

### Contemporary Representations of Transcarpathia's Linguistic Situation

Before 1918, Transcarpathia belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary and to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The peace treaty that ended World War I ceded the region to Czechoslovakia. From 1938 to 1944, it was again a part of Hungary, after which it was annexed by the Soviet Union from Czechoslovakia in 1946. Since 1991, it has been part of an independent Ukraine. The Ukraine Today portal of the Rada (the Ukrainian parliament) states the following: 'No other oblast of Ukraine has such national diversity as does Zakarpattya: it is inhabited by representatives of 80 nationalities' (Rada, 2015). Regarding Transcarpathia, the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (2015) states that it 'has been for long a convenient junction between the countries of northern and southern, eastern and western Europe'. These passages suggest that in contemporary official Ukrainian discourses, diversity, borders and transnational mobility are connected to Transcarpathia. It is notable that official sources seem to even exaggerate the multiethnic and multilingual character of the region. In a closer reading of the number of so-called nationalities or ethnicities, it is difficult to come up with 80 different ones, at least in significant numbers of people. According to Thurlow and Jaworski (2010, p. 131), such an 'exaggeration of cultural differences' is typical for 'touristic representations of language(s)'. It is these representations to which we turn next.

*Lonely Planet's* online travel guide provides a global interpretation of Transcarpathia's 'otherness' (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010, p. 131). The guide describes the region in the following manner:

This corner of the world, where the Soviet Union once faded out and Europe took over, is a melting pot of Hungarian, Slovak, Ukrainian and Roma cultures and has a fascinating social mix. It's also the home of Ukraine's best red wines and most impenetrable dialects.

*(Lonely Planet, 2015)*

The *Lonely Planet* text also conceptualizes multiculturalism as consisting of certain named cultures. Here, however, the number of different

cultures is reduced to four from the previous 80 nationalities. As a metalinguistic commentary, *Lonely Planet* mentions the region's 'impenetrable dialects'. For the English-speaking reader, it might not be clear which dialects the text is referring to, even though from a western European ethnolinguistic nation-state worldview, Ukrainian dialects seems to be a safe assumption (cf. Dickinson, 2010). In addition, the *Lonely Planet*, in its English-only text, assumes a reader that is knowledgeable in Slavic languages and their regional varieties, knowledge which is most likely beyond the grasp of a typical reader of the travel guide (cf. Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010, p. 144).

The *Lonely Planet* passage suggests two conclusions. First, the linguistic diversity of Transcarpathia may be erased and diminished to a set of recognizable categories displaying widespread linguistic hierarchies. Second, even in the case of global English-only materials on Transcarpathia, metalinguistic touristic discourses go beyond the typical practices of mentioning a local language and commenting on the local inhabitants' competence (or lack thereof) in English (see Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010, p. 143).

### **Peripheral Tourism and Language(s)**

According to Thurlow and Jaworski (2010, p. 9), communication between tourism providers (hosts) and tourists is fundamental to the construction 'of the touristic experience, the meaning of culture and space, as well as to each other and their identities'. Kallen (2009), in turn, established that being a tourist is about breaking away from home and everyday routines. Language has a direct role in that process: 'The "foreign" language (...) offers an immediate sense of transcendence from the mundane, and a token of authenticity in the new surroundings' (Kallen, 2009, p. 271). Beyond having a break from everyday routines and finding authentic experiences, safety is also an important need for a tourist. According to Kallen (2009, p. 272), this need translates into the possibility of understanding and being understood at the tourist destination. From this point of view, the *Lonely Planet* description of Transcarpathia contains no assurances of linguistic safety for the English reader.

Kallen (2009, p. 274) also describes the touristic experience as 'the representation of the country or region'. Peripheral multilingual regions in Western Europe and Canada have been studied from the point of view of languages and tourism, most notably in a volume by Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes (2013) and in a special issue by Heller, Jaworski and Thurlow (2014). For instance, Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen (2014) describe how in Sámiland English as a touristic lingua franca, Finnish as the national language – and the language of most everyday local communication – and the Sámi languages as so-called authentic indigenous languages alternate during a touristic show. A common trait for the

Western European linguistic minorities investigated is that the use of a minority language is most often explained as a way to discursively construct authenticity through using a characteristically local code, which is always accompanied by a national language or lingua franca translation (see Moriarty, 2014). In this manner, authentic (local) and safe (global) touristic experiences (Kallen, 2009) are offered simultaneously.

Thurlow and Jaworski (2010, p. 14) state that their study was based on English-speaking British tourists. What is more, Heller, et al. (2014) propose a general model of understanding tourism as a part of the economic history of the West and its post-capitalist stage, thus restricting their investigation historically to Western Europe and North America. With regards to the nation-state, as Brubaker (2011) has suggested, a 'post-multinationalism' stage began after the collapse of the Soviet Union in countries such as Ukraine. That is, multicultural federations (the USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia) have been divided into smaller units, such as Ukraine, which have then begun nation-building enterprises. These efforts have in turn been encouraged by post-World War II Western European models of diversity management, which themselves are based on the hegemony of one language over the domains of politics, education, media and administration. From this backdrop, we can hypothesize that tourism and the role of languages in Eastern Europe will also divert from rather than converge with Western European development.

### **Tourism and Language(s) in the Post-Soviet Space**

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was famous for its tourism industry, and especially for its luxurious spas. In Transcarpathia, such past forms of luxury are still visible, especially in the architecture, but the mobility between different regions and countries has not been restored. In interviews that we conducted, local inhabitants recalled with nostalgia the period of workers' tourism during the Soviet era (1945–1991) as the time when everybody had the chance to travel in groups to Leningrad, Sochi and even to the Soviet Far East. The well-known Soviet restrictions to travel to the west were seldom mentioned. In Transcarpathia, the Soviet era came to an end in 1991 when Ukraine declared independence. Immediately afterward, the economy collapsed.

Pavlenko, in her discussion of Russian tourism (2015), found that the post-Soviet privatization of the economy in Russia quickly resulted in a new wealthy class interested in tourism. In Ukraine, however, a somewhat stable currency was established only later, around 1996. In Transcarpathia, the new forms of income have been based on informal forms of border trade, border transportation and seasonal work in European Union countries (see Csernicsekó & Laihonen, 2016).



There are few studies on tourism inside the post-Soviet space. However, Pavlenko (2015) has recently studied the touristic habits of Russians in the west. Furthermore, Muth (2015) and Marten, Ladziņa, Pošeiko, & Murinska (2013) have examined the post-Soviet Baltic States from the point of view of languages in tourism. According to Pavlenko (2008), Russian was removed from the post-Soviet space beyond Russia soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The removal included especially the ‘elimination of Russian from official paperwork, official communication, the state-sponsored media and public signage’ (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 282). However, as Pavlenko (2015, p. 4) indicates, at the same time a lot of ‘mid-market’ Russian tourists began to travel to the bordering regions where everyday competence of Russian is still common. Furthermore, Pavlenko (2015) establishes that Russian tourists typically spend a lot of money and seldom speak any language other than Russian. Accordingly, Marten, et al. (2013) describe how at Baltic touristic sites, Russian has been replaced by English on the surface level (e.g. in public signs, the names and webpages), but on the spot, Russian remains the lingua franca, and sometimes, even the language of communication between the local hosts. As Muth (2015) documents, in the case of the recent revival of the Lithuanian health tourism sector, Russian patients were targeted by capitalizing on the knowledge of Russian language and culture by nurses and doctors. This indicates a recent paradigmatic change from so-called de-Russification (i.e. Russian language removal) to a stage where western medical expertise is now advertised and provided in a touristic package that accommodates Russian linguistically as well as culturally (Muth, 2015). Ryzanova-Clarke (2014, p. 12) even posits that a reemergence of Russian beyond Russia is taking place due to its perceived transnational economic value.

## **Method and Data**

Our chapter examines the linguascope of a contemporary multilingual tourist attraction in Transcarpathia, next to the EU border. The linguascope denotes an extended notion of the linguistic landscape (Kallen, 2009), including all kinds of images, symbols and forms of interaction and discourse, spoken and written, included in tourism. In line with Kallen (2009, p. 274), in such discourses and interaction, the tourist often has the role of being addressed, being the audience or being an observer. He adds that the tourist can also shape the linguascope (Kallen, 2009, p. 274).

In this study, we follow the methodological strands of Heller, et al. (2014) by focusing on the discourses of tourism, readable in the linguistic landscape (e.g. Kallen, 2009) and online materials (e.g. Muth, 2015; Pavlenko, 2015), all of which we treat as manifestations of language

ideologies. In line with Heller, Jaworski and Thurlow (2014), we are interested in the semiotic (non)representations of cultures and languages in the tourism of a multilingual region. We also contribute to the discussion on the periphery-center relationship as conceptualized in Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes (2013).

As data we use touristic materials available in Transcarpathia and online. Ethnographic insights on Transcarpathia in this study are based on two sources: (1) long-term research by Csernicsekó, who is a researcher native to Transcarpathia and competent in Hungarian, Ukrainian and Russian (see e.g. Csernicsekó, 2013) and (2) the readings and numerous visits to the region by Laihonen, a foreign researcher competent in Hungarian, and especially, the one-month fieldwork carried out by him in two villages in November 2012. During this fieldwork, 40 interviews were carried out in Hungarian and approximately 1,000 photos were taken. For this chapter, all references to tourism in the data set were mapped and complementary data were gathered to find alternative perspectives and phenomena not included in the data. In the empirical section, we focus on multimodal materials from various sources, including the Internet, where we were especially searching for the linguistic practices and reviews of tourists that have visited Transcarpathia.

### **Language(s) in the Field: The Sociolinguistic Context**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, flows of migration and travel in general have changed their main directions from east to west. This change of direction is observable in the interviews with local people. In the past, study, work and (Soviet-type) tourism often included sojourns to the east, whereas now the target destinations are more often in the West. The spread of English is visible also in Transcarpathia as a major sign of the new western orientation. However, knowledge of Russian as a functional lingua franca still supersedes English, whereas English is now the lingua franca in the symbolic realm (see Pavlenko, 2009, p. 258). According to our experience, English is rarely of any help in getting by in Transcarpathia. Instead, knowledge of Ukrainian, Russian or Hungarian is needed. While browsing online for comments on tourism in Transcarpathia (see 'Languages online' below), we found that there are few in English. As Pavlenko (2009, p. 258) has already pointed out for other parts of Ukraine, English with little clear informational content is also often used in advertising for its believed emotional value.

In the two censuses carried out in Ukraine (in 1989 and in 2001), the three major languages spoken by the inhabitants of Transcarpathia were Ukrainian, Russian and Hungarian (for detailed census information see, Csernicsekó & Laihonen, 2016). In the field, the first Slavic language of the majority of Transcarpathians is often conceptualized

as a dialect of Ukrainian that is distinct from any other dialects (e.g. Dickinson, 2010, p. 60). Before Transcarpathia's annexation to the Soviet Union (1946), the local Slavic vernacular was conceptualized as the Rusyn language (see Magocsi, 2015). Still today, there is a considerable distance between the local vernacular and standard Ukrainian. Such differences, however, are often explained as local peculiarities, changing from village to village. According to Dickinson (2010), the local Slavic dialects are viewed negatively as hybrid or 'bad' Ukrainian by Ukrainian speakers from other regions. Standard Ukrainian is used in national media and in highly formal contexts; however, in everyday interaction, it indexes people from other regions of Ukraine. In addition, Russian is still often used as the formal register by those grown up in the Soviet Union.

The amount of ethnic Russians in Transcarpathia did not exceed 5% even during the Soviet era, but Russian was the language of social advancement and interethnic communication in the region. The censuses suggest that between 1989 and 2001 about half of the 1.2 million inhabitants have removed Russian from their language repertoire (see Csernicskó & Laihonon, 2016). This removal is of course only symbolic, and can be explained as a display of the willingness to participate in the Ukrainian nation-building project. Dickinson (2010, p. 71) suggests that, from a 'Ukrainian nationalist ideology' perspective, in local interethnic communication 'Russian language use is interpreted as a form of resistance, as the impolite refusal to learn Ukrainian and, by extension, refusal to recognize the change in regime from the Russian-dominated Soviet Union to the developing Ukrainian nation-state'. Nevertheless, during her fieldwork in Transcarpathia, Dickinson (2010) discovered other ideologies as well, ones that are in favor of retaining Russian in the region. These include acknowledging the Soviet legacy of Russian as the 'language of interethnic communication', and an economic ideology, where Russian is viewed as a business asset. In any case, together with the imperative to erase Russian from the public space and official use in Transcarpathia, it is a general expectation that Russian-speaking tourists should have no trouble in being understood. On a major tourism portal for Transcarpathia (Zakarpattyia tourism, 2015), most accommodation and other services advertise that they speak Ukrainian and Russian, in some cases, also Hungarian or English, and more rarely, German or Romanian.

According to *Ukraine Today* (Rada, 2015), tourism has the potential to become a leading economic sector in Transcarpathia. Domestic tourism is a popular choice for the middle class, since the EU countries and other touristic destinations require a visa. The webpages produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (2015) state that most foreign tourists visiting Transcarpathia come from Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Russia.

The south-western swath of Transcarpathia can be considered a Hungarian enclave. The area on the eastern bank of the Tisza River has approximately 120,000 Hungarian-speaking inhabitants, as recorded in the 2001 census. For Hungarian heritage tourists (see Feischmidt, 2008), there are several culturally significant destinations in Transcarpathia. Some of the most well-known include the Verecke Pass in the Carpathian Mountains, the Hungarians' mythical place of homecoming to Central Europe around 896 CE; the castle of Munkács (Ukrainian: Mukachevo); and the remains of the Árpád line, the World War II Hungarian defensive line in the Carpathian Mountains. According to Feischmidt (2008, p. 122), 'national sites that lie outside the boundaries of the nation state (...) have particularly strong emotive power.' Such places in Transcarpathia have now been 'liberated' from the constraints of communist ideology and they have been restored and made available for visitors since the end of Soviet rule in 1991. Hungarian national heritage sites in Transcarpathia are now frequently visited by groups of Hungarian intellectuals, national-minded people (cf. Feischmidt, 2008) and pensioners, especially since the one-sided opening of the border after the Orange Revolution in 2004–2005. (Since 2006, no visa to Ukraine has been required for Hungarians or other citizens of western European countries.) Hungarian heritage tourism to Transcarpathia can be viewed as a part of what Feischmidt (2008) has called 'reconstruction of lost territories', a phenomenon she identified while exploring similar destinations in Romania. She introduced the term 're-territorialization' and defined it as a trend where 'certain places are (re)discovered and invested with new symbolic meanings, making them the target and locale of identity-search and creation' (Feischmidt, 2008, p. 119). There are various small Hungarian tourist agencies organizing trips to the Hungarian heritage sites in Transcarpathia. Such sites indicate a 'golden era' of the region, an era when it was not in the margins, but in the center of a historical Hungarian national event: 'home-coming', a national uprising, or a defensive line, the symbols and relics of which can all be easily commodified for the needs of post-socialist Hungarian heritage tourism.

Local Hungarians have also primarily targeted Hungarians from Hungary as sources of tourism. Most significantly, there is a network of village tourism providers who accommodate Hungarian groups and organize trips to Hungarian sites in Transcarpathia. We interviewed two hosts that were part of this network and they explained that there are many requests from Ukrainians as well, but that they prefer Hungarian guests, because Ukrainians are less dependable, tend to have many complaints and do not take care of the premises. That is why the network advertises mostly in Hungarian and on Hungarian forums. Finally, with regard to Hungarian tourism in Transcarpathia, we first and foremost observed that most Hungarians from Hungary come to Transcarpathia

for border trade, typically for petrol, which is much cheaper in Ukraine than it is in Hungary. Beyond the groups of heritage tourists, most Hungarians from Hungary have little information about Transcarpathia and they have concerns about safety in the region.

In this section, we have not described the relationship of the other languages and ethnicities to tourism. That is, our discussions of multilingualism and basic conceptualizations of language manifested in tourism in Transcarpathia is, at best, a partial one. For the rest of this chapter, we concentrate our study on a specific tourist destination in the westernmost swath of Transcarpathia, which has a Hungarian majority.

### **Kosohove Hot Springs Spa Resort**

In this section, we examine a single tourist attraction in Transcarpathia, a thermal spa resort located near, what we call with a pseudonym, the Kosohove hot springs. In the 2000s, the spa has been refurbished and expanded and it has made a notable investment in cultural and linguistic commodification. It is also a significant site for the contemporary development of tourism in Transcarpathia. For instance, on the global portal of TripAdvisor, it is among the sites with the most reviews from the Zakarpattia Oblast.

The Kosohove hot springs spa resort in Transcarpathia received some global attention due to one of its promotional videos being chosen as the worst spa video for 2014. In the video, people in swimsuits dance around different pools to the 2012 global pop hit ‘Gangnam Style’ by the South Korean artist Psy (see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gangnam\\_Style](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gangnam_Style)). The Gangnam Style promo video gives an indication of how the spa uses multimodal semiotic resources including cultural symbols and different languages to address its potential customers.

The spa is located 200 meters from the Hungarian border, in the territory of a village where, according to the 2001 Ukrainian census, 96% of the inhabitants speak Hungarian as their first language. Recently, however, Ukrainians have also discovered the Hungarian enclave. In Ukrainian tourism, which is practiced by the new upper class, the Hungarian area has become a fairly popular destination.

### **Languages on Site: Hungarian**

As a new phenomenon, Ukrainians from the eastern part of the country are even investing in tourist sites found in the Hungarian enclave. They regard the Hungarian image as a resource, as can be seen in Figure 9.2, which shows the main building of the thermal bath.

During the Soviet period, this tourist attraction was an open air spa, with a sanatorium next to it. Now a Ukrainian family from the eastern



Figure 9.2 ‘Iváncsó estates, thermal bath’ in Hungarian (© Petteri Laihonen).

part of the country has invested in it and, instead of giving it a typical face-lift, they built a brand new, luxuriant bathhouse with several Hungarian symbols, such as statues of Hungarian kings and paintings depicting events from Hungarian history as well as Hungarian folk motifs. One of the rooms of the bath has a collection of Hungarian kings. In advertising for the spa, the term ‘royal sauna’ is used for this space. The captions for Hungarian images are in Hungarian only. The more symbolic the sign, the more likely it is to be in Hungarian only. The Hungarian aspect is also mentioned on the spa’s homepage, which states that the bath was built in ‘Austro-Hungarian style’.

Among local Hungarians, who use the Hungarian language for most of their everyday activities, however, the main text on the tower of the building and above the main entrance, *Iváncsó birtok* (‘Iváncsó estates’, see Figure 9.2), is seen as a sign of bad taste and putting on airs. It is common knowledge that the investor was not a Hungarian, so imitating the habit of bygone Hungarian nobles who possessed *birtok* (estates) and combining it with a Slavic name (*Iván + csó*) makes it a cultural and linguistic hybrid, rendering it kitsch in the eyes of local Hungarians that we interviewed. On top of that, it is a spa, not an estate, so the sign is clearly a misnomer as far as the locals are concerned. In this manner, the Hungarian linguistic identity has become commodified, and so Pujolar’s (2013, p. 71) question about who has the right to represent local culture, including language, and how, is now being posed by the Hungarians in Transcarpathia as well.

## **Ukrainian and English**

Most of the functional texts, however, are bilingual, in Ukrainian and Hungarian. For example, the spa's restaurants serve Hungarian dishes and their signs have Hungarian or Hungarian and Ukrainian bilingual inscriptions. Some of the texts are in English and Ukrainian (e.g. *Caution!*) and some are in English only (*Relax Zone*). The signs with a text in English only are typically multimodal, with universal icons indicating 'silence' or 'rest'. In that way, there is no functional need to have a text in any language, but English-only signs can be seen to add to the image of this destination at the margins as 'modern' and 'global' in the same way the Gangnam Style video ad does.

In contrast, the menus in the spa's Japanese teahouse, its only non-Hungarian restaurant and the official signs regarding the contents of the thermal water are in Ukrainian only. In other words, the more functional (monomodal, informative and detailed) or official a sign is, the more likely it is to be in Ukrainian only. For instance, the quality of water is detailed in Ukrainian only. Throughout the spa, similar technical descriptions are in Ukrainian only. Also the homepage of the spa is available only in Ukrainian.

In general, a global mix is present: English is used in a place where the customers come from the eastern parts of Ukraine, combined with the decision to put a Japanese tea house in a Hungarian spa, together with bars and grills serving traditional Hungarian dishes. This indicates that the spa, as Pujolar (2013, p. 70) has expressed in relation to Welsh heritage tourism, is negotiating an 'aesthetic balance between providing local flavor and catering to the needs of contemporary customers'. In the case of the spa, it means building the image of a global or western tourist attraction, symbolized by the use of Hungarian emblems and language with some English language and Japanese culture mixed in. At the same time, however, the Ukrainian tourist is assured that all of this is available without having to go to the trouble of getting a Schengen visa and without having to cope with a non-Slavic language.

## **Languages Online: Russian**

A further question concerns who the spa's customers are and what their language preferences are. During visits to the spa and in conversations with its staff, we have learned that most of the guests come from the eastern part of Ukraine. This information is supported by numerous customer reviews and comments on Google+ and TripAdvisor as well as on Facebook and on the Russian social networking site VKontakte. Most of the reviews focus on the spa facilities such as the thermal pools and 'royal saunas' or on the prices of services. A frequent evaluation of the spa resort is that it is a 'European' resort. Here are two examples



(in Russian) from TripAdvisor: (1) Все сделано на Европейском уровне! (Everything is done at the European level!), (2) Я в восторге, маленький кусочек Европы (I am delighted, a little piece of Europe). Such frequent remarks by Ukrainian tourists indicate that the resort is already a part of Western Europe, which can be reached without a visa. That is, the margins are constructed here as a part of the economic and cultural center, Western Europe. As one reviewer put it: 'It is like being abroad without crossing the border.'

The Hungarian character of the spa resort is often mentioned as well. For instance: отличный термальный курорт, альтернатива Венгрии (Excellent spa resort, an alternative to Hungary) or Сервис и бассейны не хуже чем в Будапеште (Service and the pools are not worse than in Budapest). The spa's Hungarian restaurants also received frequent positive remarks. In this manner, the European character is at times replaced with a Hungarian one. That is, the spa is a part of European Ukraine, but it has a Hungarian aspect as well. The negative reviews, especially on VKontakte and Facebook, deal with the prices, which are considered too high for Ukraine. Other comments state that the prices are acceptable because the spa's 'European' character justifies 'European prices'. There were relatively few comments by customers from Hungary and elsewhere, which supports the idea that Hungarians from Hungary prefer to visit health tourism sites in Hungary.

At the end of 2015, Google+ had 113 reviews of the spa, with an average rating of 4.4 out of 5. About 60% of the reviews are in Russian and the rest are in Ukrainian. One was in English. In a similar manner, a majority of reviews on TripAdvisor for the spa are in Russian, even though there are also several reviews in English. For the majority of guests, Russian is the language of writing reviews. It is commonplace knowledge that the Ukrainian population is bilingual (e.g. Bilaniuk, 2010) and this bilingualism has often been described as diglossic (cf. Kamusella, Nomachi, & Gibson, 2016). According to the 2001 Ukrainian census, 29.6% of the population is Russian speaking. Further, 39.5% of city dwellers, who make most of the tourists, claimed Russian as their first language in the census. In addition, Russian seems to be a review-writing lingua franca, just as elsewhere the lingua franca is English, as indicated by the English reviews in TripAdvisor by Ukrainian guests. In general, language use on the Ukrainian Internet is dominantly Russian (see Cserniczkó, 2016, for details). As mentioned above, the spa website is available in Ukrainian only, which can be seen as both providing linguistic safety (Kallen, 2009) for domestic tourists and forming a linguistic political statement vis-à-vis the Russian-dominated online space in Ukraine.

No accommodations are made for Russian in writing by the spa itself, there is no sign of Russian in any of its materials and the souvenirs are

in Ukrainian only. The texts of the postcards and souvenirs indicate a commitment to Ukrainian nation-building efforts and their images to symbolic Hungarian nation building. Most significantly, the absence of Russian language and Soviet or Russian images in symbolic and functional signs is achieved. However, it is worth noting that this erasure also seems to be accepted by those that use Russian in their reviews. For example, no mention of language is made in the customer comments, indicating that Russian is still facilitated in the spoken realm. This can be interpreted as a local manifestation of the nationwide and normative pattern of mutual non-accommodation of Russian and Ukrainian, as described by Bilaniuk (2010), where Ukrainian as well as Russian speakers are expected to understand each other, and at the same time, display a preference for one of the languages in their own communication. Such a pattern creates a preference for monolingual signage in the Slavic languages, which is the case in the spa as well. In addition, in the spa's job announcements we found on VKontakte, applicants were required to speak either Ukrainian or Russian. That is, the spa management takes for granted that anybody speaking Ukrainian or Russian will be competent in the other Slavic language as well.

## Conclusions

Tourism in the Transcarpathia region of Ukraine displays the region's complex and heterogeneous multilingualism (cf. Dickinson, 2010) along with the post-Soviet ideological tensions over Ukrainian-Russian bilingualism (cf. Pavlenko, 2008). Our study has also examined the practices of designing local vernaculars in different ways for different touristic target groups as manifestations of language ideologies in the present context of socioeconomic change, current identification processes and nation-building ideologies. Our study indicates that the region of Transcarpathia, as a periphery, can be brought into the center (cf. Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013) for Ukrainian tourists through the commodification of Hungarian language and culture as the most modern, European corner of the country. As one of the reviewers put it on Google+: Я в Украине, но как будто в Европе (I am in Ukraine, but it is as if I were in Europe). In this way, Transcarpathia's image is not that of a marginal, 'rural bastion' (Heller, et al., 2014, p. 544), which is a typical view of minority regions in the western world, even though the oblast is among one of the least economically developed and most rural regions in Ukraine.

Our case study of a spa resort indicated that the targeted tourists come from other Ukrainian regions, east of the Carpathians, the majority of which consists of wealthier, bilingual (Russian and Ukrainian) Ukrainians – what Pavlenko (2015) calls 'mid-market travelers'. This

group has recently lost access to its primary domestic touristic destination, the Crimea, and is thus seeking new attractions in western Ukraine, a need that can be seen in the continuing expansion of the spa. The use of Hungarian can be seen to contribute to both the discursive and symbolic construction linguistic authenticity and to constructing a Western European image, together with occasional English and global culture, such as the Gangnam Style promo video and the Japanese teahouse.

The extensive commodification of Hungarian for Ukrainian tourists by Ukrainian owners has been a source of some contestation by the local Hungarians, whose own village tourism network has targeted Hungarian heritage tourists from Hungary, thus combining Hungarian national pride and local profit (cf. Heller & Duchêne, 2012) in tourism. In these cases, Hungarian national heritage sites are brought into the center of Hungarian national ideology and commodified by local Hungarians as touristic services in Hungarian for Hungarians from Hungary (cf. Feischmidt, 2008).

## Discussion

Linguistic diversity and multilingualism are a major resource for Transcarpathia, which has an iconic image in the region as a junction between east and west, and can thus be viewed as a mobile region in terms of periphery-center conceptualizations. Tourism has the potential of becoming a major source of income in the region. In these tourism sites, several local and (trans)national languages have already been utilized to produce instrumental and symbolic added value. Our case study focused on the westernmost swath bordering Hungary, which is inhabited mainly by Hungarians. For these inhabitants of Ukraine, tourism can provide a form of formal employment in the Transcarpathian region itself and a chance to remain in their home communities. For instance, the Hungarian-dominant municipality next to Kosohove spa has recently earned much-needed revenues from the spa (e.g. through community taxes and land sales). Also, the spa has employed many of the Hungarian-speaking inhabitants in the Hungarian-dominant villages nearby. In this manner, the spa has enabled the Hungarian population to find work in Ukraine, and thus, to remain in the region.

As in other traditional multilingual regions (e.g. Kelly-Holmes & Pietikäinen, 2014), there are linguistic tensions in Transcarpathia as well. As our analysis of the spa's use of Hungarian in its name (*Iváncsó birtok*) indicated, local Hungarians were concerned about issues of linguistic purity (cf. Kamusella, Nomachi, & Gibson, 2016; Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2011). Furthermore, the new opportunity to work in a touristic site intended for the Ukrainian majority population has revealed the lack of local inhabitants' language skills in standard Ukrainian or

Russian. For this reason, local villagers from the Hungarian-dominated region have been employed in only low-paying jobs as, for example, parking lot attendants and kitchen staff. The better paying and managerial positions have been filled by more multilingual city dwellers commuting some 50 kilometers to the spa every day. The reason for this, according to one of the managers, was that local Hungarians do not speak either Ukrainian or Russian well enough, and thus, they cannot be employed in jobs, which include extensive communication with customers. The unequal mastery of the norm is also an aspect of the discourses on peripheral multilingualism (see Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013). Further, the manager explained that at first all staff are only hired for three months, after which they have to pass a test of describing their tasks, work equipment, facilities and procedures in Ukrainian or Russian. If they fail this test, they are no longer employed by the spa. That is, in the case of the spa also, normative language ideologies are at work, which marginalize local rural inhabitants.

In the villages near the spa, the local Hungarians use mostly Hungarian in their daily lives. Their children attend Hungarian schools, which are considered essential by local Hungarian elite for producing standard Hungarian speakers in Ukraine and maintaining a significant Hungarian population in Transcarpathia (see e.g. Csernicskó, 2005). Knowledge of standard Hungarian is especially valuable when interacting with Hungarians from Hungary, including heritage tourism. However, recalling such encounters occasional marginalizing moments were also mentioned in interviews, when a local vernacular nonstandard or 'mixed' Hungarian expression was underlined by Hungarian metropolitan tourists.

In the Hungarian medium schools, Ukrainian is learned from the first year, but to little effect (see Csernicskó, 2015). Since Ukrainian independence in 1991, Russian is no longer taught in Transcarpathian schools. In the contacts with local Ukrainians, the local vernacular Rusyn is used, which is considerably different from standard Ukrainian (cf. Dickinson, 2010). For these reasons, the younger generation of Hungarians speak no Russian and only a little standard Ukrainian (Kulyk, 2013). This produces a further challenge for the local Hungarians to escape their marginality inside Ukraine.

Since 1991, there has been a major investment in teaching English in all Ukrainian schools. At the time of our fieldwork, English was taught from the first year in all schools. In addition, considerable help from Western European countries as well as from the United States and Canada (e.g. by sending volunteer teachers) has been provided to enhance the teaching of English in schools and other institutions. In Transcarpathia, however, English-speaking tourists are an exception. Russian is still used as the instrumental lingua franca in the region, in interethnic communication and in communication with tourists from other parts

of Ukraine and as a major digital language. Our study indicated that people in Ukraine with the most internal mobility are Russian speakers or use Russian as their touristic lingua franca. English is important for symbolic reasons and for targeting western European mobility. However, more investment in teaching Ukrainian and the reappraisal of Russian in educational language policy could enable better integration of Transcarpathian Hungarians and other linguistic minorities into the Ukrainian job market, such as the analyzed spa.

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# 10 Globalized Linguistic Resources at Work

## A Case Study of a Local Supermarket in Finnish Lapland

*Massimiliano Spotti*

### Introduction

In its general sense, globalization is neither new nor recent. Population flows have been perennial in almost any part of the world, and trade networks connecting contemporary continents have also existed for millennia (see Mufwene, 2008 on language and cultural evolution through trade in history). What is *now* called globalization, therefore, is a particular historical moment in which interconnectedness of Appaduraiian scapes (Appadurai, 1996) and, within that, mobility of goods, people, technologies and knowledge have acquired unprecedented – indeed, global – scale levels. According to Hobsbawm (2007) this historical phase coincides with what he calls the ‘short century’, that is the time that goes from World War I to the fall of communism and that can be broken down in shorter phases. Furthermore, in terms of space, globalization has ushered in ‘zones of entanglement’ between North and South, on multiple levels. These include the effects of colonialism, capitalism and neoliberalism, on different orders of visibility. These effects range from fast growing capital-driven accumulation of wealth through online trading for some, to silencing and increased marginalization for others (see Kerfoot & Hyltenstam, 2017). It is this redefinition of the world order that has led to the intensification of both the volume and speed of global flows, of people, goods, capital and symbolic capital, including social, political and cultural resources.

Looking at language as one of the channels through which the new forms of communication and meaning-making associated with globalization have developed, we find a large body of studies in sociolinguistics focusing on globalization-driven mobility with a strong focus on urban areas, particularly in different neighborhoods of global cities. Once we look more closely at this body of literature, we see that much of the globalization-driven focus we find in this field is being directed to processes of reconfiguration, to identity negotiation and to the construction of mobile subjects, in heavily languagized urban settings, such as

in education and law (e.g. Duarte & Gogolin, 2013; Jacquemet, 2015; Jaspers & Madsen, 2016; Spotti, 2011). There is much less sociolinguistic work focusing explicitly on the effects of globalization on the margins and on the reconfiguration of mobile subjects who live on these margins. (Examples of this work include: Blommaert, 2010; Cabral & Martin-Jones, 2017; Donald, Coupland, & Hywei, 2005; Pennycook, 2012; Wang, et al., 2014).

This chapter makes a contribution to this small body of literature by taking a close look at *ad hoc* and somewhat chaotic use of multilingual resources (resources for signage, packaging and carrying of products) that have been developed in a commercial setting, in a sociocultural space that is located on the margins, in both geographical and sociolinguistic terms. These resources have been developed in response to rapidly developing conditions of globalization-led mobility, linked to the global tourism industry. The focus of the chapter is on a supermarket located in Finnish Lapland – in a place, called Saariselka that is not usually considered to be a destination for global flows of people, images, technologies, money and ideas. The aim of the research presented here was to investigate how the supermarket in question manages to cater to the needs of tourists from across the globe, how it promotes its brand, relying on sociolinguistic resources that, from a normative perspective, do not match language form with language function, how it manages to acknowledge the presence of particular groups of tourists who frequent the store most often, and how it also brands itself and seeks to upscale.

The chapter is organized as follows: in the next section, I make some key points related to contemporary tourism. In the third section, I provide a brief description of Finnish Lapland, and the broader region of Samiland, and I touch on some of the cultural and sociolinguistic characteristics of these northern regions. In the fourth section, I then provide a sketch of the context for the supermarket study that I carried out in December 2008 and I detail the research strategy that I followed during the field work.<sup>1</sup> After this, in the fifth section, I move on to the conceptual framing of my study, locating it within the sociolinguistics of globalization. The central sections of the chapter then present a description and analysis of some of the semiotic resources employed in different types of retailer-customer communication encountered across the linguistic landscape of the supermarket. In the concluding section, I show how this study contributes to research into the sociolinguistic impact of tourism on the margins.

### **Going on Holiday on the Margins: Consuming Culture and Addressing Daily Needs**

Embarking on a holiday is an adventurous yet exciting matter, even more so if the destination is abroad and geographically remote. A holiday is, of course, not only a journey in the physical sense. Rather, it is a journey

in which tourists seek out imagined experiences, attempt to ‘go native’ and communicate messages to those back home such as: ‘wish you were here’ (Sheller & Urry, 2004). Finnish Lapland is a vast rural area that has few inhabitants. Historically, it has been marginalized in both a geopolitical and sociolinguistic sense. However, it is now advertised by tourist agencies across the globe because of its astonishing natural phenomena, e.g. the *aurora borealis* (northern lights) and its skiing facilities, and it is now being constructed as the home of Father Christmas. For local tourism entrepreneurs and personnel working in different tourist sites, the promotion of Finnish Lapland within the global tourist industry means that they need to communicate with and cater to the daily physical, cultural and sociolinguistic needs, expectations and desires of foreign visitors from different regions of the world.

These challenges have given rise to two competing discourses. First, we find a discourse about ethno-territorial belonging and cultural authenticity (see MacCannell, 1976 on staged ‘authenticity’ in indigenous lingua-cultures). Second, we find a discourse about the emerging potential for economic gain for indigenous communities through the commodification of their local lingua-cultures and local heritage (tangible and intangible) (see Heller, 2003). While the first discourse focuses on indigenous linguistic and cultural heritage as being the sole ‘authentic’ one, the second represents local lingua-cultures as potential commodities. In turn, this commodification is mediated by means of semiotic resources such as pictures, signs and texts that are authored, issued and authorized by agents such as tourist agencies, tour providers and (local) tour guides for consumption by tourists. The commodification of local lingua-cultures in the interests of global tourist industries raises questions of legitimacy (or lack thereof). That is, commodification prompts questions about who has the right to judge what counts as indigenous lingua-cultural practices, as authentic or unique, and it also prompts questions about who has the right to author, authorize, produce, distribute and profit from the global marketing of commodified authenticity (Bærenholdt & Haldrup, 2004; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2012).

Tourists do not only need to have their desire to ‘go native’ catered to. They also have daily needs. Shopping and access to other basic necessities are part of their local experience as well. Low-key encounters regularly take place between local service providers and tourists from different parts of the world. Tourists also seek out signs in languages they understand so as to orient themselves in the new landscapes they enter.

## **Finnish Lapland**

*Sápmi* is the official Sami name of Samiland. This is a transnational region that traverses the borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. In conjunction with social, cultural and economic changes, the symbolic

value of the different languages used in this region has changed, and continues to change. Sami people – the indigenous inhabitants of Samiland – have experienced a loss of autonomy in a cultural, economic and legal sense. There have also been far-reaching changes in their linguistic and cultural ecology. Today, the Sami population is transnational, multilingual and culturally diverse.

One of the parts of Samiland is Finnish Lapland, an area that has always been multilingual and multicultural because of the diverse languages of the people inhabiting the area, but also because of ties of trade, tourism and family stretching across language borders (Lehtola, 2000). Although this region is on the geographical margins of Europe, in Pratt's (1991) terms – it is a (multilingual) *contact zone* where speakers with disparate cultural and linguistic resources have both convivial and conflictual encounters, often in the context of highly asymmetrical power relationships. These asymmetries surface in situations where official majority languages, like Finnish, are used and also among speakers of indigenous and non-indigenous minority languages. Following the criteria used in the official statistics issued by different countries in the Nordic region, the Sami population as a whole comprises approximately 50,000–70,000 people. Approximately 7,500 Sami people live within the borders of Finnish Lapland. The Sami are the only officially recognized indigenous minority of the European Union (EU), and they speak languages that vary in numbers of users. The figures vary according to how the definition and enumeration of languages is done, according to who is counting, authoring and authorizing the definition and according to the purpose of the activity (cf. Moore, Blommaert, & Pietikäinen, 2010). In principle though, nine Sami languages are still in use. As the village I am concerned with here – Saariselka – is in Finland, I should mention that the Northern Sami constitute the largest minority language group, with approximately 30,000 speakers, while the Inari Sami and Skolt Sami groups include no more than 500 speakers. These languages are legally recognized indigenous languages across Norway, Sweden and Finland and their speakers have acknowledged rights and resources. Although they are not major languages in terms of their numbers of users and learners, they are generally the objects of heated discussions in Sami politics and in debates about Sami cultural heritage.

### **Research Site and Research Strategy**

As I embarked on this study of tourism and the impact of globalized tourism in the transnational, multilingual contact zone of Samiland, I soon came to realize that although they are geographically marginal, zones like this one are heavily languagized. That is, they are spaces that have the potential to transform and commodify local indigenous lingua-cultures and represent them as semiotic products for the benefit

of tourists. These spaces benefit from the new inflow of global economic and sociolinguistic resources, but at the same time, this produces new language hierarchies within the sociolinguistic landscape. These new sociolinguistic landscapes differ (at times, in significant ways) from those owned, authorized and used by local indigenous groups. With this backdrop in mind, and adopting the concepts of authenticity (Pietikäinen, 2013; Urry, 2002) and local lingua-cultures (Jaworski, Thurlow, Ylännö-McEwen, & Lawson, 2007) as sensitizing concepts, I then began a study in Finnish Lapland, familiarizing myself with the on-line advertising of tourist sites. After having made a selection of the four tourist places in Finnish Lapland that were referred to most often online, i.e. Inari, Ivalo, Rovaniemi and Saariselka, I decided that my fieldwork destination would be Saariselka.

There, my focus was initially on documenting the presence and the usage of indigenous Sami languages in the Saariselkan tourist industry. However, soon after my arrival, I realized that a focus on the sociolinguistic distribution of Sami would not be very fruitful because of the almost complete absence of any Sami language variety in the local linguistic landscape. I therefore decided to focus instead on the tourists and on the ways in which their presence was reshaping the local linguistic landscape. Thus, my first step in this sociolinguistic ethnographic enquiry was to conduct observations in settings where tourists congregated.

Based at a local hotel, I started building an account of how a tourist day unfolded, which languages were on display and how they were picked up by tourists in their daily interactions in this environment. This first round of observations lasted for a couple of days. I gained insights into the sociolinguistic practices that recurred in staff-tourist encounters and I heard a wide number of non-native and vernacular varieties of English being used as lingua franca. Comparing yearly tourist data from online databases, I ascertained that the backgrounds of the hotel guests I was observing mirrored the backgrounds of the tourists who usually populated Saariselka at that time of year. They were mainly Finnish, British, German and Japanese tourists, with the latter being the largest group.

On the second day of data collection, I went out to do some shopping, at the only fully equipped local supermarket in Saariselka, named Kuukkeli. After an initial exploratory tour of the supermarket, I decided to refocus my enquiry on the linguistic landscape of this store. I first kept track of the flow of tourists in and out of the supermarket. I then moved on to investigate how this company catered to the sociolinguistic needs of the diverse tourist population and how the tourists were picking up on and interpreting the semiotic displays in Kuukkeli in Saariselka. Availing myself of a digital camera, I also took photographs to document different elements of the sociolinguistic landscape, including signage,

packaging of products and shopping bags. Where possible, I also tried to glean meta-pragmatic insights from the people working there about their understanding of different displays and their views about the international tourists doing their shopping there.

### **The Sociolinguistic of Globalization**

Sociolinguistic exploration of global sociolinguistic phenomena has led to both theoretical and methodological questioning of analyses of ‘normative’ language use, in conditions of globalization-led mobility. This questioning has, in turn, provided new insights into the nature of language and communication in contemporary social life and into the ways in which language is used and picked up by people within different cultural ecologies, in urban centers and in peripheral areas, like the one in my study. Recent research into the sociolinguistics of globalization offers abundant evidence to support the view that language can no longer be understood, in normative terms, as a fixed and bounded entity. It is now generally agreed that any form of communication, whether spoken, written or pictographic, needs to be understood and analyzed as an instance of socially situated meaning-making, imbued with ideology. Therefore, any enquiry like the one I undertook in Saariselka, needs to approach language phenomena by taking account of the ‘total linguistic fact’, which was originally defined by Silverstein (1985) as follows:

(...) the datum for a science of language is irreducibly dialectic in nature. It is an unstable mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms, contextualized to situations of interested human use and mediated by the fact of cultural ecology.

(Silverstein, 1985, p. 220)

In studies of language and globalization, Silverstein’s definition of the ‘total linguistic fact’ needs to be extended to encompass the interplay between local and globalized phenomena within particular cultural ecologies. In the last two decades, sociolinguists have attempted to come up with descriptively adequate terminology to refer to communicative practices involving the use of what Silverstein (1985) called ‘meaningful sign forms’ and communicative resources from different languages. Examples of terms include everyday languaging (Jørgensen, Karrebæk, Madsen, & Møller, 2016), transidiomatic practices (Jacquemot, 2005), truncated multilingualism (Blommaert, 2005), metrolingualism (Pennycook & Otsuij, 2015) and translanguaging (García & Li Wei, 2014). It is not possible to provide a full genealogy of terms here, but one thing that all these terms have in common is that they relate to forms of communication, observed in urban environments, that are characterized by considerable linguistic and cultural diversity. These environments range from contemporary

inner-city markets (Creese, Blackledge, & Hu, 2016) and places of fleeting intercultural encounters in sports activities (Madsen, 2015) to new web-based economies of identification (Kunming, Spotti, & Kroon, 2014). The nature of the communicative practices observed in all these environments demonstrate that ‘language’ should be viewed as a verb rather than a noun, and that is, we need to see people as ‘linguaging’ rather than using language as a fixed and bounded object. Moreover, in conditions of globalization-led mobility and contemporary diversities, normativities and expectations related to language use are changing rapidly over time.

This new tradition of sociolinguistic work on language and globalization conceptualizes the social environments of our times as characterized by an extremely low degree of presupposition in terms of identities, patterns of social and cultural behavior, social structures, norms of communication and expectations of uptake. This is an empirical field in which communicative exchanges have become extremely complex, so achieving descriptive adequacy has become a challenge. Empirical work in sociolinguistics has thus moved from a sociolinguistics of distribution toward a sociolinguistics of mobility, focusing on communicative resources (rather than languages), on communicative functions and on the communicative repertoires that different social actors draw on in different situated interactions. According to Blommaert and Rampton (2011), people take on different linguistic norms and forms as they align with or distance themselves from different groups at different moments, and as they perform different social identities. The fact that speakers often have to orient toward different centers at the same time is captured in the notion of *polycentricity* (Blommaert, 2010). Polycentricity is at play when unexpected communicative behavior occurs. This may be due to the effect of a center that is unknown to hearers. As Kroon, Dong and Blommaert (2015) put it, the current world order is:

(...) no longer an order inscribed in stable structural (and therefore generalized) features of language, but an order inscribed in the trajectories of change and development within the system. Change is the system, and observed stability in the system is a necessarily situated snapshot of a stage in a developmental trajectory in which the current state is an outcome of previous ones and a condition for future ones.

(Kroon, et al., 2015, p. 2)

According to Arnaut and Spotti (2014), signs that are designed to create order in a place used by the public, or a specific clientele, like the Kuukkeli supermarket, are never created at random. The function of these signs is explicitly denotational. That is, they should convey concise, clear and unambiguous meanings to all possible audiences. Such signs are material objects that draw on a variety of communicative resources,



spoken or written forms of language or images. For example, written resources constructed through the use of a particular set of orthographic conventions, and resources of emplacement, since social meanings are also conveyed by the particular spot in which a sign has been placed (Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2003). Such signs are typically multimodal signs, and analyzing them includes attention to the different modes employed in the construction of the sign (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Together, these modes compose the sign as a semiotic artefact.

In what follows, I will give an account of the nature and scope of the written resources employed in the Kuukkeli supermarket in Saariselka, taking account of their emplacement and what they actually do *to* and *for* Kuukkeli and its relatively new range of customers. The action of shopping, especially in a supermarket that one is not familiar with, could be conceptualized as unfolding in three broad moments: the first being that of locating specific products; the second being that of choosing the products and the third being paying for them at the checkout till. In three sections below, I trace these three moments, but first – to set the scene – I provide further details about the supermarket.

### **Kuukkeli – A Supermarket in Finnish Lapland Catering for Holiday Goers for More Than Thirty Years**

When setting foot in Kuukkeli for the first time, I noticed that its local name had a K in front of it, as in K-Kuukkeli. At first, I thought that this K stood for the first letter of Kuukkeli, however after checking with Finnish colleagues, I found that the K identified this local store as part of a supermarket chain called K-market that has branches all over Finland. Still on my first visit, I noticed that Kuukkeli had two entrances, a main one and a lower one. The lower entrance was where the taxi rank was. At this taxi rank, there were signs relating to taxi availability in three languages and two scripts. First, *taksi* (taxi) was written in Finnish. Under that were the German words *taxi hier* (taxi here) and then the Russian word такси (taxi), written in Cyrillic script. When enquiring about the absence of English in the languages used at the taxi rank, I learned that, apart from Finns, Germans and Russians had originally been the main groups of tourists coming to Saariselka, and that, it was only recently that British, Japanese, French and Italian tourists had started to flock there.

At the main entrance, the Kuukkeli logo was prominently displayed. Talking to Finnish colleagues, I learned that Kuukkeli is the Finnish name for the Siberian Jay, a bird that is typically present in the fauna of Finnish Lapland. An image of this bird appears in various places in the supermarket: at the entrance and on the information boards on each lane of the store (see Figure 10.1 below). The image of the bird straddled a globe that was light brown in color, with an image of a tree branch

within it. This logo was set against the blue and green background of the larger sign. The colors were evocative of the landscape of Finnish Lapland: the sky, the lakes and the land. Blue and white are also the colors in the Finnish flag.

In conversation with researchers who knew the local area, I discovered that the company running the supermarket was committed to branding the store as being more upmarket than other stores. Consequently, it had acquired the reputation for being: ‘the Harrod’s of Saariselkä’. Kuukkeli clearly branded itself as a place with extended experience of catering to all holiday goers. As we can see, in the following message in Finnish taken from the supermarket website, the company stressed its long-standing commitment to meeting the needs of an international clientele, across three decades; however, there was no English translation available at the time on this website:

We serve every day throughout the year from 9–21 hours, also on Sundays. We provide everything available at K-market plus. Here you will find almost everything you need under one roof. Kuukkeli knows what vacation goers need, because we have been serving Saariselkä’s holiday goers for almost 30 years.<sup>2</sup> [my translation]

### **Orienting the Shoppers: The Signage in Kuukkeli**

On entry to the Kuukkeli supermarket, the first thing one encountered during the time when I was doing this research was a fine display of local products from Lapland, ranging from reindeer meat to jams and syrups. This was done before clients could enter the first lane and it was clearly oriented toward the tourist clientele. Soon after this, moving toward the second lane, a large information board came into view (see Figure 10.1).

As shown in Figure 10.1, in the central panel of this information board, the Kuukkeli logo appeared again, on the same blue and green background, with a large white number below to indicate the supermarket lane. The remainder of this board was red in color, with words on the board appearing in white. All the words were written in Roman script. Starting from the top left corner of Figure 10.1, we see the Finnish word for preserves (*hillot*) followed by the Finnish word for canned fruit (*bedelmäsäilykkeet*). In the second row on the left, there is a clustering of product names, including the Finnish word for sugar (*sokerit*) and the Finnish word for jam (*marmeladit*). This clustering of product names also appears in the second row on the right where we find the Finnish words for different kinds of condiments, ketchup (*ketsupit*), vinegar (*etikat*) and oil (*oljyt*).

Back on the left-hand side, this time in the last row, we find the English word *sugar* as well its German translation (*zucker*). These two words are



Figure 10.1 Information board at the Kuukkeli store, Lane 2 (© Massimiliano Spotti).

combined with the English term *bakery products*. This English term is not commonly used in retailing in the anglophone world. It reads like a translation from another language. Moving to the right-hand side again, in the third row, we find the English word *spices* with the German word *gewürze* (condiments) under it. These two words are not equivalents in English and German although they are grouped together. At the same time, the Finnish word for *gewürze* (condiments) appears in another row, in the first row on the right-hand side (*mausteet*). The remaining words, in the third row on the left, are the Finnish adjective *tuore* (fresh) combined with the noun *leipa* (bread), in the last row on the right, the German word *reformkost* (wholefood) is accompanied by a closely related German word *bioprodukte* (biological products). The overall impression given by this information board is that languages other than Finnish were introduced in a rather *ad hoc* manner by the management team in the supermarket. There is no systematic layout of Finnish words, along with their equivalents in English and German.

Moving on to Lane 3, I found that there was another information board, with a similar layout. The Kuukkeli logo was present again with the colors in the background, but with a new lane number (see Figure 10.2). As before, the rest of the board was red, with white lettering.

Fewer products were listed on this board. Starting from the top left corner, again, in Figure 10.2, we find that the names of goods are clustered together. Here, in the first row on the left, we find the Finnish words for three items: biscuits (*keksit*), rusk (*korput*) and bagels (*rinkelit*). Below this, in the second row on the left-hand side, there is a single English word, *biscuits*, which is a translation of the Finnish word *keksit*.



Figure 10.2 Information board at the Kuukkeli store, Lane 3 (© Massimiliano Spotti).

Up in the top-right row, we find another three words in Finnish: coffee (*kahvi*), tea (*tee*) and cacao (*kaakao*). None of these have been translated into any other language, though in the last row in the right-hand corner, we find three German words grouped together, again in a rather *ad hoc* fashion. The first (*zucker*) sugar refers to a product that had already been listed on the board for Lane 2. This was followed by the word (*honig*) honey, and by the word (*einweggeschirr*) disposable tableware. Nearby, there were some signs that had been removed from this board. These signs listed in English products like *detergents* and *toys* that had been taken down from the board for Lane 3. This suggests that the products found on the shelves at Kuukkeli were being moved around, and that boards had to continually be modified, as in any supermarket. During the week that I was doing this research, the toys were at the back of the store close to textile products and souvenirs.

In addition to the multilingual information on the boards for each lane, other kinds of multilingual signs had been placed on specific shelves. Although Finnish, German and English were the languages that had predominated on the large information boards, handwritten signs on A4 sheets of paper had been taped on the fridge where the dairy products were kept. These signs included information such as *lait demi ecreme* (French) and *latte mezzo scremato* (Italian), both of which mean ‘semi-skimmed milk’. It is not common in retailing in Italy to find the adjectives *mezzo* and *scremato* together when referring to milk. The expression that is generally used for semi-skimmed milk in Italian is *parzialmente scremato* (partially skimmed). My point here is that *mezzo scremato* can be understood – as an approximation to the Italian



Figure 10.3 Information board at the Kuukkeli store (© Massimiliano Spotti).

form – but it is not the norm when describing this kind of milk in the context of an Italian food store.

Figure 10.3 shows a different kind of board, one that had been assembled in a more impromptu fashion. Some of the *ad hoc* and somewhat chaotic features of the signs described above appear here too.

The list on this board starts with the English word *restaurant*. This is followed by the words *home bakery*. Again, this reads as if it has been directly translated from the German word that follows, namely, *hausbäckerei*. In English, these two words are not usually collocated in a retailing context. Another unusual collocation appears in the fourth word in the list: *food service*. This is followed by a German expression that literally means ‘warm eating’ (*warmes essen*) though it stands for ‘hot meals’. After this, there is a hybrid term *Lappish delikaties* (Lappish delicacies). It is not entirely clear what language this is supposed to be in. The spelling rules it out as an English word. And it is not Finnish, since the word for delicacies is *herkkuja*. This is followed by the German *delikatessen aus Lappland*. The penultimate item on the list includes the Finnish word for textiles (*tekstiili*) and a noun (*sport*), a term that is used in a number of European languages. The same goes for the last word, the French noun *souvenirs*, which is also used in other European languages.

Referring to this particular instance of signage that I photographed in the Kuukkeli supermarket in Saariselka in 2008, Blommaert (2010, p. 151) offers the following interpretation:

The chaotic co-existence of languages ... reflects the shop owner’s willingness to move with the ultra-fast and changing rhythms of the tourist presence in Saariselka, while the presence of English reflects a more enduring layer of internationalization and that of Finnish, the national order and place.

## Shoppers Selecting Products on the Shelves at Kuukkeli

I also endeavored to build an account of how the tourist clientele was reacting to the layout and signage of the Kuukkeli store as they looked for products and selected them. To do this, I began to follow the moves of particular tourists, trying to get a sense of their reactions to language displays such as those presented in the previous section.

For example, I observed two female Japanese tourists who were trying to purchase something. I did not want to intrude on them, so I kept myself at a distance, yet close enough to observe their actions. First of all, at the fruit counter, I noticed that there were instructions in Japanese on a white A4 sheet of paper next to the weighing scale on how to weigh fruit. The weighing of products such as fruit and vegetables is a culturally specific practice in Finnish supermarkets as well as in similar commercial premises across Europe. Customers find that they have to go back and do the weighing if they arrive at the checkout till without having done so. This explains the existence of the instructions in Japanese near the weigh scale. The two Japanese tourists I was following stopped and picked up some fruit, but they did not appear to take any notice of the sign. Shortly after this, they put the fruit back on the counter where they had taken it. They then moved on to Lane 5 of the supermarket, where there were different kinds of snacks. They started to look at a packet of Japanese crackers, but these too were left behind. They finally went to buy some bread, but once they got to one of the checkout tills, they decided to leave the bread at the till and leave the supermarket empty-handed.

After they had left, I went to have a look at the Japanese crackers that they had been considering. I discovered that the packaging had Japanese characters on it. On my return to the Netherlands, I asked a proficient speaker of Japanese to look at this packaging and the characters on it. I recounted to her what I had observed and mentioned that I had been puzzled as to why these crackers had not been appealing to the two tourists although there had been a description of the contents in Japanese. My Japanese colleague pointed out the following to me: firstly, the English text that the customers saw on the package was *Authentic Japanese Rice Crackers* but the Japanese text on the package was not a translation of this. Secondly, people proficient in Japanese would have immediately recognized the two following Kanji characters 風味 (*fumi*) meaning ‘flavor’ and the following characters 舌下 (*zecca*) meaning ‘sublime’ (these can also stand for ‘sublingual’). However, the ordering of the two terms, 風味 (*fumi*) meaning ‘flavor’ and 舌下 (*zecca*) meaning ‘sublime’, was unconventional. Conventionally, they appear in the reverse order. This suggested to my colleague that the text on the packaging had its origins somewhere other than Japan, possibly in China. Thirdly, in the English text on the packaging, there were references to food products from Japan e.g. sushi mix, which had no connection with crackers. Japanese

crackers are either soy sauce-based or sea-weed based, and most crackers available in Europe are rice-based and are often made in China. Fourthly, the use of the Kanji script rather than the other two prestigious Japanese scripts also pointed to the production of the text on the packaging outside Japan. My colleague summed up her reactions as follows:

This kind of script is used for real info on the package, instructions, ingredients etc. also for children's stuff. It does not really appeal to me, a customer who knows a lot more about really good Japanese stuff. Well I would never buy them. And neither would a Japanese [person] visiting Finland, he [or she] would never buy them so your target group here is really the non-Japanese [people] who want to buy crackers.

(Field notes)

### **Paying at a Kuukkeli Checkout Till: A Translingual, Multimodal Interaction**

As I ended the day's fieldwork up and down the supermarket lanes, observing customers and taking pictures of the signs being displayed, I went to one of the checkout tills to pay for the Japanese crackers that I had picked up, along with some other items. The till operator addressed me in Finnish and told me the amount I had to pay. I replied that I did not speak any Finnish, and so she pointed at the number on the till display and I nodded in response. I also asked to speak to the manager on duty so as to make the arrangements for an interview on globalization and language at this supermarket. This part of the interaction with the till operator (Op) unfolded as follows:

Max: Excuse me, could I speak to the manager?

Op: *Mitta?* (What?)

Max: Could I speak to the manager, please?

Op: *Mitta?* (What?)

Max: Manager?

Op: *Ei, ei.* (No, no.)

Max: I would like to interview the manager, if possible?

Op: *Puutko sa Suomea?* (Do you speak Finnish?)

Max: Suomi, no, no, English.

Op: Manager no Engli[s], Finni[s]. Sorry.

(Field notes)

Despite the multilingual signage at the Kuukkeli store, and the upscaling of this supermarket to appear to cater for an international clientele, the checkout till was clearly a space where clients interacted with staff in Finnish, or relied on multimodal forms of communication combined



with occasional words in Finnish. The multimodal forms of communication included references to the prices on the till display and to the prices on the actual products or weighed items. My request for an interview with the manager was unsuccessful, either because it was not understood, or because the manager did not speak English, and so the person at the till acted as a gatekeeper, denying access to that person. Certainly, the local Finnish workers did not appear to have access to the linguistic resources displayed in the signage and on the products at Kuukkeli.

As I completed this transaction and packed my purchases into a shopping bag, my attention was drawn to the complex array of words and the images on the bag. Again here, there was evidence of the branding of the Kuukkeli store. This shopping bag is shown in Figures 10.4 and 10.5.

The first thing we encounter in Figure 10.4 is the name of the store (Kuukkeli) in blue capital letters on a white background. This use of colors reflects those used in the Finnish national flag. On the right-hand side of the bag, we have the supermarket logo and the image of the



Figure 10.4 The Kuukkeli shopping bag – top half (© Massimiliano Spotti).



Figure 10.5 The Kuukkeli shopping bag – bottom half (© Massimiliano Spotti).

Siberian Jay. Underneath the name of the store, we find the words ‘supermarket’ and ‘shopping center’. Both of these words are in capital letters. Kuukkeli clearly brands itself as a commercial entity that is bigger than a supermarket. Below this, we see the branding of the supermarket as an international store. Several languages are displayed: English comes first with the word ‘welcome’ in red, accompanied by an exclamation mark. This is followed by the word for shopping center in several languages: in German, Swedish and French (written in the Roman script), in Russian (in the Cyrillic script) and in Japanese (in Kanji characters).

Below these different languages, there is a line in Finnish in small capital letters, *Saariselän palvelu ja kauppa keskus* (The services and commercial center of Saariselka), and below this, the English word Shopping Center appears in much larger letters. To the right of this text there are three logos, two denoting facilities (purchase of lottery tickets and alcohol) and one appealing to the international clientele, advertising the availability of tax-free purchases. To the right of these logos there is a reminder of the opening hours (from nine in the morning to nine at night). This reminder appears in a small square, with the words *joka päivä* (everyday) and the numbers 9 and 21. Next to the box, there is a message, originally handwritten in English (to denote informality): We are always there for you.

Below this section, there is an image of the whole of Kuukkeli, with the functions of each section of the store written in Finnish, along with the services or merchandise available in that section. The only section in English relates to the section where the taxi stand is located. The text here is bilingual: *Taksi*, Kuukkeli Department Store, Welcome.

Moving to the bottom part of the bag, shown in Figure 10.5, we first see the contact details for the supermarket, just below the image of the store. These details include the website, the email address and three phone numbers. Below this, there is another message about the opening hours. This message is given in large letters, first in Finnish, and then in six other languages: English, German, Swedish, French, Russian and Japanese. However, an extra detail about the store being open on Sundays too appears only in Finnish in the words: *palvelemme joka päivä myös sunnuntaisin*.

## Conclusions

In this chapter, I have focused on the sociolinguistic resources displayed across the linguistic landscape of a supermarket in the village of Saariselka, in Finnish Lapland. This was the only available supermarket in Saariselka and, in a relatively short space of time, it had found itself catering to the needs of tourists from across the globe, who were shopping for essentials. Drawing on the findings presented above, I conclude this chapter with three main observations.

Firstly, we see in this linguistic landscape – in the information boards, the informal handwritten signs, the packaging and the shopping bags – the impact of the rapid pace of change experienced in tourist centers such as Saariselka. This geographically remote village in northern Finland has become one of the contact zones of the 21st century as a result of the interest generated in the area by the global tourism industry. The visibility of language resources from different languages in the linguistic landscape in this supermarket reflects the company's experience with different groups of clients, from different parts of the world, with specific needs, and it reflects their attempts to respond as swiftly as possible to this significant tourist presence. While the use of Swedish indexes the cross-border movement of people in this Nordic region, and the use of English indexes the general internationalization of the clientele, the use of other languages indexes the presence of specific groups of tourists, particularly Germans, Russians and Japanese.

Secondly, as Blommaert (2010, p. 149) has pointed out, in his reflections on language and globalization, the sheer pace of change in such commercial spaces – change that is ushered in by tourist mobilities – often precludes the possibility of managing and producing carefully ordered, symmetrical and standardized multilingual signage. The sociolinguistic consequence of the ever-changing nature of the clientele in spaces such as the Kuukkeli supermarket is that the production of signs that draw on different language resources takes place in *ad hoc* ways: language resources get collocated, juxtaposed or translated in uncommon, and sometimes, chaotic, ways that transgress linguistic norms, and that, even in peripheral areas such as Saariselka, display different degrees of polycentricity. As I indicated in the fifth section of this chapter, recent sociolinguistic research related to language and globalization provides us with new conceptual lenses for interpreting and analyzing the complexity of the communicative resources that we encounter in the linguistic landscape of stores such as Kuukkeli.

Thirdly, alongside the use of resources from numerous languages, the use of written Finnish in the signs, the packaging and the shopping bags, and the use of spoken Finnish by the staff at the checkout tills, indexes the wider national context and the current sociolinguistic order. At the same time, the virtual absence of the indigenous Sami lingua-cultures is striking. Products from across Samiland are only on display in the souvenirs section of the Kuukkeli store. As I pointed out early in this chapter, the three Sami language varieties – Northern Sami, Inari Sami and Skolt Sami – constitute a key part of the sociolinguistic landscape of Finnish Lapland, but they are not visible in the linguistic landscape of commercial enterprises such as this one. In the wake of the rapid expansion of the tourist industry in places like Saariselka, we see here one of the key challenges facing speakers of these local languages.

## Notes

- 1 This research was carried out as part of a CIMO post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Jyväskylä.
- 2 Palvelemme joka päivä läpi vuoden kello 9–21, myös sunnuntaisin. Meiltä saat kaikista ostoistasi K-kaupan plussaa. Meiltä löydät lähes kaiken tarvitsemasi saman katon alta. Kuukkelitietää, mitä lomalainen tarvitsee, koska olemme saaneet palvella jo lähes 30 vuotta Saariselän lomalaisia. See: [www.saariselka.fi/sisalto/yriytykset/tavaratalo\\_supermarket\\_kuukkelit](http://www.saariselka.fi/sisalto/yriytykset/tavaratalo_supermarket_kuukkelit).

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# 11 Calypso Music, Globalization and Plurilingualism in the Dutch Caribbean

*Gregory Richardson*

## Introduction

The linguistically underresearched area of the Dutch Caribbean deserves much attention in that it provides a superdiverse sociolinguistic environment. It has mainly emerged as a consequence of migration processes throughout the centuries by means of Amerindian interisland migration, European colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, inner and outer regional work migration, tourism and the age of Internet (Allen, 2011; Alofs & Merkies, 2001; Richardson, 2015; Wever, 2015). An argument thus can be made that globalization processes started prior to the generally applied 20th century globalization theories (Mufwene & Vigouroux, 2008). Nevertheless, the theoretical framework of ‘globalization in the margins’, as theorized by Wang, et al. (2014) as is the thread of this book provides an interesting space in which sociolinguistic superdiversity can be explored in various ways throughout the globe. The concept of globalization in the margins, however, in itself can be a point of discussion, as the general semantics perhaps could erroneously suggest some form of ‘marginality’, in remote ‘underdeveloped’, ‘exotic’ peripheries of the earth; in this case, the Caribbean. It also seems to be a concept that has as its premise, a western-centric prism, and that more effort should be made to look at globalization in other areas of the world. As an endo-ethnographer working at an academic institution in the Caribbean, some of these theoretical articulations are indeed a point of concern if not nuanced and if one does not recognize that it is but a particular form of world-making from a particular point of departure (Richardson, 2012).

It is argued in this chapter, however, that in this context, globalization in the margins must be viewed in its broadest sense; that is, as superdiverse sociolinguistic spaces, be it physical or virtual, where a conversion of pluri-constructions, pluri-languages and pluri-cultures exists and continues to develop (Wang, et al., 2014). In addition, it can also be argued that precisely because of the historical undervaluing of certain regions through western prisms, a concerted effort should be made to shed light on what Gayatri Spivak and other oriental and postcolonial



scholars call subaltern narratives as much insight is to be gained from them (Spivak, 2010).

Superdiverse sociolinguistic spaces also share similarities with commonly more used theoretical concepts in cultural anthropology, such as *mosaic*, *bricolage*, hybridization, *metissage*, *mestizaje* and creolization (Benítez-Rojo, 1997; Glissant, 1999). Especially creolization as a concept bares much significance here as Creole languages, for example, in the Caribbean are productions and reproductions of these types of societies. Though they may have different academic interpretations and a regional focus, they share a seemingly oxymoronic idea of sameness through pluri-identification. Under this model, one's identity construct is giving meaning within a broader continuum where one could be black and white; European, Indian, Amerindian and African simultaneously; one could be plurilingual and one could have several mother tongues; one could act local as well as transnational. One could argue that these Caribbean societies to some degree deemphasize and decenter European/North American colonial and neocolonial political and cultural domination as they leave space for agency void of time and space. Édouard Glissant, in articulating a vocabulary for creolization (in some ways like superdiversity) says:

If we posit *metissage* as, generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences, creolization seems to be a limitless *metissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable. (...) Its most obvious symbol is in the Creole language, whose genius consists in always being open. (...) Creolization carries along then into the adventure of multilingualism and into the incredible explosion of cultures.

(Glissant, 1999, p. 35)

Overseeing the above-described ways of looking at the globalized world in the 'margins', I take creolization to be most similar and best applicable as it seeks to defy totalizing, singular, mono-causal, essentialist, binary pro- or contra-narratives for the most part, and instead, tries to embrace connections, synergies and fusions out of multiplicities. Creolization probably even goes further than superdiversity as it is not only articulated as a post-World War II migration phenomenon but rather as mobilities within a historically much broader continuum; a span of at least five to six hundred years. The recent literature on superdiversity has been, for example, rather only focused on the emergence of superdiversity in places such as London, England and other European metropolises with an emphasis on hyper-migration in the past century (Vertovec, 2006).

The concept of *multiculturalism* is not used in this article as it is argued to be a postcolonial top-down construction by Western European governments as a policy to organize mass migration to European metropolises such as London and Amsterdam (Richardson, 2012). Though

the different ethnic groups share the same space and cross-cultural fertilization takes place yet *difference* remains central as it is still seen through a monolingual, monocultural, mono-identified lens, where one group is dominant and still in charge of the grand discourse. If one observes what can be called the ‘creole superdiverse’ model of the Caribbean, it is argued that superdiversity is not only external but especially internal; *one* is the *other* and vice versa and can be utilized situationally.

Before an impression is created that the above-described is akin to a utopian society, it should be made clear that even in these spaces, the politics of identity, whether it concerns class, color, language, gender, sexuality or regionality, are present. Some argue that it is much like a kaleidoscope in that it creates a colorful illusion, that there are endless variations and multiple patterns through every move of the colored glass pieces, but the pieces themselves always stay constant (Van de Port, 2016). The critique is also that it romanticizes these phenomena and ignores very real challenges as a result of cultural clashes.

Nevertheless, as will be seen in this chapter, tensions indeed take shape in various spaces, overt and covert, on different levels and during different periods such as during carnival and in carnivalesque spaces. Here subverted discourses are amplified and attempts to deconstruct the underlying tensions through inversive and subversive dialogical expressions are made (Bakhtin, 1984). Despite its frictions, one could argue that there is a collective consciousness that aims to manage these tensions through their pluri-identified forms of world making.

This brings us to the main question of this chapter. How does Calypso music embed a transnational genre locally through language and what traces of globalization are visible content-wise and linguistically?

This chapter aims to shed light on sociolinguistic diversity on the Dutch Caribbean island of Aruba using Calypso, historically one of the oldest musical genres in the English Creole-speaking Caribbean as a case to observe how the politics of sociolinguism in a carnivalesque setting play out. This work is based on findings of a longitudinal ethnographic study on Calypso and the deconstruction of dominant discourses throughout the Caribbean. Much of the data have been collected over the course of 10 years throughout the Caribbean through participant observation, interviews and song text transcriptions, and is presented through ethnographic descriptions, theory and song text analysis. This work can be considered an intersection of cultural anthropology, sociolinguistics and ethnomusicology. The interview transcriptions and song texts in the English Creole and Papiamentu languages are italicized.

### **Aruba, a Super Diverse Linguistic Space**

Aruba, a relatively small Dutch Caribbean island off the northern coast of Venezuela is one such diverse sociolinguistic case. The island is characterized by a small-scale-dependent economy that carries a cultural,

political and linguistic legacy of colonialism and patterns of globalization through trade and transnational flows (Croes, 2007). Together with its sister islands Curaçao and Bonaire, they make up what are known as the ABC islands. St Maarten, Saba and St Eustatius, also of the Dutch Caribbean make up the SSS islands; they are located in the northeastern Caribbean. As for their political status, Aruba alongside Curaçao and St Maarten have a semi-autonomous status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands as they are in large part self-determinant except for national defense and international affairs. Their status, in some respects, is similar to the commonwealth of Puerto Rico and its political relationship with the United States of America (Alofs & Merkies, 2001).

Aruba is one of the few islands in the region where plurilingualism is considered one of its main identity markers (Croes, 1995). The Iberian lexifier Creole *Papiamentu*, the most commonly spoken language on Aruba (also on Curaçao and Bonaire), is a Creole language with a Spanish and Portuguese lexicon and a typically West African (Benue-Kwa) grammar (Martinus, 2004). Papiamentu and Dutch represent the official languages of Aruba. English and English lexifier Creole as well as Spanish are also spoken and together they represent the so-called 'Big four' (CBS, 2010; Rodríguez Lorenzo, 2015; Stamper, 2009). According to the 2010 census mother-tongue speakers of Papiamentu averaged at 69%, Spanish at 13%, English at 8.2%, which also includes English Creole speakers and Dutch at 6.2%. The remaining residents speak other languages such as Haitian Creole, Mandarin, Hindi and even Tagalog among others (CBS, 2010). Dutch is the least spoken language of the 'Big four'; it is mostly used in an academic and legislative capacity and has been a source of debate for many years (Dijkhof & Pereira, 2010).

From the monolingual, monocultural and mono-identified perspective, this dynamic contact between languages and cultures might seem to be somewhat of an anomaly, yet native Caribbean theorists have convincingly demonstrated how, through processes such as creolization in superdiverse globalized settings, persons move creatively and seamlessly from one code to another and from one identity to another. Arubans engage with multiple languages situationally where there is constant border crossing by means of code switching and codemixing (Faraclas & De Luna, 2012). An argument can be made that the 'plurilingualism identity marker' on Aruba is of the character that when one is not functional in all four languages, one is viewed negatively, or, in some cases, 'Un-Aruban'. It is an expectation that one is at least understandable in all four of the languages.

Most Caribbean islands outside of the Spanish Caribbean are bilingual where most speak a European-derived language and a Creole language; for example, in Jamaica, Jamaican Creole and English are spoken, in Martinique, Martinican Creole as well as French is spoken. This is also

the case for Haiti, St Lucia, St Kitts, Grenada and others. This is not to say that only dual languages are practiced on these islands; often more is spoken, such as in Suriname and in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, where varieties of Spanish, French Creole, Bhojpuri and Hindi are spoken; yet, the expectation is not that it counts for the entire island. Comparatively, Aruba and the other islands of the Dutch Caribbean are sociolinguistically quite unique.

Aruba's superdiverse ethnic and sociolinguistic roots owe their existence to diverse historical processes; yet 20th century oil migration and tourism arguably have had the biggest impact. Because of these waves of migration over the course of roughly 100 years, the population skyrocketed from about 10,000 at the turn of the 20th century to about 130,000 in 2010 (Alofs & Merkies, 2001; Ridderstaat, 2007). Today, Aruba is home to over 90 different nationalities from diverse ethnic backgrounds and depends almost entirely on the tourism industry for its livelihood (CBS, 2010; Croes, 2007). It is argued that mainly during this period the acceleration of globalization processes amplified the hyper-diverse nature of Aruba.

One of the groups that had a significant influence on the sociolinguistic and cultural landscape of Aruba were the English Creole-speaking immigrants from the Dutch Windward Islands (Northern Caribbean) and immigrants from places like Trinidad, St Vincent, Grenada and other Anglophone Caribbean islands, as well as English speakers from San Pedro de Macoris in the Dominican Republic. This subgroup of immigrants was locally known as *ingles* (English). Scholars of the Dutch Caribbean such as Vera Green (1974), Jorge Ridderstaat (2007), Rose Mary Allen (2011), Luc Alofs and Leontine Merkies (2001) and Francio Guadeloupe (2008) to name a few, provide us with research concerning the numbers of people involved in this wave of migration, as well as concerning the ways in which they constructed their realities.

When oil was discovered in the lake of Maracaibo Venezuela in the earlier half of the 20th century, the Dutch quickly arranged to have multinational refineries built just off the Venezuelan coast on their colonial island territories of Aruba and Curaçao. Venezuela, Curaçao, Aruba and Trinidad (where petroleum is also pumped and refined) became known in the region as the 'oil countries'. On Aruba, an American-owned oil refinery named Lago Oil and Transport Company was established. This refinery was at one time one of the largest in the world and was a key supplier of allied fuel during World War II. In 1942, a German U-boat even attacked the refinery causing significant damage, illustrated here as an example of small island developing states having a global impact (Ridderstaat, 2007).

The narrative among many of those who came to work at the refinery in Aruba was that they had no intention of migrating permanently to the island, and that they always had their suitcases packed, stacked and

ready to head back home. The moment of return for most, however, never eventuated (Aymer, 1997). They have resided mostly near the refinery in the district of San Nicolas, on the eastern tip of the island, and for the most part, still speak an English Creole known to some in Aruba as San Nicolas English (Richardson & Richardson 2012; Rodriguez Lorenzo, 2015; Stamper, 2009).

These *ingles* immigrants also played an important role in the development of the tourism industry, which replaced oil refining as the main economic activity on the island from the 1980s (Alofs & Merkies, 2001). In the earlier half of the 20th century, this immigrant group constituted almost half of the inhabitants on the island of Aruba (Alofs & Merkies, 2001). A thriving community, several very prominent figures in Caribbean history were descended from these immigrants and spent some of their younger years in San Nicolas, including Maurice Bishop, the Grenadian socialist revolutionary and leader of the New Jewel Movement as well as former Grenadian Prime Minister Eric Gairy who was a prominent trade unionist during this period (Allen, 2011).

### Calypso Music on Aruba

It was during this explosive period of hyper-migration in the 20th century that the Calypso music genre was introduced to the island and through cross-cultural fertilization eventually gave rise to what locals refer to as *Calipso di Aruba* (Aruban Calypso) (Razak, 1997).

Calypso music has since gained so much prominence that it has become the most popular musical genre during the carnival season, which is considered the biggest cultural celebration on the island. It has a special place in the hearts of many in the Anglophone Caribbean, and is considered one of the region's crowning achievements alongside steelpan, reggae, athletics and cricket (Manuel, Bilby, & Largey, 1995; Rohlehr, 1994). Many are very adamant in stating that, '*Is we pride and joy*' as it is a prominent staple in the national discourse of the region. Sylvester, Alfonso and McDowell (2013) provide a description of Calypso music that emphasizes its folk and multiple voicing aspects, highlighting its origins on the island of Trinidad:

[Calypso] (...) can be described as an indigenous folk music whose roots stem from the plantation era when complaints, disunity and disloyalty was frowned upon. As such slaves developed a system of communication amongst themselves where they sang of their woes and their causes in hidden verses or double entendre, which sought to satirise the actions of their slave masters as well as create the great divide in communication between the slaves and the plantation owners.

(Sylvester, et al., 2013, p. 201)

The Andrew Sisters' interpretation of Lord Invader's *Rum and Coca Cola*, Harry Belafonte's *Daylight Come* 'day oh, banana song', Arrow's *Hot Hot Hot* and Baha Men's interpretation of Anselm Douglas' *Who let the Dogs Out* are internationally some of the most commonly known Calypso songs, but Calypso music has had a much longer and deeper history throughout the entire Anglophone Caribbean (Hill, 1993). On the international scene, Calypso music is identified 'happy music' but within the Caribbean, veiled behind the curtain of its creole languages, it is especially known for its critique of the dominant classes and the articulation of a plethora of emotions for that matter through rhyming of words. Calypso, like many other Afro-Atlantic musical forms in the Americas, is an expression of the 'agency' of African slaves brought to labor on the sugar plantations all throughout the Caribbean. Forbidden to communicate, and severed from family and home, African slaves began to sing songs covertly mocking their masters as an alternative form of resistance (Liverpool, 2001; Rohlehr, 1990).

Calypso singers, known as Calypsonians, also cloaked themselves with royal names, coined by themselves or others to fit their personalities. In the Calypso world you could either be a King, Queen, Lady, Baron, Mighty, Lord, Doctor or any *sobriquet*, a playful nickname that stood out as being powerful or as somehow exemplifying your personality. Barbara Babcock speaks about how symbolic reversals can be seen as emerging from a playful space where one can witness a 'freeing of focused energies within a restrictive or artificial environment in which social threat can paradoxically be expressed without threatening' (Babcock, 1978, pp. 24–25) or 'a space in time to take chances with new roles and ideas' (Babcock, 1978, p. 25). The sobriquet of the Calypsonian in a way took control over the actor, the role player, who became transformed by the title into a character who had the authority to speak on issues of significance, without having to suffer any of the consequences that would normally follow (Best, 2012, p. 44).

Most radio stations on the island broadcast the Calypso Festival live for free while television stations broadcast the event live via pay-per-view. A great number of Arubans choose to go to the event or, if this is not possible, to tune in at home or abroad to enjoy the music as well as to form and express their opinions regarding the performances and the official results. The fact that this festival is considered to be local and homebred has added significantly to its popularity. An indication how serious Calypsonians take this role can be found in the excerpt of an interview with Aruban Calypsonian The Baron. In Emanuelson's (2015) documentary *Mighty, Lords, Kings and Queens, Calypso and the Politics of Recognition* he said,

Calypso slash Soca Monarch, is our biggest festival on this island. I think it should have value, who you put on stage. Don't come and

say, if I want a comedian. This is serious business. You talking about 50 thousand guilders a band getting. So that's serious money man, you don't make that in a year sitting down talking, just you and me like that. This is going to be our future for the entire year. Depends how well you do on stage, is how well your year is going to end up. You going to get play outs, you going to get people wanting you, your group is going to do good. So if you have it as a joke, stay home!  
(Emanuelson, 2015)

It is evident that Calypso music has come a long way and taken on a vibrant life of its own in Aruba. What was once considered a fringe musical genre belonging to the *ingles* immigrant community has now become part of the identity construct of the everyday Aruban all over the island to the point where Calypso music is now referred to by most Arubans as *nos cultura* (our culture). Many Arubans have adopted and adapted one another's linguistic, cultural and identificational codes, often on their own terms as an act of creative resistance and rejection of the imposed opposition between 'self' and 'other'.

### **Calypso Music and Plurilingualism: The Case of Mighty Talent**

Aruban Calypsonian Claudius Phillips, who goes by the stage name of Mighty Talent, is considered one of the most successful Aruban Calypsonians. He has won countless titles and prizes over the course of 30 years. He is also credited with being the principal trendsetter of code switching in Aruban Calypso. This approach has been emulated by quite a few artists, and has for the most part, become the prototype for the manner Calypso is performed in Aruba.

Despite his popularity, Mighty Talent's approach is considered controversial, especially by fellow Calypsonians, Calypso commentators and critical Calypso fans. When performing, he strategically mixes different languages, mainly English and Papiamentu, and sometimes, Spanish and Dutch. About this style of Calypso, John Gumbs a local DJ and Calypso commentator said:

It is not, one hundred percent the real thing because English (English Creole) is the language of Calypso not Papiamentu. That is the language of the people who brought Calypso to Aruba. Those who don't know better, taking it over as well.

(J. Gumbs, personal communication, August 2010)

One of the biggest critics is a fellow Calypsonian that goes by the sobriquet of Black Diamond. His main argument is that Calypso should be sung completely in English Creole as it is the language that Calypso is



sung in the rest of the Anglophone Caribbean, and more importantly, the language of what he calls the cultural owners of the Calypso art form. He said:

(...) you shouldn't use different languages, because it is a bail out. When you can't find a word to rhyme in English, you switch it up with Papiament, because Papiament is strong phonetically, to make it work. I see it as limitation (of skill).

(A. Gario, personal communication, January 2013)

Calypsonian Mighty Whitey in a similar vein said:

Calypso should be sung in English ... many people might not agree with me but the reason I say this is if you sing in Papiamento, how are people going to understand you internationally. You cannot go anywhere.

(G. Leyder, personal communication, January 2013)

Resistance toward Calypso's linguistic diversification was very real as its proponents wanted to maintain a specific form that was more in line with what Melville Herskovits (1941) calls the traditional African retentionist approach. For example, a reliance on African drums in the music, the wearing of African attire during performances such as dashiki's and an emphasis on the African roots of Calypso music.

On the other side of the debate, some have said that it is actually because of Mighty Talent's plurilingual approach they are drawn to him. In this line, fellow up and coming Calypsonian, King Jeon, said the following about Mighty Talent in Emanuelson's documentary [in Papiamento]:

Mighty Talent tawata e artista cu a trece e estilo di pariba y pabou hunto den un solo estilo, el a mix e Ingles y e Papiamento. Desde awo mi ta bay canta tur mi canticanan na Papiamento, pasobra esey ta mi idioma, pasobra e ingles cu ami a sina na scol, no ta e ingles cu nan kier tende. Mi ta respete si pasobra pariba e cultura a cuminsa.  
(Emanuelson, 2015)

Mighty Talent was the artist who brought the style of *pariba* and *pabou* together into one distinct style, he combined the English language and the Papiamento language. From now on I will sing all my songs in Papiamento, because that is my language, because the English that I learned at school, isn't the English that they want to hear. I respect it though because *pariba* is where the culture began.

According to C. van Heyningen (personal communication, February 2013), it was actually because Mighty Talent codeswitches, that 'I can

understand his songs; the other Calypsonians, who sing in San Nicolas English alone, I have difficulty understanding'. He went on to say that:

Papiamentu is our national language. We should be proud to use it. We don't have to copy Trinidad style, we have our own style.

Mighty Reds, a Calypso elder, doesn't seem to have a problem with singing in Papiamentu either (Emanuelson, 2015). He says:

(...) it's all about the content of the song, yuh message have to be good, if it so, then I don't see no problem. Even Mighty Sparrow, sing a Calypso in Dutch, Beautiful Dutch Girl. If Sparrow could make it sound good, I don't see no problem.

About the language debate, Mighty Talent in Emanuelson (2015) says:

I don't see the problem with it. Aruba is a country of different languages. I grew up speaking different languages. I sing for everybody. What people don't understand, is that I do it strategically, I just don't mix languages together. You have to know how and when to do it. Most of the youngsters imitating me, don't know that.

He went on further to say:

Growing up we use to learn all these languages, English, Spanish, Papiamentu and Dutch. I represent Aruba, I represent all. I am not competing in any other country, I live in Aruba.

Mighty Talent's statements were not at all strange as Venezuelan television was the only audiovisual broadcast medium available on Aruba in the 1970s and 1980s. Papiamentu and English were spoken at home and on the street and Dutch was spoken in schools. Performing was his only livelihood, and thus, he had to cater to all of his fans. He realized that at the end, he is not only an artist but also has to live and secure his financial position. There was a strategic approach between being authentic and playing into the capitalist-driven market. He saw it clearly not as 'selling out' but as 'cashing in'. The system was already rigged; thus, the best he could do was to exploit it.

The very linguistic variety had its corresponding culture and values that were learned as well. Mighty Talent understood this evidenced Calypso in how he constructs his songs. Many of the punch lines were in a strategically chosen language (Richardson & Richardson, 2012). The strategic switching of languages was thus used as a means of getting more recognition from certain language groups in the population. There

is then a linguistic connection that allows one to interconnect on a more profound level because one could identify with the language, and thus, the audience could also see themselves as partly owner of the Calypso genre. It is argued that this went even further than many sociolinguistically diverse 'creole' societies in the Caribbean and the diasporas. Most of the cases are still departing from a monolingual, or at the most, bilingual position. Until one is immersed in such a society, where multiple languages and interpretations, not necessarily related (for example Dutch and Spanish or English, English Creole and Papiamentu) are continuously used in a *flow*, one's conceptualization of the lived experience of sociolinguistic diversity, *creolization* and *border crossing* would be different.

Arubans are very much aware of codeswitching tactics and consciously employ a language politics where identities and power relations are negotiated based on the outcome of the interaction. This to make a good impression on the person whom they are dealing with or maybe to do the opposite to prove a specific point. For example, insisting on speaking Papiamentu in the presence of a Dutch language speaker to prove that the Dutch immigrant ought to integrate and learn the native language. This can be considered a form of covert agency in response to a history of colonialism (Richardson & Richardson, 2012).

### **Mighty Talent's Plurilingual Calypso Song Texts**

In what follows, I go into a selection of plurilingual Calypsos by Mighty Talent around themes associated with globalization such as nationalism, materialism, migration and stereotypes, gender roles and economic hardship in Aruba as a result of a global economy. Globalization aspects are not only present in the plurilingual aspect of his song approach but also in the content of the lyrics.

In his 1998 Calypso 'Life in Aruba', Mighty Talent addressed issues concerning the livability of Aruba and how Arubans deal with each other as a result of globalization. He complains that the influence of media, ill-intentioned foreigners, materialism and selfishness has changed the mentality of his people through waves of migration of the past 30 years. He longs for an Aruba where locals could sleep with their doors open and where neighbors would greet and look out for one another. Foreigners were also welcome as long as they took on the 'help thy neighbor philosophy'. His refrain had a deliberate patriotic flavor as he quoted the words of Betico Croes, the architect of the *Status Aparte*, which established the autonomy of Aruba from the Netherlands Antilles in 1986 and whom some would consider the founding father of the nation, much in the fashion of Simon Bolivar in Latin America. The Papiamentu words are italicized.

### Life in Aruba (Philips, 1998)

I am Aruba, I am *orgulloso*, (I am Aruban, I am proud)  
 I going to *lucha lucha pa henter mi pueblo*, (I am going to fight for my  
 people)  
*anto si mi cay na caminda*, (if I should fall by the way side)  
*coy e bandera, y swaai e, zwaai e*, (take the flag and wave it)  
*hisa bo bandera, hisa bo cultura*, (lift your flag, lift your culture)  
*yuda bo prohimo*, yes even *stranhero*, (help your brothers, even foreigners)  
 common help everybody, not just your friends and *compinchi*, (partners)  
*hisa nos na layra*, (lift us in the sky)  
 like you using plenty Viagra

In his 2001-winning Calypso, ‘Wait one Minute’, he talks on behalf of Aruban women, who have complained to him about Latina women taking ‘their’ men. He speaks about ‘ill-intentioned’ foreigners. He makes a plight for immigrants to learn to speak Papiamentu. They complain that these so-called voluptuous *mamitas*, do anything, so that they can marry these men and get a Dutch Passport. Mighty Talent goes on to do his own research, to ask these *mamitas* why they are considered so special. To which they reply, they are exciting and try different sexual positions. Again, one sees, Mighty Talent’s plurilingual approach, using English Creole, Papiamentu and Spanish to describe this scenario. Everyone is able to understand him and as this topic is a pressing issue, taking the defending the rights of Aruban women gives him support from a large part of the crowd.

### Wait One Minute (Philips, 2001)

I read Bon Dia, I read the Diario, (Aruban newspapers)  
 Someone woman, always writing *remetido*, (opinion column)  
 Telling you, *muhernan*, you betta *cuida bo casa* (women take care of  
 your husband)  
 Before he leave you, for a Spanish *Mamita*  
 I ask *Mamita*, *oye*, what have you got,  
 That Aruban, woman have not  
 She say *oye, papito, ya sabe tu* (hey daddy, you already know)  
 We do things Aruban women would never do  
*Homber, kier love, amor* in a different style (Men, want...)  
*Muher rubiano* say No, one time! (Aruban women say...)  
 But if he ask she, *mamita*, she say *si si*  
 She talking bout sixty nine  
 But wait, my Aruban woman is great  
 She respect, her body and mind  
 She will cook, clean and love you blind  
 But she aint giving you no behind

In his 2009 Calypso entitled *Situacion na Aruba, Perempempem*, he talked about economic difficulties in Aruba as a result of the international economic crisis. Most of the goods in Aruba are imported, and thus, the island is susceptible to external economic forces. Food prices are relatively high when compared to other islands in the Caribbean. *Perempempem* is a local Papiamentu saying for ‘things are tight economically’. With these lyrics in his Calypso, he proposes a solution for high water and electricity costs. Mighty Talent breaks down the barriers between the four main languages spoken on Aruba even more clearly, and aggressively codeswitches seemingly as an indication that he wants to appeal to all groups on the island. His philosophy is very pragmatic. It does not include a special allegiance to a specific group above any other.

### *Situacion na Aruba, Perempempem* (Philips, 2009)

Cost a living, Lord it raising,  
going high like skyrocket,  
*cos ta frega, placa aint yega*, (things are tight, money isn’t reaching)  
*ora bo bay supermarket*, when (you go at the supermarket)  
*Gobierno* tell me (government)  
*awa y coriente, conscientemente* (water and electricity, should be used  
consciously)  
*baha mi consumo*, (lower consumption)  
I got a plan, *presente na bo*, (I’ll present it to you)  
*spar cu talent y biba miho*, (save with talent, and live better)  
*look tur siman, bay lama*, (go to the beach every week)  
*sambuya by di ship what zink*, (take a dip by the sunken ship)  
*e mesun seawater, herbe den weya*, (the same seawater, should be boiled)  
*pa laba paña*, even to drink, (to wash clothes)  
forget about using airco, *basha alcolado* and then you blow, (pour alco-  
lado; a brand of mentholated splash lotion)  
*toiletpapier baby tha di past*, (toilet paper is in the past)  
*kabi lesa corant* then you wipe your *asssina* (when you finish reading the  
paper then you can wipe your ass...)

The three song texts above exemplify how even in the contents of his lyrics, modern Calypso reflects many aspects of globalization. We see how, for example, in the first song text the so-called ‘Spanish Mamita’, a Latin American female immigrant who is willing to do more than Aruban women, is symbolic of much more than sexual innuendo. The ‘Spanish Mamita’ case actually speaks to a larger debate on migration and the threat of global influence on traditional norms on Aruba as a consequence of modern day globalization, both in and out of the bedroom. The local Aruban feels that the traditional family nucleus is being threatened by Aruban men potentially leaving their Aruban wives for foreign women. The local narrative by Arubans suggests that many of these foreign women

are only interested in marrying Aruban men to obtain Dutch Citizenship, and thus, to send for their families back home in Colombia or the Dominican Republic, or perhaps to travel to Europe for a better life.

The plurilingual song lyrics also play into an economic nationalist sentiment reflected in the way many discourses about foreigners similar to, for example, the ways the Dutch speak about Moroccans, the English about Pakistanis and Americans on Mexicans on the job front. We can see that these examples are global; thus, the experiences in the margins are similar to elsewhere. It also coincides with the critique of economic globalization where local economies suffer due to the influences of the foreign market. Arubans are increasingly financially challenged because of the rising cost of living due to global financial crises, which affect Aruba directly as more than 90% of the economy is dependent on tourism. In Mighty Talent's Calypso *Perempempem*, he alludes to this as well. Most of the consumer goods are also imported leaving the island susceptible to outside influences. As in many of the narratives, the scapegoats in these cases are usually foreigners who are 'taking the jobs of Arubans', the so-called *stranheros* doing the same jobs for less.

## Conclusion

On the sociolinguistic level, one could argue that it is Mighty Talent who is in great part responsible for taking Calypso music in Aruba from being *ingles* music to *nos musica* (our music), which a large part of the island could identify with and claim as their own. This is mainly because of his 'plurilingual all-inclusive' approach, with the usage of Papiamentu.

Calypso commentators and other critics in the Calypso world have argued that in his 'opening of the market' for all to partake in, he has violated the 'sacredness' of the art form. They contend that for financial gain, he has sold the art form to the masses, commercialized it, and that which has been transferred over generations, to those who were 'worthy', persons who have dedicated themselves to understanding the language and culture, has in this process been depreciated.

I argue, however, that many of his critics perhaps have mis-associated the role of plurilingualism, and specifically, Calypso sung in Papiamentu, with 'selling out'. Perhaps it is the other way around. Sticking to one language and emulating western modes of being actually promotes monolingualism, preferably American English, and in school, Dutch, with little room for Creole languages. So Mighty Talent singing in English, Papiamentu, Spanish and Dutch in magnificent acts of codeswitching typifies the masterful way that Arubans have for seamlessly and resourcefully operating among two, three or four languages in the same sentence – a prime example of how globalization in the margins has been given form. This is not because of lack of competence in any one of those languages,

but because one language is better suited to express what the speaker wants to convey in a superdiverse creole society.

Arubans in their own way, through Calypso music have developed ways in de-intensifying many of the challenges that come along with globalization. Going back to Mighty Talent's Calypsos in general we see that the issues he critiques are indeed similar to many of the challenges that many superdiverse metropolises face as a result of globalization. The politics of identity, race, class, gender, sexuality, language and the like are very much present. On the surface, it would seem that there was nothing unique about the way Arubans dealt with this. The difference I would argue is that the Calypsonian as a typical trickster, a man of words, in a carnivalesque space is able to play identity politics, and yet, through plurilingualism, is able to deescalate the tension with humor, satire and wordplay, and is even sometimes, able to highlight the oneness of its people through their common history that goes back centuries. Perhaps the best way here to describe globalization in the margins on Aruba is through the calypso dance. On the dance floor or behind of the music truck during carnival, collectively in a forward dancing motion, one is given the space to truly 'be' beyond their constructed realities.

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# 12 Consuming English in Rural China

## Lookalike Language and the Semiotics of Aspiration

*Xuan Wang*

### Language Commodification and Neoliberal English

The ‘value’ of language is made pertinent to sociolinguistics in Bourdieu’s (1991) theorization of language and symbolic power through metaphors such as ‘capital’, ‘market’ and ‘profit’. Framing social interactions as an economy of practice, Bourdieu describes language as part of the symbolic capital that is unequally distributed, with some forms of use carrying more value, prestige and social advantage than others. As such, access to and capacity to mobilize language resources, which are often interchangeable with material capital, are subject to and reflective of social power and control. The indexical link between language use and relative social power highlighted by Bourdieu offers a useful lens through which we can critically examine language in society, especially under the current conditions of neoliberal globalization in which language is increasingly becoming a form of commodity.

The rise of English as a global language has much to do with processes of language marketization and commodification in globalization which, as Heller (2010) suggests, involve two distinct trends: that of the direct exchange of language as an identity marker for money and that of the demand for – thus, value increase of – certain linguistic skills as a result of new forms of economic activities. Such processes center on the value of language and its transactions in both material and perceptual terms. English Language Teaching (ELT) is a case in point (Park & Wee, 2012). Over the past decades, ELT has evolved into a lucrative global industry. Arguably, it is also a market that is driven and stratified by Western cultural hegemony and native-speaker normativity surrounding English as depicted, for instance, in Kachru’s (1992) model of the inner, outer and expanding circles of varieties and speakers. While this distinct global flow necessarily entails resistance, negotiation and innovation (Block & Cameron, 2002; Canagarajah, 1999), the ELT market continues to predicate upon and profit from the economic value of English endowed by its institutionally enregistered prestige and mobility – notably so in the expanding circle or the periphery of the world of English (Cameron, 2012). Blommaert’s (2010) analysis of a case of online

marketing of training for acquiring the ‘neutral’ American accent as a much-desired employability skill provides a sharp observation about the ideological underpinning of the indexical values and socioeconomic effects of language on the global linguistic and labor market. The commodification process as shown in his example is not simply of English (or a specific feature of English: accent), but of its emblematic function of being one of the ‘global indexicals of success’ (Blommaert, 2010, p. 55) – a dual process of marketizing and ideologizing English as a semiotic commodity, seeking out its peripheral users. Thus, Blommaert (2010, p. 49) contends, ‘What is spread is [...] not just the language as linguistic structure but the language as a densely loaded ideological format, something that is far more than a language but also an acquirable imagery of the self as being “in the world”.’

The commodification of language, especially that revolving around language as a semiotic-identity object, cannot be separated from ideological and related discursive practices about the language *per se*, and about the identity potentials these products and practices may offer whether real or imagined. In this respect, consumer culture has long been seen as, among other forms of capitalism, instrumental in shaping the relationship between what we consume and who we are. Veblen’s ([1899] 1994) theory of the leisure class points us to correlations between economic and social patterns of consumption behaviors in which individuals are positioned hierarchically in society based on the ‘wealth’ associated with the goods or services they consume. Bourdieu’s (1984) critique of ‘taste’ and ‘distinction’ further extends our understanding of value, consumption and identity into a symbolic and inferential frame of meaning making, which accentuates the relevance of ideological processes about the economic and social gain in motivating the choice and consumption of linguistic resources.

Such identity politics, according to Giddens (1991), is heightened by circumstances of globalization and late modernity in which individuality as the project of the self, orients increasingly toward commodity capitalism (see also Castells, 2010). Propelled by new media, technology and transnational movements, consumerism as a prevailing ‘ideoscape’ (Appadurai, 1996) tends more so than ever toward a binding of possibilities of self-expression and mobility with ‘lifestyle’ templates that involve a wide range of choices, behaviors, attitudes and beliefs (Giddens, 1991). In this sense, the question of which semiotic products to consume, much like the question of which goods or services to consume, belongs to lifestyle choices that index and transform social meanings and positioning.

In many ways, the status of ‘globalness’ acquired by English (notwithstanding its related ‘myths and facts’, see Mufwene, 2010) makes the language itself prone to processes of commodification. In discussing language ideologies in Japanese society, Seargeant (2009) shows that the idea of global English renders the language a highly desirable

commodity in social domains such as education and, conversely, this idea is constructed and enforced through locally embedded processes of commercialization and consumption, drawing on motifs such as ‘authenticity’ and ‘aspiration’. In terms of language commodification, the idea and *ideologizing* of English in Japan (for other contexts see e.g. Gao, 2014; Higgins, 2009; Pan, 2015; Park, 2009; Park & Wee, 2012) can be taken as an illustration that, in locally conceptualizing the global language, the consumerist ideology and the global English ideology are seen coming together, mutually constitutive and reinforcing. While the indexical field of English surrounding its perceived ‘globalness’ engenders market values, consumption needs and identity orientations, consumerism impregnates English with the indexical potency of prestige and privileges the language over most of the other semiotic commodities on the global marketplace, thus, once again, giving rise to the idea of English as a global language. It is in this duality framed by old and new economic conditions and discursive regimes that individuals are steered toward being enrolled in the self-identification process.

The interrelation, discussed above, between language and ideology and between language commodification and English in globalization is, in fact, part and parcel of the neoliberal political economy framework in which language, particularly the English language, has become a crucial resource and embodiment of the hegemonic order of global capitalism (Holborow, 2015; Phillipson, 1992, 2008). For many, the economic and ideological mechanisms outlined here may sound nothing new or controversial. However, as Massey (2013) cautions us, there is a real danger that the use of ‘vocabularies of the economy’ for explaining our world is acceptance of ‘common sense’ (cf. Gramsci, 1971) with regard to language, that is, its role in propagating and legitimatizing the popularized ideology and dominant architecture of the system in place. This common sense produces ‘real hegemony’ and, therefore, should be debunked and challenged (Massey, 2013, p. 20). Indeed, one emerging line of sociolinguistic critique of neoliberal globalization is about tensions between the established capitalist world order and new mobilities and possibilities of meaning making. It is argued that the center-margin configuration as delineated by Wallerstein (2004) is becoming increasingly fragmented, destabilized and complexified; therefore, the reality of globalization, rather than assumed, needs to be accounted for ethnographically, as *practices* from the local and from below, in order to uncover new dynamics of power and coercion and new forms of inequality (Arnaut, Blommaert, Rampton, & Spotti, 2016; Blommaert, 2010; Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013). Following this line, concepts such as margins, English and language are opened up for rethinking and reinterpretation.

This study does not by any means conform with the kind of common sense of neoliberal hegemony as criticized by Massey. On the contrary, albeit on a modest scale, it will address the hegemonic structuring in

relation to the commodification of English by focusing on how this is manifested in the margins of globalization, and how this is played out in local quotidian life. The margin in this case is a nascent consumer market in a small town in rural China where English is beginning to emerge on public signage in local shopping streets. Given that China on the whole still constitutes a margin in the world of English, and that globalization processes within China are rather unevenly developed, with tremendous urban-rural inequality (Gao, 2014; Whyte, 2010), the use of the descriptor ‘margin’ is hardly *a priori* labeling in this case, but it is based on the ethnographic observation of the place and local lived experiences (see below). The sociolinguistic reality in that margin, as we will see, is marked with such intriguing yet clear features of marginality that they affirm the neoliberal hegemony articulated through vocabularies of the economy. However, my description of these features is not offered as the neoliberal common sense. Rather, it serves as ‘descriptive analysis’ (following Hymes, 1996) of hegemony and as *de facto* evidence of the consequence of neoliberal globalization and, more importantly, how people positioned in the margins live with this consequence from within their predicament. In this sense, this study is aligned with the sociolinguistics of the margins (Wang, et al., 2014). It is primarily concerned with the dynamic interplay between the material life and the ideological life of language in globalization, asking how seemingly common sense patterns of language commodification might reveal new insights about language use when looked at from the perspective of the margins.

### **Ethnographic Linguistic Landscaping and English in the Margin**

Let us now turn to the margin as the space of language commodification. While navigating the local space, I will also outline the ethnographic approach taken to this space, more specifically, the approach of ethnographic linguistic landscaping with respect to English in this space.

As aforementioned, this study follows the Hymesian ethnographic orientation to language and communication, especially its Marxian perspective on power and linguistic inequality (Hymes, 1996). This ethnographic approach has provided considerable paradigmatic inspiration to the recent advancement of a sociolinguistics of globalization (Arnaut, Blommaert, Rampton, & Spotti, 2016; Blommaert, 2010; Coupland, 2003, 2010) which, at its core, considers language in terms of communicative practices embedded in specific local opportunities and conditions of globalization on multiple scale levels, rather than in the preexisting, self-contained and apolitical linguistic system (Higgins, 2009; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Pennycook, 2010). Furthermore, according to this approach, *language as practice* is better described and examined as everyday experiences of localization grounded in the insider’s

viewpoint (Hymes, 1996) from below (Fairclough, 2007), even from the margins (Wang, et al., 2014). Based on these ontological and epistemological assumptions, the globalization of English can no longer be seen as neatly contained within Kachru's (1992) model of three circles that is largely based on the center-margin configuration organized around native-speaker normativity. It is argued that, as a sociolinguistic object, English is increasingly contested, appropriated and reformulated from its margins by growing numbers of nonnative speakers in diverse communities (Park & Wee, 2012; Pennycook, 2007). This viewpoint is particularly relevant to the analysis of English in this study.

What emerges from the marginal space of a rural town in China, as we will soon see, is a distinctively local and marginal form of English, in the sense that (a) its linguistic forms are highly peculiar, either conspicuously erroneous and 'broken' in terms of orthographic, spelling or grammatical norms, or, are unrecognizable and nonexistent in terms of English proper, but are circulated on the local market in 'fake' forms, so to speak; and (b) these 'broken' and 'fake' forms of English are produced and circulated in a setting where English is an extremely prestigious yet scarce type of resource, and where global urban patterns of high-street retail business and associated consumption lifestyles are only beginning to take shape. More often than not, such marginal forms and practices of English are judged as bad and offensive, ridiculed (for instance, labelled as 'Engrish') and dismissed for being anything but serious, authentic or legitimate in the mainstream socioeconomic and cultural sphere. Neither do they receive much scholarly attention (although see e.g. Blommaert, 2010, 2012). However, by taking an ethnographic perspective, we are invited to reconsider the sociolinguistic significance of such seemingly superficial and banal phenomena, calling into question what kind of local context these peculiar forms of English derive from, why they are produced and enregistered as 'English', and what this can tell us about language and its social functions in the margins.

More specifically, this study follows the key principles of ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis (Blommaert, 2013; Blommaert & Maly, 2016; Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009) evolving out of the growing interests in multilingual spaces under conditions of globalization. Central to these principles is that, linguistic signs should be analyzed in context, as part of the *geosemiotic and discursive practices* (cf. Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2003) afforded by specific multimodal resources that are made available, shaped by competing ideologies and norms, and emplaced by social actors in relation to multilayered spacetime frames. In this sense, the kind of marginal English in the linguistic landscape of rural China has more to it than meets the eye. Rather than being a static, contextless object measured only by dominant linguistic standards, its inscription is better seen as a dynamic process of 'semiotic design' (Kress, 2010) in which different modes of semiotic production and processes of



meaning making are involved, in relation to the users, the social space they occupy and the sense of authenticity they construct – increasingly, of ‘designed authenticity’ in the context of globalization (Wang, 2015). As Cameron (2012, p. 359) confirms, through language commodification, ‘the rather generic meaning [of English] may be inflected differently in and for different local contexts, making English not so much a global as a “glocal” semiotic commodity.’ The approach to take, then, is not simply to look at English in abstract terms, but at *English in place* (following ‘language in place’ by Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 2003), as globalized semiotic features with material and symbolic values, installed in a specific locale and public milieu and facilitating a local instance of commodification and consumption of space and identity.

The locale under investigation here is the town of Enshi, which is the capital of a rural ethnic minority region in central China officially called Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture. Although administratively Enshi is labelled as a ‘city’,<sup>1</sup> it is actually located in deep, arid mountains with very limited economic infrastructures or resources, and is inhabited mainly by people from rural minority populations such as the Tujia and the Miao. Until not so long ago, the only way to reach Enshi from nearby urban agglomerates was days of traveling by sleeper bus along treacherous mountain roads. The prefecture has historically been among the poorest in central and western China, with its gross domestic product ranking persistently at the bottom in its home province of Hubei. Evidently, in China’s geopolitical and economic map of globalization, Enshi is situated in the margins. The city is not so much a ‘city’ in the full sense of the term, but a town, surrounded by a vast area of inaccessible and underdeveloped rural mountains.

In recent years, Enshi has picked up some vigor of globalization from the centers of the country and begun to undergo major transformations, spearheaded by the development of a new form of economy based on heritage tourism and the commodification of the local indigenous identities (Wang, 2015). With this economic and political initiative comes the need for a local urban hub where commercial activities of both tourists and local communities can be generated and catered to. This hub is beginning to emerge from the very center of the town along Wuyang Street (see Figure 12.1) where the local government and major institutions used to sit.<sup>2</sup> Wuyang Street is also the artery and the central conjunction that connects all the other roads going through the city. For decades, this street has been ‘the place to be’ of Enshi. Today, the street is undergoing substantial upgrading, with the road being widened, resurfaced and better regulated, and with the narrow footpaths, with Enshi’s first ever footbridges as well as an increasing number of multi-storey shopfronts. With the buildings in Wuyang Street being constantly refurbished and extended in order to stimulate more retail business, the street is also becoming an amazingly dense semiotic landscape where all kinds of



Figure 12.1 A nascent consumer market in Enshi.

advertisements, images, notices and other commercial signs and displays are put in place.

Figure 12.1 shows a glimpse of Wuyang Street in transformation and the tremendously complex, interrelated compilation of semiotic displays arising from that process. Without delving into a comprehensive analysis, one can easily detect from this little jungle of signs, the emergence of a consumer market from the local processes of urbanization and globalization, a market that is turning Wuyang Street from an old-fashioned solemn space of politics of the socialist era to a small but bustling and colorful space of commodification refilled with imageries of globalization. We see signs as diverse and playful looking as in probably any street corner of a cosmopolitan city, advertising goods and services ranging from computer training to fashionable underwear, from banking to health club membership, from accountancy to cosmetic surgery – all pointing to business genres and formats assembled by the concept of a town center ‘high street’ from the (anglophone) West. On the other hand, in that same space, we also see imageries of marginality: the exhausted, basic and crammed-looking infrastructure, the somewhat unengaged and unaffluent looking shoppers and passersby (note the shoulder pole carrier with two sacks of rubbish wandering along the main road for vehicles), and, importantly, the marked ‘localness’ and lack of outward

and upward mobility as indexed by the almost exclusive use of Chinese texts, which are designed for expressing the local orientation to globalization and ‘globalness’, but only with a reach to the local and regional consumers as the audience.

The space of Wuyang Street, therefore, is a space of ‘layers of historicity’ (Blommaert, 2010, p. 147) where old and new, very different processes of development overlap and intertwine, shaping the emplacement of a mixture of old and new material and semiotic objects. Collectively, these objects offer a snapshot of the rapid processes of transformation in Enshi. The space is nevertheless one of ‘disjuncture’ (Appadurai, 1996) in which a deeply local stretch of neighborhood in what was a relatively isolated and enclosed community is being visibly hallmarked and ruptured by the incoming of economic and ideological patterns from the global and national scale levels, producing an uneasy intersection and juxtaposition as well as stratification of the globalness and the localness. For the space users, Wuyang Street is transforming into a nascent marketplace in which consumption and identity choices are becoming not only more diverse but also more complex, since they are now navigating a multi-scalar space structured by old and new material and symbolic values. This new space of commodification will, to various extents, entice their consumerist awareness and orient them toward commodities with higher monetary values as much as higher symbolic values.

It is in the context of such dynamism that English is beginning to come into use on the local market in Enshi. Like many other places in the margins of the globalization of English, in Enshi, this language is considered to be the most prestigious and valuable, but is extremely scarce, and therefore, costly. For the vast majority of the local people, the only access they have to the thing called ‘English’ is through formal schooling. This means that English is indoctrinated into them as a state politically ideologized instrument for globalization and internationalization, as a largely abstract ideological object with a supreme status (Pan, 2015), but confined almost exclusively to limited and marginal classroom use (comparable to peripheral practices and normativity described in Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans, & Dyers, 2005). This stark contrast only magnifies, almost disproportionally, the value of English symbolically and economically, as can be seen in Figure 12.2.

Here, we see that, against a dilapidated building that is what is left of a local primary school at the far end of Wuyang Street, hang two enormous banners advertising shadow education (which local middle-class parents subscribe to for their children to have a better chance in achieving lifetime success). What is eye-catching is the banner on the right-hand side, which is professionally made for a local private company called Fangyuan English Training Center. With the company name printed in big emboldened script on the top, the banner centers on two



Figure 12.2 'our school has a foreign teacher'.

messages: 'our school has a foreign teacher' (on a blue background) and 'only good oral English proves that you are truly good at English' (on a pink background). The messages are accompanied by a photo of a young white male teacher on the left, echoed by more photos of him in action at the bottom, with two lines proclaiming that the company is 'the longest-standing professional English training company in Enshi' and 'the only one licensed to hire foreign teachers'.

There is complex politics surrounding the globalized ELT business at play here, such as the discourse of authenticity related to the (white, male) 'native-speaker' and 'foreign expert' myth, the traditional ELT ideology that gives primacy to oral practice, and the genre of authentication and the commodification of assumed ELT authenticity. These will not be discussed in detail (but see Gray, 2010; Medgyes, 1994; Stanley, 2013; and others) since Figure 12.2 is merely to illustrate that in Enshi:

- English is an acutely rare resource, so much so that, ironically, even in an upmarket advertisement for English training placed in a prime location by a most impressive training company, there is no trace of English itself;
- the commodification of English is dominated by multiple layers of ideologies and discourses, notably that of English as a global language, and is structured around concepts such as 'authenticity' (in

terms of ownership and dealership of English) and ‘aspiration’ (in terms of both personal and patriotic national interest in the global indexical of success);

– the geosemiotic features of commodification of English manifest a dramatic effect of ‘a clash of scales’ (Eriksen, 2016) in the margins, that is, an intense process of scale-crossing in which the hegemonic ideologies and discourses surrounding neoliberal English meet with deep local reactions and interactions, which, in this case, is iconized in the contradistinction between the banner as a global semiotics of commodification, and its local semiotization and emplacement in an extremely marginal environment.

The scale-clashing demonstrated in Figure 12.2 foregrounds the marginal nature of the local uptake of the global flows of English. It indexes the increased local stratification in terms of access to English as an economic and social capital which, basically, separates the language users in Enshi into the minority of ‘haves’ and the vast majority of ‘have-nots’. Under the condition of this new inequality, the symbolic access to and use of English become all the more important and aspirational for neoliberal subject formation.

### **Consuming Global English on the Local Market**

Having discussed the emergence of a nascent consumer market in Enshi and the meanings and positioning of English in that marginal space, we are now ready to look closely at how this global language is actually used on the local market. I will focus on commercial displays of English in Wuyang Street and the sociolinguistic processes they involve. As explained earlier, the local displays of commercial English demonstrate distinct features of marginality and can be roughly identified as ‘bad’ English and ‘fake’ English when applying the neoliberal common sense of globalization. In this section, we will try to map out some of these features with processes, and consider what such instances of ‘banal globalization’ (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010) may lead us to via an ethnographic lens.

#### **‘Bad’ English: From Broken Signs to the Commodification of Space**

‘Bad’ English can be (normatively) described as erroneous and ‘broken’ forms of English use in terms of orthographic, spelling, or grammatical norms. Let us consider the following example (see Figure 12.3).

Figure 12.3 shows the window display of a men’s clothing store in Wuyang Street. The store is part of the national retail chain of a large domestic garment company called Baoxiniao (报喜鸟, Spring Bird), a company that became successful and representative of China’s textile industrialization and economic modernization at the end of the 20th





*Figure 12.3* ‘OCUS ON JACKET FOR 30 YEARS’.

century (Brown, Waldorn, & Longworth, 2005). On consumer markets in metropolitan and affluent cities, Baoxiniao is commonly regarded as a moderate and inexpensive brand and its products far less costly than those of brands from global fashion centers. However, for the local, lower-end clientele in grassroots towns and rural areas such as Enshi, Baoxiniao is packaged as an exclusive boutique specializing in men’s apparel. As can be seen in Figure 12.3, English is used as a striking indexical feature on the shopfront of Baoxiniao’s local branch in order to invoke that sense of ‘specialism’ and ‘expensiveness’.

The rather minimalist window display is dominated by the sight of English, with an eye-catching red line positioned in the center of the window glass and written in capital letters ‘OCUS ON JACKET FOR 30 YEARS’. Clearly the letter ‘F’ is missing in ‘OCUS’, as the English phrase is directly translated from the Chinese slogan below ‘专注茄克30年’, which literally means ‘[we have been] focusing on [the production and sale of] men’s jacket for thirty years’. To the left, on a tall display shelf, stands a large red word sculpture of the ordinal number ‘the thirtieth’, written digitally, which echoes the years mentioned underneath: ‘2010’ and ‘1980’, presumably to declare the 30th anniversary of the company’s establishment. Upon closer examination, however, further peculiarities can be detected: the word ‘30HT’ has the letter combination ‘th’, the English suffix for ordinal numbers, in the wrong sequence, and the mentioning of the years from the company’s establishment to the current year is also rendered in a reversed sequence. We are looking at, one might say, an instance of rather badly presented English in the sense that, despite the minimum dose, it contains notable errors and forms that deviate from some of the most basic orthographic and layout norms in English.

On the other hand, it can be argued that the linguistically ‘bad’ use of English spotted in Figure 12.3 is not necessarily bad in its sociolinguistic design, since inscribing a business slogan and flagging up the company’s history of establishment in the store window, especially when done in English, constitute distinctive indexical orientations to the globalized genre and register of advertisement and branding. They follow the established formats and features of commercial practices that index tradition and artisanship in business, thus, credibility, exclusivity and (designed) authenticity. Moreover, English here should be seen as part of a sophisticated multimodal semiotic composition in enacting the global trend of visual merchandising. As shown in Figure 12.3, the shop window contains two mannequins showcasing two male winter outfits. The two outfits have nothing extraordinary in themselves: one is a dark brown leather jacket with grey trousers, and one is a short black coat with black trousers. What adds substantially to their appeal as commodities is largely to do with the ‘chic’ and ‘luxury’ surrounding them projected through the semiosis of window dressing: the minimalist use of background colors (white with red) and spotlight, framed by the floor-to-ceiling glass window; the choice of headless mannequins (which, according to Lindström, et al., 2016, indexes expert fashion knowledge) performing high-end fashion through stylized catwalk poses; and the simple yet strategic display of English and Chinese commercial texts. The deployment of all these features can be seen as processes of semiotic and spatial design that collectively reproduce what Baudrillard (1998) describes as the cultural codes of sign consumption under the conditions of consumerist globalization.

Seen in this light, the small dose of English as shown in Figure 12.3 can be understood as potent emblematic language use (cf. Silverstein, 2003). Despite the subtle local ‘accent’, its display points straight to the global economic and semiotic patterns of commodification and the associated idea of authenticity. Moreover, in the local marginal environment where English is such a prestigious yet scarce form of resource, and where hardly any local consumer is a competent user of it, it is mostly the sight of English – namely, the *visual effect* of ‘Englishness’ – that counts, since the linguistic and pragmatic norms or lack thereof are more or less irrelevant in communicating locally about the monetary and symbolic values of the commodities. In this sense, what is normatively considered ‘*bad*’ forms of language are actually produced and consumed as ‘*good*’ English, charged with indexical potency on the local consumerist landscape in Enshi. In fact, one might even go a step further and argue that what we are looking at in Figure 12.3 are semiotic features borrowed from the global flows of English, reframed and reinserted into the local sociolinguistic economy of signing and meaning making, features that are linguistically, pragmatically and metapragmatically embedded in the local Chinese context of expressing consumerist ideas. They





Figure 12.4 'Exclusive'.



Figure 12.5 'warm winter, harm feet'.

are, therefore, English-looking Chinese (following Blommaert, 2010), a form of *lookalike language* functioning primarily as the semiotics of aspiration.

This distinctive pattern of language use has a growing presence in the shopping streets of Enshi, a pattern in which 'meaning does not depend on being able to decode the words but only on recognizing the language they belong to and making the associations' (Cameron, 2012, p. 359). Figures 12.4 and 12.5 offer another example.

Figure 12.4 shows a two-meter tall billboard standing outside a multi-storey shop in Wuyang Street advertising the shop's new leatherwear

collection. The scale-jumping and clashing effect this billboard creates is astonishing. Its use of overwhelmingly sized images of high-fashion, foreign- and Chinese-looking female models demonstrating leather products in provocative poses, all coded in classical black and white color combination, immediately transforms this small stretch of street from a nascent market in rural China into a spectacular global space of luxury. The semiotic subscription to the global imagery and discourse of fashion and luxury symbolically reorganizes the space (somewhat abruptly) as an identity site and resource for its users. This is also loudly announced through language use, notably by the Chinese caption occupying the center top of the billboard, which says ‘新’贵’登场’, a four-character word-play that can be read in two ways: ‘the grand entry of new and expensive goods’ when 新 (new) and 贵 (expensive) are considered as two separate words, or, when they are treated as one single word 新贵 (nouveau riche), ‘the grand entry of new wealthy customers’. The use of double quotation marks around 贵 further emphasizes the *value* of the commodities – both the symbolic and the monetary value, which are made to coincide precisely through the kind of semiotic practices witnessed here.

Such semiotic and indexical details exude local economic and identity aspirations to be global and to be rich; in short, to maximize from within this marginal space of commodification, the material and immaterial potentials for translocally recognizable mobility and prestige. Unsurprisingly, these details involve the limited yet strategic use of English. This includes, as shown in Figure 12.4, displaying on the billboard several English (or English-looking) trademarks and, strikingly, the word ‘Exclusive’, which is placed in a large circle and reaffirmed by the accompanying Chinese expression ‘正中独家’ (exclusively on offer in the shop Zhengzhong). More noteworthy is the oversized English text in the left of the billboard, which can be seen in detail in Figure 12.5.

The English text contains a brief but odd-looking commercial slogan: ‘warm winter, harm feet’. Similar to that of Figure 12.3, the linguistic and pragmatic peculiarities in this instance of English start to make sense when, and only when, it is read in relation to the Chinese texts surrounding it. Here, again, the English line is a direct translation of the Chinese phrase above it: ‘暖冬魅足’. This is a coined phrase that adopts the format of a Chinese four-character idiom (a classical form of literary device that uses a four-character expression, often derived from ancient literature or historical stories, to convey a metaphorical or moral message) that seems to maintain linguistic and aesthetic harmony with the other two Chinese phrases on the board. The four characters in the sequence as shown literally mean ‘warm’ (暖), ‘winter’ (冬), ‘charming’ (魅) and ‘foot/feet’ (足). For a Chinese speaker, this phrase can be interpreted as a marketing wordplay that basically means that wearing new shoes from this shop will not only keep your feet warm in the cold season of winter but also make you look charming.

Based on the above understanding – by placing English within its Chinese context in and for which it was created – one begins to see the linguistic and cultural meanings and functions of its use. The hierarchy of languages is such here that the intricate wordplay and tradition-invoking poetics in Chinese is absent from what happens with English: English is treated here according to a very different set of semiotic procedures, as emblematic ‘translation’ of fully-formed and fully functional Chinese expressions. In this sense, this use of English constitutes another example of English-looking Chinese. One also begins to notice that the strange expression ‘harm feet’, which defies its very purpose of effective marketing, is due to the missing of the letter ‘c’ in ‘charm’. Ironically, no harm is necessarily done since this unwitting mistake has not been spotted or registered by either the sign producers or the sign consumers. This can be testified by the obscure detail that, when looked at closely, the letter ‘c’ is actually there on the board (see Figure 12.5) but has been printed with a color that is not so dissimilar to its background color, thus, is nearly invisible. In other words, had the sign makers sufficient competence in English to know the difference between ‘charm’ and ‘harm’, and the potentially damaging consequences of confusing the former word with the latter, they would have avoided or at least corrected such a significant mistake in this public space. Nevertheless, for the local consumers, this phenomenally ‘bad’ English, and the almost parodic effect, appear to make little difference, for the same reason as above: most of them may well have a good sociolinguistic knowledge, but very limited linguistic knowledge of English. As a matter of fact, when I asked shoppers flooding in and out of the premises about the letter ‘F’ in ‘1F 鞋区’ (ground floor: shoe department) at the bottom of the billboard, nobody knew or cared to know what it really stands for. It seems that for many of them, the sight of English such as that in Figures 12.4 and 12.5, bad or not, constitutes but another local instance of banal semiotization of global consumerism, a form of neoliberal discourse and consumption practice which, one might argue (relating to the concept of ‘biopolitics’ by Foucault, 1980), is becoming internalized and normalized locally as an ideological as well as embodied mode of being.

This process of semiotization is further captured in Figure 12.5, in the Chinese text below the English slogan, which says:

EVER SINCE THE CRYSTAL SHOES ALLOWED CINDERELLA  
TO LIVE A HAPPY LIFE...

For women, shoes are another effective tool beside hair for expressing feelings. In order for a reason to put that next beautiful, always better pair of shoes in your cupboard, a new version of myth is born, ‘when a woman puts on beautiful shoes, those shoes will take you to the most beautiful place in the world.’



Figure 12.6 'our branding concept'.

Inspired by the Cinderella myth, this reflexive narrative performs a drastic scale shift from being a locally situated piece of fashion commercial into a global (gendered) identity myth (in the sense of Barthes, 1972) in which shoes as commodities are ascribed with – in addition to monetary values – indexical values of upward mobility and lifestyle politics of happiness, as well as complex symbolic meanings that link fashion, desire and the construction of self. Its emplacement renders the space and space users simultaneously local and global, speaking from a deep margin but steering toward the very core of capitalist modernity. It, thus, serves as a blatant ideological apparatus of neoliberal consumerism that underpins and shapes the way English (as well as Chinese and other communicative resources) is used on the local market.

Figure 12.6 shows a similar ideological process that articulates globalized branding strategies, also through heavily accented local English. We see a conspicuous wall-sized red cloth banner advertising the opening of a new home accessories store called 'inLIFESHOP' (a Shanghai-based Taiwanese company) inside a soon-to-open shopping center in Wuyang Street. This is one of the first shops of such kind in Enshi, which will bring from urban centers to the local market not only trendy home deco products, but also modern(ist) lifestyle concepts and aspirations. What is interesting about the use of English here, at its most apparent level, is the linguistic distortions (see Figure 12.6): the constant irregular use of space surrounding lexical items and punctuations, the misspelling of

words such as ‘vlsion’ and ‘Invlgorated’ (instead of ‘vision’ and ‘invigorated’, which appears to be a typeset confusion over the letters ‘i’ and ‘l’), and the syntactic malformation throughout the text. Following earlier arguments, it can be suggested that all this belongs to the type of ‘bad’ English functioning in the local commercial environment largely as a *graphic-emblematic* system – rather than a linguistic system – a system of lookalike language that works primarily with the symbolic capital offered by its visual and indexical effect of Englishness and globalness. Paradoxically, the ‘broken’ form also necessarily indexes the marginal context from which ‘bad’ English derives, thus, the marginal nature of the local English.

Equally interesting is the content of the text. Instead of marketing the commodity *per se*, the text provides a metapragmatic narrative about ‘our branding concept’, integrating and advocating popularized ideologies and discourses about branding practices from the global business world (e.g. the ‘3Ps’). This interdiscursivity shifts the focus from the material objects to the abstract semiotic and ideological dimension of commodification which, through the ‘dematerialization’ of brand (Manning, 2010), ushers customers into the overwhelmingly creative yet hegemonic symbolic universe of the global ideoscape of brand consumption. Remarkably, this is done in a text that is not there for *reading* but for *viewing*. This text, meanwhile, functions beyond the indexical level, as a biopolitically inceptive and instructive device (albeit a contingent and partially accessible one) for forging consumer citizenship in the nascent local market. Its effectiveness, even if linguistically ‘bad’, can be seen in terms of the ideological and spatial production of ‘historical bodies’ (Blommaert, 2013), namely, of customers who are momentarily ‘en-skilled’ to navigate the aspirational or imaginable ways of being scripted in both material and symbolic commodities.

### **‘Fake’ English: From ‘balabala’ to Brand Myth**

If ‘bad’ English refers to local language use that looks like English but violates various linguistic norms of English, ‘fake’ English can be described as invented language, another form of lookalike language that is linguistically unrelated or only loosely related to English proper, but is loaded with symbolic meanings and functions associated with English for the sake of commodification in the local market. This, as we will see next, manifests mainly in branding practices (as indicated in Figure 12.6) and involves complex work of imagination and myth making.

‘Fake’ English came to light when my eyes were constantly caught by the large billboards along Wuyang Street inscribed with the word ‘balabala’ (see Figure 12.7), which is apparently a popular brand name for children’s clothing. Whereas this word looks somewhat amusing since it resembles the English expression ‘blah blah’ which means ‘nonsense’,



Figure 12.7 'balabala'.

therefore, might not be an ideal brand name from the perspective of English, 'balabala' is a well-received brand in Enshi. Local customers consider 'balabala' an iconic brand not least because its catchy look and sound seem more than appropriate for young children as its targeted clientele. They also believe, extraordinarily, that it is an English word, while the fact is quite the opposite: 'balabala' is a domestic brand based in Wenzhou; rather than English, it is the Chinese Pinyin phonetic transcription of 巴拉巴拉, a coined Chinese word more than likely to be onomatopoeia, a representation of the babbling noise made by children.

'Balabala' draws attention to an intriguing process of 'enregisterment' (Agha, 2007) of English that is highly specific to margins such as Enshi. To formulate the notion of enregisterment, in alignment with Johnstone (2016), this involves a process in which *foreign looking or sounding semiotic items* created by companies and other marketers as *brand names*, are conceived, circulated and consumed as *English language* by its *marginal users*. Marginal users are, in turn, conditioned by their significant disadvantages in accessing global economic and cultural resources, yet they are greatly inspired by the globalized consumerist ideas and practices and the niche symbolic and identity opportunities these may offer. The sociolinguistic outcome of this process is 'fake' English, another local form of lookalike language.

Thus, in order to understand 'fake' English and its socioeconomic purchase, it is essential to understand language commodification in terms of the semiotics of brand and branding (Manning, 2010). In consumerist economy, branding is a crucial semiotic mode of capital accumulation in which brands function as copyrighted signifiers, often semiotic inventions, attributed with a myriad of economic, cultural and ideological



meanings and values by an intersection of stakeholders. This function offers ‘added value’ known as brand equity to the commodity, which resides largely on the symbolic meanings a brand can generate and signify to the consumers. Critical to successful branding is, among other mechanisms, the sociocultural and psychological process of ‘myth’ making. That is, as conceptualized by Barthes (1972), a powerful discursive process of producing widely held but arbitrary or false ideas as naturalized collective cultural values, by means of either existing or improvised artefacts. It is through the work of myth that ‘designed objects’, including semiotic objects, become ‘metaphoric vehicles of collective desire’ in consumer culture and mass communication (Huppertz, 2011, p. 88). The inculcation of consumerist desire through myth is pertinent to the semiotic design of brand. As we will see below, this is a complex endeavor in the margins involving what Appadurai (1996) describes as the social force of imagination as new forms of desire and subjectivity in globalization.

In what follows, I will discuss the semiotic and ideological mode of branding through one example of ‘fake’ English (among many others). The example of creating brand myths via lookalike language will demonstrate that, once again, the idea of global English offers linguistic and cultural expressions for consumerism through the globalized Western (luxury) brands and branding strategies that prevail the Chinese consumerist market (Tian & Dong, 2011). However, instead of mimics, the example reveals complex interactions between the global consumerism, the national identity politics, and the local market and semiotic conditions, and the role coined English-looking brands play in such processes.

The example is taken from a sign of Christmas sale promotion displayed outside a men’s clothing store in Wuyang Street. As shown in Figure 12.8, the brand of this store is called ‘Tedelon’, which is printed in block letters in discreet font and color on the top of the sign. Underneath that is a small annotation that says ‘oriental style’. From the perspective of the local consumers, these are in ‘English’ in contrast with the rest of the sign themed in ‘Chinese’. The background of the sign is dominated by two shades of red and with the image of a large red packet (a Chinese money gift for special occasions) on which a traditional calligraphic character ‘樂’ (joy) is written. In the center of the board, the promotional text is inscribed in emboldened white Chinese characters: ‘to celebrate Christmas, to welcome the New Year’s Day, free gift with all purchases.’ Following that, in smaller characters, details of the offer are written in Chinese bullet points: one free shirt for purchase over three hundred-yuan, one free pair of trousers for purchase over five hundred yuan, and so forth.

‘Tedelon’ is a typical example of the kind of ‘fake’ English circulated on the local market as a recognizable brand. It is ‘fake’ because, first





Figure 12.8 TEDELON.

of all, the word ‘Tedelon’ does not really exist in what we normally (or normatively) consider to be the English language; secondly, rather than English, the local consumers refer to the brand only by its Chinese name ‘Taizilong’ (太子龙, prince dragon). No one seems to care that the brand name has an ‘English’ equivalent, or what it might sound like or mean for that matter.

Even if it has little linguistic role to play as a word of English, it does have an important, implicit semiotic function in signing and indexing symbolic information and distinction that a ‘real’ English word offers. As can be seen in Figure 12.8, the word is lumped together with the English phrase ‘oriental style’ and positioned in the top of the shop sign, which then creates a contradistinction with the Chinese semiotic features surrounding it. This visual and indexical contrast (English versus Chinese) and hierarchical ordering (English above Chinese) imply that, as with ‘oriental style’, ‘Tedelon’ belongs to English, as opposed to Chinese. The presence of ‘oriental style’ as ‘real’ English beneath it confirms and authenticates that impression – as do the ‘English’ cultural and business occasions of Christmas and New Year’s Eve as a notable spacetime frame of the sign. Furthermore, together with ‘oriental style’, ‘Tedelon’ is arranged into a Chinese ecology of signification similar to what we have discussed earlier: it functions mainly as an abstract, English-looking graphic logo that is depleted of any ‘English’ meaning,

but charged instead with the ‘Chinese’ interpretations about English, making it a decorative and emblematic token of Englishness which invokes meanings such as trendy, expensive, tasteful, international, etc. These meanings certainly add to the local popularity of the products ‘Tedelon’ represents, and may be the main stimulus for it.

The way ‘Tedelon’ is locally construed as English, however, goes beyond the visual-semiotic play with the materiality of quotidian language contained in commercial signage in the local market. It also derives from a strong ideological motivation and argument for cultural and symbolic meanings that endow it with perceived (brand) authenticity. This is explicitly stated in the company’s ‘brand explanation’ in Chinese on its website:

... The word TEDELON did not exist in English originally. It belongs exclusively to Taizilong. ... TEDELON is a soundalike of ‘Taizilong’, which stimulates many imaginations since it offers a sense of beauty while expressing the brand’s benefit. This is also the precondition for developing an international brand, which is intimately connected with the customer maturity in China. Today consumers have entered a ‘brand consumption era’ because the vast majority of products are highly homogenized and similar in product price, quality, function, and packaging. When buying products, consumers attach more importance to the unique experience, extra value enjoyment, and cultural essence offered by their brands.

([www.tedelon.cn/web/dispArticle.Asp?ID=1456](http://www.tedelon.cn/web/dispArticle.Asp?ID=1456),  
translated by the author)

This metapragmatic narrative provides an ideological rationalization and justification for the invention of ‘Tedelon’ as a word of English, an act of semiotic design overtly driven by the ‘many imaginations’ for beauty, quality, essence and uniqueness (whatever these might be) that are implanted by the pervasiveness of consumer culture and warranted by the symbolic values associated with English (albeit framed by Chinese).<sup>3</sup> By drawing on the global conditions of a ‘brand consumption era’ and its development on the Chinese domestic market in nurturing ‘customer maturity’ (i.e. the internalized consumer awareness to prioritize consumption choices in accordance with capitalist consumerism), this narrative brings to the fore the logic of ‘demand and supply’ underlying the language use in brand design. This logic, explained precisely through a vocabulary of economy, conforms to and naturalizes the neoliberal hegemony in globalization. The meanings acquired by ‘Tedelon’ as an ‘English’ item in such discursive and ideological processes are then convertible and can be projected as identity claims for globality and internationalism onto the consumers and the company during their interactions with the brand and the products, forming part of the wider processes of

imagining the global and imagining the future through the consumption of foreign brands in China (Tian & Dong, 2011).

The highly dynamic processes of inventing 'Tedelon' and its mechanism of self-propagated recognition as an English word on China's consumer market, as described in this narrative, are akin to the creation of myth through which we structure and make sense of our world. While this particular trend of branding is rather common and constitutes an indispensable part of the Chinese consumer economy (Lin, 2011), it is largely a marginal phenomenon that reflects the kind of growing grassroots commercial creativity in China's globalization (Wang, 2008). Its market coverage lies predominantly in the economic and cultural margins such as Enshi where mimics and counterfeits often are created as substitute in the absence of the 'authentic' foreign brands and products.

On the other hand, supported by Lin's (2011) study of 'fake' goods in China, it is perhaps untenable to claim that 'Tedelon' is a mere imitation of Western brand names. According to Lin (2011, p. 2), an economy of counterfeit brands and goods banks largely on our fascination with brand names, of which 'questions of authenticity are routinely destabilized and even made arbitrary'. As can be observed in both the sign of Tedelon displayed in Wuyang Street and its brand concept published online, the brand name speaks simultaneously to the markets inside and outside of China. While 'Tedelon' is designed to articulate the idea of English to Chinese consumers, it is also designed as a tool for communicating about a distinctive self-imagined Chinese identity to both domestic and global audiences. This, for instance, can be seen in the annotating text 'oriental style' in the commercial display, which can be read as a self-assertion of 'Chineseness' of the brand, at the same time, is made available for interpretation to the eyes of the non-Chinese Other. Further, as stated in its online brand explanation, 'Tedelon' has its origin rooted in Chinese: it sounds like and 'belongs exclusively to' Taizilong, a word imbued with ancient Chinese mythic and imperial heritage and born from within the Chinese market as a response to the growing consumer brand awareness as its new agenda in order to 'develop an international brand'. All these render 'Tedelon' a multivocal shorthand of different, competing trajectories of meaning making and ideological agendas, which all gravitate toward the construction of a Chinese brand and a Chinese identity. In this sense, 'Tedelon' is not so much a case of branding through 'fake' (global) English as that of designing an English-looking name for a Chinese (national) brand. It constitutes another instance of lookalike language, with its designed Englishness largely nested within the Chinese market, and firmly attached to its grassroots brand origin and the local marginal market segments from which its value derives.

'Tedelon' points us to the perplexing but common practice of branding through lookalike or soundalike English. This is something that needs to be understood vis-à-vis the complex socioeconomic and

cultural processes of intersection in a globalizing China in which, on the one hand, (real) Western brands are embraced by Chinese consumer citizens as a tool to symbolically construct a collective modern(ist) identity (Tian & Dong, 2011) and, on the other hand, the consumption of fake brands and goods is emerging as a counter-hegemony strategy for them to ‘resist and reclaim control of meanings from a changing economic system’ (Lin, 2011, p. 7; see also Yang, 2016). As we have seen, ‘Tedelon’ is related to both, but does not fit easily with either, since it is neither ‘real’ as a Western brand nor ‘fake’ in terms of counterfeiting. What it entails is a paradoxical process of designing ‘inauthentic authenticity’ (Wang, 2015) in which languages and symbols as resources of communication are being ‘disinvented’ and ‘reconstituted’ (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007) – redesigned, reassembled and reappropriated by local users for their own economic, social and cultural pursuits, while being regulated by the global and local opportunities and conditions of meaning making.

Such practices of designing authenticity through the semiotics of brand, in short, rely on the exploitation of the indexical mode of English that is separated from its linguistic mode. Linguistically, the language hardly qualifies as English, but it indexically maintains the arrow toward (imagined) English or foreign sources of origin and aspiration. The two need not coincide. As Blommaert (2012, p. 64) succinctly summarizes, ‘The use of language in globalization is not predicated on knowledge of its linguistic system. Mobile languages enter spaces in which the language cannot become a “real” language but can lead a busy and successful life as an emblematic object of great social significance.’ These are peculiar but central features of lookalike language, a sociolinguistic phenomenon that widely occurs and gains currency in the margins of globalization, as evidenced in English in Enshi above.

### **Lookalike Language Beyond Common Sense**

This study offers an ethnographic observation of public displays of commercial English in the margins of language and economic globalization in rural China. It shows that, contrary to the common sense view that margins are merely passive recipients of the global flows of English, they constitute interesting, interested and dynamic spaces in which English enters the local processes of globalization as a crucial social and cultural resource. As shown in this study, the local engagement with the global consumerist economy facilitates language commodification, which engenders niche opportunities and conditions for English use. Commercial displays of English in public space become crucial sites in the margins in which complex economic, semiotic and ideological processes of meaning making take place, notably through acts of language play and cultural

creativity. Although the kind of English emerging from these sites bears features that are characteristic of marginality, the hegemonic status of English as the ideological and cultural instrument for pushing through the neoliberal agenda of globalization is seen as under contest, negotiation and reworking.

As shown in the analyses, what is perceived as banal marginal forms and practices of English, such as 'bad' English and 'fake' English, can in fact be understood in terms of intriguing yet crafty semiotic design from the perspective of the margins – the design of a new semiotic object that is effectively features of English incorporated into a layered Chinese sign, connecting the 'here' and the 'not here', two contrasting indexical arrows, one pointing to locality and the other to the global. Such processes are motivated largely by the symbolic values of English and the social mobility and identity claims these values can offer on the consumerist market. It is further driven by the contrast between the supreme status of English and its scarcity on the local nascent market. These marginal conditions, as we have seen, have led to highly elaborate ways of drawing on the indexical and ideological meanings of English in constructing the local linguistic landscape of commodification, leaving the linguistic forms of English appearing either distorted, primarily functioning as a visual emblem, or fabricated according to a Chinese semiotic motif. Both processes result in semiotic products that, to varying extents, look like English but serve as part of the local Chinese agenda of communication and meaning making, as something new 'in' Chinese but pointing away from it (even if this pointing is achieved visually and not by the creation of a linguistically 'correct' English).

Such features of language use constitute what I call *lookalike language*, language that is manipulated and designed not so much for its linguistic function of expressing meanings but for the indexical functions and sociolinguistic meanings provided by its visual links with the global English. The detaching of the linguistic and the social aspects of language and the differentiated exploitation of the material and ideological dimensions of language in local language practices can be taken as part of the ongoing processes of disinventing and reconstituting language (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). These dynamics challenge the Saussurean tradition of linguistics, which conceptualizes language as stable, discrete and coherent systems. In fact, lookalike language is essentially an ethnographically informed understanding about language as practices, which is in line with the current theorization such as languaging (Jørgensen, 2008), translanguaging (Creese & Blackledge, 2010) and metrolingualism (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010) in the context of globalization.

Furthermore, lookalike language can be seen as a 'vernacular' form of English arising from the commodification of language in the margins of globalization (Appadurai, 1996). It is not necessarily a dominant pattern of

sociolinguistic change. Nevertheless, it is a significant one, at least for the margins in which issues of authenticity, power and agency are all at stake, and it shows that below the mainstream radar of ELT, there is an often unattended world of sociolinguistic globalization that is built upon English not as a ‘full’ linguistic sign, but as a ‘partial’ indexical one that produces local values and validity through globalized semiotic features of English. In this sense, lookalike language is not so much a linguistic issue as a sociolinguistic one about the margins. It provides the margins with a global indexical and script of aspiration through which neoliberal formats of identities can be symbolically incorporated, appropriated and reinscribed. While this type of language use is relatively less scrutinized and policed in the commercial domain for its, sometimes bewildering, creativity and absence of normativity, the viability and mobility of such forms of language are more or less bound to its local ecology and environment of origin, thus, making itself ultimately a marginal and grassroots phenomenon.

## Notes

- 1 Enshi is a ‘county-level city’ in China. A county-level city system was created in the 1980s as the result of China’s rapid industrialization and urbanization. It was a strategy to merge and reorganize smaller counties containing towns, villages, and farmlands into something more like a city in terms of size and resource, which nevertheless remains a county in the national administrative division. A county-level city usually consists of rural areas many times the size of their urban, built-up area (cf. Chan, 2007).
- 2 All data presented in this paper were collected by the author during repeated PhD fieldwork visits in Enshi between 2009 and 2014 (see Wang, 2017). The copyright of all pictures rests with the author.
- 3 Tedelon’s website states that ‘Taizilong’ and its special logo design combine the classics and confidence in the Chinese culture with the maturity and nobleness in the Western/European culture to establish a new fashion, new era, and new man with the new ‘dragon’ spirit as its core value.

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