
1 Towards Interdisciplinarity in Multilingual Identity Research

Differing Perspectives and Common Ground

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten to fifteen years, researchers across a range of disciplines have critically reassessed their conceptions of language and of the relationship between language and identity, especially in multilingual or superdiverse contexts. To take the example of sociolinguistics, Eckert (2012, 2016a) outlines three broad waves in the development of thinking about language, variability and identity. In the First Wave, starting with the foundational work of William Labov, linguists sought correlations between linguistic variables and macrosocial categories of class, age, gender and ethnicity across large populations. In general, one variable was considered at a time, and the notion of a standard language was central. The Second Wave, or ‘ethnographic turn’, was associated with the introduction of ethnographic methods to determine the relationship between variation and local, participant-designed categories and configurations such as networks. Both of these waves broadly viewed the meanings of variants as identity markers related directly to the groups that most use them. The Third Wave, as described by Eckert (2016a), focusses on the indexical nature of sociolinguistic variation and on the stylistic practice¹ in which variables gain their meaning. It differs in its focus on social meaning and speaker agency and it views styles, rather than variables, as directly associated with identity categories. In this framework, variables emerge in

¹ As Eckert (2016a) explains, stylistic practice involves comparing styles on the basis of their social differences and parsing out elements perceived as indexing salient aspects of those differences. To the extent that a stylistic parse is widely shared, the resulting units become available for incorporation in other styles in a process of *bricolage*.

the construction and presentation of self in relation to whatever aspect of the social world is salient. As Eckert notes (2016a), while macrosocial categories are abstract and heterogeneous, ‘indexical activity ... is local and specific’.

Many of the same considerations emerged in the so-called multilingual turn in education. Based on an analysis of two volumes published in 2014 both of which feature the concept of ‘multilingual turn’ in their titles (Conteh & Meier, 2014; May, 2014), Gabriela Meier (2017) identifies a number of recurring features of this critical movement. Language is again viewed as local practice through which, to cite Norton and McKinney (2011: 77), ‘relationships and identities are defined, negotiated and resisted’. Languages are seen as embodied and part of a multimodal repertoire, and as socially constructed based on power and ideologies. Language is, in short, conceived as situated social practice and the definition of multilingualism is broadened and problematized, as we shall see. Blommaert and Backus’s notion of linguistic repertoire (Blommaert & Backus, 2011, 2013) is key in this: repertoires are conceived as a ‘patchwork of resources, skills and competences learnt by (mobile) individual speakers along their life trajectories in situations of formal language learning and informal encounters with language’ (Busch, 2015: 3). Meier (2017) observes that in the studies in the two *Multilingual Turn* volumes, learners are conceived as having individual, heterogeneous and dynamic identities, as multilinguals and users of mixed and integrated languages.

These parallels immediately raise questions about the extent to which different disciplines contribute separately or together to the complex study of multilingualism and identity. We will return to the question of interdisciplinarity in Section 1.6. We will first begin by discussing the thorny issue of terminology (Section 1.2) before considering the major themes around which the volume is structured: situated multilingualism and identity (Section 1.3), multilingual identity practices (Section 1.4) and multilingual identity and investment (Section 1.5).

1.2 TERMINOLOGICAL ISSUES

The terminology used to describe multilingual speakers and practices is bound up with the values and identities ascribed to them by society in general and by researchers in particular. Researchers and others may act as ‘gatekeepers’, determining who in their view could or should be described as multilingual (see Haukås, Chapter 14, this volume).

A number of studies have reviewed the definitions and terminology associated with multilingualism (Kemp, 2009; Cenoz, 2013; Clyne, 2017 [1998]).

We will briefly outline some of the major developments and debates here. In general, we follow the practice of using multilingualism (rather than bilingualism as was typical in earlier studies) as the generic term for anyone who speaks more than one language, and we reserve the terms bilingualism, trilingualism, etc. for those contexts where it is important to specify the number of languages. Adoption of the term plurilingualism, defined by the Council of Europe in 2002 as the ‘repertoire of “varieties of language” which individuals use,’² as distinct from multilingualism which occurs at the societal level, whether officially or de facto, has been uneven, and its use remains more frequent in Francophone than in Anglophone contexts (see Marshall & Moore (2018) for a fuller discussion). Similarly, Dewaele’s (2013) proposal to replace the ‘successional labels’ L1, L2, L3 – despite the somewhat over-simplified image of language acquisition that they may give – with the label LX user, to cover what was previously called a non-native user, has not received widespread support.

An issue that recurs through much of the literature is how proficient a speaker must be before they can be identified as – or identify themselves as – multilingual. Bassetti and Cook (2011: 143–4) argue that definitions of bilingualism appear to cluster in two groups: one consists of a maximal assumption where being bilingual means speaking two or more languages with equal fluency in every situation, as in Bloomfield’s (1933: 56) classic definition, ‘native-like control of two languages’. The other takes the minimal view that bilingualism refers to any real-life use of more than one language at whatever level. Here we might cite Haugen (1953: 7), who claims that bilingualism begins at ‘the point where a speaker can first produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language’. An alternative viewpoint focusses rather on frequency of use, and whether two or more languages are employed in everyday life. Both of these positions rely to a greater or lesser extent on monolingual ideologies or on structuralist views of languages as discrete systems. Research has been transformed in recent decades in important ways. Building on the work on code-switching which began as early as the 1970s, we now have a substantial body of literature on what has been variously termed languaging, translanguaging, polylanguaging and translinguistic shift.³ The best-established term, translanguaging (García, 2009; Creese &

² Council of Europe, February 2002: <https://rm.coe.int/090000168097c59b> (last accessed 13.4.2022).

³ Rampton (2005 [1995]) introduces the concept of ‘language crossing’, a sociolinguistic practice whereby social actors (re)negotiate ethnolinguistic boundaries.

Blackledge, 2010; Li, 2011), originated in the use of the Welsh term *trawsieithu* by Williams (1994) to describe educational practices in bilingual classrooms that did not strictly keep apart the use of two languages in instruction. It then expanded in use to describe the language practices of multilinguals more generally. In light of the reconceptualization of the linguistic repertoire to include the range of sociolinguistic and multimodal resources available to a speaker, regardless of whether they are from what have traditionally been described as separate languages or from within the same language, translanguaging is now conceived as:

the use of language as a dynamic repertoire and not as a system with socially and politically defined boundaries. With the focus on actual language use, translanguaging necessarily goes *beyond* the named languages such as Chinese, English, or French ... Instead, it privileges the language of speakers as a semiotic system of linguistic and multimodal signs that together make up the speaker's own communicative repertoire. (García & Li, 2018: 1)

This expanded conception of linguistic repertoire and of multilingualism is adopted, for instance, in Gayton and Fisher's work (Chapter 15) on developing students' multilingual identities in the classroom. Students are encouraged to understand that they are already, in a very broad sense, multilingual, whether they use emojis, can do some coding, or employ different registers, varieties, genres, modalities, etc. in different situations (cf. Blommaert, 2010: 102).⁴ Importantly, starting to identify as multilingual, even in the earliest stages of learning another language, has positive benefits for both motivation and outcomes (Forbes et al., 2021; Rutgers et al., 2021).

Another set of terminology that relates to questions around the hierarchization of languages and the relative status of speakers of different languages and varieties also impacts on questions of identity. As Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004: 1) write, 'in multilingual settings, language choice and attitudes are inseparable from political arrangements, relations of power, language ideologies, and interlocutors' views of their own and others' identities'. As early as 1959, Charles Ferguson introduced the notion of diglossia to differentiate a variety called the H ('high') variety and the regional dialects called L ('low') varieties.⁵ A key concept is Bourdieu's (1987) notion of symbolic power: language varieties

⁴ An interesting precursor is found in Calvet (1987: 80) who asserts that 'however monolingual we are, we are all more or less plurilingual. By that I mean that, even within the scope of a single language, ... we use different forms of that language, and that the choice of one or other of these forms relates to particular functions' (our translation).

⁵ The related terms of triglossia and polyglossia are also occasionally used in the literature.

are forms of symbolic capital unevenly distributed in society. It is the institutions of state, and notably education, that legitimize languages. The opposition between elite or elective multilinguals and circumstantial multilinguals (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994) – the former category relating to those who choose to learn languages, the latter to those who have to in order to meet everyday communicative needs – is therefore not necessarily neutral. As Valdés (2005: 411) points out, circumstantial multilingualism is generally characteristic of populations who occupy subaltern positions in particular settings, whether they are indigenous minorities in established nation states (e.g. Bretons, Samis, Kurds) or other border crossers such as migrants, refugees, nomads and exiles. In Chapter 14, Haukås observes how in the Norwegian context, a simple equation is sometimes made: multilingual = immigrant = problem. The label ‘heritage language speaker’ rather than ‘community language speaker’ may also be ideologically loaded and thus inappropriate to describe what Cruickshank (2014: 59) terms the ‘complexity and dynamism of young people’s identities’.

A final concept, which seeks to move beyond current notions of multilingualism and multiculturalism, and which is intimately bound up with notions of identity, is that of metrolingualism coined by Otsuji and Pennycook (2010, 2011).⁶ Metrolingualism, as they define it, is a product of modern and often urban interaction, describing the ways in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through language.⁷ In Section 1.3, we will return to the question of language and identity in super-diverse urban settings.

1.3 SITUATED MULTILINGUALISM AND IDENTITY

The centrality of place, space and situatedness to our linguistic identities has a long history in language scholarship. From the middle of the eighteenth century on, language and nation were seen as inextricably linked, above all in the works of German authors such as Herder, Fichte and Schlegel (Burke, 2004: 163–6). In Chapter 3, Finnin and Kozachenko maintain that, in the case of Ukraine, space has been wrongly privileged, leading to a misleading – and

⁶ This discussion is not intended in any way to be exhaustive. The rise in research on multilingualism has been accompanied by a sometimes bewildering growth in terminology. For instance, we make no mention here of heteroglossia, polylingualism or polyglottism.

⁷ There are, of course, a number of interesting antecedents to this work, such as Hewitt’s (1986) study of ‘black talk/white talk’ or Maher’s (2005) concept of ‘metroethnicity’.

monolingually-based – stereotype that characterizes Ukraine as a country divided by languages, with linguistic diversity projected as linguistic adversity in the political sphere. The media, for instance, in relating news about the armed conflict in Ukraine, typically presents a simple colour-coded map of the country with a so-called ‘Russian-speaking east’ and ‘Ukrainian-speaking west’. Shifting the focus from the national to the individual multilingual Ukrainian subject sheds a very different light on the relationship between language, nation and questions of identity.

Mapping – and its challenges – is also at the heart of Joseph’s exploration of geographical and cerebral mapping, and different types of visual and spatial conceptualizations of multilingualism and identity (Chapter 2). Joseph contrasts the lack of scientific certainty and accuracy associated with linguistic geography and neuroimaging with the language silhouettes drawn by multilingual immigrant children which beautifully capture their own perceptions of their, often complex, linguistic identities (Martin, 2012). This research has important implications for the formulation of educational policy, which, Joseph argues, in the case of immigrant children is of the utmost urgency.

Globalization, migration and the resulting movement of speakers have increasingly led to what Vertovec (2007) terms ‘super-diversity’, particularly in multicultural urban settings around the globe. In such contexts, the repertoires of multilingual (frequently migrant) speakers are typically dynamic and heterogeneous, such that, to cite Makoni and Pennycook (2012: 447), ‘languages are so deeply intertwined and fused into each other that the level of fluidity renders it difficult to determine any boundaries that may indicate that there are different languages involved’. Whereas in early models language and standard language were often simply equated, in the superdiverse urban contexts of late modernity speakers make what Gal (2006: 27) has termed ‘self-conscious, anti-standardizing moves’, introducing forms from other languages, hybrid forms and neologisms. The complex multilingual repertoires that typify contemporary urban vernaculars (Rampton, 2011; Sabatier Bullock, Chapter 5; Carruthers & McAuley, Chapter 6) have been the subject of sophisticated linguistic and ethnographic studies, which may identify a linguistic ‘feature pool’ used to index identity and other social-semiotic values.

One of the major projects devoted to a contemporary urban vernacular is Cheshire et al.’s (2011) study of Multicultural London English, but other cities such as Paris, Marseille and Brussels have also been the focus of research (Audrit, 2009; Gadet, 2017; McAuley, 2017; McAuley & Carruthers, 2020). Emphasis has been placed primarily on identity creation and negotiation

through production, while Carruthers and McAuley (Chapter 6) focus on how such identities are perceived. Here again, as Carruthers and McAuley point out, these are not just dry academic questions, but have important policy implications. A limitation of much of the literature to date has been the concentration on Western, and especially European, contexts. In Chapter 7, Hui Zhao cogently argues that studies of non-Western contexts are urgently needed to validate, challenge and expand dominant theories and approaches towards urban superdiversity, pointing out that China and other parts of Asia account for more than half of the world's population. A different challenge to the narrow focus on Western urban contexts is offered by Alison Phipps who, in Chapter 8, turns attention away from the urban to the rural, from the Global North to the Global South (see Section 1.4).

As already noted, Pennycook and Otsuji favour the term 'metrolingualism' to refer to such urban vernaculars, particularly their everyday multilingual use in urban workplaces. In their chapter (Chapter 4), they present a number of multilingual encounters in a Bangladeshi-owned shop in Shinjuku, Tokyo. Drawing on their research on metrolingualism and urban workspaces, they turn attention away from methodological individualism to study what they call distributed identity. Taking the example of an Uzbek banknote in the corner shop, the Uzbek identification is, for them, not merely the use of this indexical sign; rather, items such as the banknote form part of an assemblage through which 'identity is distributed across everyday objects, places and interactions.'

1.4 MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY PRACTICES

In the diverse sites of social interaction and within the context of personal and social power relationships outlined previously, identities are articulated through action, or participation. Such enactments of identity, or identity practices, entail making identity positions salient, described by Wenger (1998: 151) as 'a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other.' How we participate, how we construe this participation and the extent to which we are legitimized in our participation, all contribute to identity construction.

These themes of participation and legitimacy are visible in chapters by Block (Chapter 9) and by Mercer and Talbot (Chapter 11), both of which consider identity practice in similar contexts (higher education settings which employ English as Medium of Instruction (EMI)). Mercer and Talbot argue

that in bringing psychological, social and contextual factors into relationship, Complex Dynamic Systems (CDS) theory can explain the emergence and complexity of multilingual identity. Their example of Iris, a teacher of immunology in Austria renegotiating her professional identity as she teaches through the medium of English, raises issues of legitimacy and ambivalence, which Iris ultimately resolves.

Adopting a version of positioning theory to consider how identities emerge in interaction in situated practice, Block presents an extended interview with Raquel, a university biotechnology lecturer and bilingual English speaker, to explore how she contests and resists the positioning gambits of her two interviewers, who by adopting an 'ELT gaze' try to ascribe to her an identity as a teacher of English. Of particular interest here is Block's framing of research interviews themselves as 'social events' and a form of identity practice; this has important repercussions for how identity research should be conducted and emphasizes how the individual and the social operate dialectically.

Perrino and Wortham (Chapter 12) similarly analyze the discourse of social events, in this instance story and joke telling in the multilingual speech 'community of practice' in the Veneto area of northern Italy. Analysis of the exclusionary dynamics of switching to Venetan from standard Italian during joke telling and how this draws boundaries in otherwise 'heterogenous communities of practice' supports the authors' argument that oral narratives cannot be studied as purely denotational content, but that the veiled or explicit interactional moves revealed by the 'interactional text' need to be considered. While engendering a sense of pride or belonging for some in this community, resonating with the work of Heller and Duchêne (2012), the code-switching practice observed simultaneously excluded others or positioned them as outsiders (e.g. migrants).

How conventional power dynamics can be disrupted through intentional multilingual practice is a theme of several chapters. For instance, Doherty, Norton and Stranger-Johannessen explore the critical influence of identity in collaborative translation practice (Chapter 10). Working on a multilingual literacy initiative, Global Storybooks, multilingual translators employed their full linguistic repertoires to produce the story, often translating minority languages into other minority languages from the Global South and negotiating with a range of co-contributors with different and sometimes overlapping languages, dialects and cultures. Doherty et al. argue that, through this translanguaging in collaborative translation practice, issues of legitimacy and peripheral engagement can be overcome, as conventional power dynamics (e.g. the primacy of the 'native speaker') are challenged.

Phipps also offers a passionate argument for a disruption of power dynamics through intentional multilingualism practised outside the normative bounds of urban-centred environments of the Global North (Chapter 8). She considers the success of a project which attempted to ‘decolonize’ by researching multilingually in a rural African township and by ‘working more indigenously, in the true sense of that word, that is as people on and of the land’. For Phipps and her team this involved relegating English in favour of seventeen local languages and using multimodality in the form of arts-based outcomes, here a dance performance. With reference to her own language learning experiences, Phipps argues that for too long the centralizing of power in the urban has structured both our language practice and research methods and that researchers need to leave behind the professional identifications associated with ways of knowing that confer power in the Western academy.

1.5 MULTILINGUAL IDENTITY AND INVESTMENT

How our identities are constructed and (re)negotiated within social contexts and how that affects our commitments to our languages is the basis of Bonny Norton’s concept of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2013), further developed in Darwin and Norton (2015, 2021). Drawing on Bourdieu (1977) and habitus to elaborate the psychological basis of motivation, Norton foregrounded the role that power plays in social interaction, exemplified by people’s different behaviours in different contexts at different points in time according to what they perceive the context allows or demands. As discussed earlier, for example, despite structuration in the form of the English Medium of Instruction apparatus that surrounded her in the university context and the ‘ELT gaze’ of her interviewers, Raquel was able to use her agency to resist identification as a teacher of English.

Such agency is not always available, as we can see in some of the case studies of learners of Mandarin Chinese presented in Chapter 13, where Duff draws on the Douglas Fir Group’s transdisciplinary framework to consider the macro- (e.g. the sociopolitical and ideologies), meso- (school, home, community) and micro- (interactions, activities and linguistic practices) level forces which account for investment in language learning and language maintenance. One case highlights the ethnolinguistic cost of learning Mandarin, where sociopolitical factors and dominant ideologies about Chinese learning impact on individual agency in the attempt to maintain home languages. Issues of ‘legitimacy’ are raised in the cases of two non-heritage learners, very

different in terms of age, background and instrumental reasons for study, who both invest heavily in learning Mandarin Chinese but, despite gaining a high level of fluency after years of study, lose momentum when their bids to become ‘insiders’ are resisted. While Duff’s cases display a range of personal, intellectual and economic reasons for language learning or maintenance, all substantiate Norton’s notion of investment as complex and changeable, varying over time and locality, and the role that structuration can play.

Similar themes are found in Sallabank and King’s work on new adult speakers’ investment in learning minoritized or endangered languages, here Guernesiais, the Indigenous language of Guernsey, Channel Islands, and *te reo Māori*, the indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand (Chapter 17). Concurring that the usual social-psychological frameworks for motivation are not sufficient in contexts of endangered and Indigenous languages, Sallabank and King draw on the idea of *mudes*, or critical points at which people may develop new understandings of their linguistic identities which might then lead them to invest in learning. Common to both Guernesiais and *te reo Māori* was the finding that more than any symbolic or material capital, adults derived emotional capital from their studies, as it enhanced their personal well-being and understanding of who they perceived themselves to be.

This linguistic identity consciousness is central, too, to Haukås’s study, where she compares the role of social framings of multilingualism with the conceptions of young language learners in Norway (Chapter 14). Although a very multilingual country (with a broad range of languages and dialects and English widely spoken), in the policy context the label ‘multilingual’ is ascribed mainly to immigrants. While a small number of Haukås’s young learners did equate multilingualism with immigration and about a third were unsure, most students were willing to ascribe the term ‘multilingual’ to themselves. Here habitus was not a constraint and the secondary-age Norwegians investigated were agentive enough to claim such an identity. In contrast, Gayton and Fisher suggest that the decline in participation in language learning in post-compulsory phases of education in Anglophone settings is related to students’ perceptions about the degree of agency they have in making such an identity claim (Chapter 15), reflecting a maximal view of bi- or multilingualism as regards fluency. A deficiency of understanding about sociolinguistics and about the extent of their own linguistic repertoires means young learners may lack the legitimacy to claim a multilingual identity.

Nevertheless, Gayton and Fisher argue that the development of students’ multilingual identity is a route to improve investment in language learning and therefore that linguistic identity exploration in the classroom needs to