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Jan Blommaert
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The Sociolinguistics of Globalization

Human language has changed in the age of globalization: no longer tied to stable and resident communities, it moves across the globe, and it changes in the process. The world has become a complex 'web' of villages, towns, neighbourhoods and settlements connected by material and symbolic ties in often unpredictable ways. This phenomenon requires us to revise our understanding of linguistic communication. In *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization* Jan Blommaert constructs a theory of changing language in a changing society, reconsidering locality, repertoires, competence, history and sociolinguistic inequality.

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For Michael S. and Sali M., loyal Kepketarians

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Series editor's foreword

The series *Cambridge Approaches to Language Contact* (CALC) was set up to publish outstanding monographs on language contact, especially by authors who approach their specific subject matter from a diachronic or developmental perspective. Our goal is to integrate the ever-growing scholarship on language diversification (including the development of creoles, pidgins, and indigenized varieties of colonial European languages), bilingual language development, code-switching, and language endangerment. We hope to provide a select forum to scholars who contribute insightfully to understanding language evolution from an interdisciplinary perspective. We favour approaches that highlight the role of ecology and draw inspiration both from the authors' own fields of specialization and from related research areas in linguistics or other disciplines. Eclecticism is one of our mottoes, as we endeavour to comprehend the complexity of evolutionary processes associated with contact.

We are very happy to add to our list Jan Blommaert's *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*, an authoritative invitation to rethink linguistic communication in a world that has become increasingly interconnected, is marked by more and more mobility of both people and commodities (including language) as well as by socio-economic inequities, and is undeniably polycentric. Some hegemonic languages, chiefly English, have spread world-wide but have not only become 'global' but also indigenized, both adapted to new communicative habits and subjected to local norms. Consequently, their market values are not universally identical across national borders; in fact, not even within the same borders. It is more and more a question of whose English it is and where it is spoken. These factors determine not only whether a speaker is (fully) integrated or marginalized by the host population, especially in the metropoles of former colonies, but also what social representations their communication in English conjures up of the speaker or writer.

The increasing population mobility brought about by European colonization and associated especially with today's patterns of economic globalization and war refugeeism have also produced non-hegemonic diasporas, in which languages of the politically and/or economically underprivileged have spread (far) beyond their homelands, making traditional, static geolinguistics clearly out of

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date. While some linguists have blamed the globalization of today's world for language endangerment, little attention has been paid to the new forms of individual and societal multilingualism that it has produced and to the need to conceive of speakers' repertoires dynamically and no longer as complete but as 'truncated'. Blommaert proposes a 'sociolinguistics of mobile resources', which should acknowledge not only the variable communicative capacities and functions of the different languages spoken by individual speakers but also differences between purely communicative and emblematic uses of a language, such that the same phrases from the same language (say, English or Japanese) used in different settings (say, London or Tokyo) may not have the same ethnographic values.

The Sociolinguistics of Globalization highlights the ways in which heterogeneity in language practice and inequities in the authorities that dictate normative standards reflect new forms of socio-economic inequities created by the recent colonization of the world by Europe and by the way world-wide economic globalization is now practised. They also reflect the particularly uneven ways in which national and world economies have developed world-wide, especially increasing the gap between the economic North and South as well as between the rural and urban communities in the economic South. They have likewise created enormous gaps between urban centres and urban peripheries, between national centres and national peripheries, and of course between world centres and world peripheries. As people travel across their residential boundaries, the market values of the language varieties they practise change as much as their own, as their socio-economic positions are constantly being redefined. It is becoming obviously inadequate to practise a sociolinguistics of Saussurean synchrony. Blommaert argues for one that can capture the historical trajectories of speakers and their linguistic communities as they move across social and geographical spaces, i.e. a sociolinguistics in which both speakers and language varieties are treated as historical entities. Linguistic communities can thus be treated as emergent ones, constantly being reshaped by the interactive dynamics of their members. This is a stimulating and thought-provoking book that CALC is proud to be associated with.

SALIKOKO S. MUFWENE
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Preface

I see this book as the third one of a trilogy in which I try to formulate some of the consequences of globalization for the study of language in society. The first book of the series, *Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (2005) attempted to sketch these consequences for our understanding of discourse, as well as for our ethos of analysing it. The same approach was applied to literacy in *Grassroots Literacy* (2008), and I am here bringing the same exercise to the field of sociolinguistics. Each of the books is an attempt, an *essai* in the classical and original sense of the term, in which I try my best to describe the problem and offer some conceptual and analytical tools for addressing it. And I make this effort because I believe that globalization forces us – whether we like it or not – to an *aggiornamento* of our theoretical and methodological toolkit. Much as modernism defined most of the current widespread tools of our trade, the transition towards a different kind of social system forces us to redefine them. Such an exercise, however iconoclastic it may seem at first, cannot be avoided or postponed.

The tone of this book, like the previous two, is consequently critical and paradigmatic. I deliberately try to push myself to explore the limits of the present sociolinguistic instrumentarium in an attempt to demonstrate its shortcomings and the need to revise its ingredients. It is a conscious attempt to think outside the box, and at times it will suffer from its own radicalism. There will be passages in this book where I will probably overstate my case while trying to be as clear as possible, and there will be places where I produce theoretical overkill. I hope, however, that I will nowhere create a caricature of sociolinguistic globalization processes. I have in this book tried to be outspokenly empirical in the theoretical effort I make. The theoretical issues will be addressed by providing long and detailed empirical analyses, partly to enhance the clarity of my argument and partly to provide baseline descriptions of globalization phenomena of a particular kind. I hope that, even in the event that the theoretical effort will be judged to be worthless, the empirical effort will be appreciated. Behind the job of theoretical development lies the work of description, and being an ethnographer I tend to take that job quite seriously. I also believe that this job of description is the most important contribution that sociolinguistic

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work can make. We possess (if we use it well) a descriptive apparatus of unparalleled precision, capable of reading infinitely big features of society from infinitely small details of communicative behaviour. Our most persuasive discourse is empirical and descriptive: we are at our best when we provide theoretically grounded and sophisticated descriptions of language problems in the world. The theoretical challenges of globalization may make some scholars inclined to produce more theory than description; in my view this would mean that we thereby sacrifice some of our best and most powerful tools.

The three books have one large theoretical theme in common – a theme which will emerge here towards the end of this book. It is a critique of the Saussurean synchrony – a view of sociolinguistic reality in which language is undressed, so to speak, and robbed of the spatial and temporal features that define its occurrence, meaning and function in real social life. It is my view that this Saussurean synchrony has no real existence, and cannot remain intact even as a hypothetical theoretical construct. We need to replace it with a view of language as something intrinsically and perpetually mobile, through space as well as time, and *made for* mobility. The finality of language is mobility, not immobility. I share this insight with several other scholars and cannot claim to be original in this respect. Michael Silverstein, for one, has done a lot in questioning this old paradigm, and the book is dedicated to him and to Salikoko Mufwene, another scholar with a unique sense of history (and the man who offered me an opportunity to write this book). But the attack started as soon as people such as John Gumperz, Dell Hymes, Erving Goffman and Aaron Cicourel rediscovered the theoretical and paradigmatic value of ethnography, and Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and others launched their critiques on structuralism. Needless to say, Gunther Kress's development of multimodal analysis was also instrumental in the critique of the static and totalizing features of synchronicity. In my view, synchrony is a feature of a modernist epistemology, one that reflected its times. Now that times have changed and we are looking at a world that can no longer be neatly divided into clear and transparent categories, the theoretical paradigms need to be revised as well. My effort is, in that sense, deeply historical.

Even if the direct origins of the book are a series of seminars I taught at the University of Chicago in 2003, this book is a synthesis of a decade of research, and I cannot possibly thank everyone who has influenced its sound and shape. But I must thank the original co-authors of certain parts of it for allowing me to re-use our joint work here: Tope Omoniyi, Charlyn Dyers, Nathalie Muyllaert, Marieke Huysmans, Evita Willaert, Lies Creve and Lieselotte Van der Donck. Stef Slembrouck and Jim Collins were essential in formulating some of the key concepts and insights that drive this book. I am also grateful to Dong Jie, April Huang, Sjaak Kroon, Max Spotti, Sari Pietikäinen and Rob Moore, my partners during fieldwork adventures over the past few years, who have helped

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me shape my thoughts on numerous issues (and sometimes also helped me in formulating them). My wife Pika gave me advice on the Japanese examples and read the whole manuscript a couple of times, providing me with tons of helpful comments and suggestions for clarification. And some of my interlocutors of the past few years – Gunther Kress, Ben Rampton, Roxy Harris, Brian Street, Constant Leung, David Block, Sirpa Leppänen and Päivi Pahta – constantly fed me with a supply of thoughts, reflections and criticisms of my radical views.

One final word about the series in which this book is appearing. I consider it a great privilege to become an author in the *Cambridge Approaches to Language Contact*. The series has consistently produced books of the highest quality, and I can only be flattered and humbled by the association with the outstanding group of authors in that series. The consistent quality of the series is to a large extent the result of the rigorous and meticulous editorial work of Sali Mufwene, who thus deserves another accolade here. In my own case, Sali provided me with hundreds of thoughtful and constructive comments and questions on the first draft of this book. The revisions prompted by them greatly improved the book.

All of these people deserve my thanks, and if the book is judged to be good, it is in no small measure due to them. On the other hand, if it is judged to be bad, I alone naturally take the blame for it.

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Different parts of this book are based on materials that were previously published. Section 2.2 is based on 'Sociolinguistic scales' (*Intercultural Pragmatics* 4/1: 1–19, 2007). The sections 2.3 and 2.4 have their origins in 'Sociolinguistics and discourse analysis: orders of indexicality and polycentricity' (*Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 2/2: 115–130, 2007). Section 3.1 is a revised version of 'Writing locality in globalized Swahili: Semiotizing space in a Tanzanian novel' (In Cécile B. Vigouroux and Salikoko S. Mufwene, eds., *Globalization and Language Vitality: Perspectives from Africa:* 210–228. London: Continuum, 2008). Section 3.3 is based on 'Peripheral normativity: literacy and the production of locality in a South African Township school (*Linguistics and Education* 16: 378–403, 2005), a paper co-authored with Nathalie Muyllaert, Marieke Huysmans and Charlyn Dyers. Section 4.2 has its origins in a paper, co-authored with Tope Omoniyi and titled 'Email fraud: language, technology, and the indexicals of globalisation' (*Social Semiotics* 16/4: 573–605, 2006). Section 6.2 appeared as 'Language, asylum and the national order' in *Current Anthropology* 50/4: 415–441. Section 7.2, finally, is an adapted version of 'Situating language rights: English and Swahili in Tanzania revisited' (*Journal of Sociolinguistics* 9/3: 390–417, 2005). I am grateful to Mouton de Gruyter, Routledge, Continuum, Elsevier and Wiley-Blackwell for permission to use these materials for inclusion in the book.

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