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SUPERDIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE AND THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will show how the superdiversity perspective suggested in recent critical sociolinguistics can provide the study of social media discourse and communication with a useful approach to conceptualizing and empirically investigating complex and multiple axes of diversity and difference - social, discursive, linguistic and semiotic - that characterize social media activities and interactions. To this end, we will discuss recent work in sociolinguistics of social media and, with the help of insights it offers, highlight how social media practices illustrate many of the aspects of contemporary social life and communication that are considered symptomatic of superdiversity. We will begin our chapter by defining what we mean by the superdiversity perspective, and then give a brief historical account of the development of the field, showing how researchers have moved from initial views of superdiversity as a quality or quantity that characterizes particular places, spaces, groups and networks, to a notion of superdiversity as an approach to language use and communication that aims at capturing and empirically investigating the unpredictability, complexity,

heterogeneity and mobility of semiotic resources and normativities in play in communicative practices, identity work and discourses about superdiversity. Finally, we will discuss two key challenges for future work in this area: the role of social media communication in surveillance and securitization, and in new (precarious) labour and entrepreneurship.

By social media we here refer to websites, applications and online platforms that, via the internet and with the help of digital devices such as computers and mobile devices, allow the presentation and exchange of user generated content. Typically, in social media practices content is produced and developed in a participatory and collaborative fashion (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 61), involving the mobilization of varied semiotic materials in social interaction between individuals, groups and communities who use such media (see Fornäs et al. 2002). Social media platforms can offer different affordances for content production, participation and interaction, as well as impose different constraints on them. These affordances and constraints do not, however, necessarily straitjacket the actions of participants who may also adopt and appropriate media (platforms) for their own (creative, playful and critical) purposes. In this sense, social media are social in nature not only because they afford interaction, exchange of content and the development communality, but because participation in them involves shared sets of semiotic preferences, productive and interpretive conventions and norms regulating participant action and the creation and interpretation of their discourse.

The superdiversity perspective and social media practices

In line with recent theorizations in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (Blommaert & Rampton 2011; Blommaert 2015; Arnaut 2016), superdiversity can be seen as a paradigmatic

and tactical choice of perspective on theorizing and investigating the complexity that increasingly characterizes communication in late modern and globalized social settings. In Blommaert's (2015: 83) words, language and superdiversity can be understood as "a nexus of developments long underway". This nexus is best seen as a theoretical and methodological explorative perspective necessitated by "the acceptance of *uncertainty* in sociolinguistic analysis" that compels us to question the traditional assumptions about language, and addresses the ways in which people mobilize different linguistic forms to negotiate their (dis)identifications with different groups at different moments, settings and stages through their lives (Blommaert & Rampton 2011: 5). In these ways, superdiversity as a perspective opens up possibilities for scholarship, on the one hand, to consider "complexity, hybridity, 'impurity' and other features of 'abnormal' sociolinguistic objects as 'normal'"; and, on the other hand, to engage in their ethnographic investigation to find out "how sociolinguistic systems operate rather than to project a priori characteristics onto them" (Blommaert 2015: 83). In a similar vein, Arnaut (2016: 63) argues that a superdiversity perspective makes possible sociolinguistic investigations of "the post-panopticon of unregimented, messy, transversal interactions among actors who enjoy the relative openness of performing 'dividuality' [i.e. collectiveness, communality or hive-mindedness, our addition] in metrolingualism, in styling and crossing, in activating certain repertoires, in engaging in certain alignments, etc."

In conceptualizations such as these, superdiversity goes radically beyond the description of diversified diversity of migrant populations - a view that has characterized the first discussions of superdiversity (Vertovec 2006, 2007; Meissner 2015; 2016). Instead, these more recent views draw on seminal work in linguistic ethnography and sociolinguistics suggesting that superdiversity is essentially a move that allows scholars to refocus their ethnographic gazes and analytic takes on linguistic and other semiotic forms and their

diversity as resources and repertoires for situated and contingent meaning making in human social life. These resources can thus be seen as means with which individuals and groups reflexively navigate and manage the mobile dimensions of complexity that characterize communication, social lives, identifications and relationships in contemporary shifting and turbulent socio-cultural and discursive circumstances (see Stroud 2015; Creswell & Martin 2012).

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The history of the study of language, superdiversity and social media is relatively short, with the first studies emerging in the 2010s. However, the significance of social media was noted already in the first discussions of sociolinguistics and superdiversity, with an emphasis on the role of digital media in shaping communicative practices and human social relations, and making available resources which cross territorial boundaries (Creese & Blackledge 2010; Blommaert & Rampton 2011). For instance, Blommaert and Rampton (2011: 3) discuss the impact of new communication technologies both on migrants, their communities and transnational networks, and more generally on (many) people's "lived experiences and sociocultural modes of life".

Despite the young age of the field of language and superdiversity, and some allegations of its ahistoricity (see e.g. Pavlenko forthcoming; Flores & Lewis 2016: 105), the sociolinguistic enquiry of superdiversity, also in relation to social media practices, is a fundamentally historical enterprise. This is because the emergent activities, interactions and discourses it investigates are always enmeshed in, contributing to and shaped by social,

cultural and political processes of development, and their functions and effects derive from their historical trajectories and embeddedness (see also Blommaert, 2016).

In sociolinguistic work on social media communications and discourses, studies typically seek to understand the participant perspectives on how their resources are functional and meaningful in the creation and negotiation of socio-cultural meanings. Such an empirical project of the reduction of uncertainty thus requires an ethnographic immersion into the sociocultural worlds, practices and meaning makings of social media participants. It often involves multiple (digital and physical) sites and sets of data (see Androutsopoulos and Stæhr in this volume), blending and connecting ethnographic observations of groups and communities from different sites (see e.g. Peuronen, 2017) and aims at a progressively developing, nuanced understanding of social media practices as a realm of contemporary social life.

Superdiverse places, spaces, groups and networks of social media participants

In the first empirical studies that sought to apply the concept of superdiversity in the investigation of digital communication, scholars often used the notion to describe particular physical and/or digital settings, groups, communities or networks. For example, the empirical studies in the collection by Androutsopoulos & Juffermans (2014: 5) primarily approach superdiversity as digital language practices in “a range of settings which can be reasonably considered ‘superdiverse’ in terms of their respective countries, communities and networks”. In Stæhr (2014), for example, Copenhagen is described as a superdiverse metropolis, while Sharma (2014) considers Nepalis in the diaspora as a superdiverse group, and Jonson & Muhonen (2014) argue that superdiversity is also a quality of some digital settings and networks. However, as noted by Androutsopoulos & Juffermans (2014: 4), these

settings and networks are not understood as parts of a monolithic superdiverse entity, but as “specific social spaces discursively constructed”, each of which enable networked individuals in different ways.

As Deumert (2014) notes, the view of superdiversity that the papers draw upon in the compilation is not, however, without its problems. In her view, when superdiversity is seen either as a quality - complexified diversity - or a quantity, i.e. diversity that, while complexified, has also augmented and intensified in certain settings such as “contemporary metropolis or in digital spaces”, it raises the question what exactly can be the “kind of threshold at which the ordinary diverse becomes superdiverse” (Deumert 2014: 117).

A similar observation is also made by Varis (2017: 26). Focusing on the quantifying approach to superdiversity, she argues that it “allows for in a way putting the cart before the horse in analyses, if spaces and places are characterised as ‘superdiverse’ from the outset by relying on (statistical) information on how many ‘different’ people inhabit those spaces or places and then proceeding to explain what it means to have ‘so much’ diversity there.” In other words, analyses of language uses in (digital) spaces and (physical) places that have been established as superdiverse can lead analysts to discover exactly what they already knew to be there and identify the ‘unexpected’ (Pennycook 2012: 17). In Varis’s (2017:26) words, the ‘more paradigm’ is also problematic, because it can “come with a normative vision of a baseline level of diversity, and a vision on difference that can be exoticising and essentialising”. Instead, she (2017: 43) argues that

[s]uperdiversity does not refer to an end point, but aims to capture inchoate phenomena, and can help understand points in time and space where agency is situated in temporal articulations. It would be usefully applied to refer to a process in which horizons of meaning are changing and in motion – not a quantitative change

(‘more diversity’), but a change in the quality of social relations and personal experience as social within a specific historical conjuncture.

Complex diversity in translocal social media practices

While the approach to superdiversity as a quality or quantity characterizing particular groups and contexts has been established as problematic, recent research has shown how engagement and communication with both known and unknown addressees in social media necessarily means that participants need to orient to complex diversity. This is particularly significant in activities and interactions characterized by complex social relations and interactions across categorical and traditional boundaries in which the linguistic resources in use exceed those of individual participants. It is in this sense that social media activities and interactions can exemplify the kind of unpredictability, metalinguistic and pragmatic negotiations, and contingency of social patterns with different degrees of permanence (Blommaert 2015) that have been argued to be characteristic of superdiversity (Blommaert & Rampton 2011).

For example, in a study of Facebook interactions that involve participants from different countries and language communities, Androutsopoulos (2014: 64-5) shows how the participants needed to negotiate their language choices in a situation of context collapse (Marwick & boyd 2011), characterized by a destabilization of style and a proliferation of metalinguistic negotiations among participants. In a similar way, Leppänen (2012, 2015) discusses how social media spaces can serve as niches for international, multilingual communities of practice and affinity groups that congregate around shared interests, projects and causes. For instance, she (Leppänen 2015) demonstrates how in informal and interest-driven social media practices, participation often requires the mobilization of resources that,

from a more traditional sociolinguistic perspective, can appear as esoteric and exceptional. From the emic perspective of the participants themselves, however, such resources can be part of the repertoire that enable their access to the activities, and serve as means for authenticating themselves as legitimate members in the online groups or communities (for more details on diverse communicative resources in authentication, see the papers in Leppänen et al. 2015).

In such social media practices as these that transcend and span linguistic and cultural borders, communication and interaction can thus provide participants with means for identifications and alignments that are not organized on the basis of local, ethnic, national, or regional affiliations and allegiances only, but that can be increasingly translocal and -cultural in nature (Kytölä, 2016). To illustrate this, we now turn to an on-going multi-sited ethnographic study of ours that focuses on a group of young men from Jyväskylä, Finland - the Real Skifi group - who label themselves as 'urban skiers' and use the city environment for performing various tricks and jumps with skis.

While engaging in physical activities locally in the city, the group also film and broadcast webisodes of urban skiing as well as engage in multilingual dialogue with their proximal and more distant audiences, thus using the mediating means and technologies of social media to reach out beyond their local settings. While doing so, they also draw on, take up and recontextualize resources used in other types of urban sports (e.g. parkour, skateboarding, snowboarding), for example by broadcasting edited versions of their skiing tricks, providing commentaries on them and presenting them online with the accompaniment of music. Their enthusiasm about, and creativity in, both urban skiing and in disseminating their activities in different social media platforms have made them micro-celebrities (Senft 2013) both locally and globally. Their awareness of the position they have in the global

scene of urban skiing can be illustrated with the help of an extract from the interview we did with them:

There are quite a few people who film skiing on the streets like all around the world, and a lot in the US especially. And many of them shoot for films and somewhat fewer for online episodes. I'm perhaps tempted to say that all the other skiers are like on a scale from here up, and here you have their skill level, and here are those who make a living out of it and make movies. And the Real Skifi is somewhere else completely. So it's hard to place us on that scale because it is such a different thing we do. So are we better or not? - that divides opinions a lot. We may appeal more to the non-skiers. But it's a fact that they are- there are guys out there in the world with better technical skills than we have. (Translated from Finnish by the authors)

In his account, a member of the group describes a global scale that can be used to evaluate skiers who film on the streets. Rather than placing themselves on this scale, he places their group “somewhere else completely”. With this statement, he acknowledges that, while other skiers may be more talented in terms of their technical skills, Real Skifi’s popularity is based on their social media activities that attract audiences beyond the lifestyle sportsscape. In this way, he constructs a discourse of professionalism within urban skiing and at the same time, disidentifies their group from the typical tokens of “being successful”. This enables him to fashion a unique identity for the group that sets them apart from the mainstream film industry in lifestyle sports.

Thus, operating in their local context, the group mobilize and appropriate certain forms, practices and discourses of urban skiing circulating globally, as well as create digital content in their own terms. At the same time, via their translocality and engagement with transcultural

discourses and practices of urban sports and the ways they are mediated, the Real Skifi also connect and actively interact with audiences and fans of their videos from both their local environment and from other parts of the world. In these ways, too, their multilingual and multimodal mediated activities are both territorial and deterritorial, finding dimensions and meanings from spaces and locales beyond their daily habitat, and engaging in the exchange and spread of cultural forms and practices beyond their home base.

CORE ISSUES AND TOPICS

Heterogeneity and circulation of semiotic resources in social media communication

In comparison with many face-to-face situations and settings, language use in social media is often characterized by unpredictability: the correlation in such communication between participants, places/sites, and the ways of communicating tends to be less stable and more variable (Blommaert & Rampton 2011; see also McLaughlin 2014).

At the same time, in sociolinguistics of social media, language is viewed as a repertoire of resources that social actors choose to draw on and employ for their specific communicative purposes. Such a view of language echoes recent views that language is something that people do in acts and practices of (poly)linguaging (Jørgensen et al. 2011), translanguaging (Garcia & Li 2013), translingualism (Ganagarajah 2013) and metrolingualism (Pennycook & Otsuji 2015). What all these concepts underline in different ways is how language users, guided by norms, conventions and preferences particular to the situation and type of communication in question, draw on and apply the resources available to them for specific social and discursive purposes in ways that are situationally and socio-

culturally functional and meaningful. In addition, they all emphasize that the mobilization of linguistic and semiotic resources in communication is not unique to specific ‘multilingual’ speakers, sites or contexts, but that all human communication is in different degrees linguistically heterogeneous.

Such a view of language characterizes much of the recent work on social media. An early example is a paper by Varis and Wang (2011: 71) in which, while emphasizing the role of the internet in the globalisation processes, they suggest that “discussions on superdiversity should take into account the significance of the Internet in complexifying the nature of human communication and engagement with others, of transnational movements and migration, and of social and cultural life in general”. Other empirical studies have shown how in digital communication participants draw on and apply resources provided by (what are traditionally seen as) different languages, varieties and registers. For example, the cases investigated in Leppänen et al. (2017) demonstrate how linguistic diversity in digital communication can take variant forms, sometimes involving the alternation between the use of more than one language, often serving as a discursive resource for contextualizing meanings, while in yet other contexts, it can manifest as a thoroughly enmeshed style, involving features conventionally associated with different languages, varieties or styles (for overviews, see e.g. Androutsopoulos 2011; Leppänen & Peuronen 2012; Lee 2016).

Studies have also shown how the heterogeneity of resources used in social media communication often entails more than linguistic diversity (Androutsopoulos 2011; Leppänen 2012; Peuronen 2013). With the help of the concept of heteroglossia, initially suggested by Bakhtin (1981: 263), they investigate the inherent diversity that is present in language and that enables the simultaneous expression of a multiplicity of social voices, as well as the potential socio-ideological tension in the use of particular linguistic signs in a specific context. More specifically, they show how in social media, a diversity of social, cultural and

ideological discourses and differing social voices can be evoked through the strategic use of specific resources. For example, Androutsopoulos (2011) investigates the heteroglossic contrasts and relations in Web 2.0 environments, manifesting in the layered composition of web pages, and the ways in which different elements involved convey multiple voices and genres. He points out that in digital environments, heteroglossic language or discourses can be both intentional and emergent - a side effect of the composite structure of Web 2.0 environments, and a product of multiple authors. In a study of the ways in which young Finns organize their social realities, Peuronen (2013) shows how, both in their monolingual and multilingual communication, they navigate many socio-ideological voices that might occasionally even be in contradiction with each other (Peuronen 2013: 300). She demonstrates how, by mobilizing particular registers in English and Finnish, members of a community of practice of Christian snowboarders mobilize specific voices found in the Bible and youth culture and apply these voices to construct their identities and relationships as modern young Christians.

Besides verbal language(s), communication in contemporary social media also increasingly involves the use and integration of other semiotic resources (Thurlow & Mroczek 2011). The diversity and complexity of digitally mediated practices is thus multi-semiotic in nature, involving different modes and modalities which, in principle, can have equal salience as communicative resources (Barton & Lee 2013; Seargeant & Tagg 2014; Page 2016). Besides the growing role of pictures, videos, music and sounds in digital practices, also layout, design and positioning, as well as complex mediation chains and sequences between online (and offline) spaces are crucial resources for meaning making (Leppänen & Kytölä 2017). In the rhizomatically connected social media, participants can take up, recirculate and resignify previously used semiotic material in processes of entextualization (Bauman & Briggs 1990: 73; Blommaert 2005: 47) and resemiotization

(Iedema 2003). In these processes, socially, culturally, and historically situated pieces of discourse are lifted out of their original context and embedded and rearticulated as parts of another discourse, often involving a transmission across modes and modalities, from some groups of people to others. For instance, the ways in which mediated popular cultural phenomena (e.g. films, TV programs, music videos), and political events and speeches are subverted for the purposes of parody or satire are good examples of popular recirculation and resignification practices in social media (see e.g. Leppänen et al. 2014).

Multiple and layered normativities

Another focus in research on social media highlighting the relevance of a superdiversity perspective has been the investigation of participant engagement in and orientations to normativity. It opens for investigation not only the unexpected, creative and innovative, but also complex forms of governmentality: such social forces as conventionality, normativity and power (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 7-8), involving particular forms of subjectivization, on the one hand, and the manufacturing of linguistic and other semiotic norms, on the other hand. (Arnaut 2016).

The importance of normativity is already apparent in many of the early studies on superdiversity and digital communication. For example, with specific reference to Chinese hip hop online, Varis and Wang (2011) investigate the dynamics of creativity and normativity. They state that social actors engaged in hip hop can creatively draw on globally circulating resources, “super-vernaculars”, that they define as new forms of semiotic codes emerging in the context of technology-driven globalization processes (see also Blommaert 2012), to fashion their local identities according to their own communicative or representative purposes. More recently, digital social media practices have been shown to

illustrate late modern ‘post-Panopticon’ normativity in action (Arnaut 2016), manifesting in the lack of centralized mechanisms of control by ‘those in power’ and in a shift to forms of peer policing of activities in which participants need to orient to plural centers of normativity, some of which may be specific to the sites and activities in question, while others may draw on normative centers in other domains and contexts (Blommaert 2010; Leppänen et al. 2017).

Normativity as a form of reflexive action involves ways of evaluating, judging and policing the semiotic conduct of oneself and others. Thus, normativity is always partly “imposed from below - by oneself or one’s peers” (Leppänen and Piirainen-Marsh 2009: 261; Kytölä 2013), in acts of grassroots language policing which can both reflect and thereby consolidate situated and pre-existing norms for behaviour, but also contribute to the emergence, (re)shaping and (re)contextualization of new norms for specific contexts, cultures and communities. Besides such bottom-up and interactional forms of normativity, social media activities and interactions are also subjected to explicit forms of regulation that constrain the options and opportunities of participants when they express themselves and interact with others. These can include, for example, formalised codes of conduct, such as netiquettes, as well as explicit and institutionalized forms of policing, such as moderation and censorship.

Superdiversity and identity work in social media

The investigation of social media activities from a superdiversity perspective also highlights the social needs, agency and experiences of participants who, in their communication in specific socio-historical circumstances and afforded by the particular technologies and discourses in which they operate, construct and represent themselves as particular kinds of people, with particular social needs for connectivity, communality and belonging.

While identity and communality have always featured in research on language and digital communication (see e.g. Thurlow & Mroczek 2011; Barton & Lee 2013; Seargeant & Tagg 2014), they have also been the focus in studies that have added superdiversity in the equation. For example, several of the papers in Androutsopoulos and Juffermans (2014) draw attention to ways in which digital language practices “extend and complicate the semiotic resources available to people for their performance of identities and social relationships” (2014: 5). Specific foci include, for example, the identity work of Dutch Chinese youth vis-à-vis their Chinese heritage (Juffermans et al. 2014), the performance of glocal social identities with manga cartoon art by multi-ethnic Swedish adolescents (Jonsson & Muhonen 2014), and the construction of racial and ethnic identity and ethnolinguistic repertoires in a Nigerian web forum (Heyd 2014).

More recently, another collection of studies on social media, (dis)identifications and diversities (Leppänen et al 2017) shows how social media sites serve as fora in which, despite geographical distances and/or asynchronicity of communication, participants, often in mutually transparent and collectively ratified ways, categorize and construct situationally salient versions of selves and others, as well as (dis)identify, (dis)align and (dis)connect with (known and unknown) others - individuals, groups and social (stereo)types. The empirical studies in this collection also demonstrate how the robust analytic frameworks provided by sociolinguistics, ethnography, discourse studies and the study of multimodality provide analysts with versatile tools for anatomizing how identity work is conducted, made understandable and directed at audiences at the fine-grained level of semiotic choices and communicative acts, without, at the same time, losing sight of the situatedness of communication, and its embeddedness in particular social structures and relations. A study by Westinen (2017), for instance, explores the complex and multifaceted identifications by migrant hip hop artists in social media, relating these to the ways in which they both draw on

and counter such identity categories as ethnicity, and gendered and racialized stereotypes of Africans. Another key focus in the analyses of identity work in the volume includes processes and practices whereby social media participants take part in the construction and maintenance of collectively monitored communal spaces and communities of practice. For example, a study by Kytölä (2017) focuses on football forum discussions and debates on nationalism and demonstrates how these resurfacing nationalist discourses arose from and addressed the ethnic, cultural and sociolinguistic diversification of football and football culture.

Social media and discourses about superdiversity

Social media can also engage with superdiversity by offering participants a discursive space and a set of semiotic resources with which they can strive to make sense of, reflect on and evaluate their experiences relating to superdiversity. For instance, it is argued by Arnaut & Spotti (2014: 6) that superdiversity constitutes a discourse in itself and that it is beginning to tackle “basic concerns underlying the multiculturalism discourse that it seeks to replace”, such as inequality, discrimination and marginalisation. In addition, as suggested by Arnaut (2016: 65), because governmentality is a key focus in the critical sociolinguistics of superdiversity, it also involves “the recognition of its other, that hails sociolinguistics to engage with superdiversity’s dimension of responding to forces and discourses of ‘counter-diversity’, focusing on “countering, reworking, escaping established identities, categories, standards, registers, styles, etc.”.

In line with Arnaut’s assertion, empirical studies of digital practices have shown how accounts, analyses, discussion, debates, critique and disparagement of superdiversity encountered in physical or mediated environments abound in social media, effectively foregrounding how superdiversity is emerging as a nexus for participation and material for

further meaning-making spreading via the rhizomes provided by the internet (Leppänen & Elo 2016). For example, Sharma (2014) has shown how Nepalis have used YouTube as a discursive site to engage in language ideological debates over a the ‘bad’ English by a Nepali minister.

To show some of the ways in which superdiversity can be discursively interrogated and evaluated in social media, by mobilizing a range of semiotic resources and discourses our second example will briefly discuss the case of Bianca Sossu, a multilingual Finland-based black comedian who migrated from Angola to Finland in the early 2000s. He has recently started producing short comic ‘shows’ that he disseminates via several social media platforms (e.g. his own website, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram). He described his aims to us as follows:

I started producing videos because I wanted to do something different, real, something that people can relate to, whether it's through relationship dilemmas, friendship matters or things that happen in our everyday lives for example how foreigners deal with racism, struggle to speak the Finnish language, and how hard it is to get a decent job if u are a foreigner.

Bianca’s performances are both mediated and corporeal ones, involving short dramatized episodes of everyday life, with the black migrant man performing in drag and pretending to be a young, white, native-speaker Finn, sharing with audiences her/his insider knowledge about Finnish society and its customs and values. The performances are thus thoroughly heteroglossic in nature, building on the ironic contrast between the quasi-Finnish figure of Bianca and the real-life black migrant from Angola. Together with the audience comments they trigger, the performances are a good illustration of the ways in which social media can provide affordances for addressing the complexities, dislocations and fissures in the connections between specific identities, places and semiotic and communicative practices that we have discussed above as some of the key coordinates that a superdiversity perspective guides us to examine. Bianca’s shows also illustrate how social media performances, as part of a more general contemporary

post-politically correct entertainment culture (McRobbie 2005), can address, often in highly transgressive and problematizing ways, societal issues and discourses related to, for example, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, and the shifting power relations between host-society members and migrants.

Such social media performances as those by Bianca Sossu are also interesting because of the ways in which they highlight “scale work” (Summerson Carr & Lempert 2016). In this case, scale work manifests in how features of the performed, fictional performance are made to index more general, actual practices and (populist) discourses relating to migrants, xenophobia, and racism in the Finnish society. In addition, through their characterization and parodic subversions, Bianca's performances also underline the mobility and complexity of individuals and their identities, resources and repertoires. From this perspective, Bianca's social media performances could thus be seen as presenting its diverse audiences a particular superdiversity perspective of their own, addressing, interrogating via multisemiotic and heteroglossic means, the challenges facing individuals and groups with complex trajectories and repertoires navigating in turbulent socio-historical and political conditions and shifting and complex communicative contexts.

NEW DEBATES

In this chapter, we have discussed and illustrated key coordinates and issues in the investigation of communication and discourse in social media from a superdiversity perspective. An underlying motivation in this discussion has been our belief in the value of social media activities and interactions as research objects. Despite the fact that in both popular and academic debates they are sometimes seen as trivial, esoteric, or problematic, we argue here that they need to be taken seriously and subjected to rigorous and unbiased

investigations for the purpose of showing the complex ways in which they serve as meaningful sites for socio-cultural action, communication and meaning making.

Taking social media seriously in research is also a correlate of how their potential has been recognized, on the one hand, by corporations and official bodies, and the grassroots social media actors themselves, on the other. Regarding the former, it is becoming increasingly clear that, as social media constitute important sites of consumption, participation and socio-cultural action, they also attract governments and businesses to collect and extract maximal value from data, “be it information that will lead to more targeted advertising, product design, traffic planning or criminal policing” (Arnaut & Spotti 2014: 6). The collection of social media data can also contribute to the management and control of people’s possibilities of mobility. For some, digitalisation can create possibilities for new kinds of mobility, whereas for others, it can mean technologies with which “borders can be drawn which may and may not correspond with those of nation-states” and in which “certain subjects will be held firmly in place” (Varis 2017: 31). Besides focusing on how language and other semiotic resources are employed in communication and socio-cultural (inter)action in social media, sociolinguists thus need to investigate ways in which social media data are used in profiling, data gathering, surveillance and securitization. In highlighting digital practices geared towards the management and control of diversity, research on social media data can thus pose an important new task to sociolinguistics of superdiversity in general (see also Charalambous et al. forthcoming).

At the same time, the value that grassroots actors assign to the social media practices poses another important challenge to research. This has to do with the ways in which participants in informal and interest-driven social media activities are increasingly recognizing the potential that their immersive, participatory and collaborative activities can have. They can be important for their individual lives and livelihoods, but also in relation to

the largely digital, decentralized, translocal Collaborative Commons in which activities builds on collaborative interests and that are “driven by a deep desire to connect with others and share, open-source innovation, transparency and the search for community” (Rifkin 2014: 18-9). As such social media practices often rely on the users’ capacity to mobilize highly particularized linguistic and semiotic resources, they can develop into forms of expertise that can be valuable in the social niches of both local and more global participatory cultures and networks and can even constitute forms of non-traditional employment and entrepreneurship (Leppänen & Kytölä, 2017). Why the investigation of such social media practices as these are particularly important for sociolinguists of social media has to with how they are especially well positioned to show in detail the ways in which the capacity to strategically mobilize particular linguistic, semiotic and discursive resources is in a key role in this type of new labour. On the basis of such discussions, they can also highlight how such diversifying forms of discursive work can contribute to empowerment and agency (see also e.g. Alim 2009; Stroud & Wee 2012; Deumert 2015), while remaining conscious and critical of the ways in which they may also contribute to new forms of inequality and precarity.

SUMMARY

This chapter has argued how the superdiversity perspective suggested in critical sociolinguistics can provide the study of social media discourse and communication with a sophisticated approach to theorizing and investigating complex and multiple axes of diversity and difference in social media activities and interactions. Drawing on recent work in sociolinguistics of social media, it has discussed ways in which social media practices highlight aspects of contemporary social life and communication that are considered symptomatic of superdiversity, thus highlighting how new theorizations in this area can

contribute to the further development of the sociolinguistic theory on superdiversity more generally.

FURTHER READING

Androutsopoulos, J. and K. Juffermans (eds.) (2014) Digital language practices in superdiversity. Special issue in *Discourse, Context & Media* 4–5.

(A collection of case studies focusing on superdiverse places and spaces, with a useful introduction by the editors and a critical discussion by Ana Deumert.)

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