

Special issue on
Mediated multilingualism

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Editorial: The shifting paradigm: towards a re-conceptualisation of multilingualism

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In today's late modern, globalised world of mobilities and flows, multilingualism is increasingly an everyday phenomenon which people encounter and need to cope with in work, education, institutions, leisure time and media uses, for example. The increasing linguistic diversity has important consequences for individuals as well as for societies as a whole. For many people, it often means a problem – their multilingualism may be unwanted, disqualified or actively endangering (Blommaert & Spotti, forthcoming) and it may face denial, be the target of various acts of policing, and lead to inequities and exclusion. However, for others, multilingualism can be an asset and a means enabling them as social actors, and nuanced and versatile means for situated identity work, social interaction, cultural production and political action (Makoni & Pennycook 2007; Heller 2007; Blommaert 2010; Leppänen, forthcoming).

The view of multilingualism as an important symbolic and indexical resource underlies several recent attempts at re-conceptualising what has traditionally been seen as multilingualism, the collection of languages controlled by individuals, groups, institutions or nations. In this work by an increasing number of researchers in sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and language education (e.g. Heller 2007; Bailey 2007; Makoni & Pennycook 2007; Jørgensen 2008; Blommaert 2010; Pennycook 2010; Creese & Blackledge 2010) the concept of multilingualism has, in fact, been so intensively scrutinised that it may be justified to argue that the concept as well as its associated field of study are now experiencing a paradigmatic shift. At the core of this shift is a general dissatisfaction with the traditional enumerative and classificatory view of multilingualism as the language entities possessed by the language using subject – a view which basically considers multilingualism simply as a pluralisation of monolingualism. For example, it has been argued by Blommaert (2010) that the new forms of social interaction associated with globalisation necessarily require that research reconsiders the earlier sociolinguistic frameworks and assumptions concerning the social nature of language and goes beyond the traditional conceptual apparatus based on the idea of languages as autonomous codes in order to understand the complex ways in which linguistic and other semiotic resources act and interact in multilingual settings.

In a similar vein, Makoni and Pennycook (2007) have suggested that one of the perennial problems in considering languages as bounded entities is that it prevents any serious re-theorizing of multilingualism as anything else but moving beyond, alternating between, switching to and from and/or mixing

elements provided by two or more bounded language entities. If, however, their argument goes, language is regarded as a social, political and historical construct, the focus in the study of multilingualism can shift to investigations of what multilingualism means to people in their local contexts, of how they use their multilingual resources and how they themselves understand language use.

Instead of the traditional conceptualisation of multilingualism, researchers have offered a number of concepts each of which in their own way emphasise that, firstly, multilingualism needs to be seen as language resources available to individuals and social groups, secondly, that these resources may be heterogeneous and varied in nature, and, thirdly, that these resources are mobilised by individuals and groups with different – social, cultural, political, economic – effects and outcomes.

In this de/re-constructive work, the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin on the relation between sociolinguistic stratification of a language and socio-ideological diversity have been an influential intellectual source. Bakhtin's (1981) protosociolinguistic writings originating from the early 1930s, and, in particular, his notion of *heteroglossia* have been drawn on by several recent studies in order to account for the complex interplay between language diversity, negotiation of identities and different socio-ideological representations of reality (see e.g. Bailey 2007; Blommaert 2010; Lähteenmäki 2010; Androutsopoulos, forthcoming; Leppänen, forthcoming; Peuronen, in press).

The notion of heteroglossia, as discussed by Bakhtin (1981), presupposes a connection between linguistic diversity and ideological diversity in the sense that different language-forms are taken to be connected with particular ideological positions and to express particular world-views conceptualising extra-discursive reality in their own unique way. Thus, the notion of heteroglossia allows accounting for how language use and language choice can be used to index a particular ideological point of view and its place in wider social, historical and cultural contexts (Lähteenmäki 2010; Androutsopoulos, forthcoming). From the point of view of the language user, heteroglossia does not operate on the idea of separable languages but represents a dynamic and hybrid conglomerate of linguistic and discursive resources that afford self-expression, communication and identification in particular communicative situations (Leppänen, forthcoming). Thus, the notion assumes that an individual does not necessarily experience particular bits and pieces of his/her linguistic and discursive repertoire as representing distinct languages when s/he combines elements from two or more languages or from two or more varieties of a language.

Besides heteroglossia, another, and more recent re-conceptualisation of multilingualism as a “shift from language to resources” is *truncated multilingualism* by Blommaert (2010: 180). Essentially, Blommaert (ibid.: 181) suggests that people “draw resources from a repertoire that contains materials conventionally associated with ‘languages’.” That is, rather than whole languages (as indeed nobody masters the whole of any language), people have *repertoires*, and they employ specific bits and pieces of language included in these repertoires for different purposes. Repertoires consist of, for instance, accents, genres and registers that people acquire and have at their disposal, and these resources are always truncated in the sense that each individual accumulates specific resources – not the whole of any language. The specific compilation of resources at one's disposal is thus biographical in the sense that

it reflects one's life trajectory: the resources we have consist of the bits and pieces of language we stumble upon or actively strive to acquire into our repertoires.

Blommaert's contribution is perhaps particularly relevant in explaining today's globalised, super-diverse environments characterised by a "diversification of diversity" (Vertovec 2006): increased movement and migration, both forced and voluntary, that results in complex patterns of interaction and employment of (linguistic) resources. In today's complex multilingual societies, resources are also important markers of (in)equality: the possession of very truncated resources easily results in disadvantage and immobility. In a world characterised by heightened globalisation and increased movement, people may find that their limited resources work against them as they move around the globe, often in the hope of a better life. These are phenomena that a 'resources' approach to multilingualism can effectively help explain. As Blommaert (2010: 198) points out, "the world is not a nice place for everyone, and sociolinguistics has the capacity to show, in great detail and with an unparalleled amount of precision, how language reflects the predicaments of people in a globalizing world."

In a similar attempt to explain today's complex (especially urban) multilingual environments, Alastair Pennycook has introduced the term *metrolinguism* (Pennycook 2010; Otsuji & Pennycook 2010). In his view, the 'multi' in multilingualism – while pointing towards the hybridity in people's employment of resources – has stood for a simplification where multiplicity consists of distinct, fixed and countable languages and cultures without much sensitivity towards the very complexity of the multiplicity as such. In Pennycook's understanding of language, fixity and fluidity coexist, and metrolinguism as a concept best captures the hybrid ways in which people employ the resources at their disposal in specific loci. What he proposes is an understanding of "language in time and space" (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010: 247) – that is, language as a *local* phenomenon. This localisation does not, however, mean that what people do with language would be tied to or in any straightforward manner derive from essentialist identity parameters or contexts of use, but rather aims at an understanding of

the ways in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through language; it does not assume connections between language, culture, ethnicity, nationality or geography but rather seeks to explore how such relations are produced, resisted, defied or rearranged; its focus is not on language systems but on languages as emergent from contexts of interaction (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010: 246).

This may seem like nothing new; interrogating language as a local phenomenon – language 'in context' – is by no means a revolutionary idea as such. This is not, however, what Pennycook (2010: 9) has in mind: rather, he suggests that "the local is not so much a context in which language changes but rather a constituent part of language practice." From this it follows, then, that "the ways in which language practices are moulded by social, cultural, discursive and historical precedents and concurrent contexts (...) become central to any understanding of language." (ibid.) Sensitive to issues of locality, time and space, metrolinguism – like its cognate concepts *metroethnicity* and *metrosexuality* – as

an approach aims to challenge fixed notions of language and culture, and dichotomies such as monolingualism vs. multilingualism.

A similar desire to deconstruct such fixed notions as a language and multilingualism has also characterised the work by Norman Jørgensen (2008) and Janus Møller (2008). The specific concept they suggest is *polylingualism* by which they refer to the way in which language users orient to a linguistic norm where all available linguistic resources can be used to reach the goals of the speaker (Møller 2008: 218). Speakers and writers thus use features, rather than languages as such. In addition, when they use whatever linguistic feature at their disposal with the intention of reaching their communicative goals, they are engaged in active *linguaging*: selecting and combining features from more than one set of “so-called languages” (Jørgensen 2008). Importantly, like Otsuji and Pennycook, also Jørgensen (2008: 173) emphasises that polylingualism is situated action in that language users can and do negotiate the ways in which they orient to norms and values ascribed to different types of linguistic behaviour in society at large. Language users are seen as skilled social actors and negotiators who can use a wide range of linguistic features – accompanied by values ascribed to them – in their interaction.

While such re-conceptualisations of the notion of multilingualism and its study help us understand that multilingualism is something much more complex, shifting and situated than what it has conventionally been taken to be, they also emphasise that the multilingualism as lived by the citizens of today’s late modern, globalised world who need to manage socially, culturally, professionally and economically is also equally complex. What late modern, globalised people need is complex poly/metrolingual sensitivities in order to be able to negotiate their language uses so that their language uses are appropriate in the varied contexts, strategic and meaningful in ways that it enhances their possibilities for identification, action, interaction, welfare and agency.

The articles in this issue

The articles of the present special issue comprise selected papers delivered at the conference organised in Jyväskylä in 2008, whose theme was formulated as Mediated Multilingualism. Like the new notions of multilingualism briefly described above, the concept of mediated multilingualism was yet another attempt by the local research community to reformulate the notion of multilingualism in a way which resonated by on-going work by many of its members (see e.g. Dufva 2006; Lähteenmäki 2010; Leppänen, forthcoming; Pietikäinen 2008; Pietikäinen et al. 2008).

While sharing the mission and core arguments of the above-mentioned approaches which emphasise the importance of multilingualism as a local symbolic and indexical resource, with the help of the notion of mediating multilingualism the conference organisers¹ wished to direct attention to multilingualism as mediated symbolic activity as a particular dimension of multilingual action that has not been discussed much – at least explicitly – in previous studies. The conference approached mediation and multilingualism from a double perspective focusing on multilingualism as a mediational system as well as on the different ways and means for mediating multilingualism.

First, the idea of multilingualism as a mediational system in itself suggests that multilingualism in its various forms sustains, but also mobilises and reorganises language users' identities, relationships and possibilities for action and the relative values of languages. Like Blommaert's notion of truncated multilingualism, it holds that people's multilingual repertoires can be treated and evaluated in quite different ways and they can thus have repercussions in terms of what resources and possibilities individuals and groups have to agency and participation. For example, while African immigrants' multilingual repertoires can be highly functional and highly appreciated in their country of origins, they may radically lose value in the countries to which they immigrate (Blommaert 2001). Or, to take another example, while the multilingual repertoires and resources mobilised by young people within the context of activity cultures on the web are considered appropriate, meaningful and effective there, they can be considered worthless and problematic by for example parents and schools (see e.g. Nikula & Pitkänen-Huhta 2008).

Second, by the notion of mediating multilingualism we also aimed at capturing the idea that multilingualism is always mediated by specific activities. This particular aspect of the concept stems from sociocultural theory in which mediation plays a central role, as already suggested by its founding father, Lev Vygotsky. A basic assumption of this theory is that humans do not interact with the world directly, but that this interaction is always mediated by symbolic artifacts and material artifacts and technologies (see Lantolf & Thorne 2006: 19). In order to avoid the Cartesian dualism between material and mental worlds, Vygotsky (1986) argued that while material and symbolic objects used in the interaction with the world are not identical, they are similar to another in the sense that they both function as tools. For example, recent economic, social and cultural globalisation together with technological innovations have produced both new symbolic artifacts (e.g. the forms of representation characteristic of new media) and new material artifacts (e.g. new communication technologies) which mediate our interaction with others and the world outside. What is more, from the mediated nature of human activity it necessarily follows that a change in the medium and environment necessarily changes the nature or quality of action effectively producing new forms of action. This suggests that one should be sceptical, for instance, regarding the adequacy of the existing conceptual frameworks and methodological tools for the study of multilingual activity and language diversity in virtual environments (see Leppänen & Peuronen, forthcoming; Androutsopoulos, forthcoming).

Following from these theoretical touchstones, the notion of mediating multilingualism was seen by the conference organisers as a type of activity which is always mediated by particular material and symbolic means. In addition to language resources, material and symbolic tools include such varied mediational structures and practices as places, objects, technologies, genres and modalities and so forth.

The papers included in this special issue all shed light on the complexities of mediation and multilingualism and develop new ways of investigating and understanding the roles, meanings and modalities of mediation in multilingual settings. They also display various theoretical and methodological perspectives to understanding mediation and multilingualism ranging from ethnography, to literacy studies, discourse studies, translation studies, to sociolinguistics and second language acquisition research and deal with questions such as language

and identity, translation problems in multicultural institutional contexts, code switching and language learning. The individual articles are organised into two thematic sections: 1) Ethnographic approaches to the mediation of the experience of multilingualism and 2) Multilingual practices.

The section 'Ethnographic approaches to the mediation of experience of multilingualism' highlights the importance of understanding how language users perceive, make sense and orient to multilingualism. It includes two articles which explore individuals' experiences of multilingualism in different social, cultural and institutional settings. In the first article of the section David Divita addresses the question of the historicity of semiotic relationships and the role of both physical and symbolic artefacts as mediational tools in social interaction. Divita utilises the theoretical frameworks of the Vygotskian socio-cultural approach and ethnography focusing on the enabling functions of artefacts in activity as well as on the ways in which artefacts are referred to and spoken about by individuals in French-Spanish multilingual settings. In the second article of the section, Alicia Copp Jinkerson examines how a monolingual norm is managed in classroom interaction focusing on the ways in which the norm is reinterpreted, reformulated and contested in an English speaking class in Finland. Her analysis is informed by the perspective of language socialisation and draws on methods of microethnographic discourse analysis. She concludes that students articulate different stances on the use of English and Finnish in their lives from which it follows that their interpretations of the monolingual norm in classroom setting may be in conflict with other members of the class.

The articles of the second section 'Multilingual practices' discuss actual multilingual practices and the ways in which they resonate and interact with – or fail to satisfy – the expectations, and ideological and language political discourses of the mono/multilingual settings in which they occur. The articles address multilingualism at the level of linguistic and cultural practices which also relate to the construction of identity. In the first article of section two Shahzaman Haque discusses migrants' multilingual behavioural moods and language policy on the basis of his analysis of the language practices of an Indian migrant plurilingual family in their day-to-day life in Finland. He concentrates on the role of the family language policy which primarily aims to maintain the native language and its relation to the official language policy of Finland. The author investigates how the official language policy is coping with the challenges of luring qualified migrants and at the same time imparting minority language instruction for the second generation.

Megan Wells investigates code switching in the comedy of George Lopez focusing on the intersectionality of language, culture and identity in the performance of the U.S.-born, bilingual Spanish-English speaking comedian. Codeswitches are examined in terms of the speaker's relationship to the audience. The author compares two performances with two distinct audiences in order to shed light on how the bilingual comedian uses language mixing to underscore his Latino identity, how he constructs his audience through his choice of codes and how he accommodates monolingual English speaking audiences. Wells concludes that the choice of the code has a social meaning which is directly linked to the speaker's identity and the perceived identity(ies) of his audiences.

Next, Dana Cole investigates the role of multilingualism in border culture and the interface between Mexico and the U.S. focusing on the manifestations of

multilingualism in the works of the Mexican writer and performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña. The author highlights Gómez-Peña's use of monolingual English and Spanish as well as his application of code mixed dialogue in order to illustrate how linguistic innovations in Gómez-Peña's works reflect his position on border culture. Cole suggests that Gómez-Peña's manipulation of language must be seen as a powerful element central to his work and as an expression of his political position.

In the fourth article of the section, Tuija Kinnunen discusses the challenges of multilingual court work in Finland and argues for the need of shared expertise and multiprofessional collaboration in the field of legal translating and court interpreting. She analyses a transcribed hearing in a Finnish District Court. Her analysis of the data suggests that limited professional experience of the interpreter as well as insufficient knowledge of juridical discourse and special terminology may threaten the fairness of the trial, although the majority of court interpreters are well trained and highly professional. Despite the rapidly increasing immigration, multilingual court sessions involving interpreters are still seen as an anomaly. To rectify this problem shared expertise and multiprofessional team work is needed.

In the final article of the section, Hannele Dufva, Minna Suni, Mari Aro and Olli-Pekka Salo approach multilingualism from the point of view of language learning and teaching focusing on the conceptualisation of the learning process. Their discussion makes it evident that the changing nature of multilingualism in the globalised world has also important implications for our theorising of language learning and language teaching. The authors argue that linguistics has been dominated by 'monological' thinking which is also reflected in the research of language learning and teaching. As an alternative to monologism, the authors argue for a dialogical notion of language which, in their view, inherently involves a multilingual stand instead of seeing monolingualism as a norm or normal state of affairs.

Both the focus of the conference and the articles included in this special issue highlight the fact that there is a multiplicity of existing understandings of multilingualism. Multilingualism can be seen as an aspect of regions, societies and specific places, communicative and institutional settings, nations, families, groups and individuals, talk and text, as well as processes of cognition, translation and learning.

The study of multilingualism is thus a heterogeneous field and manifestations of language diversity are studied from a range of disciplinary perspectives with a variety of methodologies. Whether or not the various understandings actually refer to the same phenomenon is not always that clear; but what is more interesting is perhaps that scholars representing a wide variety of approaches, questions and topics all, nevertheless, identify their work as belonging to the study of multilingualism. The articles also make it evident that questions central in many traditionally separate fields of enquiry can also be seen as questions relevant for the study of multilingualism. For some, such a wealth of understandings, approaches and questions pertaining to multilingualism may suggest that the parameters of research should be specified more precisely in order to ensure at least a certain degree of disciplinary autonomy. However, it can also be argued that the current richness of theoretical positions and methodological approaches actually derives from the very nature of the object of study which represents a highly complex, dynamic and multidimensional

phenomenon. In order to understand and explain the varied and changing forms and meanings of human communication in a linguistically, socially and culturally complex world multiple perspectives, approaches and questions are definitely needed.

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Endnotes

¹ The members of the Organising Committee were Päivi Pahta, Sirpa Leppänen, Hannele Dufva, Sari Pietikäinen, Tarja Nikula, Sirkka Laihiala-Kankainen, Piia Varis, Tiina Virkkula, Samu Kytölä and Marianne Toriseva.