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Bilingualism, Multilingualism, Globalization, and Superdiversity: Toward Sociolinguistic Repertoires

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Abstract and Keywords

The chapter tackles key concepts in the study of language and society. It shows how the study of language has shifted its terminology and its conceptual understanding of language use by moving from (individual and societal) bilingualism to multilingualism and languaging, ending with the revitalization of a much abandoned concept, that of language repertoires. Rather than a comprehensive review, the chapter discusses selected key assumptions, topics, and analytical developments in the field. It further examines how the past decades of the study of language use have reached a post-Fishmanian stage of maturity in its theorizing, moving from a sociolinguistics of distribution to questions of speakerhood and praxis within complexity. Last, the chapter considers how superdiversity, the emergent perspective of the study of language, and its theoretical and methodological insights bring new life into old issues of language and social change.

Keywords: bilingualism, multilingualism, languaging, superdiversity, repertoires, Fishman

Introduction

Given that digital, and in particular mobile communication technologies are considered a backbone of transnational mobility (e.g. Vertovec, 2004), understanding the relation of language to individual trajectories in super-diverse settings seems impossible without taking digitally-mediated communication into account. The social functions of individual digital connectivity are manifold—transnational families reuniting on Skype, couples maintaining a flow of interaction via text messaging, undocumented migrants devising their route with

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> the help of mobile phones, etc.—and so are the implications of these trajectories for individual linguistic repertoires.
>
> —Androtsopolous and Juffermans (2014: 1)

IN the preceding quotation we find all the jargon that is considered "hot" these days when dealing with the study of language and society. That is, we find the word "mobility" accompanied by the adjective "transnational"; further, we find the prefix "super-" and the noun "diversity," and it takes very little time before we encounter another trope of language and globalization, "the digital individual," now the *ecce homo* of the e-turn in the humanities. Apart from the fact that this quote could be addressed as yet another of the many examples of the "super, new, big" syndrome (Reyes, 2014: 366–378) currently (p. 162) affecting the study of language and society, there is no way to escape the fact that human beings—whether or not engaged in migratory movements—are increasingly transnational mobile subjects and that transnational networks' dynamics have gone through deep changes since the advent of the Internet (Castells, 2010; Rigoni and Saitta, 2012). There is also no easy way around the fact that human beings have always been mobile subjects—albeit perhaps functioning at a slower pace—and that language, in either its verbal, written, or pictographic representation, is always involved. As Joshua Fishman has pointed out in his seminal work on the sociology of language (Fishman 1968: 45), the point of departure in the study of language in society is that language—in whichever form and through whichever channels—is constantly present in the daily lives of human beings. That is, the use of language and the social organization of human behavior that stems from it are constituent *rei* of the *conditio humana*. Consequently, what this chapter seeks to do is to first review selected key assumptions, topics, and analytical developments surrounding the study of language and society. From there, it explores how, in the past five decades, the study of language and society has managed to move from a Fishmanian stage, that is, from a sociolinguistics of spread, to a post-Fishmanian stage, that is, to a sociolinguistics of mobility (Blommaert, 2013; Spotti, 2011). We show how it has managed to move from questions of who uses which language with whom and for which purpose to questions of speaker-ness and praxis within mobility-driven complexity (Blommaert, 2014). In order to map out this shift in perspective, we first tackle bilingualism and its foundations. From there, we move on to multilingualism and we try to describe how contemporary sociolinguistics has moved from a variationist perspective toward a poststructuralist perspective that has tackled linguistic diversity both as a focus of empirical description and as a political commitment toward the eradication of inequality. Finally, we illustrate the concept of superdiversity and its implications for the study of language and society. In so doing, we focus on the notion of repertoire and we look at how, in conditions of superdiversity, the conceptual

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and methodological armamentarium used so far by sociolinguistics appears to be in need of urgent revisions.

Historical Perspectives on the Topic

The problem with the expert and lay understanding of language (as with other big concepts in the social sciences) is that the notion of language is often couched in nationalist ideologies of belonging. Take the case of ethnicity and of its bedfellow, identity (see Harris and Rampton, 2009: 96–100, for a comprehensive review of this concept in the British context), and one will see that the two of them together create the most exquisite byproducts of national ideological ordering. In the same fashion, it is the mainstream view held by institutions—education and immigration services champion such a view—that language(s) are neatly separated entities and that is so because a "real" language can be named, as well as because real languages can be counted (see Moore, Chapter 11 of this volume, regarding endangered languages). Contemporary (p. 163) sociolinguists have always opposed this kind of ideological underpinning, which espouses a monolithic notion of language and of language use in society. Consequently, they responded by advocating that all languages are equal (see Baugh, Chapter 17 of this volume, for an exploration of the case of Ebonics in the United States) and they contrasted the view that characterized language as a monolithic system and the language user as someone who knows his or her (only) language perfectly. Blommaert et al. (2015), among others, argue that no matter how unfortunate this situation may seem to policymakers and governmental institutions, the world is not neatly divided into monolingual states. Consequently, official administrative belonging—being a citizen of a given nation-state—is a poor indicator of sociolinguistic belonging, let alone of language behavior in general. They further add that the relationship between national identity and the language-oriented activities of the state are even less straightforward if, for nothing else, because of the elusiveness of the concept of "national identity" (cf. Blommaert, 2006: 238). In order to make all of the preceding more tangible to the reader and to show how the field of the study of language and society has moved from a monolithic conceptualization of language to a re-evaluation of the concept of language repertoires, we begin by giving an outline of how present-day sociolinguistics has emerged from studies of bilingualism. In doing so, we examine bilingualism—its streams of thoughts as well as its foundations—and the way in which the study of this phenomenon has been tackled through the past decades.

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Bilingualism and Its Foundations

Although it would be wrong to state that there is a fundamental difference between bilingualism and multilingualism (see Bhatia and Ritchie, 2004: 1), if we take bilingualism to refer to a social situation in which two languages are used, and multilingualism to a social situation in which more than two languages are used, then it makes sense to draw a distinction between the two terms, their foundations, and the scholars who have been characterizing these phenomena and the respective growth of their conceptual apparatuses at both the individual as well as the societal level. The investigation of bilingualism remains a broad and complex field. For this reason, we have chosen to first review its main assumptions before then moving on to deal with the study of bilingual practices, such as code-switching and code-mixing, and putting these two processes in relation to the concept of identity and more precisely of "bilingual identities," a term very much in vogue until the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Hamers and Blanc, 2000, for an overview). John Edwards's review of the field and his examination of those issues that have tried to establish who is (and is not) bilingual can still be seen as one of the most representative publications in the field (Edwards, 2004, 7–31). His uptake, very much anchored in a structuralist understanding of language, shows that much of the concern with bilingualism had to do with what a bilingual language user can and cannot do, as well as with coming up with workable definitions of who is and who is not a bilingual language user.

(p. 164) Before Edwards, many have been engaged with the job of defining and measuring the degrees of bilingualism that someone may hold. In 1933, for instance, Leonard Bloomfield had already observed that bilingualism resulted from the addition of a "perfectly learned" foreign language to one's own. However, Weinreich in his 1953 work on language contact, working within a structural paradigm, defined bilingualism as a loose alternate of two codes that could not be explained without conceiving the individual as social as well as a language user. Haugen, also in 1953, building on Weinreich's work, gave the bilingual individual the connotation of an individual who was able to produce finite meaningful sentences in both languages. Given that this approach held as its pivotal point the notion of (educational) mastery of the two languages involved, it opened the problem of assessment of bilingual proficiency and of the education of bilingual pupils (Baker, 1988: 2; Reich and Reid, 1992). This critique was then brought to the dichotomous condition of whether bilingualism had to be either simultaneous or sequential/successive, and with that came the dilemma, for both bilingual families and schooling institutions, of having to deal with which model would allow a more balanced bilingualism for their children (Kloss, 1966). All of the employed criteria ended up revamping the debate of whether someone could or could not be categorized as bilingual

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and raised the question around the degree of competence and performance someone had to have in order to be bilingual. As for bilingual individuals and their identities, much of the work being done pointed at deficiency, most often associated with disadvantaged communities that were also language-minoritized (see Barac and Bialystok, 2011, for a comprehensive overview).

An area of special interest, and ultimately disturbing interest, in this field was the study of code-switching—a language contact phenomenon defined as the alternate use of material from two or more languages in the same speech event. It was a widespread assumption that the capacity for code-switching was predicated on bilingualism. Lehiste, for instance, defined code-switching in these terms: “a perfect bilingual may switch from language to language during a conversation. This phenomenon is called code-switching” (Lehiste 1988: 2). And the leading code-switching scholar of that era, Carol Myers-Scotton, explained code-switching as “dueling languages” (the title of her 1993 book)—two fully developed Chomskyan grammars at work in one speaker’s mind. It took some time before scholars understood that code-switching did *not* presuppose full competence in the languages deployed in this process. Scholars also saw that the perceived grammatical battles in speakers’ minds were less dramatic than initially assumed, and that other forces appeared to be stronger in explaining code-switching behavior than bilingual competence alone—complex identity work being the primary one (Blom and Gumperz, 1972; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985; essays in Auer, 1998). In such identity work, which would be later addressed as “identity bricolage” through language resources (Hinnenkamp, 2003), speakers would adopt and display language materials from any available source, provided that such materials indexed specific identity orientations and could thus be satisfactorily used for delicate shifts in identity construction, not unlike Goffmanian “footing” shifts (e.g., Rampton, 1995). Such language materials had their origins, not in extensive processes of language learning and **(p. 165)** socialization, but in sometimes superficial contacts in informal learning environments, such as popular culture or small peer groups (Rampton, 2006). While “macro”-patterns of social and political access to such resources could be critical in explaining what speakers could achieve with such resources (Heller, 2003; Li Wei, 1998; Meeuwis and Blommaert, 1998; Spotti, 2007), situational factors—the co-presence of interlocutors in specific contexts, for instance—as well as discourse-functional factors such as topic continuity, style and genre choices, and narrative structuring, could also be shown to have a particularly critical impact on specific forms of occurrences of code-switching (e.g., Auer, 1998; Jørgensen, 1998; Maryns and Blommaert, 2001). And while code-switching was of course seen as the mixing of separate “codes” (coterminous with “languages”), a “mixed” form of speech could also be shown to be a “code” in its own right (Alvarez-Cáccamo, 1998; Jacquemet, 2005; Meeuwis and Blommaert, 1998).

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Such developments called into question the established notions of bilingualism itself, gradually replacing the assumptions of full competence in two languages by a view in which speakers would draw on *any* kinds of resources useful and accessible to them, with various degrees of fluency determining the scope of such resources—the concept of "languaging" (Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Jørgensen et al., 2011). Thus, from a "dual grammar" perspective, bilingualism gradually moved toward a more flexible and less structured field of multilingualism—a shift that involved other reorientations: one, toward the macrosocial contexts of multilingualism in society; another, toward attention to the individual speech repertoires of speakers.

Multilingual Languaging and Its Foundations

Surely, however, the study of language and society and more precisely of language as social practice is much indebted to the work of Joshua Fishman and to the later developments brought to the field by Gumperz and Hymes (1964, 1972). Building on Fishman (1971), we see that the basis of the sociology of language rests on the foundation of the use of language in concomitance with the social organization of behavior. And it is again thanks to Fishman that from a descriptive sociology of language whose basic task was to show how social networks and communities do not display either the same language usage or the same behavior toward language, scholars have moved toward a dynamic sociology of language. The main goal of this more dynamic sociology of language has been to unravel both why and how two once similar networks or communities have arrived at a quite different social organization of language use and have a quite different behavior toward language, whether factual or ideological. Although Fishman's dynamic approach to the sociology of language touches the issue of repertoire change, much of his initial work remains anchored to a sociolinguistics of spread, talking of stable and unstable bilingualism, as well as of the creation and revision of writing systems.

It is with the work of John Gumperz that the definition of language undergoes a total reshaping. From his first work on linguistic relativity to his later work, Gumperz—immersed in the massive linguistic variety that surrounded him during fieldwork in the (p. 166) Indian subcontinent—found that individuals used language differently. Rather, in the work that was seminal for the discussion of the concept of "speech community" (1968), Gumperz showed that while a named language was a category for those who studied language, it was not so for those who were the object of that study. Starting with communicative practices, functions, and repertories, rather than focusing on structuralist grammatical systems, the study of language for Gumperz went beyond approaches that questioned how linguistic knowledge is structured in systematic ways.

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Rather, the core notions in Gumperz's approach to the study of *language* became interpretation, understanding, and meaning-making in interaction. This required a new level of sociolinguistic analysis—the level of social communication (Gumperz, 1971: 343). In so doing, Gumperz proposed a sociolinguistic analysis that had as its focal point how interpretation and understanding are intertwined with the construction of shared common ground (fully developed in his 1982 book on sociolinguistics and interpersonal communication). So while Gumperz's earlier work was indeed linked to the beginnings of sociolinguistics and particularly to the establishment of what became known as the "ethnography of communication" (1972), the later Gumperz focused on what is now called interactional sociolinguistics. Gumperz argued that other sociolinguistic scholars neglected linguistic diversity, multilingualism, and so on, not because these phenomena fell outside their fields of interest, but because—he argued—they were intrinsically inept to deal with these phenomena (cf. Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 2005). What is today regarded as a Gumperzian approach to interactional sociolinguistics and more generally to the study of language and society can be summed up as an approach to social interaction through language. This approach then continued to grow, informed also by Grice's "Discourse Strategies" (1982), and then was expanded with concepts such as Silverstein's "orders of indexicality," Agha's "enregisterment" (2005) and Gumperz and Levinson's "rethinking of linguistic relativism" (1996). In short, Gumperz pointed to shared experience, uptake, and contextualization cues (see also De Mauro et al., 1988) as a prerequisite for shared interpretation. Thus, Gumperz put the phenomenon of multilingualism at the center of his programmatic research agenda. In contrast to a perspective that saw multilinguals as being cognitively deficit, Gumperz posed that the pervasive phenomena related to multilingualism were to be noticed everywhere.

The conceptual, intellectual, and empirical itinerary that we have outlined needs to be put next to another "sacred monster" of contemporary sociolinguistics, Dell Hymes. For Hymes, language is formed in, by, and for social, cultural, and political contexts; injustice and social hierarchy, on the one hand, and human agency and creativity, on the other. There is, for Hymes, nothing "mechanical" about the production and reproduction of texts, institutions, or cultures. What were then understood by structural linguists as different languages could be different language varieties, and what an analysis of language features could do would be to designate or highlight lexical or phonological styles that made up for varieties of the same language. Gumperz and Hymes, of course, defined a linguistic-anthropological tradition, the foundations and assumptions of which have tended to develop in parallel with mainstream sociolinguistics in the Labovian-Fishmanian tradition. In this linguistic-anthropological (p. 167) tradition, a gradual deconstruction of the notion of "language" itself happened: "language" as a unified (Chomskyan) concept being "chopped up" and reconfigured, as it were, into a far more layered and fragmented concept of "communication," with functions far broader than just

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the transmission of denotational meaning (e.g., Cicourel, 1972; Hymes, 1996). Of particular importance in this development is the attention given to *language ideologies* since the early 1990s: the presence and function of socioculturally conditioned ideas about language, its usage, and its effects (Kroskrity, 2000; Kroskrity, Schieffelin, and Woolard, 1992; Silverstein, 1979). What this development generated was the idea that whenever we use language in actual communication—“pragmatics”—the use of language is accompanied by ideas we have of how to use it, why, and for which effects—“meta-pragmatics.” Even more, we use language very much on the basis of how we view language, that is, on the basis of how we ideologically construct and construe it (Irvine and Gal 2000; Jaffe 1999). Distinctions between language forms—the “variation” of dialectology, for instance—appear to be governed by ideologically mediated understandings—such as those distinguishing “standard” from “dialect” or “sociolect” for instance. In fact, any aspect of linguistic-communicative form can be ideologically configured in such a way that it “indexically” points toward an aspect of social and cultural structure, and derives meaning from it. The contextually situated deployment of such ideologically mediated variation creates an object far more complex than the established notion of “language” itself; it creates the “total linguistic fact”:

> [t]he total linguistic fact, the datum for a science of language is irreducibly dialectic in nature. It is an unstable mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms, contextualized to situations of interested human use and mediated by the fact of cultural ecology.
>
> (Silverstein, 1985: 220)

This invites an analysis that bypasses the a priori assignment of specific sociolinguistic statuses to specific linguistic-communicative resources because such statuses—for example, the assumption that certain resources are “English,” “standard English,” or “standard American English”—are objects of inquiry in their own right and not neutral assumptions. Evidently, the preceding calls into question the established stability of “-lingualism,” as in “bilingualism” or “multilingualism,” and gives priority to “languaging” as a set of empirically observable practices in which “languages,” “codes,” “-lects,” and so forth, emerge as ideological upshot of communicative deployment. A further advancement along this trail is the one brought by research on crossing and stylization in the everyday linguistic practices of youngsters in multi-ethnic Britain during the 1980s and the 1990s by Ben Rampton and Roxy Harris. Their work combines a conversation analysis (CA) methodology together with an ethnographic tradition that looks at British social theory and (black) cultural studies as their points of departure. Rampton, in his work on crossing, as well as Harris in his work on romantic bilingualism, argued that situated in linguistic forms, there is always the presence of discourse and ideologies and that these three elements need to be analyzed together. So while in variationist

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sociolinguistics, as Rampton points out (2011: 2), there is much attention being paid to (p. 168) discourse and ideologies, and not much attention being paid to situated interaction. At the opposite end, while CA is champion of finely grained attention being paid to situated interaction, it tends to neglect discourse and ideology. It is instead through the combination of stylistic performances together with ideological categories and social stances within discourses of (ethnic) identity construction that Rampton and Harris (Harris and Rampton, 2009), in the analysis of their speakers' stylistic choices, manage to also evoke the nonreferential social indexical possibilities given to speech by the use of the local English by an L2 speaker of English.

A last advancement in the study of multilingual languaging is the one brought into sociolinguistics by the Copenhagen group led by Jørgensen and associates (2011). The understanding of language practices generated by their work has introduced the concept of polylanguaging. Although this concept was developed almost exclusively within the frame of a longitudinal project on urban multilingualism in a Copenhagen multi-ethnic school, it aimed at emphasizing the multisensory, multimodal, multisemiotic, and multilingual nature at play in the meaning-making process involved in communicative exchanges. This reassessment sees language as but one of the vehicles through which meaning is made and sees it as being communicated through the strategic employment of multiple semiotic resources. In interaction, speakers first and foremost use linguistic resources, rather than languages understood as coherent packages. Somewhere along the way, speakers learn that some of these resources are thought to belong together in “languages.” In this sense, “languages” can be described as sociocultural constructs (Heller, 2007; Makoni and Pennycook, 2006). These constructs have a powerful impact on speakers' sociolinguistic knowledge and organization of linguistic material, and speakers sometimes juxtapose features from different “languages” in the same interaction. Such polylingual behavior (Jørgensen and Møller, 2014) may evolve into recognizable ways of speaking that their users (and others) may identify with and describe through labels such as “street” or “ghetto” language or with adjectives such as the “natural” way of speaking, since these labeled types of polylanguaging are equally as susceptible to ideologization as “languages” are (Silverstein 1979).

Superdiversity and Sociolinguistics

In response to a lack of attention being paid to the US-based linguistic anthropological tradition (Duranti, 1997), sociolinguists in Europe have recently turned their gaze to ethnography. The first UK-based ethnographic endeavor—in the words of Ben Rampton and associates—has aimed at “opening linguistics up and [tying] ethnography

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down" (2004: 2). This effort has culminated in setting up the ground for an epistemological and ontological tradition of European-based linguistic ethnographers, most of whom have a background in teaching, gathered under the linguistic ethnographic forum (LEF) (see Rampton, Maybin, and Tusting, 2007). Following the spin-off born out of a European Science Foundation exploratory workshop organized by Jan Blommaert and Steven (p. 169) Vertovec in 2009, sociolinguists, linguistic ethnographers, and anthropologists started to turn their glance to the changes brought to the Wallersteinian world order by key historical events, for example, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the opening of China to the world, the incipient flow of asylum seekers toward Europe, and the new dynamics of transnationalism (Spotti, 2015).

The term "superdiversity" was initially seen as a summary term that tried to recap the scattered character of transnationalism for migration studies. Today superdiversity refers to "the diversification of diversity" (Vertovec 2007, 2010, 2015)—that is, to a new, more complex, more scattered, and more transnationally connected flow of people coming from many places and moving to many places, making up a societal layer that is on top of the group-based migration that had characterized Europe from the late 1960s onward. Once sociolinguists became confronted by the rapid changes taking place in society, they felt that their discipline should have gone "back home to do its homework." That is, they felt the need for a revised analytical *apparata* and vocabulary. Although superdiversity has not proven to be a flawless concept and it has received some—at times equally flawed—criticisms (see Flores and Lewis, 2016; Makoni, 2012; Reyes, 2014), the radically empirical and practice-focused angle that it offers to sociolinguistics has so far proved to be highly useful whenever scholars address the "messy" sociolinguistic and discursive contemporary realities unfolding both online as well as offline (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). New objects such as Internet memes or mobile phone texting codes, as well as identity repertoires and transnational communication taking place through the means of social media channels, offer both descriptive as well as theoretical challenges because such complex multimodal objects defy standard assumptions of language, channel, meaning, and uptake (cf. Deumert, 2015; also Lillis, 2013). Similarly, the highly volatile forms of languaging observed in contemporary urban metropoles, as well as in the geopolitical and socioeconomic margins, further complicate the issues mentioned in our earlier discussion of code-switching (Blackledge and Creese, 2011; Wang et al., 2014; Jørgensen et al., 2011; Pennycook and Otsuji, 2015; Rampton, 2006).

The exploration of such new complex data has led to theoretical and methodological reflections that eventually have called into question the analyses of more "normal" sociolinguistic and discursive phenomena, and have demanded a re-evaluation of the methodological and conceptual sociolinguistic armamentarium that has characterized sociolinguistics thus far (Blommaert, 2015). Although still developing its *umwelt*, the

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impact that superdiversity and its emerging discursive perspective have for the study of language and society can be regarded as paradigmatic. This is so in that it forces us to see the new social environments in which we live in as characterized by an extremely low degree of presupposition in terms of identities, patterns of social and cultural behavior, social and cultural structure, norms and expectations. People can no longer be straightforwardly associated with particular (national, ethnic, sociocultural) groups and identities; their meaning-making practices can no longer be guessed to "belong" to particular languages and subcultures. The empirical field in which communicative exchanges unfold has become extremely complex, and descriptive adequacy has become a challenge for the social sciences as we know them (see Blommaert, Spotti, and Van der Aa, 2016). (p. 170) The empirical field has moved from a sociolinguistics of spread toward a sociolinguistics of mobility, characterized by resources, functions, and repertoires.

This renewed understanding, which is presently making its way to becoming a paradigm shift, is based on a post-Fishmanian awareness that views language use and identity construction as polycentric semiotic performances. Again according to Blommaert and Rampton (2011), people take on different linguistic forms as they align and disaffiliate with different groups at different moments and stages. The fact that speakers have to orient toward different centers at the same time is defined as *polycentricity* (Blommaert, 2010). Behavior that is unexpected to a hearer can be the effect of a center that is unknown to the hearer. The notions of covert and overt prestige are illustrative of linguistic behavior that can either orient toward official, often national standards (overt prestige) or to norms of subcultures or minority communities (covert prestige; see Labov, 2006). Thus, "… adopting a polycentric image of society shows a more complex and more nuanced picture in which a reaction against something is also a marker of adherence to something else" (Blommaert, 2005: 78).

According to Arnaut and Spotti (2015), the sociolinguistics that feeds into superdiversity, while heir to a "linguistics of contact" (Pratt, 1987), builds heavily on the Gumperzian and Hymesian traditions that have been outlined in the previous section. While locating and articulating the agentive and resistant dimensions of multimodal and multilingual languaging, it projects itself to map ideological dynamics in the form of emerging normativities of new, national as well as post-national, regimes of surveying and controlling diversity, heteronormativity, and so on. Although hazardous, one could say that superdiversity as a concept, as well as a lens for sociolinguistic research, introduces a rapidly expanding range of explorative and programmatic ethnographic work in various empirical fields—all of which, when coming together, will bring to bear a new awareness of where the study of language in society has been steadily moving toward. In what follows, we give an example of how sociolinguistics through superdiversity reshapes its armamentarium by dealing with the concept of (communicative) repertoires, a concept

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that has regained the glamour of the spotlights by being elected as key to the understanding of the language doings of people involved in mobility and transnationalism.

Repertoires: Conceptual Overview and Re-evaluation

As stated in the previous section, the notion of (communicative) repertoire has been a radical concept in linguistics for years. John Gumperz and Dell Hymes, in their introduction to *Directions in Sociolinguistics* (1972), listed linguistic repertoire as one of the basic sociolinguistic concepts and defined it as “the totality of linguistic resources (i.e. including both invariant forms and variables) available to members of particular communities” (1972: 20–21), a notion that would be later combined with the much broader and less precise notion of “manners of speaking.” The purpose of Gumperzian and Hymesian sociolinguistics therefore became a coagulation of resources and means of (p. 171) speaking. From there, “repertoire” became the word used to describe all the “means of speaking” that users of a language have—that is, all the means of speaking that users of a language know, know how to use, and use with a specific reasoning in mind, while they are engaged in a communicative encounter. Repertoires then range from linguistic ones, with language varieties, to sociocultural ones with genres, styles, and their respective norms that make someone’s ways of speaking fit (or not) within a certain sociocultural space.

Although groundbreaking back then, this is more or less where the concept of communicative repertoires has stayed for decades. With time, its use became more closely associated with a Chomskyan approach to language and often was placed on the same level as “competence.” But in conditions of superdiversity, the concept of repertoires has become a term that calls for re-evaluation. In their reconsideration of the concept of repertoire, drawn from both a cognitive linguistic as well as a sociolinguistic stance, Backus and Blommaert (2011: 9) point out that “the distinction between acquisition and learning alludes to the fact that some effects of learning lead to permanent and enduring cognitive entrenchment while others cause temporary and dynamic entrenchment.” Means of speaking, to go back to the Hymesian tradition, would then typically be regarded as temporary and dynamic in the sense that their learning pattern(s) would closely follow the life of the language user. At the age of fifteen, a young man could style his speech to that of an older person. Because of that, he would then be regarded as a well-spoken young man for his age. Yet again, this young man would not be speaking *as* a grown-up but *like* a grown-up, as the learning of these resources and the capacity of mapping these language resources onto the right language functions take place later in life.

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Building first on both Corder (1973) and then Hymes (1982), this shows that the “language” we produce is always a work in progress. As a matter of fact, at no point in someone’s life is the sociolinguistic system of a person totally formed, and at no point in someone’s life is the sociolinguistic system the mere cumulative product of an incremental language process. Rather, actual knowledge of language is dependent on someone’s biography. This means that repertoires do not develop along a linear path of ever-increasing size; rather, they develop more in certain areas rather than in others, according to the situational communicative needs that someone may encounter. A sociolinguistic perspective rooted in the study of language and superdiversity therefore looks at people and at their communicative repertoires neither as something that is owned nor as something that can be used purely for a communicative purpose—that is, rather than looking at language as a noun, the perspective that sociolinguists of superdiversity flag is that they look at language as a verb, as something that people do in that “people language.”

Building on the Gumperzian and Hymesian tradition, a sociolinguistic perspective of this kind looks at people using language as performing repertoires of identities through linguistic-semiotic resources acquired over the course of their life trajectories through membership or participation in various sociocultural spaces in which their identities are measured against normative centers of practice (Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Jørgensen et al., 2011; Canagarajah, 2013). The notion of repertoires therefore builds on the notion (p. 172) of polycentricity and sees someone’s communicative as well as cultural repertoires as hybrid, translingual, plural, and unstable (for the instability of repertoires both in manners of speaking and in manners of writing, see also Martin-Jones and Jones, 2000, as well as Street 2010, paving the way for New Literacy Studies). Consequently, repertoires, although having a biographical base (see Rymes, 2015; Zentz 2012), also hold a gamut of resources deployed by individuals who take on board bits of any language available in strategically diverse ways in order to achieve a (localized) communicative function inserted in a global ideological discourse.

This observation, as obvious as it may seem to many, holds serious implications for other sociolinguistic concepts, like that of the speech community, which, as Silverstein shows when dealing with the “whence of superdiversity” and its incremental or transformative power (2015), organizes people by how they engage in and interpret the inherent indexicality of communication. Superdiversity and repertoires have therefore much to say on how we understand language in society, on the limitations of the present understanding proposed by sociolinguistics, and on its possible pathways of development. If we stick to the one-dimensional model of language use that equates a speech community to a language community, we miss the indexical side of language. That is, if we wish to see how much more is being achieved through language by participants in a

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communicative exchange, when we merely base our analyses on denotational alignment (or lack thereof), we then miss an understanding of language that sees its pragmatic and meta-pragmatic aspects as inseparable units of analysis.

Concluding Remarks and Review of Key Points

The study of language and society has moved from the study of bilingualism to the study of multilingual languaging. It has now arrived at the study of communicative practices in conditions of superdiversity. But we should remain aware that the latter still is a developing perspective. It is true that prior to the late 1980s and early 1990s there was already an acceleration of contact through electronically mediated means. This made it feasible to speak of a new form of globalization that was much different from those that had taken place before. However, in these previous waves of globalization, political economies and sociocultural diversity were seen as being made up of supposedly discrete units that, in turn, made up for parallel groups that were living next to one another. Superdiversity, with its outreaching potential in the social sciences, tries instead to capture the implications of the diversification of diversity. It does so by reconceptualizing diversity from the coexistence side by side of relatively bounded entities to the mingling of these different entities. Ethnicity is thus no more a guarantee and the struggle between semiotic normativity and creativity appeals to other characteristics.

(p. 173) Often, though, superdiversity's *umwelt* for sociolinguistics is questioned as to whether it is blowing new life into old issues or whether it is developing a terminological icing for early 1960s and 1970s descriptions of sociolinguistic phenomena, such as those formulated by Joshua Fishman on language shift mostly tied to language as belonging to a group, by John Gumperz on discourse strategies, and by Dell Hymes on the ethnography of communication. Although haunted by their shadows, what superdiversity and sociolinguistics lend to one another should be reiterated here in our conclusion. If the traditional state-operated classificatory systems, based on ethnicity and nationality, no longer seem to pay justice to the new forms of diversity that characterize present-day society, then it means that both *theoretically* as well as *methodologically* things should be readjusted. Theoretically, the multiscalar dimensions of diasporic life in superdiversity, in fact, account for complex forms of new urban multilingual languaging. In a multiscalar view of context, features that used to be treated solely at the macro-scopic level ought now to be seen as operating at the micro-level of interaction, or even, and more correctly so, at the nano-level of interaction as resources that participants can draw upon when making sense of what is going on in a communicative exchange. Messages, texts, genres, styles, and repertoires vary greatly in their potential for circulation, which in its own

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right is already a source of stratification. The way in which people differ in their normative feeling of what should be allowed and carried out within a communicative exchange is also a source of stratification. It follows that the *here and now* aspect of each communicative exchange, in conditions of superdiversity, cannot be anything else than scale-sensitive and informed by the transnational, national, and local provenance and potential of a communicative text or practice.

Methodologically, the work that is developing with the study of language and superdiversity holds to two axioms. First, the context of communication ought to be investigated rather than assumed. Meaning takes shape within specific sociocultural spaces, discourses, interactional histories, textual trajectories, and institutional regimes, all of which, once examined, produce a nexus in which agents act and their cultural and sociolinguistic repertoires ought to be examined ethnographically. Second, the analysis of communicative exchanges ought to happen with an eye on the semiotic data that accompany them in order to understand the communicative act in its totality. Biographically drawn sociolinguistic repertories, styles, stance, and nuance within the micro-politics of identification strategies are extensively signaled, as Rampton and Sharma (2014) demonstrate in their work, which drills down to the fine grain of superdiversity. They explore the linguistic features of language users, features that move away from L2 exceptionalism and sociolinguistic romanticization that have often neglected the fact that formal, interactional, and ideological aspects of sociolinguistics develop at different rates.

The last question to be tackled here is whether superdiversity holds in itself either an incremental or a transformative potential for the study of language and society. An answer here implies a final series of considerations for future investigations. As pointed out by Arnaut and Spotti (2015), superdiversity and its emergent discourse could mean two things for a renewed understanding of diversity. On the one hand, it could mean the introduction of even more refined measurements for understanding the latter. On **(p. 174)** the other, it could mean the collapse of the measurements of difference. In the same fashion, we can say here that superdiversity has the same implications for the study of language and society. In fact, when approached through the linguistic ethnographic lens of multilingual languaging or multi-ethnic (urban and non-urban) heteroglossia, this may also be seen as a system collapse. To become aware of the extent to which sociolinguistics operates in a potentially ambiance of superdiversity, post-structuralism, late modernity, we see that what sociolinguistics has lost in terms of theoretical certainty, or even security, has now been regained in a fresh ethnographic engagement with the study of unruly, unexpected, seemingly loose yet creative forms of contemporary communicative survival. However, unless this interest is turned into an ontology-driven approach to the study of language and society in conditions of superdiversity (Parkin

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2012), for the time being superdiversity appears to be the place where sociolinguistics is re-engineering its conceptual toolbox along the structure-agency divide.

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