TILBURG ◆ UNIVERSITY

Understanding Society

TilburgPapers in CultureStudies

Paper **171**

Sociolinguistic Superdiversity and Asylum

by

Marco Jacquemet© *(University of San Francisco)*

mjacquemet@usfca.edu

October 2016

Sociolinguistic Superdiversity and Asylum

Marco Jacquemet (University of San Francisco)

Language and superdiversity

The concept of superdiversity is directly tied to the contemporary discourse on globalization. Although there are a few pockets of theoretical resistance, most scholars agree that the world is experiencing globalization at an unprecedented scale and scope, mostly because of the high degree of space-time compression achieved by the increasing mobility of people, commodities, texts, and knowledge (Harvey 1989, Hannerz 1996, Clifford 1997, Tomlinson 2007). As a result of these social and technological changes, we are witnessing the growth of a novel and generalized global consciousness (Robertson 1998, Bauman 2000): people all over the world experience the speed and immediacy of global flows as significant factors in their ability to feel interconnected, to be part of a world where geographical, social, political, and linguistic entities seem to be losing their bounded nature.

Best understood as a development *within* globalization, late modern globalization is characterized by mobile, deterritorialized people and digital communication technologies. As Appadurai conclusively established two decades ago (Appadurai 1996), transnational migration and digital communication technologies are the two most important diacritics of post-industrial globalization. These two forces play a central role in the organization of social life on a global scale, and where they intersect, we find novel communicative environments shaped by the multiple languages of deterritorialized speakers transmitted over diverse, simultaneous communicative channels (Jacquemet 2005). At the same time, these forces do not operate against the background of neutral space, but are rather shaped by relations of power and inequality visible in communicative flows crossing national boundaries and socio-political formations (Blommaert 2009, Coupland 2010).

Late modern globalization makes a significant impact on language in two ways. First, as people move, they learn new languages, often while maintaining previous ones. The movement of people across borders thus creates multilingual speakers. Second, the global circulation of resources—both material goods and intangible resources such as knowledge—increases the demand for people with multilingual capabilities. Globalization makes multilingualism more common and more valuable (Heller 2003).

Consequently, multilingualism in all its forms has taken center stage in the communicative environments of late modernity. As a corollary, the study of multilingualism in transnational communities has generated an impressive array of new terminology to explain the increasingly unbounded nature of communicative practices through which speakers not only engage with their immediate surroundings (by developing locally appropriate cultural and communicative competencies), but also activate wider networks (allowing them to stay in touch with distant social realities and alternative social imaginations). In the past decade, language scholars, never too shy to create new words, have introduced the following terms: codemeshing (Canagarajah 2006), transidiomatic practices (Jacquemet 2005), truncated multilingualism (Blommaert et al. 2005), transnational heteroglossia (Bailey 2007), polylingual/polylanguaging (Jørgensen 2008, 2013), translanguaging (García 2009), plurilingualism (Canagarajah 2009), flexible bilingualism (Creese and Blackledge 2010), heterolingualism (Pratt 2011), metrolingualism (Otsuji and Pennycook 2011), translingual practices (Canagarajah 2010), and transglossic language practices (Sultana et al. 2015). This impressive nomenclature of compound terms is evidence of a movement within language studies to develop much-needed tools for analyzing a transformed communicative landscape.

The concept of *sociolinguistic superdiversity* entered the fray during the same period, as northern European sociolinguists (Jan Blommaert and Ben Rampton above all) sought to extend to language studies the sociological insights of Steven Vertovec's concept of superdiversity (2006, 2007). Vertovec coined this term in a review of demographic and socio-economic changes in post-Cold War Britain: "Super-diversity underscores the fact that the new conjunctions and interactions of variables that have arisen over the past decade surpass the ways—in public discourse, policy debates and academic literature—that we usually understand diversity in Britain." (2007: 1024). He developed the term to describe the evolving, late-modern patterns and itineraries of migration worldwide, resulting in "more people now moving from more places, through more places, to more places" (Vertovec 2010:86). Through this concept, he set out to investigate the tremendous increase in the categories of migrants, not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns of migration, processes of insertion into the labor and housing markets of the host society, and so on (Vertovec 2010).

In 2009, during a workshop at Tilburg University attended by Vertovec, a group of language scholars (led by Jan Blommaert) proposed to extend the concept of superdiversity to the analysis of communicative practices.[1] I was also present at this workshop, where I made the case for studying communication resulting not only from complex migration flows but

also from dramatic upheavals in communication technologies (the so-called "digital revolution," McChesney 2007). During this meeting we agreed that the contemporary complexity of migration depended on, and was enabled by, communicative technologies that made digital media accessible to everyone via digital devices (from mobile phones to tablets to computers), producing an epochal transformation in long-distance interactions (just think of Skype or Facebook) and access to knowledge infrastructure (Google, above all). Digital technologies have greatly facilitated the transcontinental travels, transnational moves, chain migrations, and diasporic networks of migrants.

With this shift toward looking at digital communication as well as migration, scholars of sociolinguistic superdiversity joined the growing number of sociolinguists and communication researchers who have come to see digital communication technologies as much more than enablers of interactivity and mobility. These scholars understand digital communication technologies as altering the very nature of this interactivity, confronting people with expanded rules and resources for the construction of social identity and transforming people's sense of place, cultural belonging, and social relations. The integration of communication technologies into late modern communicative practices has resulted in the emergence of a telemediated cultural field, occupying a space in everyday experience that is distinct from yet integrated with face-to-face interactions of physical proximity. This field is transforming human experience in all its dimensions: from social interactions (now globalized and deterritorialized) to the semiocapitalist marketplace (with its shifting methods of production, delivery, and consumption of virtual sign-commodities, Berardi 2009) to the production of new conveniences and excitements as well as new anxieties and pathologies (Tomlinson 2007).

To summarize, sociolinguistic superdiversity—that is, the extraordinary communicative complexity of contemporary social configurations, resulting from "post-cold war migration patterns and the digital revolution" (Blommaert 2013: 4)—has come to be understood as the *diversification within diversity*, produced by the interaction of mobile people and digital communication technologies.

Yet the concept of superdiversity has recently received pointed criticism, especially from scholars in the United States (Makoni 2012, Orman 2012, Reyes 2014). Most have taken a cautious middle ground, impressed by the concept's quick rise to become a "branding juggernaut" (Pavlenko 2014). For instance, Michael Silverstein delicately pointed out the metropolitan bias of this concept: "from a wider, sociolinguistically informed perspective, minority and majority language communities in the states of the politico-economic 'north' or

politico-economic metropole are now intersecting in ways that we have long observed as students of the peripheries of colonial expansion, of empire, and of globalization" (2015: 7, see also the endnote in Jacquemet 2015).

Critical whispers have faulted this concept for being banal and vacuous, having a naïve understanding of social inequality, and using a prefix ("super") that indexes a neoliberal slant echoing the euphoric representation of a contemporary world of new media, big data, and "supersizes" (Orman 2012, Reyes 2014, to which Arnault et al. replied that "'super' implies complication and some need for rethinking" 2015: 3-4). Furthermore, and more germane for the analysis below, criticism has pointed out that the superdiversity concept suffers from a Eurocentric perspective and, ironically, lacks global historical perspective.

Vertovec clearly developed the term in a European context, and its proponents remained until recently mainly focused on European societies. One quote from an article about superdiversity should suffice as an example: "Western societies have become more diverse in recent times" (Creese and Blackledge 2010: 550). These scholars often cite "the fall of the Berlin Wall" as the milestone that delimits the geographical and historical threshold between plain old diversity and its supersized variety. Reference to the Berlin Wall appears in Vertovec's seminal text (2007: 1029); it has been metonymically expanded, as in "the new post-Cold War flows" (Creese and Blackledge 2010: 551), and then repeated in Blommaert and Rampton's first piece on superdiversity (2011: 2), and in their latest publications: "The term superdiversity refers to the diversity of diversity that occurred after the end of the cold war" (Blommaert et al. 2015: 1) and "The onset of globalised superdiversity in recent times is often linked to the fall of the Berlin Wall" (Arnaut et al. 2015: 9).

In their most recent works, Blommaert and his collaborators recognized this ethnocentricity, arguing for accepting "the inescapability of our historical particularity" and embracing "the opportunities for local engagement" (Arnaut et al. 2015: 9). This is an important clarification, and yet it seems hardly to square with these scholars' aspirations for the theory to bring a global perspective to analysis of communicative phenomena (for instance, the 2015 volume edited by Arnault et al. includes articles on the Internet in China, YouTube in Finland, and urban Chinese migration). The end of the Cold War is undeniably epochal, and images of the fall of the Berlin Wall have become the icon of this historic turn, but the global reach of this event must be problematized from a non-European perspective. For instance, how did it impact Mexican migration to the United States or Filipinos' decisions to work in the Middle East?

Much more compelling, in my view, is a recent comment in a blog by Blommaert (2016), where he argued that accusations of ethnocentrism and metronormativity "can only be held by those who stick to pre-virtual spatial ontologies and conveniently choose to overlook what the presence of the e-space (the largest social space on earth) has done to contemporary societies: 'Eurocentrism' is no longer a stable term in the era of Facebook and Google." He went on to preempt the potential accusation that precisely the focus on the internet constitutes metronormativity by claiming that: "I'd like to remind those who take this view of something established by Braudel and Wallerstein in consecutive versions of World-Systems Analysis: that the presence of a new infrastructure in *parts* of the world system affects the *entire* system" (http://alternative-democracy-research.org/2016/02/10/sociolinguistic-superdiversity-under-construction-a-response-to-stephen-may).

This is an insightful response, but in my view we still need to resolve the inevitable tension between the positionality of most scholarship in sociolinguistic superdiversity (which combines both offline and online research) and their avowed global outlook. I believe we should follow the example set more than a decade ago by the discussion of the sociological relation between global and local (Barber 1996, Bauman 2000, Robertson 2002, Marramao 2012[2003]). One of the consequences of that discussion was the theoretical recasting of the concept of *glocalization*, a term initially developed in Japan to address the impact of globalization on local markets (Levitt 1983). According to this body of theory, anything global has its locality and any locale is not just global but in particular a node in the spatialized networks of global social relations (Herod 2010). Glocalization should be understood as the "mutual implication of homogenization and heterogenization: the inclusion of the locality of difference in the same global organic composition" (Marramao 2012: 29). Of importance here is that the local is not a microcosm reflecting the global macrocosm, but a singularity in the current form of a polycentric and molecularly diffuse world system (Marramao 2012[2003]).

Similarly, a superdiverse environment should be understood as the conflictual cohabitation of two tendencies: the synergic trends of global flows, represented by global migration and digital communication, and the allergic local trends represented by the turbulence of socio-cultural differences, strong reactions against outside forces, and ideological struggles around linguistic varieties. Such turbulences must be expected, since any effort to define what is local is prone to contestation, and language figures centrally in these processes (Besnier 2013). As a result, scholarship on sociolinguistic superdiversity should focus on the production of local codes, their circulation in global networks of meaning and

signification, and their recontextualization into different, yet homologous locales. Researchers should exploit their particular positionality to provide insights on the experience of glocalization.

Let's take, for instance, the link between scale and linguistic ideology. Scholars interested in sociolinguistic superdiversity are going beyond simplistic core-periphery analysis, which sees clear power cleavages between dominant and subordinate actors. Blommaert, for example, has pointed out that the ability to speak a globally commodified language, such as English, in a way that is acceptable locally may indicate a "cosmopolitan" person in that peripheric setting, but that same manner of speaking may, in a global center, point to the inferior status of this speaker. Her marked, "unorthodox" communicative style becomes an index of her outsider, marginalized status: "the English spoken by a middle-class person in Nairobi may not be (and is unlikely to be) perceived as a middle-class attribute in London or New York" (Blommaert 2010:38). Superdiverse glocalization allows us to build upon Blommaert's perspective and recognize that this same non-standard variety may find a more sympathetic audience among people who have recently arrived in the metropole (for instance, other African migrants to London). Non-standard deterritorialized speakers often find social and political alliances and smoother lines of communication with other non-standard speakers.

In the rest of this paper, I will discuss asylum cases drawn from my fieldwork in Rome, Italy. Most of my current and past analyses have relied on theoretical tools developed in Northern European sociolinguistics and American linguistic anthropology. As such, they reflect my own positionality and theoretical toolkit. As I will discuss below, many of the local communicative patterns I identify reveal global processes of meaning and signification. While studies of asylum proceedings in non-European contexts (in Brazil, for instance) may yield different, perhaps unexpected, findings, both Italian and non-European asylum cases will reveal features that are specific to a globalized, superdiverse condition—and contribute to a more thoroughly global theory of institutional interactions.

Asylum, regardless of its specific local manifestation, is just one of the many settings where deterritorialized speakers use a mixture of languages in interacting with family, friends, coworkers, and authorities; read English and other "global" languages on the screens of their digital devices; watch local, regional, or global broadcasts; and access national and international institutions in a variety of languages. Such settings will become ever more widespread in the future as superdiversity, caused by both migratory flows and digital communication, becomes the standard modality.

Transidioma, asylum, and sociolinguistic superdiversity

Asylum proceedings are one of the most complex contemporary adjudication procedures performed by Western bureaucracies (Good 2004, Jacquemet 2011). They are thus an ideal laboratory for studying sociolinguistic superdiversity in action, where migration and refugee flows blend with technological innovations to produce mutated communicative routines, novel linguistic repertoires, and more complex forms of interactions. However, asylum scholars interested in sociolinguistic superdiversity have seldom focused on examining communication at the intersection of mobile people and mobile texts. Although they have produced excellent work (Blommaert 2001, 2009, Maryns 2005, Spotti 2015), they typically focus on the institutional linguistic (at times multilinguistic) nature of asylum proceedings, rather than its digital dimension. There has been very little study of those aspects of asylum proceedings that result from a combination of superdiverse populations and multimodal digital communication. Scholars interested in superdiversity should stretch their analysis to include not only asylum seekers' multilinguistic practices, but also the digital interactions of applicants and other participants in these procedures. It is with this perspective in mind that I have included asylum proceedings in my study of "transidiomatic practices," that is, the multilingual communicative practices found at the intersection between deterritorialized people and digital interfaces (Jacquemet 2005).

Two brief notes on this term: The root word *idiomatic* in *transidiomatic* must be understood in its most generic meaning, which is close to its Latin root: "the usual way in which the words of a particular language are joined together to express thought" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v.). It does not mean "an expression that has a meaning contrary to the usual meaning of the words (such as 'it's raining cats and dogs')" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). On the other hand, the main difference from related terms, such as *translanguaging/ translinguistic* (and the other compound terms listed above), lies in my insistence on the importance of digital communication for multilingual practices. I do not claim that all multilingual settings are now transidiomatic; instead, I use "transidiomatic" to flag, for analytical purposes, the increasing number of communicative environments where we find the comingling of localized, multilingual interactions and technologically mediated, digitalized communication.

I have applied the *transidioma* concept to asylum proceedings as a way to investigate the communicative practices of deterritorialized people (such as refugees) embedded in multilingual environments (such as asylum courts) *but also* engaged in interactions that mix

face-to-face and electronically-mediated communication (as in the asylum hearings described below). Furthermore, asylum proceedings allow analysis of transidiomatic communication in a power-saturated setting, opening an investigation of the ways social hierarchies and power asymmetries are reconfigured in the interaction between global forces and local ideologies (Jacquemet 2013, see also Fairclough 2002, Rampton 2006, 2013, Blommaert 2009).

The contemporary refugee experience is shaped by transidiomatic practices at every step. Refugees' transnational communications and movements, the support networks they tap, and their progress through the institutional hurdles to attain asylum are all greatly facilitated by technologies that make digitalized information accessible to everyone with a mobile phone, tablet, or Internet-connected computer.

Indeed, the entire sociolinguistic landscape of asylum is being transformed by *digitalization*—that is, the restructuring of social life around digital communication and media infrastructures. Digitalization is altering the shape of communicative practices during the asylum process, where focused, face-to-face interactions are now layered with multifocal, multichanneled exchanges flowing through local and distant nodes. It has produced an epochal transformation in the way asylum interactions are managed and in the access to the knowledge infrastructure that supports asylum seekers and asylum hearings. At the same time, digital communication technologies are becoming the latest tool in the battle between, on one hand, nation-states bent on undermining asylum claims and, on the other, refugees and their advocates fighting for the right to asylum.

Until the late 1970s, agencies in charge of asylum determination placed considerable emphasis on the applicant's account. In the absence of written evidence, applicants were prompted to demonstrate their credibility by means of a detailed narration of their stories. Evidence provided directly by the asylum-seeker was awarded a high value and was generally accepted at its face value (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). Starting in the 1980s, however, more restrictive policies were introduced in almost all Western nations (the final destination of most asylum seekers) and asylum agencies reduced their reliance on the credibility of the applicant's testimony. As a result, asylum depositions increasingly acquired the flavor of cross-examinations, with asylum officers systematically and harshly questioning applicants' narratives, seeking to disprove their accuracy, and at times curtailing their story-telling altogether (Jacquemet 2010).

Since the turn of the 21st century, the digitalization of the asylum process has provided both state agents and asylum seekers (and their advocates) new power technologies to be activated in the struggle over asylum determination. The main digital technologies

utilized in these language wars are mobile digital devices, machine translation, and search engines. These technologies and related transidiomatic practices are shaping and being shaped by three forces that have relevance for a theory of superdiversity: the tension between sedentary and mobile power, translation as a power technè, and the primacy of denotational meaning in transidiomatic environments.

Mobile digital devices: sedentary vs. mobile power

The various agents involved in the asylum process—including government officials, refugee advocates, interpreters, and the asylum seekers themselves—can be understood as occupying a spectrum of positions generated by the structural tension between two opposing figures: the sedentary sovereign, represented by immigration officials, and the nomadic, deterritorialized subject, represented by asylum seekers (of which refugees are a subset). Intermediate players, such as court clerks, interpreters, lawyers, and other refugee advocates are scattered along this continuum.

Immigration officials and migrants have at their disposal different power technologies to handle the displacement and dispersion of people unrestrained by territorial control. These processes of displacement and their related power technologies were first provided a theoretical framework by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their discussion of *nomadology* and *deterritorialization* (1987). Central to their discussion was the structural difference between sedentary and mobile power. Deleuze and Guattari viewed sedentary sovereigns (kingdoms, city-states, and free ports) as occupying a "striated space" where these sovereigns use sedentary power technologies (frontiers, passports, moats, border guards) to counter the "smooth space" activated by nomads in their endless move to new territories.

Sedentary power reorders space and makes it measurable. Lines of division and demarcation serve to classify, measure, and distribute striated space following political or economic imperatives. Borders, fortifications, land lots, and city walls are all products of the striation of space—structures and constructs through which lines of flight can be harnessed and controlled. This striation is resisted by the turbulent, rhizomatic, smooth space of nomadic movement, where demarcating lines (roads, bridges, railway tracks) become vectors rather than units of measurement. Smooth space is "a direction and not a dimension or metric determination" (1987: 478). As opposed to the gravitational space of a striated topography, a smooth topology of movement creates a deterritorialized space in which particular places are strictly subordinated to the paths crisscrossing them. This boundless space shifts with every

movement. Like an ocean, it lacks the features that result in privileging one place over other places; it cannot be controlled by sedentary means (1987: 480).

This dichotomy between sedentary power and nomadic movement provides a useful framework for examining the strategies used by asylum officers and asylum seekers. Government asylum agencies mostly operate in the striated space of the nation-state: gathering intelligence on refugees through the collection, coordination, and analysis of multiple databases; probing intrawebs to gather additional evidence for assessing asylum claims; relying on fixed digital infrastructures (such as networked office computers) during their interactions with claimants. On the other hand, asylum seekers occupy a smooth space, which they defend in the face of sedentary forces through their use of mobile digital devices. They use smartphones to organize and coordinate activities "on the fly;" orient themselves and navigate in smooth, unmarked territories; and maintain links with their social networks by storing valuable information (phone numbers, contact names, addresses, maps, and meeting points) in minimal space.

At the same time, we acknowledge that the structural opposition between sedentary and mobile power is a simplification of the complex phenomena of asylum, in which there is a continuum between sedentary and mobile uses of technology on the part of asylum seekers and authorities, who both employ hybrid strategies. Smartphones' advantages for migrants are clear, but they are not the only ones who use them. State and international agencies use a combination of fixed infrastructures (radars, observation posts, communication control and command centers) and mobile technologies (ships, high-speed inflatable boats, surveillance camcopters, as well as smartphones and other communication technologies) to search, intercept, and at times rescue undocumented migrants and refugees crossing into state-controlled territory. On the other hand, asylum seekers sometimes adopt strategies of striated space, such as securing identity papers (real or fake), identifying secure departure and destination points, or tapping into the resources of land-based organizations (such as relief agencies).

The emergence of hybrid strategies of sedentary-mobile power does not, however, diminish the importance of mobile technologies for deterritorialized subjects. To access and manage the asylum process, asylum seekers routinely rely on their cell phones to maintain contact with the lawyers and humanitarian organizations helping them, to communicate with asylum authorities, and to access valuable information about the asylum process. In addition, asylum seekers can use images and maps stored on smartphones during the asylum hearing itself.

Let me illustrate this point with a specific case I witnessed in May 2009 in Rome, Italy, during the asylum deposition of a Kurdish Yazidi refugee from Syria who claimed that he fled his country because of religious persecution. The asylum court employed a young female Kurdish Muslim interpreter familiar with the Kurdish variety spoken by the claimant. When the asylum officer asked the claimant for information on his religion, the interpreter refused to translate the asylum seeker's full reply, at one point claiming, "lui sta parlando del diavolo… e io non posso piu` tradurre!" ("he speaks of the devil… I cannot translate this!"). After a moment of stunned silence, the judge—who knew that the interpreter was Sunni and was familiar with previous asylum cases that exposed religious intolerance between Sunnis and Yazidis—asked the interpreter whether the claimant had any images on his cell phone linked to his worship. The interpreter was able to relay this question and the asylum seeker, with a puzzled shrug, turned on his cell phone, searched through its images, and finally produced an image of Melek Taus, the "Peacock Angel":

Cellphone with image of Melek Taus, the "Peacock Angel" worshipped by the Yadizis.

Luckily for this asylum seeker, the judge knew that the Yazidis believe God placed the world under the care of seven holy beings or angels, most notably Melek Taus, who, as world-ruler, causes both good and bad to befall individuals. The judge was also familiar with the particular persecution Yazidis suffered at the hands of their Syrian Muslim neighbors. Because the asylum seeker was able to corroborate his claim to be Yazidi by producing the right religious image, he was deemed a credible refugee and his claim was accepted.

In this case, the judge was able to tap into classic tools of sedentary power, such as sedimented knowledge encoded into court records, prior cases, and archived materials,

whereas the mobile technology of digitizing images on cell phones (making them easily storable, transmissible, and portable) became an asset for the asylum seeker in his quest for credibility. These two power technologies, both geared towards storing information yet achieving their goal in opposite ways (sedentary/mobile), had a direct impact on the transidiomatic environment of the asylum hearing, allowing people to reach a mutual understanding without relying on a common language or forcing a recalcitrant interpreter into cooperating.

Human-computer interactions

The crucial role of interpreters in linguistically superdiverse asylum-related interactions is well documented (Inghilleri 2005, Pollauner 2009, Jacquemet 2011, 2013, Spotti 2015). For the past decade, asylum courts have coped with limitations on the availability and capabilities of human interpreters by relying on computing power to solve some translation puzzles. Yet these human-computer interactions have received relatively little attention from language scholars, despite the fact that, with the introduction of digitalization, we are witnessing the rise of an integrated structure of techno-linguistic mechanisms that facilitate linguistic exchanges and social interaction in asylum proceedings.

Machine translation (MT), and especially Machine Assisted Human Translation (MAHT), is an integral part of this structure. For many years since its inception in the 1940s, the competence of rule-governed MT programs was, unsurprisingly, quite limited. The inability to take context into consideration and to translate ambiguity, irregular syntax, and multiple meanings made MT the butt of the joke in many linguistics departments.[2] In 1959, Yehoshoa Bar-Hillel, the first academic researcher in the United States to work full time on automatic translation (he was hired by MIT in 1951), predicted that fully automatic, high-quality translation "was an unreachable goal, not only in the near future but altogether." His prediction still stands: the flash of superior intelligence remains absent in MT.

Over the past two decades, however, MT has improved dramatically, propelled by cheap computing power, a spike in federal funding in the wake of 9/11, and, most important, a better idea for the design of machine translation programs. This idea dates from the late 1980s, when researchers at IBM stopped relying on grammar rules as the foundation for translation programs and began experimenting with comparisons of sets of original texts and their translations, known as *parallel text*. The most promising method to emerge from this work is called statistical MT. In statistical MT, algorithms analyze large collections of parallel texts (called *parallel corpora*), such as the proceedings of the European Parliament or

newswire copy, to divine the statistical probability of words and phrases in one language ending up as particular words or phrases in another. A model is then built on those probabilities and used to evaluate and translate new text. A slew of researchers took up IBM's insights, and by the turn of the 21st century the quality of statistical MT had drawn even with five decades of grammar-based MT.

The success of statistical systems, however, comes with a catch: such algorithms do well only when applied to the same type of text on which they have been "trained." Statistical MT software trained on English and Spanish parallel texts from the BBC World Service, for example, excels with other news articles but flops with software manuals. As a result, such systems require vast parallel corpora not only for every language pair they intend to translate—which may not be available for, say, Pashto—but also for different genres within those language pairs. What is missing from the search for a perfect translation program is an awareness of the fuzzy nature of all communication and of the way meanings are negotiated by social groups in the structuration, diffusion, and interpretation of language in context.

That does not mean there is no role for computers in the translation process. Even a machine translation that fails to render the full significance of the source language may still have value to a reader who can piece together meaning from less-than-well-formed text. As in face-to-face talk, where people manage to understand each other's fragmented sentences through continuous feedback and guesswork, computer-mediated communication allows net-users to achieve understanding through rapid back-and-forth exchange (as in chat room talk, where the high levels of communicative inaccuracy and quick tempo of overlapping themes require a continuous recourse to conversational repairs and redundancy, Jepson 2005).

Similarly, feedback mechanisms can facilitate human-computer interactions in superdiverse linguistic environments. For instance, machine translations from one language to the other may be checked by human users for intelligibility and corrected. This strategy of bricolage can be seen in the work of asylum agents (mainly interpreters, but also judges and lawyers) who today routinely utilize MT to produce comprehensible texts in the target language. Entire segments of the initial asylum application (especially the story accompanying the asylum request, which can be written in any number of languages) are routinely inserted into online translation services (such as Google Translate or GoFish) to get a glimpse of the main elements of a case. These inevitably imprecise and partial translations are then checked by professional translators with the support of digital databases from multiple languages to account for regional or non-standard codes.

Another techno-linguistic mechanism used in asylum proceedings is the online multilingual dictionary. Today many online dictionaries offer both word-to-word translation and text-to-speech capabilities (providing the standard pronunciation of any word). They contain millions of combined entries accessed via an array of user interfaces, from the very simple to the highly sophisticated (some include an auto-complete function, word tips, in-line thesaurus, instant reverse-translation, and translation history tracking). Online dictionaries are quickly becoming the necessary tool for lexicographical translation, especially in institutional settings. This trend became evident to me during my fieldwork with an Italian humanitarian organization (*Senza Confine*) which provides logistical and legal support to asylum seekers in Rome. *Senza Confine* routinely relies on interpreters, but at times these interpreters are confronted with multilingual documents that test their linguistic competence.

Such was the case in summer 2009 during an interview between an Italian lawyer from *Senza Confine* and a Kurdish asylum seeker, assisted by a Kurdish interpreter. The asylum seeker had earlier hand-written, in Turkish, the story of his departure from Turkey and included it with his asylum application materials. While reviewing the materials during the interview, the lawyer asked the interpreter—who spoke some Turkish as well as Kurdish and Italian—for an oral translation of the story:

When the Kurdish interpreter got to the Turkish word *şebeke*, he was stumped. In the text above, *şebeke* is found in the next to the last line, which reads:

> Antalyada bir ay sonra   dayım bir   şebeke bulup Antalyadan bizi İzmire   getirdi
> [Antalya-at one month after uncle-mine a *şebeke* finding Antalya-from us İzmir-to brought]
> At Antalya my uncle found a *şebeke* after a month and he brought us from Antalya to İzmir.

He decided to consult his smartphone. First he looked *şebeke* up in an online Turkish-Italian dictionary but was unsatisfied with the result: the words the dictionary offered—such as *alimentazione* (food) and *sulla griglia* (on the grill)—were completely unrelated to the topic. He then checked an online Turkish-English dictionary, which yielded "network, system, graticule, grid." So he decided to render *şebeke* as "networker."

Interpreter translating a Kurdish narrative written in Turkish for an Italian asylum lawyer. Senza Confine, Rome, 2009)

This English word, however, did not satisfy the asylum lawyer, who asked the intepreter for a more precise explanation of "networker":

```
Transcript 1. Senza Confine, Roma, May 6, 2009
Law   Lawyer, young woman, Italian
Int   Intepreter, young man, Kurdish
AS    Asylum seeker, young man, Kurdish

Law    e chi e` questo networker?         Law    and who's this networker?
Int    volevo dire trafficanti            Int    I meant human traffickers
Law    ah, ok                             Law    oh, ok
       e quanto li ha pagati?                    how much did he pay them?
Int    te çiqas da şebekê?                Int     how much did you pay the trafficker?
AS     heft hezar euro                    AS     7,000 euros
Int    settemila euro                     Int    7,000 euros
Law    e vabbene                          Law    oh, very well
```

As the transcript above shows, the interpreter understood that "networker" in this context could best be translated in Italian as *trafficanti* (traffickers or human smugglers), and the interview moved forward successfully.

Here we see a series of feedback mechanisms operating to translate the asylum seeker's story. The interpreter's interaction with an online dictionary, accessed through his smartphone, bridged the gap between the Turkish term and the interpreter's knowledge. Even

though the interpreter's initial search was not fruitful and the second one turned up a word that was still quite ambiguous, the continuous interaction and feedback between digital and human agent achieved some form of shared knowledge.

If the lawyer had not questioned the word "networker" and instead allowed it to enter the legal deposition, the impreciseness and foreignness of this term could have had serious negative consequences for the asylum seeker. In the permanent culture of suspicion that characterizes asylum hearings (especially when it comes to determining the credibility of the asylum seekers, see Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Jacquemet 2011), a skeptical judge could have interpreted the use of such a non-standard, "fuzzy" lexeme as sign that the asylum seeker had something to hide—and decided against the asylum seeker's claim. It was only through the multiple reciprocal moves of all agents (interpreter, online dictionaries, lawyer) that the superdiverse, fuzzy nature of this story could be rendered in the acceptable, standard Italian of the asylum court.

If we want to translate literature by authors such as James Joyce (Eco 2000) we should stay clear of MT technologies for years to come, and maybe forever. If, on the other hand, we are just looking for some pointers (a function, after all, crucial to all processes of indexicality) that can help us understand multilingual exchanges, then MT can be quite useful—especially when combined with human intelligence.

Search engines: denotation in a superdiverse environment.
One of the most serious consequences of operating in a superdiverse environment such as the asylum process may be the increasing lack of predictability. As Blommaert argues, a few decades ago it would have been possible to predict with some degree of certainty what a 14-year-old grade-school student in an European metropolis would be like: her looks, mother tongue, religious affiliation, cultural preferences, and musical taste were much more restricted than what we observe today. Now the identities of native-born and immigrants alike are impossible to foresee. Blommaert observes, "[t]he presuppositions of common integration policies—that we know who the immigrants are, and that they have a shared language and culture—can no longer be upheld" (2010: 7).

This lack of predictability is particularly vexing for the apparatuses of national sovereignty. Needing to regulate access to state-controlled resources by a wider range of speakers (from natives to aliens) but unable to ensure smooth institutional interactions, nation-states have grudgingly set up procedures to handle not only the local population but also the growing number of deterritorialized speakers and their multiple languages.

In the case of the asylum process, most Western nations (as well as international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Jesuit Refugee Service) have set up offices that attempt to handle the needs of asylum seekers by providing them with interpreters, access to websites containing information useful to their cases, and the services of lawyers, social workers, and cultural mediators.

Despite such efforts, the asylum process in Western countries remains a site where refugees' multilingual practices come into conflict with national language ideologies. State bureaucrats, in particular, impose norms and forms (shaped by national concerns and ethnocentric cultural assumptions) on immigrants barely able to understand the nation's local language, let alone the officials' procedures for conducting in-depth interviews, writing reports, and producing the records required in order for institutions to grant refugees access to local resources (Eades and Arends 2004; Pollabauer 2004; Maryns and Blommaert 2001, Blommaert 2009).

During the asylum process, state and international agencies operate within a regime of denotational heavy registers. They focus mostly on the denotational axis (the link between description and the thing or event described) to determine the credibility of an asylum seeker's application. Applicants are asked at various steps in the procedure to provide denotational information (personal names, date and place of birth, names of relatives, place names, etc.), which is then probed by officers in order to assess the credibility of the applicants' claims. In this context, asylum seekers are responsible for the accuracy of their statements, while examiners and adjudicators use the communicative power of their techno-political practices (questioning, producing a record, checking databases, and so on) to ensure that applicants' claims are verifiable in accordance with dominant understandings of the referential world. In such a multilingual environment, the officers' search for and the applicants' production of proper references are rendered problematic by intercultural breakdowns that can result from discrepant semiotics of the denotational world. Applicants must make sure that the information they supply is properly produced and interpreted. If it is not, the applicants alone face the charge of being not credible—which, as in the case discussed below, may lead to incarceration, deportation, torture, and death.

The ethnographic interviews I have conducted with asylum officers and my review of the existing literature reveal a particular linguistic register based on the (over)reliance on proper names. The reasons for this are multiple. To start with, institutional agents (judges, police officers, bureaucrats, etc.) view proper names as stable signs that are easily transferrable across languages. Proper names are (erroneously) believed to survive the

translation from one language to another in a fairly constant, recognizable form. They are believed to carry denotation but not connotation (an idea that goes back to John Stuart Mill). These agents thus attribute to proper names high denotational value ("John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Friday, November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas" has higher denotational-referential value than "the president was killed in the sixties"). They believe that proper names boost referential accuracy, making it possible to investigate the credibility of an asylum claim or the testimony the claimant subsequently gives before a judge.

Bureaucrats have routinely used proper names to examine and create dossiers since the formation of nation-states. In this sense, proper names have always functioned as specific communicative technologies for imposing disciplinary power (Foucault 1980, cf. also Battaglia's "representational economy" 1995 and Butler's "sovereign performatives" 1997). Moreover, common-sense notions about the rigidity of proper names make them sought after—and heavily monitored—in asymmetrical multilingual environments where speakers do not have equal access to the various languages being spoken and must rely on interpreters or mechanical translators. Proper names are believed to survive the linguistic mutations brought about by the process of translation, and as such they are seen as the only linguistic resource equally available to all participants. In these situations, proper names are used by interactants in locating the interactional flow during turns in languages they do not comprehend. Proper names can thus be considered anaphoric cairns allowing listeners to follow, albeit approximately, the turns they do not understand in the staggered process of producing speech in language 1 (L1), translating it to L2 (and/or L3, L4, etc.), replying in L2 (and/or L3, L4), translating the reply back to L1, and so on.

This is particularly true within superdiverse settings where non-native speakers (such as new immigrants, refugees, or asylum seekers) need to rely on interpreters (sometimes family members, Davidson 2000, Reynolds and Orellana 2009, Orellana 2009) to make sense of the interaction at hand. Consider for instance the following case from my fieldwork among asylum seekers in Rome, Italy. Here we see how an applicant—a young man from Afghanistan who could not comprehend a whole Italian sentence—was able to enter the conversation without the help of the interpreter:

```
Transcript 2. Senza Confine, Roma, May 20, 2009
AS  Asylum seeker, young man, Pashtun
O   Officer, young woman, Italian
I   Interpreter, middle age woman, Farsi/Pashtun/Italian

O [to I] l'udienza si terrà              O   [to I] the hearing will be held
      a Roma o a Ca=serta?=                  in Rome or Caserta?
AS              = Roma =                  AS  Rome
```

The asylum seeker did not have to wait for the interpreter to relay the question and promptly overlapped the officer to provide an answer, eager to show his awareness of the exchange and his ability to answer based just on his knowledge of the context and recognition of a proper name (in this case a place name).[i]

Personal names enter the asylum process at multiple points, from the apparently simple task of proving one's identity to the more involved step of providing external denotational references to corroborate an asylum claim.

The difficulty of proving asylum applicants' identities lies at the heart of the asylum process. How can they prove they are who they claim to be (thus deserving of asylum) when they lack identity papers or any other kind of supporting evidence? In most cases, asylum seekers have had to compromise their identity: they may have destroyed their documents to conceal their identity from pursuers; their documents may have become irremediably damaged and unreadable along the way; they may have left them behind in their rush to escape; they may have had to forge fake identities; or they may never have had any identity papers to start with. This latter case is more complex than a case of missing documents. As Bohmer and Shuman state: "The applicants themselves find the whole idea of needing documents to prove identity incomprehensible. For them, identity is about much more than one's name on an unforged document" (2007: 88).

In the Italian situation, most asylum seekers arrive on small boats overloaded with people. They carry a minimal amount of baggage, or none at all, and the majority lack identity papers. As a result, one of the first acts they are asked to perform in front of Italian immigration officers is to provide their names. This act, however, is far from unproblematic. Italian officers unfamiliar with foreign names, lacking proper interpreting support, and under pressure to process a boatful of people as expeditiously as possible routinely make mistakes in transcribing the names of asylum seekers. These failed "mini entextualizations" can have serious consequences for the asylum seekers later on (Jacquemet 2009).

For instance, an Italian nongovernmental organization working on behalf of refugees reported the case of Mr. Boukhari, a refugee from Southern Morocco who made his way on a boat to the Italian island of Lampedusa. Mr. Boukhari did not understand Italian, but he could speak some French. The officer processing his case in the Identification Center in Lampedusa wrote down his name incorrectly in the transcription of the hearing. To compound the mistake, Mr. Boukhari, unfamiliar with the Roman alphabet, did not realize the spelling was

wrong when he signed the report. He was admitted to the country on humanitarian grounds and was granted a one-year stay permit. Once settled, he applied for a permanent work visa. When the Italian Immigration Office reviewed his application, they discovered the difference between the name recorded in his first interview in the Identification Center and the name he was using in his application for a work permit. He was accused of having entered the country under a false name and his one-year stay permit was revoked (Rovelli 2006:151).

In a similar case, Mr. Adesida, a Nigerian refugee, was admitted to Italy in 2003 and given a one-year work permit. When the permit was about to expire, he went to the Immigration Office to renew it, where he was arrested on the grounds that he had filed his renewal form under a false name. It turned out that the report on his original interview had omitted one of his four personal names. Not only was his renewal denied, but he was arrested and confined in Milan's detention center for undocumented migrants, from which he was sent back to Nigeria (ICS 2005:56).

With the digitalization of bureaucratic processes, proper names have become increasingly important. In fact, denotation is built into the technological affordances of digitalization: databases are structured so that personal names and numeric codes can be tracked and mined; web search engines make it easy to find references to names; and social networks tag names (and link them to personal photographs) to establish their referentiality in the offline world.

Digitalization has allowed asylum courts to become "smart courtrooms," fully wired with access to the digital information infrastructure 24/7. In particular, digitalization has enabled the staff of asylum courts to conduct immediate online searches to verify proper names cited by applicants, even while the applicants are in process of giving their testimony. At the asylum hearings I observed in Italy, typically one member of the asylum commission would be assigned to conduct searches through both the public Internet and ministerial databases on foreign intelligence to try to verify (or discredit) the applicant's story.

The following example illustrates the obsession with proper names and the use of digital searches particular to asylum courts, including court interpreters, who often take it upon themselves to seek and produce clear denotational references. The asylum seeker in this case was a man from Turkish Kurdistan; the interpreter was a young woman fluent in the applicant's first language (Kurmanji) but unfamiliar with the political situation in his homeland. She mistakenly lexicalized and transformed a fragment from the applicant's story into a proper name, triggering a frantic search to verify the said proper name:

```
Transcript 3. Commissione Territoriale, Roma, May 26, 2009
AS    Asylum seeker, young man, Kurdish
I     Interpreter, young woman, Kurdish
O     Officer, young woman, Italian
Law   Lawyer, Italian woman

O     allora perche` i militari turchi       O    so, why the Turkish army
      ce l'avevano con lei?                        was after you?
I     cima leshkerè tirka tera neyarti dikirin? I  why was the army after you?
AS    min arikari dida kurda                  AS   because I helped the Kurds
      u leshkerè kurda                             and the Kurd army
I     aiutava i kurdi e l'armata kurda        I    he helped the Kurds and its army
O     come l'aiutavate?                       O    how did you help it?
I     çawa te wanra arikari dikir?            I    how did you help them?
AS    min arikari dida wan kesè              AS    I helped the people waging a
      ciyada gerila bun                            guerrilla war in the mountains
I     aiutava i Guerrigli (...)               I    he helped the Guerrigli
      sono dei soldati kurdi                       they are Kurdish soldiers
O     I Guerrigli (..)                        O    The Guerrigli?
      questi non li ho mai sentiti (...)           these ones I never heard of...
      e chi sono?                                  And who are they
-----[Fourteen minutes omitted]
O     e che rapporti ci sono                  O    and what kind of relationship is there
      tra il PKK e questi Guerrigli                between the PKK and these Guerrigli
      che ho sentito qui per la prima volta        that I heard about here for the first
                                                   time
→     e che il collega non trova su internet?      and that my colleague cannot find on ←
                                                   internet?                            ←
Law   guardi che c'è                         Law   I believe
      un errore di traduzione,                     there's a translation mistake
      lui ha detto che aiutava la guerriglia,      he said he helped the guerrilla
      cioè il PKK                                  that is, the PKK
O     ah!                                     O    so,
      voi aiutavate dei guerriglieri del PKK?      you helped the PKK guerrilla?
      [a I] chiedi un pò?                          [to I] can you ask him?
I     we arikari PKK è ra dikir?              I    did you help the PKK
AS    erè                                    AS    yes
I     sì, aiutava il PKK                      I    yes, he helped the PKK
O     oh, meno male!                          O    well, finally!
(...)                                         (...)
O     e come si chiamava una volta il PKK?    O    how was the PKK previously called?
I     PKK bi naveki dinè ra ji tè naskirinè?  I    the PKK, is it know with another name?
AS    KADEK                                   AS   KADEK
O     vabbene                                 O    very good.
```

This transcript begins with the asylum officer asking the applicant how he came to be
persecuted by the Turkish Army. The applicant replied in Kurmanji that he helped the "people
waging a guerrilla war in the mountains." This description was mistranslated by the
interpreter as "i Guerrigli" (which in English could be rendered as "the Warriors"). Faced
with a proper name she had not encountered in her five years of deposing Kurdish asylum
seekers, the Italian officer expressed her skeptical curiosity and probed the applicant for more
information. After listening for more than fifteen minutes to an interaction (not included in the
transcript) between the asylum seeker and interpreter that turned increasingly nonsensical, the
officer once again expressed her skepticism about the existence of this guerrilla organization
("that I heard about here for the first time") and referred to her colleague, who was feverishly
searching that supposed organization's name both on the Internet and the intranet of the
Italian foreign office ("and that my colleague cannot find on internet"). At this point, the
applicant's lawyer felt compelled to intervene and clarify that the "Guerrigli" were really the

PKK, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* in Kurdish). Once the officer ascertained that the applicant was indeed referring to the PKK when the interpreter translated his words as "Guerrigli," she quickly moved to establish an internal reference by asking the applicant whether the PKK had been known by a different name. When he provided the correct answer, "KADEK," the acronym for the Freedom and Democracy Congress of Kurdistan (*Kongreya Azadî û Demokrasiya Kurdistanê*), she was finally satisfied with his accuracy and expressed her satisfaction. Note that in the last turn, once the applicant produced the proper name KADEK, the officer did not wait for the interpreter because she immediately recognized the name. It took fifteen minutes, but they arrived at a successful decoding of the proper reference. The asylum seeker was subsequently granted the status of refugee and allowed to remain in Italy.

Conclusions

The current debate over the concept of sociolinguistic superdiversity mirrors the academic response to the emergence of the discourse on globalization. When the term "globalization" first started to gain traction in academia, multiple voices, particularly those of historians and political scientists, objected to this characterization of late modernity and critiqued its social importance. In particular, they pointed out that globalization was not an altogether new phenomenon, considering that the social, economic, and cultural flows that typify it have been shaping people's lives since imperial and colonial times (for all, see Kellner 1989). Similarly, resistance to the idea of superdiversity often takes the shape of "nothing new here."

But the world is entering a "new" phase, which I would not hesitate to identify as a paradigm shift (à la Kuhn). The impact of digitalization on social life, the increasingly pervasive presence of de- and reterritorialization processes, and the development of digital communication are of tremendous theoretical and methodological relevance. It is exactly the online-offline nexus which is entirely *new* (no online behavior existed in sociocultural, political, and historical phenomenology until the final decades of the 20th century). As such, this nexus offers formidable potential for empirical and theoretical reformulation. My emphasis on transidiomatic environments (as well as the work on sociolinguistic superdiversity by scholars such as Blommaert, Rampton, and Blackledge & Creese) represents an important departure not only from most of traditional sociological and anthropological thought, but also from the phenomenology used in what could be called the "Vertovec tradition" of superdiversity research, which concentrates on migration flows in offline space.

By looking at social realities characterized by massively fluid multilingual interactions in both offline and online social networks, scholars interested in sociolinguistic superdiversity are studying linguistic habits and communicative mutations that are redefining the entire field of language and communication studies. The concepts of transidioma and sociolinguistic superdiversity challenge researchers to look at multiple linguistic forms, social indexicalities, and power relations in multilingual, mobile, and media-saturated contexts. In these contexts, registers operating across various languages (such as the denotational-heavy register) may be simultaneously activated over multiple channels, depending on the social desires and linguistic ideologies at play in a particular environment. My emphasis here is on transidioma as a combination of registers across multiple languages rather than within a specific language. Based on Agha's definition (2007), these registers are a combination of transcultural models of actions which link speech varieties to stereotypical linguistic values, performable over multiple media, and recognized by a socio-historical population. In this light, transidiomatic registers figure centrally in the reterritorialization of transcultural processes, the production of locally exchangeable codes, and their circulation in global networks of meaning and signification.

Moreover, as Blommaert (2016) points out, by looking at sociolinguistically superdiverse communities (what I would like to call transidiomatic netdoms, as social aggregates composed of a mixture of social networks and semiotic domains, see White 2008) we question widely used conceptualizations of social space, including well-established distinctions between "centers" and "peripheries" (and thus also between "metropolitan" and "indigenous" languages, and between "urban" and "rural").

Finally, it is clear from the discussion above (as well as from other sources, such as Arnaut et al. 2015) that superdiversity presents a huge challenge to the forms of social classification with which nation-states and institutions have traditionally monitored their populations. The straightforward determination of a personal identity, always already fraught with complications even within the homogeneous frame of a single national entity, cannot be taken for granted in a superdiverse environment. This led some scholars to argue that instead of relying on essentialist identity categories, research should focus on practices, especially digital ones (Cheney-Lippold 2011, Ruppert 2011, Huysmans 2014). Newly developed digital tools (such as big data mining) are advancing an idea of personal identity no longer restricted to demographics but gleaned from the digital shadow left behind when people search, shop, read, or discuss online.

This focus on people's digital footprints may have enormous consequences for the

new generation of wired refugees (Butcher 2015). There are systems of surveillance already in place that could mine refugees' smartphone and email data or recover a record of the movements of displaced people—information that could be brought to bear on the asylum process. It is likely that new digital power technologies will be added to the migration apparatus in order to carry out the ideology of suspicion currently prevalent in the asylum process (Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Feldman 2013 Jacquemet 2015). We can foresee a world where asylum will be determined by technocrats' abilities to access refugees' devices, crack their security systems, and implement the proper search. The social and communicative implications for refugees' privacy and exposure (especially the consequences of self-exposure, from selfies to online shopping) are clear.

But before we get there, we are still faced with an asylum system where, in the current age of suspicion, the search for denotational accuracy has become an exclusionary practice geared to filter out fraudulent claims. As noted above, denotational signs such as personal names do not necessarily provide the referential stability that asylum officers seek. While it is undeniable that a portion of asylum claims are bogus and need to be handled accordingly, my concern is that the stringent search for denotational certainty may ultimately hurt a great number of refugees with legitimate claims. We need to implement policies that support asylum seekers' human rights, including their linguistic and communicative rights. These policies may allow ways of telling stories and constructing claims that clash with the dominant forms and norms of asylum agencies. As a first step, these agencies should revert to, or at least revisit, their earlier practices for making asylum determination: paying more attention to asylum seekers' own stories, even when fragmentary and circular, and exercising greater patience and empathy, building feed-back loops able to handle stories lacking denotational accuracy.

This is particularly important when we consider that asylum seekers' statements and narratives are no longer embedded in a single dominant language but in the transidiomatic practices that arise in superdiverse environments shaped by the tension between the reterritorialization of global cultural flows and national political discourses. Participants in such environments (including more tolerant and welcoming asylum agencies) should consider that successful outcomes are increasingly determined by their ability to attend to the intercultural nature of these interactions and, in particular, to accommodate for syncopated and imprecise narrations, reversals, false starts, and ambiguous turns that are characteristic of asylum narratives. In other words, asylum agencies need to become aware of the differential power and linguistic skill of all participants, the impact of unexpected cultural assumptions,

and the unevenly distributed competence of the participants to produce institutionally appropriate and interculturally effective performances.

References

Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press

Arnaut, K. et al. (eds.) (2015) *Language and Superdiversity*. New York: Routledge.

Barber, B. (1996) *Jihad vs. McWorld: How globalization and tribalism are reshaping the world.* New York: Ballantine.

Battaglia, D. (1995) Problematizing the Self. In Battaglia, D. (ed.) *Rhetorics of Self-Making*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bailey, B. (2007) Heteroglossia and boundaries. In Heller, M. (ed.) *Bilingualism: A Social Approach*. London: Palgrave.

Berardi, F. (2009) *Precarious Rhapsody. Semio-capitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation.* London: Autonomedia,

Besnier, N. (2013) Language on the Edge of the Global: Communicative Competence, Agency, and the Complexity of the Local. *Language & Communication* 33: 463–471. 2013.

Blommaert, J. (2001). Investigating narrative inequality: African asylum seekers' stories in Belgium. *Discourse and Society* 12 (4): 413-449.

--- (2009) Language, asylum, and the national order. *Current Anthropology*.

--- (2010) *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge University Press.

--- (2013) *Ethnography, Superdiversity and Linguistic Landscapes.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

--- (2016) Sociolinguistic superdiversity under construction: A response to Stephen May. Web blog post. *Ctrl+Alt+Dem.* 10 Feb, 2016. http://alternative-democracy-research.org/2016/02/10/sociolinguistic-superdiversity-under-construction-a-response-to-stephen-may/

Blommaert, J., Collins, J. and Slembrouck, S. (2005) Spaces of multilingualism. *Language and Communication* 25: 197-216

Blommaert, J. and Rampton, B. (2011) Language and superdiversity. *Diversities* 13(2), 1-21.

Blommaert, J. Spotti, M. and Van Der Aa, J. (2015) Complexity, mobility, migration. *Tilburg Papers in Cultural Studies* 137.

Bohmer, C. and Shuman, A. (2007) *Rejecting Refugees: Political Asylum in the 21st century*. London: Routledge.

Butcher, M. (2015) *TechfugeesConference. London:* Skillsmatter.

Butler, J. (1997) *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge.

Canagarajah, A. S. (2006). The place of world Englishes in composition: Pluralization continued. *College Composition and Communication*, 57(4), 586-619

--- (2009) The plurilingual tradition and the English language in South Asia. *AILA Review, 22*(1), 5-22.

--- (2011) Codemeshing in academic writing: Identifying teachable strategies of translanguaging. *The Modern Language Journal, 95*(iii), 401-417.

Cheney-Lippold, J. (2011) A new algorithmic identity: Soft biopolitics and the modulation of control. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 28(6): 164–181.

Clifford, J. (1997) *Routes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Coupland, N. (ed.) (2010) *Handbook of Language and Globalization*. London: Routledge.

Creese, A. and Blackledge, A. (2010) Towards a sociolinguistics of superdiversity. *Z Erziehungswiss* 13:549–572

Davidson, B. (2000) The interpreter as institutional gatekeeper: The social-linguistic role of interpreters in Spanish-English medical discourse. *Journal of Sociolinguistics,* 4, 3: 379-405

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia 2*. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press

Eades, D. and Arends, J. eds. (2004) International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law 11 (2). Special issue on language analysis in asylum hearings.

Eco, U. (2000) *Experiences in Translation.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Fassin, D. and Rechtman, R. (2009) *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry Into the Condition of Victimhood*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fairclough, N. (2002) Language in New Capitalism. *Discourse and Society*, 13, 2: 163-166

--- (2006) *Language and Globalization.* London: Routledge

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge*. Brighton: Harvester Press.

García, O. (2009) Education, multilingualism and translanguaging in the 21st century. In Ajit Mohanty, Minati Panda, Robert Phillipson, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (eds.) *Multilingual Education for Social Justice: Globalising the local*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan

Good, A. (2007) *Anthropology and Expertise in the Asylum Courts*. London: Routledge.

Hannerz, U. (1996) *Transnational Connections*. New York: Routledge

Harvey, D. (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity.* New York: Wiley

Heller, M. (2003) Globalization, the new economy, and the commodification of language and identity. Special Issue: Sociolinguistics and Globalization, Journal of Sociolinguistics, 7, 4: 473–492

--- (2010) Commodification of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39,: 101-114

Herod, A. (2010) *Scale: Key Ideas in Geography*. New York: Routledge.

Huysmans, J. (2014) *Security Unbound*. London: Routledge.

ICS-Consorzio Italiano Solidarietà (2005). *La Protezione Negata.* Milan: Feltrinelli.

Inghilleri, M. (2005). Mediating zones of uncertainty: Interpreter agency, the interpreting habitus, and political asylum adjudication. *Translator* 11 (1): 69-85.

Jacquemet, M. (2005) Transidiomatic practices: Language and power in the age of globalization. *Language and Communication* 25: 257-277.

--- (2009) Transcribing refugees: The entextualization of asylum seekers' hearings in a transidiomatic environment. *Text and Talk* 29(5), 525-546.

--- (2010) The registration interview: Restricting refugees' narrative performances. In Baker, M. (ed.) *Critical Readings in Translation Studies*. London: Routledge.

--- (2011) Crosstalk 2.0. *Text and Talk*, 31 (4): 475-497

--- (2013) Language, Media, and Digital Landscapes. In Auer, P. and Stuckenbrok, A. (eds.) *Language and Space: Applied Cases*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

--- (2015) Asylum and Superdiversity. *Language and Communication.* 44: 72-81

--- (forth) *Transidioma: Language and Power in the Age of Globalization.* London, New York: Blackwell-Wiley.

Jørgensen, J. N. (2008) Polylingual languaging around and among children and adolescents. *International Journal of Multilingualism, 5*(3), 161-176.

Jørgensen, J. N., Karrebaek, M., Madsen, L. and Moller, J. (2011) Polylanguaging in superdiversity. *Diversities 13*/2: 22-37

Kaplan, C. (1996) *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Duke University Press

Kellner, D. (1989) *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity.* Cambridge University Press.

Levitt, T. (1983) The Globalization of Markets. *Harvard Business Review*. May-June issue

Ling, R. (2004) *The Mobile Connection: The Cell Phone's Impact on Soci*ety. London: Morgan Kaufmann

Maryns, K. (2005) *The Asylum Speaker: Language in the Belgian Asylum Procedure*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.

Maryns, K. and Blommaert, J. (2001). Stylistic and thematic shifting as a narrative resource: Assessing asylum seekers' repertoires. *Multilingua* 20 (1): 61-84.

Marramao, G. (2012 [2003]) *The Passage West: Philosophy After the Age of the Nation-State.* London: Verso.

McChesney, R. (2007) *Communication revolution: Critical junctures and the future of media.* New York: The New Press.

Makoni, S. 2012. A critique of language, languaging and supervernacular. *Multas Vozes*, 1(2): 189–199.

Mignolo, W. (2000) *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton University Press

Orellana, M. (2009) *Translating Childhoods: Immigrant Youth, Language, and Culture*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Orman, J. (2012) Not so Super: The Ontology of Supervernaculars. *Language & Communication*, 32, 4: 349–357

Otsuji, E. and Pennycook, A. (2010) Metrolingualism: Fixity, fluidity, and language in flux. *International Journal of Multilingualism, 7*(3), 240-254.

Pavlenko, A. (2014) Superdiversity and why it isn't. Paper presented at the *Sloganizations in Language Education Discourse Conference*. Humboldt Universität, Berlin.

Pollabauer, S. (2004). Interpreting in asylum hearings: Issues of role, responsibility and power. *Interpreting* 6 (2): 143-180.

Pratt et al. (2011) Comparative Literature and Global Languascapes. In A. Behdad and D. Thomas (eds), *A Companion to Comparative Literature*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, Chichester, UK.

Rampton, B. (2006) *Language in Late Modernity: Interaction in an Urban School*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

--- (2014) Gumperz and governmentality in the 21st century: Interaction, power and subjectivity. Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies, n. 117.

Reyes, A. (2014) Linguistic anthropology in 2013: Super-New-Big. *American Anthropologist*, 116 (2): 366–378.

Reynolds, J. and Orellana, M. (2009) New Immigrant Youth Interpreting in White Public Space. *American Anthropologist*, 111, 2: 211-223

Robertson, R. (1998) Discourses of Globalization: Preliminary Considerations *International Sociology,* 13: 25-40

Rovelli, M. (2006). *Lager Italiani.* Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli.

Ruppert, E. (2011) Population objects: Interpassive subjects. *Sociology*, 45(2): 218–233.

Silverman, S. (2000) Talking to Strangers. *Wired.* May issue.

Silverstein, M. (2015) How language communities intersect: Is "superdiversity" an incremental or transformative condition? *Language and Communication.* 44: 7-18

Spotti, M. (2015) Sociolinguistic Shibboleths at the Institutional Gate Language, Origin, and the Construction of Asylum Seekers' Identities. In Arnaut et al. (eds.)

Sultana, S. Dovchin, S. and Pennycook, A. (2015) Transglossic language practices of young adults in Bangladesh and Mongolia. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 12, 1: 93-108

Tomlinson, J. (2007) *The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy.* London: Sage Publications.

Vertovec, S. (2006) The emergence of super-diversity in Britain. In *Research on Immigration*

and Integration in the Metropolis, 6, 14. Working Paper Series, Vancouver Centre of Excellence.

--- (2007) Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 30 (6): 1024-1054.

--- (2010) Towards post-multiculturalism? Changing communities, contexts and conditions of diversity. *International Social Science Journal,* 99: 83-95.

White, Harrison C. (2008). *Identity and Control: How Social Formations Emerge*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press