Language and globalisation

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Introduction

Taking a critical, transformationalist view of contemporary globalisation, this chapter examines ways in which linguistic practices and ideologies are shaped by – and contribute to – dynamic social conditions in our globalising world. The first section summarises different approaches to understanding globalisation and argues that the language of globalisation is central to both the ideological framing and the enactment of globalising processes. The second section considers the globalisation of language, focusing on factors that position a language as a ‘world language’, while also noting the prevalence of ‘differential multilingualism’. The third section explores linguistic practices and ideologies situated in specific ‘glocalised’ contexts. Overall, the chapter highlights that a critical sociolinguistics of globalisation illuminates the need for refined conceptualisations of language, linguistic practices and communicative competencies, and concludes by suggesting ways in which these reconceptualisations might fruitfully inform social-justice-orientated positions of alter-globalisation.

The language (and discourses) of globalisation

What is ‘globalisation’?

Generally agreed-upon features of contemporary globalisation include that: (1) it entails a complex set of processes that ‘intensify and extensify’ the circulation of ideas, goods, information, capital and people; (2) these processes have brought about a ‘widening, deepening, and speeding up of global interconnectedness in which the local and global are deeply enmeshed and their boundaries are increasingly blurred’; and (3) consequently, the impacts of globalisation ‘can be located on a continuum with the local, national, and regional’ (Held et al. 1999, pp. 14–15). Thus, our era of technological globalisation has resulted in an accelerated ‘compression of time and space’ (Giddens 1990; Harvey 1989), accompanied by a rising ‘global imaginary’ in which people the world over have a heightened sense of global connectivity (Steger 2013).
As with all labels, however, the term ‘globalization’ is polysemic and subject to contestation. Common critiques include that it is a fuzzy concept, conflates processes with conditions, and/or is a new buzzword for long-existing economic, political, social and cultural phenomena (e.g. Garrett 2010; Schirato & Webb 2003; Steger 2013). For critical scholars, an over-riding concern is that dominant representations of globalization elide causality, thus naturalising current processes and conditions as if they were an independent ‘techno-economic juggernaut’ propelling humankind to inevitable social, political, and economic conditions (Marcuse 2000, p. 23).

While allowing for variation within each grouping, Held et al. (1999) outline three main camps of scholars in the ‘great globalization debate’: hyperglobalisers, sceptics, and transformationalists. Hyperglobalisers emphasise economic globalisation and argue that the ‘borderless’ neo-liberal global market has ushered in a new epoch with social formations superseding (eventually supplanting) nation-states’ economic and political power. However, this new world order is envisioned differently: the optimist camp foresees an emerging global civilisation; the critical camp sees a rising cultural homogenisation with a ‘consumerist ideology … displacing traditional … ways of life’ (Held et al. 1999, p. 4).

Conversely, the sceptic camp argues against a historical disjuncture for contemporary economic globalisation. They note that economic liberalisation continues to depend upon national governments’ regulatory powers; they also note that there is a continued regionalisation of the economy in three primary blocs: Europe, Asia-Pacific and North America. Overall, then, this camp perceives a continuation of global economic relations, including long-entrenched patterns of inequality and hierarchy.

Transformationalists observe an overall restructuring of global relations wherein the power and function of national governments is continuing yet shifting via constant negotiation with public and private entities at local, national, regional and global levels. Also, rather than viewing the economy as the primary force of globalisation, or global processes as mainly West-centric, they note multi-centric networks of interpenetrated, complex global systems: financial, technical, political, cultural, ecological.

Regarding cultural globalisation, hyperglobalisers emphasise pressures towards cultural homogenisation, especially from the spread of American popular culture and Western consumerism. Sceptics, however, see a continued strength of national cultures in contrast to the ‘ersatz quality’ of thin ‘global cultures’ (Held et al. 1999, p. 327). Indeed, (ethno) national identification is intensifying in many places as people react to pressures from economic globalisation and rising numbers of immigrants and refugees. Transformationalists hold a third viewpoint, noting an increased ‘intermingling of cultures and peoples’, which produces a veritable ‘global mélange’ (Nederveen Pieterse 2015) of ‘cultural hybrids and new global cultural networks’ (Held et al. 1999, p. 327).

Not surprisingly, popular discourse also carries differing perceptions about globalisation. In a survey of university students in Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, the UK and the USA, Garrett (2010) found that certain domains were commonly listed – culture, economy, politics/power and communication; however, respondents varied considerably as to whether ‘globalisation’ carries a positive or negative valence. In Asia, Koh (2005) notes that ‘globalisation’ has indigenised in various ways. In Korea, segyehwa conveys economic liberalisation as well as political, cultural and social open-mindedness. In Japan, kokusaika (internationalisation) is cautiously balanced by ‘Japanization’, to protect national identity while engaging in the global economy. In Thailand, logapiwatana signifies spread around the world and change all over the world; however, Thais primarily perceive globalisation as economic. In Singapore, globalisation denotes competitiveness and entrepreneurship, but
also creativity and foreign talent. Koh thus concludes that discourses of globalisation are heteroglossic (multi-voiced).

**Globalisation as a keyword**

These different understandings of ‘globalisation’ remind us that the meaning(s) of any term varies according to how individuals are positioned in particular contexts at particular points in time and in relation to particular ideologies. In fact, ‘globalisation’ is best understood as a ‘keyword’ emerging during a period of rapid social change (Williams 1983; Grossberg 2005). As with all keywords, ‘globalisation’ involves both ‘ideas and values’; certain uses are bound together with ‘certain ways of seeing culture and society’; and ‘the problems of its meaning [are] inextricably bound up with the problems it [is] being used to discuss’ (Williams 1983, pp. 12–17). Nevertheless, for ‘globalisation’ to have purchase as an analytic construct, conceptual usage should be clarified. Rather than taking Williams’ historical semantic approach, however, I adopt Steger’s (2013) strategy of using different terms when discussing particular facets of globalisation. These terms are globalisation, globalism and globality, and they are used to differentiate between processes, ideologies, and the resulting conditions of globalisation.

**A working definition of globalisation**

Held et al. describe ‘globalization’ as a set of processes that ‘embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power’ (1999, p. 16). Thus, globalisation involves flows and networks across space and time as these operate in a dynamic relationship with more spatially delimited processes on local, national and regional levels. Regarding these flows and networks, Appadurai (1990) outlines five primary, intertwined (yet disjunctive) ‘scapes’ – ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes and ideoscapes. Importantly, language is central to each dimension. Finanscapes involve the incredibly rapid movement of global capital. Language is vital to information-based ‘New Capitalism’, which also relies upon hyper-commodification of language (Heller 2010) and ‘discourses of flexibility’ (Weiss 2000). Ethnoscapes involve flows of people, including immigrants, guest workers, refugees, tourists and the international elite. These large-scale movements include flows of linguistic repertoires and language ideologies, which both challenge and reinforce longstanding language attitudes and practices. Ideoscapes involve turbulent flows of state and counter-ideologies – including competing discourses of globalism as well as ideologies about language, identity and territory. Technoscapes, the rapid flows of new and old technologies, both shape and respond to financial flows and are tightly imbricated with mediascapes, the flow of information with increasingly blurred boundaries between news, politics and commodities. Language is clearly central to technoscapes and mediascapes, such as in transnational news (e.g. Al Jazeera, BBC, CNN), the discourse of international organisations (e.g. the United Nations, the European Union, Greenpeace) (Fairclough 2006), and the worldwide flow of popular culture (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010). In fact, to underscore the importance of linguistic/discursive practices in all five dimensions of globalisation, as well as the multi-centric flows of linguistic resources around the world, one may argue for a ‘sixth scape’: linguascape. (Blommaert [2010] similarly argues that language is intrinsic to globalisation.)
Globalism(s)

Globalisms are ‘ideologies that endow the concept of globalisation with particular values and meanings’ (Steger 2013, p. 104). Steger outlines three main types of globalism with specific political agendas that seek to shape the global imaginary and future conditions of globality: market globalism, justice globalism and religious globalism.

Religious globalisms are conservative ideologies that envision a single, all-encompassing religious community superseding all state and political structures. While many religions imagine a global unity, religious globalists are understood as extreme fundamentalists. For example, Al Qaeda’s discourse of jihad and umma presents an imagined global community in a struggle against market globalism (Steger 2013). In the United States, Fairclough (2006, 2009) sees an interaction between religious and market globalisms where the ‘War on Terror’ discourse combines with neo-liberal market discourse, thus ‘legitimising’ a continued US global hegemony.

Market globalism presents globalisation in reductive neo-liberal economic terms, equating it with trade liberalisation. This discourse is itself commodified such as in Business Week, The Economist, Financial Times and The Wall Street Journal (Steger 2013). Moreover, its iterative dissemination – in media, education, business, and government – forms a hegemonic ‘new order of discourse’ that idealises a world of consumerism and free markets (Fairclough 2009). This rhetoric of globalisation and competitiveness also absolves governments of responsibility to address structural problems of un/underemployment (Weiss & Wodak 2000). For example, Weiss describes a two-step, transformative argument in globalisation rhetoric. First, confidence in the deregulated financial market guides assessments of all national economic decisions; this is depoliticised by constructing global economic constraints as both necessary and beyond the nation-state’s control. Second, these constraints are rendered a virtue and all political action is directed towards meeting this economic framework via the ‘magic formula’ of ‘competitiveness and flexibility’ (Weiss 2000, p. 48). Globalisation rhetoric especially affects the unemployed who are seen as personally responsible for their plight, and advised to acquire flexible work skills as well as ‘flexible minds’ through life-long learning (Weiss 2000, p. 35). It also creates a milieu of instability and anxiety for all workers, and consequently disciplines the aims of workers and trade unions. Operating as a doxa (Bourdieu 1977), then, market globalism largely forecloses considerations of more humane forms of globalisation (Schirato & Webb 2003). However, the hegemony of an ideological discourse is never complete, which brings us to justice globalism.

Justice globalisms is defined in respect to citizens’ groups which have long striven for a central role in shaping the economic and political order (Smith 2008). Especially since the late 1990s, however, activists have mobilised to combat neo-liberal practices considered responsible for many of the world’s social, political, economic and environmental problems. In the dominant discourse of business, bureaucracies and media, these ‘anti-globalization’ efforts are repeatedly described as misinformed, disorganised and unrealistic (Schirato & Webb, 2003). However, while some activists focus on local communities and ‘de-globalization’ (Moghadam 2013), social-justice movements are largely efforts towards alternative forms of globalisation based on co-operation and inclusion, not economic competition (Smith 2008).

Justice globalism is evidenced in democracy movements, such as in the Arab Spring demonstrations, Taiwan’s Sunflower Movement and Hong Kong’s Umbrella Movement. It has also been central to Occupy Movements and anti-austerity protests around the world. For example, Martín Rojo (2014) analyses how the 15-M (or Indignados) movement both
drew upon and contributed to the discourse of the global justice movement (GJM) by promoting new understandings of politics, citizenship and the economy. Demanding ‘Real Democracy Now’ and marching under the slogan ‘We are not commodities in the hands of bankers and politicians’, activists occupied Puerta del Sol, Madrid’s central square, along with public spaces in other cities in Spain and Europe. Martín Rojo describes the emergence of ‘intertextual chains’ (from 2011 to 2013) expressing a solidarity with other protest movements and connecting with the GJM. The display of Arabic and Greek scripts indexed a solidarity with the Arab Spring democracy movements and anti-austerity protests in Greece. A trilingual, hand-made cardboard sign proclaimed ‘Truth is with Us’ and listed Tunisia, Egypt, Sahara, Palestine, Yemen and Spain – all in Spanish, English and Arabic. English expressions of ‘Stop New World Order’ and ‘People of Europe Rise Up!’ called for a new global economic order. The combined message of languages, scripts and symbols signalled a public recognition of diversity and ties across movements, potentially foreshadowing ‘another possible world’ (2014, p. 648).

‘Another World is Possible’ is, in fact, the central tenet of The World Social Forum (WSF), which organises an annual forum for tens of thousands of delegates from a broad range of civil organisations around the world. Held as a stark alternative to the elite capitalist World Economic Forum, the convention has been held annually since 2001 – in Brazil, India, Mali, Venezuela, Pakistan, Kenya, Tunisia, Senegal and Canada. It has also spawned many local, national, regional and online social forums. WSF is thus envisioned as:

an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth.

(World Social Forum 2016)

However, does the GJM have an ideological coherence, with practical alternatives to market globalism? Employing a ‘morphological discourse analysis’ of materials from 45 organisations associated with the WSF, Steger and Wilson argue that the GJM does have a ‘congealing political ideology’ with a ‘sophisticated alternative vision of global politics’ (2012, p. 440). This alternative vision brings us to our third term, ‘globality’.

**Globality/ies**

Whereas globalisation concerns complex, interpenetrated (yet disjunctive) social processes and globalisms entail ideologies shaping these processes, globalities are future social conditions of ever-tightening, global interconnections (Steger 2013). There are many possible globalities (Axford 2013), but two primary, opposing teleologies contrast a completely deregulated world economy versus ‘one driven by worldwide solidarity’ (Slembrouck 2011, p. 153). That is, do we imagine a social system of globality based primarily on ‘individualism, competition, and laissez-faire capitalism’ (and exploitation and environmental degradation), or one founded on ‘more communal and cooperative norms’ (Steger 2013, p. 9)?

In sum, distinguishing between processes of globalisation, globalisms and globalities helps address shortcomings common to discussions about globalisation. This approach can
also unmask ideologies driving neo-liberal global capitalism and encourage consideration of alternative ideologies towards building a more just social world.\textsuperscript{3} We now turn to the second main thread of this discussion, the globalisation and hegemonic positioning of certain ‘world languages’.

The globalisation of language

World languages (WLs)

According to Ethnologue, there are approximately 7,000 – albeit unevenly distributed – living languages.\textsuperscript{4} The 13 most commonly spoken languages – counting both ‘native and non-native speakers’ (NS and NNS) – are Mandarin, English, Hindi/Urdu, Spanish, Arabic, Malay/Indonesian, Bengali, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, French, German, and Italian.\textsuperscript{5} Yet, a WL is not determined by number of speakers alone. For instance, de Swaan (2001) provides a model in which languages are hierarchised by their ‘connectivity’, the number of other languages (and speakers) to which a single language is connected via multilingualism. English, with the highest direct connectivity, is the ‘hypercentral’ WL. There are 11 ‘supercentral’ languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Malay (Indonesian), Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Swahili – all but Swahili have over 100-million speakers. These 12 are joined by about 140 other ‘central’ languages which, together, are spoken by about 95 per cent of humankind. These languages are used in institutions and media, are usually national or official languages, and are highly standardised varieties.

Ammon (2010) ranks the ‘global reach’ of WLs by their key functions: (1) number of speakers (native and non-native); (2) official status (in countries and international organisations); (3) number of global companies using the language; and, importantly, (4) economic strength of native speakers. While English is the predominant WL, Ammon emphasises the persistent identity function of non-English languages and the plurality of WLs used in (mostly) bilateral contexts.

Seidlhofer (2011) agrees that English as an international language (EIL) is an unprecedented phenomenon superseding all WLs in domains of use and global coverage. However, because most English-as-a-lingua-franca (ELF) speakers are ‘non-native’, she argues that the status of EIL is not mainly due to the economic and political power of Anglophone nations, but rather to the global need for a lingua franca. She agrees, however, that users of ELF do not experience a threat to their cultural identities – because ELF is part of a multilingual diversity, not wedded to particular identity/ies (admittedly, however, ELF is linked to the colonial past and to global capitalism). Friedman observes an increase in alternative identifications based on immigrant status, regional location and indigenousness, as people search for more stable and rooted identifications; these ‘reconfigurations of identification’ are forming new hierarchical relations ‘reflected in ranked local usages of languages’ (2003, p. 744). Thus, despite nationalistic ‘language defender’ discourses, many scholars foresee little likelihood of shifting from individual/societal multilingualism to Global English only. However, ‘all multilingualisms are not considered equal’ in our globalising world.

Globalisation and differential multilingualism

In Europe, Gal (2010) observes a shift in the language regime – from ‘coercive monolingualism’ to ‘coercive multilingualism’. This valorisation of multilingualism is due to the
need for a ‘knowledge society’ and to democratic efforts recognising regional languages and conditions of superdiversity. However, Zappettini (2014) sees a heterogeneity in official discourses on multilingualism, with tensions between ongoing reifications of language and static national identities (Europe as a ‘sum of its parts’) versus languages as new, post-national commodified entities dissociated from identities.

Not surprisingly, different multilingual repertoires are not equally valued – what we might term ‘differential multilingualism(s)’. Gal (2010) notes pan-European elite status is usually indexed via proficiency in English, French/German and another language. Wodak, Krzyżanowski and Forchtner (2012) observe that in EU institutions, multilingualism is interactionally situated, with context-dependent factors shaping an individual’s ‘performing multilingualism’. Sometimes, more prestigious languages (i.e. English, French, German) are used as a strategy of ‘hegemonic multilingualism’ for setting meeting agendas and managing interactions between participants (who may speak any of the 23 official EU languages). At other times, the goal of efficient communication determines which linguistic resources to use, regardless of a language’s relative prestige. Blommaert argues against traditional views of multilingualism altogether (as a co-ordinated use of separate ‘languages’), proposing instead the notion of ‘truncated multilingualism’, with speakers drawing upon ‘a complex of specific semiotic resources [accents, varieties, registers, genres, modalities], some of which belong to a conventionally defined “language”, while others belong to another “language”’ (2010, p. 102). Truncated multilingualisms are also not valued equally across contexts (linguistic markets); thus, in the unequal world of contemporary globalisation, some linguistic resources have much greater ‘semiotic mobility’ than others (2010, p. 3).

Thus, local, regional and global language ecologies are deeply dynamic. The complexity of these ecologies is evidenced in language and globalisation scholars’ divergent viewpoints, often summarised using Held et al.’s (1999) typology: hyperglobalists, who focus on global linguistic imperialism and concerns of linguistic homogenisation; sceptics, who observe ongoing processes of linguistic localisation and heterogenisation (language variation and speciation); and transformationalists, who emphasise new, glocalised language mixing (linguistic hybridisation) such that traditional notions of ‘bounded language and bounded culture’ should be completely refashioned (James 2009; Pennycook 2011).

**The hyperglobalists: homogenising WLs?**

Despite widespread societal and individual multilingualism, hyperglobalists see the hegemonic spread of English as a homogenising force. The optimistic branch envisions the widespread use of ELF as marching towards the near-utopic development of a Global English ‘in which intelligibility and identity happily coexist’ (Crystal 2003, p. 22). The more pessimistic branch holds a linguistic imperialism viewpoint, seeing the spread of Global English (especially American English) and Anglophone market globalism as forcing linguistic and cultural homogenisation (Phillipson 1992). Some describe Global English as a ‘killer language’ responsible for the rapid disappearance of many of the world’s languages (Skutnabb-Kangas 2003).

It is true that the world’s languages are disappearing at an alarming rate. With one language ‘dying’ every two weeks on average, linguists estimate that 50 to 90 per cent will no longer be spoken within a hundred years. However, while English did largely supplant indigenous and immigrant languages in settler colonies, such as the US and Australia, it is questionable whether the use of English as a WL is exerting direct pressure on indigenous languages elsewhere. Mufwene (2010) asserts that a widespread shift to English, and
consequent loss of indigenous languages, is not highly likely to occur in former British exploitation colonies, especially in Africa. Rather than experiencing pressures from WLs, ethnic vernaculars are primarily experiencing language-shift pressure from urban vernaculars and regional lingua francas, such as Lingala in the Democratic Republics of Congo, Swahili in East Africa and Town Bemba in Zambia (Mufwene, 2006). In Spanish-speaking Latin America, we see similar processes even in places with much ELF-based tourism, such as in Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca, Mexico, where many children are shifting from Zapotec to Spanish.

**The sceptics: heterogeneous, localising language processes (language variation and linguistic speciation)**

Rather than anticipating the emergence of a homogeneous Global English, this camp focuses on World Englishes (WEs), locally indigenised varieties that are important for national or regional identifications and are ‘languages in their own right’ and ‘testimony to a healthy – Anglophone – glossodiversity’ (James 2009, p. 85). These linguists note there has always been language spread and language contact, language death and language birth, as well as historical moments in which a dominant lingua franca stretched across vast expanses of territory, such as Latin during the time of the Roman Empire, Arabic throughout the vast Islamic Arabic Empire of the eighth century, and written Chinese (pre-classical, classical and post-classical) during many dynasties in China. And, just as Latin indigenised into new vernaculars (varieties of which were later ‘standardised’ as national languages), WEs will likely continue to diverge (Crystal 2003). Thus, ‘[r]ather than driving the world towards monolingualism, the differential evolution of English appears to be substituting a new form of diversity for an older one’; that is, we are likely witnessing language birth as well as death (Mufwene 2010, p. 50). Some scholars tend to celebrate the plurality of WEs. However, these varieties co-exist in unequal, hierarchical relationships (Tupas 2015), in part because ‘native Englishes’ (where people of European descent are the majority) are legitimised over ‘indigenized Englishes’ in non-European descent environs (Mufwene 2010).

**The transformationalists: a call for new understandings of language, culture and identity**

Transformationalist sociolinguists also emphasise the localising processes of language spread. However, with the acceleration of linguistic diversity, multilingualism and (non-standard) language mixing in ‘glocalised’ linguistic repertoires, these scholars apprehend a historical disjuncture in language spread and practices. Rather than presuming homogeneity, stability and boundedness of languages and speakers, transformationalists emphasise an unprecedented degree of linguistic hybridisation, and argue for a paradigm shift in a sociolinguistics of globalisation that takes as a starting point the conditions of ‘superdiversity’ (Blommaert 2010). This brings us to the chapter’s remaining thread, examining linguistic practices in specific – globally influenced but locally grounded – contexts.

**Linguistic repertoires (and hierarchies) in glocalised contexts**

Depending upon interactional contexts, language mixing has been labelled as ‘heteroglossia’ (Bakhtin 1981), ‘translanguaging’ (Creese & Blackledge 2010), ‘translingual practices’ (Canagarajah 2013), ‘transidiomaticity’ (Jacquemet 2005), ‘supervernaculars’ (Blommaert...
2012), ‘language crossing’ (Rampton 1995), ‘polylingualism’ (Jørgensen 2008) and ‘metrolingualism’ (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010). While some scholars examine linguistic hybridity in educational and other institutional settings, much work focuses on linguistic creativity (particularly by youth) in ‘recreational, artistic and/or oppositional contexts’ (Blommaert & Rampton 2012, p. 15).

One notable multi-centric flow is that of Global Hip-Hop, which, via ‘Hip-Hop indigenization’, is paradigmatic of the dialectic of ‘cultural globalization’ and ‘cultural localization’ (Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycook 2009). For example, Auzanneau (2002) describes the linguistic bricolage in the Libreville, Gabon rap scene wherein artists mix French (exonormative and endonormative forms, verlan and slang), local languages such as Téké and Fang, and English (standard and African-American vernacular). Hybrid practices vary widely in lexical and code choice as these are made consciously to suit an artist’s particular stylisation and situational identification, as well as the poetics and theme of the song. As one example, the lyrics of ‘To Kill La Wana’, by Siya Po’ossi X, combine (1) Fang, (2) standard urban African-French, (3) non-standard French (slang from France and from local coinage), and (4) a little English, as illustrated in these lines:

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Voici le quartier pourri, tard le soir, minuit (standard French; setting the scene)
L.B.V. by night (English; ‘LBV’ for Libreville; setting the scene)
Les bizz en patrouille (‘The bizz on patrol’, French slang = ‘police’ from Fang biz ma)
Djogué me za bîme wa (‘Clear out or I’ll punch you’, Fang)
J’emprunte un taxi (‘I jump a taxi’; taxi = French slang: drops final and resuffixes)
(‘To Kill La Wana’ by Siya Po’ossi X 1997)
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Combined, these practices signify an identification with a dynamic culture métissée, mixing traditional Gabonese and Western elements, while simultaneously differentiating from both traditional society and the dominance of Western societies. The creative use of vernacular languages and ‘relexified’ French indexes a rooted, urban Gabonese authenticity, simultaneously revalorising these languages in the (g)local hierarchy where standard French is the national language and accepted linguistic norm.

In Nigeria, Inyabri (2016) notes a similar function of linguistic stylisation in Naija Afro Hip-Hop. For example, in the song ‘Owusagi’, the artist, Wizboy, mixes Igbo (standard and slang), standard Nigerian English, Nigerian Pidgin English and ‘core slang’ from Nigeria’s Eastern state, Anambra. This linguistic bricolage indexes the artist’s hyperlocal authenticity, as well as a pan-Nigerian identity that resists ‘the linguistic (“English-as-a-second-language”) hegemony of the establishment’ (2016, p. 101). Such glocalised practices mark African Hip-Hop as both part of and distinctive from other Global Hip-Hop cultures.

Besnier’s (2003) study of the linguistic repertoires of Tonga’s socio-economically marginalised, transgendered Leitū provides another example of ‘translocalization’. Despite their rather limited English proficiency, Leitū mix English and Tongan to assert their authenticity as (trans)local Tongans, claim a sophisticated cosmopolitan distinctiveness, and index their femininity and transgendered identity. However, mainstream Tongans interpret Leitūs’ limited English proficiency as confirmation that they are ‘fake’ – as women, speakers of English and cosmopolitans – which reinforces Leitū marginalisation. For example, during the annual Leitū ‘Miss Galaxy’ beauty pageant, if a contestant speaks in fluent Tongan, she is ridiculed for not using English – the language indexing translocality and femininity. But if she stumbles when searching for a word in English, she is mocked and laughed off the stage for having exposed her ‘inauthenticity’.

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While creative, hybrid linguistic practices are often exercised by youth cultures and marginalised groups as resistance to hegemonic hierarchies, studies such as Besnier’s reveal the limitations of these strategies in bringing about more equitable structural conditions. In addition, especially in globalised business and institution settings where language is viewed as a flexible commodity, Hall (2014) notes that transnational subjects often experience linguistic anxiety; instead of embracing linguistic hybridity, they seek ‘semiotic stability’, viewing language as rooted in communal identity.

This discussion reveals several key points regarding language and globalisation/glocalisation. One concerns a heated friction between our late modern condition of highly porous boundaries of territory, language and identity versus enduring ideological constructs of their fixity and boundedness. Another point is that linguistic repertoires are ascribed different value (socially, politically, economically) according to the particular, scaled linguistic market(s) in which they are situated. A closely related point is that New Capitalism features an intensified, restructured commodification of language, with language circulating as a ‘resource’ in a globalised ‘linguistic market’, with unequal networks and power relations preserving the position of the elites (Heller 2010). These linguistic issues have serious social consequences throughout the world and highlight the need for a more concerted language and globalisation social-justice movement – a point to which we now turn.

Mobilities, human rights, and social inclusion: time for a Language and Globalisation Social Justice Movement (LG-SJM)

According to the World Bank, in 2015, there were over 250 million international migrants worldwide (the vast majority of employment age) and about 20 million refugees. Additionally, there was a record high of 1.184 billion international tourists. Clearly Appadurai’s (1990) ethnoscape continues to be a central dimension of globalisation. Thus, many sociolinguists of globalisation emphasise that we are living in a time of unprecedented superdiversity (e.g. Blommaert & Rampton 2012), conditions which raises issues about evaluations of linguistic practices in a broad range of contexts including human rights, transnational migration and employment.

For example, when evaluating asylum seekers’ narratives, officials and consultants often use a ‘Language analysis for the determination of origin’ (LADO) assessment. These frequently entail ‘folk linguistic belief and prescriptivism’ for determining a person’s linguistic ‘authenticity’ (Eades 2010) and are ‘fraught with unexamined assumptions about language, national identity, and communicative competence’ (Jacquemet 2009, p. 525). Forensic linguists thus advocate for more sophisticated analyses of asylum seekers’ ways of speaking, which take into account porous borders, language variation, and – especially for those with traumatic life histories – the likelihood of more fractured language socialisation and truncated linguistic repertoires. In one case, Blommaert (2009) argues that an asylum seeker was likely misevaluated by the UK Home Office as not ‘Rwandan’ because of his ‘abnormal’ linguistic repertoire. The Home Office held the modernist view that all Rwandans should be proficient in the national languages, Kinyarwanda and French. However, ‘Joseph’ had no formal education, had lived a marginalised existence in several super-diverse areas and had consequently developed a truncated multilingualism. Blommaert cogently argues that, because his truncated multilingualism supports his life narrative of enduring ethnic strife, war and genocide, Joseph likely was a Rwandan refugee.

Linguists have tried to address government agencies’ (mis)use of language analysis to determine country of origin. In June 2004, an international group of linguists drafted a set of
Language and globalisation guidelines for governments and agencies to consider when conducting LADO assessments. These guidelines were endorsed by professional organisations, including the British Association for Applied Linguistics and the International Association of Forensic Linguists. Unfortunately, neither the UK Home Office nor Sprakab – a Swedish company that provides linguistic analysis services to that office as well as the governments of Canada, Australia and the Netherlands – follow these guidelines (Maniar 2014).

Language proficiency also serves as a gatekeeper for employment for migrants. However, even when migrants have a high level of proficiency in a ‘host country’s language(s)’, there are often penalties for a perceived lack of ‘legitimate’ communicative competence (Bourdieu 1991). This point is evidenced in many employment contexts which have an ‘accent ceiling’ effect whereby linguistic discrimination serves as a proxy for other forms of discrimination (Piller & Takahashi 2011). It is also at play when migrant applicants experience a ‘linguistic penalty’ when striving to convey the equivalence of their foreign work experience during job interviews that follow strict, standardised formats in the name of ‘equality’ (Roberts 2012).

With the flow of humans, issues of language proficiency and communicative competencies will continue to inhere within a broad range of human-rights’ contexts, including asylum hearings, health services, educational opportunities, employment equity and occupational safety, social, economic and political integration, and legal protection. Unfortunately, market globalism largely places the burden of adjustment, linguistic and otherwise, on disadvantaged individuals (e.g. immigrants, service workers in tourism, sex workers) as well as on the global South (e.g. English language education in the Philippines to train overseas Filipino workers, which comprise 10 per cent of the national population; Tupas 2008).

A central question, then, concerns whether or not receiving locales (towns/cities, provinces/states, countries, federations), which for the most part need immigrant labour (and taxes) and tourist expenditures, should share the ‘communicative burden’ of human mobility (Piller & Takahashi 2011). For example, some locales (governments; NGOs) provide free language and/or health education for migrants, such as Australia’s federally funded Adult Migrant Education Program (Piller & Takahashi 2011) and Taiwan’s distribution of multilingual health literacy materials for new immigrants (Yen & Wu 2014). Another example is that of the ‘AMES Australia’ non-profit programme, which encourages everyone – the community, business and government, as well as new arrivals – to make necessary adjustments in language training, intercultural pragmatics, employment and social support (Piller & Takahashi 2010). A third example is that of EMPOWER, a non-profit organisation in Thailand organised by and for migrant sex workers (and other activists), whose educational centres offer free classes in language, mental and physical health, law and pre-college education, as well as research programmes on human trafficking.

Although not a panacea for all language and human-rights issues, these programmes can provide inspiration for developing a broader justice-globalism approach towards these challenges. There is no doubt that many critical scholars in discourse studies, linguistic ethnography and sociolinguistics are dedicated to promoting social justice. However, a pressing question is, ‘can we do more towards building a language and globalisation social justice movement’ (LG-SJM)? This is not to discount the efforts by those working on social-justice issues, such as endeavours documented by the Language on the Move research site devoted to multilingualism, language learning and intercultural communication in a transnational world and focuses on ways in which ‘language intersects with consumerism, family life, globalisation, tourism, identity, migration and social justice.’ Other efforts include the (still-developing) Society for Linguistic Anthropology’s Committee on Language and Social Justice, as well as the Language & Asylum Research Group site.
(unfortunately no longer updated). Although we face the common challenges of limited time and resources, there is a clear need for critical scholars and other activists to expand the scope and efficacy of their efforts through a more co-ordinated LG-SJM. Ideally, this movement would join the vibrant ‘network of networks’ and ‘movements of movements’ of the GJM, working together to promote sustainable, social-justice alternatives for our globalising world.

Concluding comments

Much more could be said about the complexity of language and globalisation in the contexts discussed thus far, as well as about language in many other domains, such as education, the environment, new and traditional media, the military, politics, religion and tourism (e.g. Blommaert 2010; Coupland 2010; Piller 2016). For all contexts, it is perhaps best to think of contemporary globalisation in terms of both continuity and change, with ongoing, multi-scalar tensions between centrifugal and centripetal forces resulting in contestations of authenticity, legitimacy and belonging. Regarding language ideologies, we must continue to argue against enduring Herderian, (ethno)nationalistic ideologies which promote a fixed, triadic relationship between language, people and territory – and argue for a recognition of the communicative validity (as well as brilliant creativity) of different multilingualisms and linguistic hybridisations, and the particular identifications that these afford. Nevertheless, we should acknowledge that some feel a legitimate need for more semiotic stability, for a degree of boundedness of ‘language’ and of ‘identity’ in our world of disjunctive flows. These differing needs will continue as dialectical tensions, and should be evaluated according to particular contexts.

Overall, we should consider the importance of the linguascape to contemporary globalisation. Discourses of globalisation must be critically examined to unmask ways in which market globalism naturalises a world of increasing socio-economic inequities; alternative discourses of justice globalism should be supported as these strive for a more equitable, interconnected world. As for the globalisation of language, we must recognise that a more just, interconnected world will likely rely upon WLs and multilingualism; nevertheless, efforts can be made to stem the hegemony of particular languages as well as to (re)valorise indigenous language varieties and multilingualisms whose value is restricted to limited linguistic markets. And despite the power of language hierarchies and ‘ideologies of boundedness’ – or rather, because of these – we should persist in advocating an alternative politics of language that takes into account the many complexities of diverse, and yet locally situated, linguistic practices. Such strategies are called for in this world of contemporary globalisation which is both ‘contingent and contradictory’; which both universalises and particularises; which both fragments and integrates; and which engenders co-operation as well as conflict (Held et al. 1999, p. 14).

Notes

While Blommaert (2010) lauds Fairclough’s (2006) focus on discourse (rather than ‘language’) in discussing globalisation, he soundly critiques Fairclough’s ‘theoretically flawed’ timeframe of globalization and ‘de-historicized’ Critical Discourse Analysis of documents concerning education reform in Romania. There are strengths and limitations to both scholars’ approaches to language and globalisation. My focus, here, concerns the importance of terminology in understanding processes, discourses, and conditions of ‘globalisation,’ including that ‘(market) globalism’ naturalises/legitimises neo-liberal economic globalisation as necessary and beneficial.
3 There are, of course, other approaches to understanding the complexities of current-day globalisation. Beck, for example, distinguishes between globalisation and cosmopolitanisation. While often equating ‘globalisation’ with economic globalisation (promoted by ‘globalism’ 2006), he has acknowledged political and cultural dimensions (Beck & Grande 2010). His work, however, emphasizes cosmopolitanisation (Beck & Grande 2010, p. 417) and distinguishes between two dimensions of cosmopolitanism: (1) ‘cosmopolitan imperatives’ to address global risks, and (2) a cosmopolitanism of diversity or dynamic intermingling of different modernities. While space precludes addressing cosmopolitan theorisations, this paper generally aligns with Beck and Grande’s discussion, such as by discussing the cosmopolitan imperative of language-related justice issues and arguing for a cosmopolitan acceptance of dynamic language practices.
4 Available from: www.ethnologue.com. Counting languages and their speakers is a highly problematic task. Linguists estimate between 5,000 and 7,000 living languages worldwide; Ethnologue estimates 7,102.
5 Arabic, Chinese, and, arguably, Malay/Indonesian may be understood as ‘macrolanguages’ comprised of closely related varieties without a high degree of mutual intelligibility, yet speakers share a single language identity and a domain such as ethnicity or religion (and script).
8 Czaika & de Haas dispute that there has been ‘a global increase in volume, diversity, and geographical scope of migration’; rather, there is a directional shift with migrants coming from an ‘increasingly diverse array of non-European-origin countries concentrating in a shrinking pool of prime destination countries’– the US, Germany, France, Canada, Australia and the Gulf countries (2015, p. 283); thus, the notion of ‘superdiversity’ may largely be a Eurocentric worldview. This can have serious social justice consequences by marking immigrants and refugees as ‘deviating’ from an imaginary ‘non-diverse’ norm (Piller 2016).
12 Available from: http://linguisticanthropology.org/socialjustice/.

References


References


References


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