From multilingual classification to translingual ontology: concluding commentary

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Abstract
This paper presents extensive commentaries and reflections on most of the papers in this special issue (with the exception of Arnaut's contribution) as well as in the previous *Language and Superdiversities* special issue (*Diversities* 13/2). The papers of David Parkin and Karel Arnaut are both attempts to device new frames of reference for the sociolinguistic study of super-diversity. Here Parkin argues that the use of semiotic resources does not unambiguously classify social strata and ethnic groups but creates and draws from communicative outlines that cut across them and blur their contours. This has two consequences. One is that contemporary polylanguaging is an ontological act on the part of speakers to empower themselves or to project a desired or appropriate personal image, perhaps in accordance with some kind of network membership but not tied to a domain or topic in the broader sense given above. The other is that this creation of identity is through semiotic stylisation, which by nonstandard means projects new identities or reinforces existing ones.

Superdiversity and language

In addressing the issue of 'superdiversity' as defined by Vertovec (2007), these papers indirectly address an historical turning point. The late nineteen eighties and early nineteen nineties saw major geo-political changes coinciding with those of rapid communications technology and the maturing of the digital age. There was the fall of the Berlin war in 1989, which Ernest Gellner called the most momentous occasion since the French revolution; the ensuing collapse of communism; its conversion to a new kind of capitalism in China following that country's reforms of the 1980s; the remarkably swift effect of India's own economic reforms; and the ending of apartheid in South Africa. That these politico-economic events occurred within a few years of each other is a good illustration of the knock-on effects of crises in relation to each other. Not necessarily related, at least in the first instance, was the way in which an already slowly growing globalisation following the second world war was further helped through increasing use of mobile phones and the internet, a change that has since been accelerated at a pace and to a geographic extent that leaves us bewildered in the very moment of experiencing it. The so-called 'Arab Spring' of 2011 is surely a precursor of more of the like to come, as are the burgeoning new patterns of international population movement, with new, smaller and more ethno-culturally diverse groups of migrants caulked upon earlier, long-standing migratory patterns. It is surely indisputable that national boundaries, for all the attempts of powerful nations to patrol them, are becoming more porous. They are part of a global demographic shift in the making, punctuated no

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doubt by savage curbs but redefining ineluctably and irreversibly the very idea of a self-recognising population.

It is true that prior to the late nineteen eighties there was already a speed of communication and contact that made it feasible to speak of a new kind of globalisation different in these respects from any predecessors. But in this earlier globalisation politico-economic and socio-cultural diversity were seen as made up of supposedly discrete elements brought together in conjunction and not yet so merged as to lose their respective remembered lines of differentiation. The diversity then was really that of parallelisms and pluralities. Ethnic pluralism, cultural pluralism, medical pluralism and linguistic pluralism referred in liberal quarters to the side-by-side relations of distinctive entities or knowledges that were encouraged to celebrate their distinctiveness and, despite real differences between them of power, privilege and resources, to take their place as equals before each other. Ideologies cannot last for long without material or substantive reinforcement and, cross-cut by increasing inequalities, the ideal-based pluralisms gave way at their edges to fuzzy boundaries or no boundaries at all.

As I understand it, the concept of super-diversity tries to capture the implications of this alleged development from the co-existing, side-to-side (and sometimes back-to-back) relations of relatively bounded entities to the reverberative, criss-crossing and subdivision of different parts of these entities. In the field of linguistic ethnography, the latter is a process that Rampton (1995; 2010) has called crossover speech or crossing, in which a range of diverse linguistic particles are borrowed, transformed, returned and employed as communicative 'resources', to use the notion much evident in many papers of this and the previous special issue and which I examine below. The resources make up what Blommaert (2011) calls a speech 'repertoire' and which are deployed in what Jørgensen and others (2011) call 'polylanguaging' and Creese and Blackledge (2010) refer to as 'translanguaging'. The key position adopted by the group authoring these papers is that such processes are more than just code-switching. To coin a phrase, everyday speech is becoming more and more a matter of constant polythetic classication with social impact, as speakers juggle the limits of face-to-face intelligibility at any one time with new styles of expression made up of ever changing linguistic resources. Varis and Xuan (2011) similarly talk of a struggle between semiotic creativity and normativity. As Rampton showed for urban Britain, ethnicity from the 1980s and 1990s began to lose its predominance as a driver of youth speech in favour of social class and the crossing of different speech 'styles', a class-based heteroglossic vernacular which seems to have lasted into some speakers' middle age and is not just a cyclical generational characteristic (Rampton 2006; 2011).

So what is the difference between this new theoretical position and, say, early 1960/1970s descriptions by Joshua Fishman (1966; 1971) of 'language shift, maintenance and stabililty' and the code-switching studied by such as John Gumperz (1961;1982) and Dell Hymes (1962) as part of an 'ethnography of speaking'?

From multilingual classification to ontology

One difference between crossover speech and code-switching (seen as speech alternating within single sentences between use of morphemes recognisable as deriving from different languages) is of focus. Rampton liked my suggestion (in an email communication) that, while the earlier studies of detailed cases of code-switching could be called micro-sociolinguistics, his and his colleagues' approach was that of nano-sociolinguistics. It is concerned with conversation analysis (CA), whose constituent features are smaller than those making up codes and require longer within any stretch to decipher. The suggestion was made in jest but underlines a tendency and perhaps a need, given the greater complexity of superdiversity, to analyse minute fractions of the borrowings and exchanges characteristic of much speech in late modern urban settings.

This perspective is a methodological response to the new and more varied population and linguistics flows whose intermingling of boundaries and identities invites a closer look at how

elements of a communicative act cohere. Language ideology, its forms, and the way these are expressed in social interaction constitute a three-part interrelationship (some would say dialectic). Thinking of this interrelationship as a triangle (see e.g. Hanks 1996:230), we can say that it has been stretched into more triangular shapes than was the case before the polycentric normative effects of modern superdiversity. Wide differences among interlocutors as to the relative value, modes of articulation and interpersonal relevance of particular speech features need not nowadays seem to be a 'foreign' incursion into a 'mainstream' speech variety but can be thought of as belonging within a broad notion of 'normality'.

For example, Rampton (forthcoming) examined the speech of a man who only started speaking English in the UK as an adult. He showed that the man's 'learned' English unconventionally combined features which were however spread among other speakers who would not be regarded as learners. The point is that it is nowadays harder to separate as a category those who have learned English as a second language from other speakers, because these other speakers may also use such combinations in English as a first language. They are together making use of the variety of language resources available through superdiversity.

Consider not only Rampton's examples but also those of Jørgensen et al (2011) in their analysis of the deployment of fractional features. In one of their cases, overlapping features of standard Danish, youth Danish, English, Spanish, Turkish and Arabic are used by three Copenhagen girls in the space of just a few exchanges of conversation. As in youth language generally such features are adopted rapidly (and in some cases discarded swiftly), many of them stylised for effect, a development to which I return below. It is difficult consistently to attribute the variable use of these features to changing topics or conversational domains.

Gumperz and some of his colleagues acknowledged this in the nineteen seventies. On the one hand, drawing on his earlier work, Gumperz recognised that there were occasions when a particular speech variety and a particular social event or setting would go together and that a change in the language or variety might change the socal setting and vice versa (Blom and Gumperz 1970; Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez 1972). On the other hand, he also provided contrary instances of conversational code-switching between words of English and Spanish where such close correlations did not apply nor could be predicted. He showed moreover that switching between codes or varieties did more than communicate the meaning of the particular words used but also metaphorically drew on the social associations each variety might have – to articulate a particular speech variety was to take on some of the stereotypical social characteristics of its speakers. Gumperz here took a step in a movement away from classification, and nowadays this is even greater. As represented in the current papers, the features making up codes can no longer be regarded as unambiguously belonging to particular languages, for they are imperceptibly merged with other features of different provenances and do not alter by topic

Fishman's interest was more macroscopic than the later Gumpez and was tied to the idea of a language as belonging to a group whose speakers would each share a loyalty to their distinctive language (Parkin 1974; Spotti 2011). He described language shift and stability. This illustrates the most obvious case of languages seen as relatively bounded entities subject to change from contact with others or able to withstand such change or, as in some of Fishman's examples, incorporating some changes while preserving an 'original' essence. Fishman's recorded material, especially on the relation in urban United States between Spanish and English, is exemplary and did indeed at that time suggest both an ideological and practiced distinctiveness of two languages seen analytically as well as indigenously separable, a distinctiveness that then, as now, has ideological-cum-political significance in defining acceptable citizenship. It is a view of integrated speech, in Jørgensen's terms (2011), in which a noticeable degree of language distinctiveness is maintained, and which educators and policy makers assume is 'natural'.

So, just as the world has allegedly undergone the transition within a generation from (urban) diversity to superdiversity as a result of historical developments, is there a commensurately different linguistic horizon today in much of the world from that which existed in, say, the 1960s and 1970s, to say nothing of even earlier periods?

It would be indulgent to dwell long on one's own researches at that time in the cities of Nairobi in Kenya and Kampala, Uganda. But it should be mentioned that migration to each city, as in many African cities consequent on the expulsion in the early 1960s of French, British and Belgian colonialism (Portugese fifteen years later), consisted heavily of new migrants from rural areas many of which were, if not monoglot, at least defined in terms of a self-perceived single 'mother tongue' vernacular hedged around with other languages used at trading centres and markets. Nairobi under the British, after all, discouraged Africans from becoming permanent residents in the city and so urban ethno-linguistic admixture was small compared with today. A non-colonial 'traditional' city like Kampala was, by contrast, already ethnically and linguistically mixed, though even there LuGanda, the language of the dominant BuGanda kingdom, was seen by everyone as the ideological standard to which one should aspire if one wanted the benefits of Ganda 'citizenship'. But it was the British and other imperialists of Africa who insisted on falsely demarcating peoples as unambiguously belonging to 'tribes'. It was false because pre-colonial movement, trade, inter-marriage and alliances had precluded set boundaries and borders (Southall 1970). But in imposing them, the imperialists in fact created a sense of bounded ethno-linguistic distinctiveness which became partially reinforced in practice and has become the bane of modern national politics.

The colonial project of ethno-linguistic essentialisation did not in practice curb language mixing, and indeed studies were made of it in Nairobi and Kampala (Parkin 1971 and 1974). But colonial essentialising did foster an ideological view on the part of African speakers of the coexistence of not just ethnic groups but also languages as discrete entities which could be found in allegedly 'pure' form somewhere, perhaps in a notional rural heartland. There was, in other words, the coexistence of, on one hand, an ideology of linguistic pluralism and individual purity, and on the other hand, increasing heteroglossia, especially with greater urban migration. Such language mixing may indeed be said now to have grown more complex in conjunction with denser urban settlement, and yet still juxtaposed to colonially derived ideas of language separateness and purity. The two, language ideologies of purity, and crossover talk, continue today, reflecting a similar duality in Europe.

Pre-colonial extensive African networks of trade, political absorption, movement to new farming, pastoral and hunting land, and intermarriage did spread the use of a number of vernaculars. To that extent there was some indigenous linguistic diversity. But it was hardly on the scale of modern superdiversity. For, by the latter, we understand the situation in late modern urban settings, and, with predictions that the majority of the world's population will be living in cities by about 2025, there clearly has been a qualitative shift. More research on older archives and records is needed to say more about this shift and to compare earlier with present periods.

Underlying such history of apparent polylingual change, is a theoretical distinction. In the English language we can interrogate the verb, 'identify', with reference to the ways in which allegedly different speech varieties are classified and have effect on social relations. For a speaker to identify a speech variety as different from others is to classify it as one might an object. The act sets up a classificatory grid which is ideological insofar as it is based on a perception and claim which may depart from the fact that the variety is not really that neatly distinctive of others and in some respects overlaps with them. By contrast, for a speaker to identify *with* a speech variety is to embody it or, perhaps, to be embodied by it, with echoes of empathy and Levy-Bruhl's notion of '*participation'* by which the speaker and the variety share in each other's being: I do not just speak it, for it is part of my being even when I do

not speak it. To identify *with* is then ontological and not just classificatory.

I raise this distinction because I have the impression that earlier sociolinguistics tended towards the 'objective' classification of speech varieties and their social and conceptual correlates. A primary task was to show how speakers make, or are induced to make, choices as between varieties or registers according to the socio-cultural domain in which they are operating or the topic on which they are speaking. As mentioned above, the later Gumperz was different in that his approach to metaphorical code-switching understood varieties as coming from different settings and informing speakers with identities built on such variation. It was to that extent moving towards a view of conversations as ontological processes and not just one of speakers collectively classifying and being classified by the languages around them. The papers in this issue are in part heirs to Gumperz but go further and strongly depict the use of not just spoken language but also other semiotic resources (text, visual, dress, music). Their usage is seen as intrinsic to and part of the migratory and social superdiversity that for at least a generation characterises cities.

I deal with the notion of semiotic resources in more detail below. But I should here briefly note that it is different from the notion of urban language resources as used in the late 1960s in Nairobi by Parkin (1974) who explicitly adopted a transactionalist market model in which sellers and buyers of different, unambiguously defined ethnic groups at a market made challenges and concessions to each other by including parts of each other's language in a game to gain custom or a lower price. The resources were seen as directly deriving from ethnic languages whose boundaries were maintained despite the reciprocal borrowing in the market transactions. It was a view of resources in the economic sense and of ethnic groups regarded by townsfolk as distinctive of each other. The classificatory predominated over the ontological, with only strains of the latter identified (e.g. Parkin 1971).

The semiotic creation of identity

Use of semiotic resources in the current and the previous special issue *Language and Superdiversities* does not unambiguously classify social strata and ethnic groups but creates and draws from communicative outlines that cut across them and blur their contours. I contend that the papers address two consequences. One is that contemporary polylanguaging is an ontological act on the part of speakers to empower themselves or to project a desired or appropriate personal image, perhaps in accordance with some kind of network membership but not tied to a domain or topic in the broader sense given above. The other is that this creation of identity is through semiotic stylisation, which by non-standard means projects new identities or reinforces existing ones, sometimes allowing change from one to the other.

The distinction between the earlier tendency to classify on the basis of language varieties and the current concern to show individuals' ontological and stylistic deployment of semiotic resources is not watertight. But it does seem to constitute a broad if overlapping shift. Referring again to John Gumperz, Levinson says Gumperz in his early days was 'interested in how social groups express and maintain their otherness in complex societies. Gumperz started as a dialectologist interested in tracking down the forces of standardization and particularly those of differentiation, and it was the search for where these forces are located that has led him inexorably from the macrosociological to the microconversational perspective; it was a long journey from the study of regional standards, to ethnic groups, to social networks, to the activation of social boundaries in verbal interaction, to discourse strategies' (Levinson 1997:1; and see Gumperz 1982; 1984). Levinson points out that Gumperz's later work on code-switching tried to reconcile the macro- (the group classification effect) with the micro- (the discursively strategic) through analysis of the individual speaker. He also wanted to explain how a speaker's utterance could be interpreted in different and sometimes conflicting ways among interlocutors depending on their own respective backgrounds. In this

attempt, he turned to 'the careful analysis of prosody, the neglected acoustic cues that might help to explain how we can possibly mean so much by uttering so little' (Levinson *ibid*). I recall Gumperz in London in the 1980s describing how the distinctive prosody of immigrant South Asian bus conductors in speaking to passengers sometimes came across as impolite and even hostile, marking and so making them different from the indigenous 'mainstream'. They were regarded as not just different speakers of English but as different persons of different behavioural disposition (personal communication).

A recent example of how the ontological may be at the root of misunderstood polylanguaging is provided by Blommaert (2011). He shows how, in the United Kingdom, an asylum seeker claiming Rwandan nationality did not speak Rwandan (KiNyaRwanda or OruNyaRwanda) as his first language. For a person not to know well the language of their official nationality is quite common in that region of east-central Africa where wars and drastic population displacement have thrust people into numerous speech enclaves away from their or their parents' natal origin, often to the detriment of any so-called 'mother tongue', to use that Eurocentric misnomer. The British home office rejected the application on the grounds that a person must have an original nationality and should therefore be able to speak the language of that nationality. In this case a man's alleged mother tongue should not only define his very being, its apparent absence disqualifies him from acceptable being, a classic case of the 'methodological nationalism' (where the modern nation, state, society or ethnic group is regarded as the natural analytical or investigative starting-point) that is critiqued by several papers in this issue.

Let me give some examples of the ontological turn in linguistic ethnography from the papers in this issue. Following on from the case of the Rwandan refugee in the United Kingdom described by Blommaert, Spotti (2011) continues the theme by showing how immigration authorities (as with other European states) test immigrants' knowledge of the host language, Dutch, as a major criterion of admission to the Netherlands and of 'civic integration'. On the back of this demand has grown a whole industry of private Dutch language courses for applicants, who are in effect being constructed in this way as acceptable Dutch citizens. It is not enough to know the host society's cultural norms. Proficiency in its language is also required. To demonstrate such linguistic competence through being tested is *ipso facto* to become regarded as a productive member of the society.

The language makes the person, or perhaps remakes him/her. Roberts's analysis of British job interviews shows how they are a form of institutional gatekeeping. It describes how judgements about immigrants' fitness as potential employees (and, by implication, citizens) becomes based on a standardised mode of linguistic competence and often disregards their work experience in another country prior to coming to the UK. The interviewees are in effect penalised for not using the language of assumed competence despite their previous skills. They may not be the 'right' person for the job in the ears, if not the eyes, of the interviewers, despite the late modern legal and institutional prohibition of such discriminatory barriers as ethnicity and class.

The irony, as with all the various European entry tests, is that ordinary everyday speech of most or many citizens bears sometimes limited resemblance to the formal language which the applicants have to learn. The heteroglossic urban vernaculars characteristic of all European cities nowadays is in fact what the new immigrants will have to learn for everyday purposes, including that of getting a job and being the productive member of society that is desired by government. But urban mixed vernaculars have ambivalence. They may not help the applicant in a formal job interview where language proficiency based on measurable, standard features is demanded. They may however help the immigrant get a job in the so-called informal employment sector where forms of non-standard English are in common use among small-scale employers of both indigenous and immigrant origin. Moreover, it can be suggested that use of the urban mixed vernaculars may among some people offer a kind of resistance to official government language

and educational policy (cf. Urla 1995 on Basque), rather like breakaway religions in some societies resisting formally established faiths. In absorbing these urban vernaculars, people set themselves apart as a separable category. An extension of the irony, therefore, is that it is not the monoglot English, Dutch or other mainstream European language that is likely to define the person, whether new immigrant or long-settled, but their capacity for polylanguaging through knowledge of urban mixed vernaculars, as is the case to some degree for much of the population. So-called BBC standard English is, after all, consistently spoken by only a minority of the country's population.

The case of African marabouts' self-advertisments in France shows how even writing styles can effect an ontological 'realignment' of the person. The marabouts deliberately cultivate the impression of poor French literacy in their written advertisements for their clairvoyant and divinatory skills, for this is how best to persuade potential French clients that they are truly authentic African practitioners, conforming therefore to French stereotypes of them. Thus self-classified, they take on the behavioural characteristics of the stereotype in their relations with customers. As Vigouroux (2011: 53) pithily puts it: '…*ways of writing* become iconic of …*ways of being.* She further says, 'Distinctive ways of writing ..are an essential part of marabouts' *doing being African'*.

Shading into speaking and writing as elements of semiosis are the visual signs and productions that punctuate most forms of everyday discourse. In their introduction to the previous special issue, Language and Superdiversities, Blommaert and Rampton (2011) provide an example of a calligraphic text found on a building in Antwerp which advertises rental accommodation and is written in two forms of Chinese language script. The traditional script probably indicates the writer as a long-standing Chinese immigrant from outside the People's Republic of China (PRC) while the more modern seems aimed at newer arrivals from within the PRC. It also gives the rent in Yuan rather than Euro and overall suggests a transition in the population of the Chinese diaspora as well as telling us something of the writer and the intended addressees. The visual is implicated in the linguistic in such a way, then, that two quite different social sub-categories are defined within the wider category of Chinese incomer: new ones from the PRC and older ones from outside it. They are defined separately according to different language scripts whose effect is visual as much as it is textual.

That meaning is thus multi-modal has been a rich source for understanding different kinds and intensities of communication, whether of propositions or moods (e.g. phatic communion). But, like semiosis and indeed as part of it, ontological person-making is also multi-modal. It may start with a person being fitted into a stereotypical class or category of persons on the basis of visual and acoustic signs distinguishing them. But, ingrained in habitus over time, each person so classified reproduces, exaggerates, and believes in the semiotic features allegedly making up that stereotype.

In addition to the example of the Antwerp advert linguo-visually setting up two categories of Chinese, there is that of the YouTube genre of 'buffalaxed videos' described by Leppänen and Häkkinen. These are made up of fragments of films and music videos taken from different cultural backgrounds. The production as a whole is subtitled in the language of the maker which is however homophonic with words drawn from other languages in which the video clips are presented. These original languages are commonly unknown to the video producer and viewer. The juxtaposition and co-occurrence of homophonic subtitles and original language snippets lend themselves to interpretation as new meanings, and so provide what the authors call 'affordances' in which identities and relationships can be represented or, as I would suggest, can be made. Every viewer can find something in the mixture which speaks to their own identity. Indeed it is a form of identity-making which transcends, through its superdiversity, that of conventional contours of ethnicity. It also achieves much of its effect through humour which belittles the many forms of Otherness, justified as harmless fun by some but rejected by others as politically incorrect.

It is an ambivalent genre for which stand-up comedians are noted. Comedians are successful to the extent that they can draw a line between the acceptable and unacceptable while straddling but not crossing it. But their reputations can plunge should they fail in this by saying something regarded by enough people as unambiguously 'racist', 'classist', 'sexist' or 'ageist'. These labels are the modern demarcators not just of moral behaviour but of the proper person, who avoids being so labelled and vice versa. The videos are then more than representational. As is evident through the use of the ecological concept of affordances, they allow viewers to see how they might fit into ontological spaces provided by the mix of identity and relationship possibilities: as in one example, is one gay or straight in one's relationship to an available girl?

The ontological is about being and presence and, as such, is commonly expressed through the body or body parts. Goffman throughout his work shows how the 'presentation of self' is not just the giving out of cognitive cues but is also to do with posture, gesture, physical and bodily orientation, distance in relation to others, and facework or ways of looking at and speaking with. In China the metaphor of 'face' has been much documented as a fundamental feature of status qualification: appearance is everything – at whatever level of social class; and it is seen and assessed from the 'front', whether of a house or a person, for the 'back' has no face and value and can even be neglected. While probably most societies have a similar form of interpersonal evaluation, the notion of face in China does seem to have special significance in occupying an inordinate area of peoples' concerns in daily interaction.

What is interesting, therefore, in Dong's account is the importance of 'voice' in contemporary China. Of Bakhtinian origin, this is her term and not that of her informants, though they are perfectly aware of the effects of different modes of language articulation. She uses voice in a conjoined metaphorical and direct manner to refer mainly to types of language use. But we may see how it can be extended in other situations to include differences between high and low status speech varieties, as in Dong's case, and of dialect, pronunciation, pitch, talk-speed, politeness, prosody, and other features of speech, including its absence, i.e. silence, as also being semiotic. 'Face' appears to be about maintaining integral and honourable selfhoods between equals, as for instance between a shop buyer and seller (personal experience in Hong Kong). 'Voice' tends towards the assertive insofar as it seeks to advance or defend selfhood and is less concerned to maintain it or create equality between speaker and listener. We may speculate on whether superdiversity and greater interpersonal competition for goods, life-styles and influence in rapidly urbanising, capitalist China has made 'voice' a more prevalent feature of semiotic interaction than 'face' which belongs more to an earlier premise of equality[2].

Dong's account is set among Chinese elite migrants who define themselves in terms of class and status hierarchy. Her self-selected group of wealthy Saab automobile owners reject use and even knowledge of such regional speech varieties as Shanghainese, which they regard as limited in its communicative and status value. The Saab car defines them as an exceptional elite whose expensive consumer interests converge and who come together in order to save the Saab company from bankruptcy and themselves from loss of their status symbol. As cosmopolitans rejecting the regional language as demeaning, they celebrate instead their knowledge both of Putonghua, the national Chinese language, and English. Dong's theoretical point is that having the 'right voice' enables people to be heard more widely than through regional vernaculars such as Shanghainese. It gives them what she calls repertoires of mobility, one throughout China by means of Putonghua and the other internationally through English.

This is an important argument about the dynamics of voice and social stratification and is analysed with the broad sweeps of the brush that current socio-linguistic stratification in China invite. One can apply the same argument more microscopically however to situations on which we have data. For example, differences of accent

2 Based on an observation made by Rampton.

in the United Kingdom, where much class prejudice, antagonism and rejection rest on the polarisation of so-called lower class and middle class pronunciations (e.g. 'estuary' and 'posh'), pitch and tone, with regional accents variably rated, sometimes treated as lower class and sometimes as standing outside it. Similarly, though in terms of regional rather than class differentiation, Swahili in Kenya is broadly distinguished as either up-country (*ya bara*) or coastal (*ya pwani*), the latter regarded as 'correct' and 'pure' and the former as at best of pragmatic usefulness only. Such distinctions belie the complicated realities. Coastal Swahili is itself further distinguished both regionally through its many, sometime mutually unintelligible forms, and as to whether it contains more Arabic than Bantu expressions. It is likewise difficult to talk unambiguously of up-country Swahili, given such rapid transformations of the Sheng type, which challenge the very idea of a single Swahili diatype. Estuary English similarly varies across much of central and southern England and in fact may overlap with regional types and residues, with middle class posh English rated above estuary but below 'royal' or 'aristocratic' speech of the 'hise', 'trizers' (for 'house' and 'trousers') variety.

Here we see 'voice' as the individual speaker's ability or inability to communicate successfully in a specific situation, doing so through adoption of a particular conventionalised 'style', the appropriateness of which determines the success or failure of the communication. As Rampton notes, 'style/voice tension is experienced in many social sites, as people struggle to match their expressive resources to the requirements of the situation' (personal communication March 2012).

'Voice' in this sense may then hover over the possibility either of deriving from or building on the stylisations of social categories which, like the speech varieties and registers, are in fact much more diverse than their stereotypes. 'Higher' speech forms embedded unambiguously in social hierarchies seem moreover to move up and away when threatened from below. Thus once the voice immediately below begins to approach in imitation the one above it, the latter develops new aspects of voice, principally pronunciation but also other speech elements and lexicon. Rampton's findings in London suggest that this process will become ever more complicated through superdiversity, as older ethnic and class differences are cut across by new kinds of hierarchised speech forms under the pressure of, and in partial 'resistance', to standard language regimes.

An interesting question is whether voice, as an expression of assertiveness, will develop a kind of autonomy of movement that precedes the creation of recognised social groupings. That is to say, will new experimental forms of voice, as defined above, be used at a pace which exceeds that of observable social differentiation? To put it simply, is class in the older sense already lagging behind voice in some late modern cities such as London, at least among the young and those older speakers exposed earlier to the process? Imagine a lower class speaker of either immigrant or indigenous origin working in the City of London, retaining his version of Estuary but, with like-speaking colleagues, setting themselves up as a desirably successful reference group in money-making skills and conspicuous consumption. Certainly media exploitation of class and regional styles, as in television adverts and some soaps, often celebrates what were once low status attributes.

Back with Dong's case, we note that the elite status of the Saab owners is threatened by the possibility that a reduction in the price of the automobile will bring in 'other' people who can now afford it but who are not regarded as of their status. The elite then distances itself further through even more consumerism by buying expensive wines, cigars and playing golf in addition to continuing to buy Saab cars. Through semiosis a status category of relatively unconnected individuals develops a common interest and agency. Semiosis thus mediates the transition from classification to ingrained ontology. It is the equivalent of the British upper classes traditionally altering pronunciation, prosody and vocabulary in order to distance themselves from evident imitation by lower strata, a subtle process which occurs slowly and perhaps largely unconsciously.

Continuing with China we have a case where 'vernacular' does not connote the regional limitations that the Saab owners ascribe to Shanghainese. Varis and Wang show how a particular form of hip-hop rapping in Beijing makes use of various global vernacular varieties. They make up a mix and create what the authors call supervernaculars. These are 'global ways of fashioning identities, forms of communication, genres, etc., recognizable for members of emergent super-groups'. They share indexical orders, and 'super-communities' are constructed through them. This coordination and bringing together of the different bits and pieces of global vernaculars is made possible through the internet, or at least the internet makes it possible for the mix to reach very many more people than would otherwise be the case.

The difference between the more face-to-face 'club' of Saab owners and the internet hip-hop rappers and audience, both within China, illustrates two uses of English. Saab club English complements Putonghua but both are viewed as relatively distinct and bounded, for that is how they can be stratified. Shanghainese is rejected and cannot therefore 'muddy' either of the two main languages, whose discrete boundedness is therefore reinforced through non-interference by the vernacular. By contrast, English for the Beijing rapper 'is the supervernacular template', into which are inserted the chosen elements of Chinese and Korean (related to current Chinese enthusiasm for Korean pop culture). Moreover, this template provides 'affordances' (to use again the term employed in two of the papers (Leppänen and Häkkinen *supra*; Varis and Wang (2011) because it is made up of such a variety of language use, clothing and other signs taken from different sources that speakers can creatively make up new combinations in the rapping lyrics and images. The thrust of this paper is indeed to show how such creativity jostles with normative constraints in a kind of search for authenticity: 'true' rap or hip-hop is Afro-American and yet is presented with a Chinese accent and so is also 'really' Chinese, possessing rebelliousness and yet working within limits of Chinese public acceptability. One image presented in the paper is of 'a young Afro male, suggesting an alignment with "hip-hop authority" embodied in blackness – being and doing "black".' It reminds us again of the marabouts doing and being 'African' so as to conform to Parisians' stereotypes of them. This is clearly an ontological consequence, i.e. creating an identity, which draws on semiotic resources. It is to the theme of these resources, central to all the presentations, that I now turn. Indeed, 'resources' is a word that occurs more than any other in the papers.

Semiotic resources, repertoire and style

The concern with resources presupposes speakers as agents. They are agents not in the unsubtle or logocentric sense of calculating beforehand the effects of speech, but as having an effect on listeners without necessarily intending that effect. Insofar as we can distinguish it, this is communicative intention which is implicit to speaking in context. In other words, we may intend something but may also elaborate on meaning as we go along, as part of performing the utterance. Putting this crudely, we often know the full sense of what we have said only after we have said it and observed its effect on the listener, sometimes to our dismay but usually without cause or wish to reflect on that sense. Resources are, by definition, there to be used or exploited, and so we must be talking about processes of speaking which draw on them as part of the speech act but without singular, aim-directed consciousness.

This view of the relationship between resources and action departs from a much earlier view prevalent in the 1960s of transactional analysis. This argued that actors are impelled to maximise gains at minimal cost, using resources consisting not just of material goods but also of emotions, reputations, and interactional skills (Barth 1966). In Nairobi in the late 1960s, Parkin (1974) looked at the use of language resources in an urban market place. There sellers and buyers of different, unambiguously defined ethnic groups made challenges and concessions to each other by including parts of each other's language in a serious game to gain custom or a lower price. The resources were seen as directly deriving from ethnic languages whose boundar-

ies were maintained despite the reciprocal borrowing in the market transactions. It was a view of resources in the economic sense and of ethnic groups regarded by townsfolk as distinctive of each other. The classificatory predominated over the ontological, with only strains of the latter identified (e.g. Parkin 1971). Whereas that view focused on actors' strategies, with language resources waiting as objects to be gathered for use, the current papers place greater emphasis on the wider range of semiotic resources as comprising the non-verbal as well as verbal, how they are created and used for new forms of communication, and on how they are inextricably part of the (changing) selfhoods of their speakers.

Their approach is concerned with the evolution of environments of linguistic opportunity resulting from the superdiversity of semiotic modes and sensibilities operating together. This approach does of course set up (the outlines of) social categories of users, as discussed above. I perceive however something near to a generative explanation: superdiversity produces 'affordances' and opportunities for semiotic crossovers which produce further diversity at an often bewildering pace, as seemingly befits the current global age. A couple of authors even talk of superdiversity as a generative logic which is not unreasonable at a certain level of analysis but raises the question of what are the triggers of choice and change among speakers.

Perhaps this is to ask how semiotic resources become what Blommaert and others have referred to as a semiotic repertoire (Blommaert and Varis 2011; 2012). That is to say, resources exist out there ready to be garnered; a repertoire is a particular ordering of them. How do we get from the first to the second? And how do speakers/communicators avoid the hazards of being unfamiliar with harvestable signs and voices and of not understanding them. In other words, resources may be out there but we cannot always know them well enough to arrange and use them to good effect. More confidently, Varis and Wang (2011) suggest that 'the meanings attached to semiotic signs… are not random, but systematic, stratified and context-specific: we attribute meaning to signs according to conventionalised normative patterns'. Similarly, Dong (*supra*) asserts that 'Linguistic resources are never distributed in a random way….(they) are distributed according to the logic of the social system, and sociolinguistic analysis has from its inception addressed these non-random aspects of distribution'.

However, the papers also talk of the creativity involved in building up and presenting new multi-modal semiotic repertoires. Creativity presupposes non-normative innovation, i.e. by transcending the non-random norms. So how can we be creative, i.e. non-normative, if meaning is drawn from the normative? The answer seems to be that it is by taking norms out of their conventionalised patterns, mixing them and presenting them for effect. The effect would seem to be to highlight a message or to package it in a special way. Its packaging is therefore likely to be a matter of style as well as of communication. That is to say, the way we communicate and create 'truths' about ourselves and our interlocutors is conveyed by a changing variety of styles and is not governed by a uniform logic.

This emphasis on style comes out directly or indirectly in many papers, most evidently as an aspect of the various forms of youth speech and pop-culture, including visual, acoustic and dress, and especially as a feature of late modern urban society. It is true that 'style' has a standard linguistic connotation of identifying a linguistic variety. Jørgensen et al suggest that, in this sense, it is one of a number of unacceptably delimited ways of analysing language, because it does not reflect the reality of speech for which the idea of semiotic resources is necessary instead. Style is of course also used in a number of different ways, for example as mode or register, covering form, interaction and ideology and not just delimited speech varieties. There is also the distinctive, everyday social connotation of trying to impress an audience, of being a discursive strategy, or style or stylisation as ontologically enacted. The papers give many examples: the use of English and Afro images in Chinese hip-hop/rap; of highly rated Creole among South London schoolchildren; the choice of 'cool' music and lyrics from different cultures as in the buffalaxed videos; the

display of magic in 'doing African' of the Paris marabouts; the status-conscious brandishing of cigars, wine, cars and golf club membership among the Chinese Saab owners; and, reaching out for the classification that may provide the conditions for national acceptance, the almost ceremonial parading of lavish language test certificates for migrants and asylum seekers in European cities. Being culturally defined, the absence of style contributes to communicative disadvantage or is regarded as linguistic incompetence, as among the immigrant job-seekers unfamiliar with British styles described by Roberts.

Style for impression-management is clearly both semiotic resource and part of a repertoire. It is likely also to be consubstantial with bodily use and images, as the examples just given suggest. The linguistic is part of this semiotics but seems almost to be drowned in its multi-modality. However we can see such multi-modality as creating a stylised semiotic package, in which speech, texts, non-verbal sounds and the visual intertwine. The packages serve two main demands made of interlocutors: to act ontologically in the sense of interacting with others on the same semiotic wave-length; and to impress listeners and bystanders. That they also classify, instruct, persuade, admonish and promise seems to me to follow in the wake of style in actual social contexts in conditions of late modern urban superdiversity.

Our interest may indeed be in a general semiology, of which language is but one strand, possibly absent altogether in, say, silent rituals lacking verbal and textual comment. But, as a matter of heuristic choice rather than of theoretical stance, it can be argued that language normally provides an empirically convenient starting-point for tracing out the other different visual and acoustic sign systems that accompany, substitute for, blend with and shadow speech. The caveat is not to return to bounded, essentialised speech varieties and languages as the initial building blocks of what we observe and study.

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