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Concluding reflections

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I would like to express my gratitude to the editor of this Special Issue for the opportunity to reflect on the articles. Even though this volume covers a wide range of issues, it has one underlying principle: diversity. Diversity is viewed through a number of prisms, including, but not restricted to home language, multilingualism, and lingua franca. In this concluding commentary, I analyze the nature of the prisms through which diversity is framed in the papers and the consequences of such an analysis on sociolinguistic practices.

One of the powerful arguments made through the issue is the value of multilingualism, reflected in the notion of lingua franca. That multilingualism can serve as a critique of the idea of pluralization of singularity or the tendency to view languages as hermetically sealed units that can be separated from each other is now well-known. The issue therefore should not be that lingua franca renders it hard to count the number of languages, but the countability of languages which should never have been an important issue in the first instance.

From multilingualism to System D

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If languages are not discrete entities, then they are not autonomous and cannot be separated from individual and community experiences, history, geography, and context. Furthermore, if languages are not discrete, the underlying principle in notions about phonology being distinct from phonology, lexis from semantics, and form from meaning are difficult to sustain. The idea of multilingualism has to be treated extremely circumspectly otherwise it might end up not being as productive as originally intended.

Multilingualism has to be treated carefully and we have to avoid celebrating it without providing a systematic analysis of terms such as repertoires, resources, diversity, and related terms. Furthermore, multilingualism as a way of framing sociolinguistics is founded on the assumption that it is the idea of a code-ideology, also referred to as monolingualism, and that it constitutes the problem because it cannot capture the complex social dynamics of current societies.

I prefer the term ‘System D’ as an alternative to multilingualism because while multilingualism may lead us to concentrate on notions about languages, irrespective of whether we are referring to repertoires, resources, super-vernaculars and other related terms, it is still language which is central to the frameworks. Instead of multilingualism,

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and other relatively new terms, I prefer the term 'System D' because it draws our attention to individual abilities, to respond to challenges, to improvise, and be creative in resolving social and linguistic problems. 'System D' therefore provides us with an opportunity to pay attention to what we actually do in resolving problems or challenges we are confronted with in postcolonial contexts. It is particularly relevant to complex urban contexts because it captures human capacity to think quickly, and at times in unorthodox ways when getting a job done under severe time pressures. The term 'System D' was introduced by Robert Neuwirth but brought into wide circulation by Anthony Bourdain in his book on travels and food. The term 'D' originated from the French noun debrouillardise or demerde (French slang). 'D' is a shorthand to make do, to manage, especially in adverse situations.

From multilingualism to spontaneous order

Generally, I agree with the contributors about the conceptual limitations of the notion of discrete languages. I, however, feel that the implications of this critique of languages as discrete have not been fully articulated and a positive path has not been proposed. I would like to propose that we consider drawing on metaphors from other areas of scholarship such as Economics in order to develop our ideas further. An attractive position to pursue is the idea of 'spontaneous order'. A 'spontaneous order' enables us to capture the degree to which language, like other issues, is a product of human action, and not a consequence of a pre-designed plan. Language in education is apparently based on a notion of language as a pre-designed plan thus contrary to the idea of 'spontaneous order'. The idea of a spontaneous order renders it feasible to capture and create a latitude for human action all be it within constraints physical, political, and physiological (En. wikipedia.org/spontaneous-order, 23 June 2014). 'Spontaneous orders' are scale-free and are neither controlled no controllable by anyone. If languages are 'spontaneous orders,' neither fully controlled nor controllable, the construct poses a serious challenge to language teaching, language planning which are in varying degrees based upon the assumption that language is controllable and its scale can be determined.

I am not arguing that language education requires both notions of monolingualism and multilingualism. What is required is an awareness that:

> language appears as something different depending how we look at it. Objectification of language as a thing–makes particular problems appear to demand urgent rectification. But how far is the problem "language" or the way we are thinking about languages? (Fardon and Graham 1994, 9).

If the nature of language depends upon how it is perceived, because language is not a natural object, then language teaching is itself a projection of a specific view of language. In other words, when we are teaching and indeed researching language, we are advancing specific views about language and society.

Identity

Identity is widely used in African Studies. Because of the weight of the identity regime there are two main features that Brubacker (2004, Stoler 2002) regards as relevant: 'strong and weak identities.' Strong identity refers to a consistency in the nature of social and behavioral practices including language performance. On the other hand, 'weak identity' is a flexible, fluid, and adaptable usage of identity. Strong identity is essentialist,

whereas weak identity is founded on 'soft' social constructivism in which individuals choose an identity by exercising individual agency. This means an individual is not trapped by the history and contemporary nature of their identity. The capacity and latitude of individuals to express and shape their identity is restricted by the fact that agency and the choices they make are constrained by a combination of linguistic, historical, and social factors. Paradoxically, if identity were completely free, the social and linguistic practices would be uninterruptable; after all, choice is meaningful if it is restricted as Brubacker cautions: 'If identity is everywhere it is nowhere' (2004, 29). The key issue, however, is the issue of identity which we project as scholars. Perhaps even more important the identity trope is a reflection of a crisis of elitist middle-class scholars. I doubt whether the low rural class Africans feel that identity is an important matter to consider.

Ownership

Ownership irrespective of whether it is partial or full can be fruitfully understood when it is situated in social theory and in historical and contemporary contexts. From the point of view of legal theory, if language is open-access it can be collectively owned because it is fundamentally non-property. The converse is also the case, that if language is a closed system, its ownership can be dominated by specific people or groups (as argued below).

Home language

One of the recurring themes in language education is the importance of home language. It is now commonly accepted that cognitive advancement occurs when students are taught in their home language. The idea of home language reflects a nationalistic view of language in which each group owns its artifact called "language," a phenomenon similar to each group's ownership of other symbols, such as land, country, etc. If home language is one of the symbols of nationalism, promotion of home language is a powerful mechanism for the advocacy of nationalism. Any nationalistic movement may have unintended effects, some of which may be negative. Therefore, language teaching, particularly the promotion of home languages, must assess whether the benefits of language teaching in a home language outweigh any negative effects.

While the promotion of a home language may be controversial, the presence of indigenous perspectives about language should not be. For example, in indigenous communities, knowledge of language may entail capabilities to sing in that language, and in many cases, knowledge of indigenous language does not necessarily mean the language is easily understandable to outsiders. Teaching and promotion of indigenous languages, however, involve the exact opposite – transparency within the language – and are restricted to writing, reading, and speaking. Promotion of indigenous languages should, therefore, include the ways in which we seriously try and capture the conflicting meanings of language practices, the diversity in the interpretation.

Super-vernacular and super-diversity

Super-diversity is increasingly becoming a popular framework used in the analysis of language practices; even though it is not discussed in this Special Issue, it is quite clear that it overshadows some of the discussion. I am uncomfortable with the idea of diversity, even more so than super-diversity because it celebrates differences and, thus, reinforces

social, ethnic, and class differences rather than challenging the elitism implied. Super-diversity does not make a distinction between claims and sociolinguistic facts. I seriously wonder whether users of the so-called super-diversity regard their sociolinguistic research as diverse. In other words, discussions of super-diversity are etic but presented as if the material is emic.

Anglo-American

The geographical and geo-linguistic space covered by the Special Issue is impressive. However, the papers are unintentionally constrained by Anglo-American frameworks. It would have been enlightening to explore the nature of language planning practices that cut across a geo-linguistic space in different geographical areas, particularly former Portuguese colonies. Lusophone countries provide a fascinating approach to language challenges, particularly the impact of Lusitanization (i.e., the spread of Portuguese colonial ideology) as a framework in former Portuguese colonies. This approach would have provided an additional lens through which to frame colonial and ex-colonial language practices because of the increasing importance of Brazil over Portugal in the spread of Portuguese.

Conclusion

In this informal commentary, I have provided an account that, I hope, complements the approaches adopted in the Special Issue.

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