

MULTIPLICITY, COMPLEXITY, CIRCULATION AND MEDIATIZATION

MULTIPLICIDADE, COMPLEXIDADE, CIRCULAÇÃO E MEDIATIZAÇÃO

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this text is to reflect upon the concepts of language, multiplicity, language ideology, metapragmatic regime and scale, among others that should be problematized in contemporary research which were, in one way or another, objects of discussion during the “School of Advanced Studies in Language and Society – Mobility at large” held in August, 2015, and organized by UNICAMP/UNIRIO in collaboration with other Brazilian universities. Ethnographic data collected in the development of my own research projects in Corsica will be referred to in my reflections about the concepts here revisited.

KEYWORDS: Multiplicity. Complexity. Circulation. Mediatization.

RESUMO: Meu objetivo neste texto é refletir sobre os conceitos de língua, de multiplicidade, de ideologia linguística, de regime metapragmático e de escala, entre outros que merecem problematização na pesquisa contemporânea e que foram, de uma forma ou de outra, objeto de discussão durante a programação da “Escola de Altos Estudos Linguagem e Sociedade – Mobilidade, Multilinguismo e Globalização” desenvolvida, em agosto de 2015, pela UNICAMP/UNIRIO, em consórcio com outras universidades brasileiras. Dados etnográficos gerados em minhas pesquisas realizadas na Córsega servirão de apoio às minhas reflexões acerca dos conceitos aqui revisitados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Multiplicidade. Complexidade. Circulação. Mediatização.

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The School of Advanced Studies Seminar in Campinas and Rio de Janeiro in August 2015 was an opportunity to reflect on a number of key themes in the study of language in social and political context. In this essay, I reflect on some of the core ideas that emerged from the seminar and their implications for the contemporary study of language.

The first big theme that cut across the seminar was the multiplicity and layering of frames, ideologies, metapragmatic regimes and scales. This complexity was the starting point for all of our analyses of specific data. It has a number of related elements. The first, and foundational principle is that all of the traditional objects of linguistic research have to be construed as situated, emergent and constructed within ideological and political fields rather than as having some essential qualities. That is, our focus is on how categories such as "languages," "speakers" and places come to be defined and construed in particular ways as well as how linguistic and cultural authenticity, authority and legitimacy and even mobility are understood and mobilized in specific discursive or other action.

This approach thus challenges one of the key modernist assumptions of the "unified speaker": the person whose language practices map perfectly onto his/her identity or identities. There are many forces and processes which "disunify" the speaker. They include language shift in minority, indigenous and immigrant communities towards dominant languages. They include the multiple and shifting linguistic repertoires and competencies that people acquire over the course of a lifetime, in response to shifting circumstances and opportunities and as a component of physical and virtual (online) mobilities. It is clear that the idea of the unified speaker is closely aligned with dominant, monolingual language ideologies that undergird traditional forms of nationalism. These ideologies propose not just ideal forms of nationhood and belonging, but also, moral hierarchies of personhood and citizenship. Some alternative models that have been proposed in the European context include the Council of

Europe's notion of "plurilingual citizenship," which validates a wide variety of languages and competencies in individuals' linguistic repertoires and places an emphasis on communicative practices/exchange over linguistic form. Another alternative framework originating in Corsica is the concept of "polynomie," in which legitimate language and legitimate speakerhood is identified as a social and political process, actualized in community "acts of recognition." Polynomie, at least in theory, legitimates both multiple varieties of Corsican and a multiplicity of speech forms and styles in which Corsican is used (to include mixed regional varieties of Corsican, Corsican-French or Corsican-Italian codeswitching and mixing etc.). Other European researchers working within a non-essentializing paradigm include members of the COST New Speakers project² and the Oslo "Standardising Minority Languages" project.³ The former explores the conditions in which learners of a minority language can become accepted as legitimate speakers; the latter looks at the kinds of language ideological frameworks that set criteria for the evaluation of minority language competencies. In both projects, the focus on issues of authority and authenticity de-essentialize both "language" and "speaker."

In other words, these research projects, like the approaches that we took during the Seminar, focuses on languages as products of social processes. These approaches--as well as the ones that I have taken to the study of Corsican--stand in contrast to a number of mainstream currents of scholarship about "language maintenance" and "language revitalization," and their companion concepts of "language death" and "language endangerment." The latter, as many have pointed out, are based on organic, ecological metaphors that objectify and essentialize languages as things that are independent from social action. These terms have particular kinds of "entailments" for how people experience sociolinguistic identity: they have the potential to frame language "loss" as loss of personal and cultural authenticity. They also have entailments for language policy and planning. For example, if we look at funding programs for "language documentation" of "endangered languages" at the U.S. National Science Foundation⁴ and the University of London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)⁵ it is clear that the main thrust of the funded activity take for granted that the languages under study are clearly delineated, bounded objects that can be studied independently from society and social process. Preserving languages, in this paradigm involves the creation of bounded, formal, ostensibly scientific and independent texts about that language. Whereas, to the contrary, a great deal of work linguistic anthropology, including my own, attests to the fact that all acts of recording, writing, transcribing etc. are part of the ideologically inflected processes that "make" as opposed to just "record" language (see DUCHÊNE and HELLER, 2007 and HILL, 2002 and responses in the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*).

To summarize, then, what I have emphasized is that discussions of language maintenance or revitalization should always investigate and problematize what people mean by "language," considering what kinds of forms or practices are imagined or prioritized; with what kinds of imagined and real interlocutors, in what kinds of social contexts and for what purposes. This does not mean, however, that language disappears in an endless pool of relativity. Ideological objects are very real, and they are made real in practice. Modernist frames of language may be socially and politically constructed, but they are experienced through the institutions and interactions they structure in powerful ways.

The notions of place and mobility have to be understood in similar ways. Contemporary discourses about globalization and superdiversity have often emphasized

² http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/isch/IS1306

³ <http://www.hf.uio.no/multiling/english/projects/standards/>

⁴ http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=12816

⁵ <http://www.eldp.net/>

"countable" diversities created by the increasing volume and speed of material movement of people, texts and goods across space. That is, particular places, people and populations are understood as intrinsically more or less superdiverse. In contrast, my preference has been to think about what Blommaert and Rampton (2011) have called "tactics" of superdiversity: attitudinal orientations towards the emergent and multiple frames in which linguistic and cultural forms of identification takes place. Further, I suggest that is in fact *because of* the scalar multiplicity of frames for social and linguistic practice brought about by globalization that we need to view "place" as emergent and constructed. That is, the diversities (or lack thereof) of places are affected by histories of movement and chronotopic imaginaries: the extent to which other (spatial or temporal) places are evoked or made relevant through talk or other semiotic practices. Discursive and semiotic practices can also orient more or less to mobility as a feature of experience or identity; this is true independent of the medium or channel of communication. That is, computer or technologically mediated communication does not by definition engage to a greater extent than communication in more traditional media or channels to "tactics of superdiversity."

The analyses and discussions during the seminar illustrate, in my view, the principle of *indeterminacy* (JAFFE, 2009). That is, our approaches have started from the position that there is a fundamental multiplicity and indeterminacy of the linguistic or sociolinguistic fact. In studying practice, we see a constant dynamic between a) practices that leave that indeterminacy (fluidity) intact by keeping multiple frames in play, avoiding pinning down meanings and b) and practices that engage in what Falk Moore has called "processes of regularization" that include the exercise of institutional power and regimentation (1978). As she points out, both the maintenance of indeterminacy and regimentation can serve the interests of social actors; the analytic task is to look at this dynamic process. Over the course of the seminary, we paid particular attention to how power--discursive, epistemological, ontological--the power to define--accrues to particular people or groups as well as how power and agency is this agency is constrained by regimes of power--institutional and otherwise.

One of the kinds of power that emerged in many of our research presentations was a particular kind of *erasure*: the power to erase the social nature of meaning-making. This is intimately tied to the promotion and reproduction of essentialized models that posit the connection between linguistic forms and social identities as given and natural rather than contingent and social. At the same time, the complexity of the current moment includes another kind of valued stance (that we might connect with "tactics of superdiversity"): a reflexive one. Reflexivity (see Pietikainen, Kelly-Holmes, Jaffe and Coupland forthcoming) is a form of agency; it involves metapragmatic virtuosity that displays control over linguistic and semiotic processes. This control is tied up with processes of mediation and mediatization (taken up in more detail below): the ability to mediatize the self (or the collectivity): to shape the production and circulation of representations through multiple media.

The value of displaying this form of agency is explored in the volume I have co-authored with Pietikainen, Kelly-Holmes and Coupland, we have pointed to conditions of "heighted reflexivity" brought about by globalization, and the emergence, alongside "conventional" authenticities of more dynamic and reflexive orientations to "authentication." We contrast a focus on conventional frameworks that document the persistence of essentializing, fixed, first-order indexicalities between linguistic and semiotic practices and person, place, time, production, form and primary materials in acts of authentication. The tropes of conventional authenticities presume two kinds of direct congruence: between personal inner states/intentions and linguistic production and between collective histories of cultural ownership and language practice. Language, in this framework, is largely defined as decontextualized and denotational and as individual and unmediated: 'The authentic' standing in unproblematised contrast to 'the artificial.'

In contrast, in the authenticities we have labeled "reflexive/transactional," the trope of the "real" is replaced by a framework of "verisimilitude," in which heavily mediated (and sometimes mediatized) reflexive performances of the authentic are framed as a valued site of connection/transaction between producers and consumers of the authentic. Indexical links between linguistic/ semiotic practices and the authentic are framed as the emergent, reflexive, 'good-for-now', mediated products of interaction in context, and this reflexivity is often put on display as the shared ground of interaction and interpretation. Artifice and performance, in this conception, can be sites of the authentic, conceived transactionally. The connection between this model of authenticity and the deconstruction of unified and homogenous categories of language and speaker are clear.

Many of the seminar discussions focused on the complexity of the current moment: a complexity brought about in no small part by the multiplication of technologies, platforms and media of communication. This complexity interpellates us methodologically--how do we capture the intertwining of the here and now, the face- to-face as it is intertwined with the other realities, other social and communicative sites and other networks? We considered and demonstrated some of the tools we have for studying the multimodal nature of communication, attending to multiple forms of semiosis and their interaction: written and spoken words, accents, spellings, graphic design, pictures, music, video. We approached, but probably did not focus extensively on the kinds of opportunities and constraints we experience as academics who might want to tell a multimodal and perhaps, indeterminate or multilayered story.

With respect to research practice, however, we evoked multisited, multiparty research as one way of attempting to capture complexity. At the same time, in line with the perspective on superdiversity sketched above, I have also suggested that the notion of the "site" as inherently "local," "bound" or unidimensional is open to contestation. That is, the rather traditional research model that I have followed (e.g. the single researcher in a single, even peripheral place with low levels of superficial diversity) can engage with the way that different scales, discourses, places etc. are brought in/made relevant in situ. This, in fact, has always been part of how I have understood context in Corsica. Corsican nationalism, for example, did not emerge in a vacuum, but was framed with reference to other nationalist movements and discourses and involved both the movement of persons and ideas. Similarly, because of a long history of out-migration; Corsican experiences of the "here" have always been in dialog with the "elsewheres" Corsicans had experienced individually and collectively. Corsica was "not France," and also "not North Africa." This points us in a direction that parallels the movement from "authenticity" to "authentication": thinking about "emplacement" rather than "place". The global, in this way of thinking is not a thing, but a possible frame for acts of emplacement, for "scaling."

In this light, the kinds of complexity associated with multiple media or channels is a difference of intensity rather than kind. That is, the notion that any stretch of talk or social action is in dialog with and draws its meaning from a dynamic interplay with prior talk--anticipated future talk--talk/discourse in other places, times, scales--with both co present and absent audiences and interlocutors and sites of production is not a new one. In fact, it can be found in a foundational text: Irvine's elegant analysis of Wolof griots and the notion that wedding poems performed in a given place, in front of a given audience, evoked and were designed in "shadow conversation" with other interlocutors, events and contexts (Irvine 1996). It is perhaps the case that that the *increased visibility* of multiple media and channels of communication and knowledge production today has highlighted for speakers and analysts alike the mediated, dialogic nature of linguistic and semiotic practices, as well as the way that practice builds up a set of normative, generic expectations -- things like cell phone etiquette--that frame the production and interpretation of meaning.

The theme of circulation and movement was also at the center of many of our analyses: what people, and what linguistic forms are able to travel; what people and language practices are rendered "immobile." We relied on foundational insights from the work of Bauman and Briggs (1990) on entextualization as the process through which words are prepared for movement. Across our various sites, we examined both textual process as well as other forms of binding and objectification (such as commodification) that are the prelude to the movement of language and communicative practices. In doing so, we emphasized that circulation is not just something that words or discourses do in exceptional circumstances or as the result of intentional practice. On the contrary, it is a core component of meaning itself. First, of course, there is the fact that words/texts that travel are inflected by their journey. This is the now classic insight that recontextualizations never just reproduce original meanings but always inflect the original text with new meanings. This is readily seen in instances of reported speech, as well as in musical sampling, translation, parody and so on. But there is another sense I would like to evoke here, in which the *movement itself*--of texts, bodies, videos etc. has its own indexicalities. This has been a longstanding interest of mine, and links to emerging foci on the materiality of language (SHANKAR and CAVANAUGH, 2012). For instance, I have been interested in how the materiality of greeting cards plays a role in the evaluation of senders' intentions and is also implicated in making the card a vehicle for social-sanctioned sentiments. The latter is accomplished in no small part by the fact that the card and its words move through space and is handled by multiple social actors (JAFFE, 2001). But the meaning of movement is of course not restricted to material objects, and plays a large role in new and social media: the "retweet" of something a person saw on Instagram, for example, carries the traces of its movement and its associated social indexicalities (to include claims on authority and/or authenticity).

This example points to another theme from the seminar, which was rich with examples from multiple media: that new genres and technologies are always in dialog with old ones, which structure the range of possibilities within which speakers and authors make choices. The choice to send a greeting card, for example, used to be understood in comparison and contrast with the choice to send a letter or a postcard; today, however, it is understood with reference to other options such as email, text messaging and so on.

This brings us to the discussion of mediatization and mediation. All of the Seminar participants examined how language and communicative practices are mediatized; all of us focused on dialogic processes of the multimodal production and circulation of meaning that goes beyond the face-to-face (to include multiple media and channels from print to social media, text messages, emails, documentaries, YouTube videos and so on) and speaks to and interpellates a variety of audiences. These expanding (and sometimes unknown) audiences, in fact, are a component of the complexities we have tried to grapple with. In keeping with our focus on power and agency, many of our analyses examined how mediatization (and all the discursive/linguistic/semiotic strategies it involves) constructs, ranks and evaluates its objects [speakers, languages, places, communities] its authors and its audiences. Mediatization is a site not just for the expression of identity, but for the examination of processes that propose or impose subject positions, and establish sociolinguistic indexicalities. My own treatment of *mediation* plays a complementary role, emphasizing the extent to which representational control or agency is distributed and displayed in media products, arguing that the display of both reflexivity and control over mediation establish the authority and legitimacy of speaking subjects (JAFFE, 2011). Finally, we have all attended to the dialogic nature of new media in a media-saturated world. We discover, for example, that even the simplest text, like a "newspaper article" becomes a dialogic one, because it exists in a complex online context that includes advertisements, related videos and reader comments. So the contemporary reader is charting a path through a very diverse assemblage of texts and images. This calls, I believe,

for new ways of doing ethnographies of reading/interacting with texts that document those complex literacy itineraries or pathways.

Finally, the Seminar was the occasion to reflect on the sitedness and circulation of academic perspectives and knowledge. We evoked the imbalances of academic knowledge circulation that result from linguistic, political and economic domination and welcomed efforts such as this one that might make that circulation wider and less unidirectional.

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