

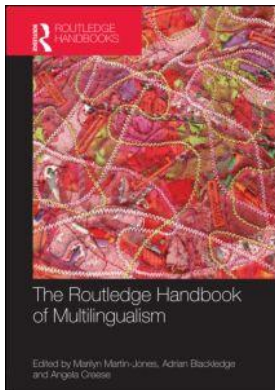
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Part V

Situated practices, lived realities

Disinventing multilingualism

From monological multilingualism to multilingua francas

Sinfree Makoni and Alastair Pennycook

Introduction

Assumptions about the existence of languages and, *ipso facto*, multilingualism, are so deeply embedded in predominant paradigms of language studies that they are rarely questioned. Multilingualism, furthermore, viewed from this perspective, is an indomitably good thing; the task of linguists, sociolinguists, applied linguists and educational linguists is to enhance our understanding of multilingualism, to overcome the monolingual blinkers of Anglo- or Eurocentric thought, to encourage both the understanding of and the practices of multilingualism. The relevance of such models to diverse contexts, however, is often taken for granted. As Haugen once observed

[t]he concept of language as a rigid, monolithic structure is false, even if it has proved to be a useful fiction in the development of linguistics. It is the kind of simplification that is necessary at a certain stage of a science, but which can now be replaced by more sophisticated models.

(1972: 25)

In this chapter we argue that it is indeed time for more sophisticated models, not models that replace monolingualism with multilingualism, as both concepts emerge from the same intellectual context, but rather models that question the very foundations that underpin such linguistic simplifications.

Drawing on different intellectual traditions, from philosophy to anthropology (Davidson 1986; Whorf 1988), that have dealt with the existence of languages with some skepticism, we therefore make an unequivocal case that “not all people have ‘a language/languages’ in the sense in which the term is currently used in English” (Heryanto 1990: 41). To this end we will first turn to the sociohistorical contexts in which notions of languages as “hermetically sealed units” (Makoni 1998) emerged, and how particular understandings of multilingualism emerged as plural monolingualisms. This will be followed by a broader discussion of contexts of diverse language use, where the notion of multilingualism is eschewed in favor of a more comprehensive understanding of the mobilization of diverse language resources. Once we go

beyond a framing of languages as discrete entities, it may be plausible to write productively about multilingualism. In order to do so we therefore pose the following three questions:

- If languages are not “primordial,” the question is under what sociohistorical contexts did they emerge, what are the philosophical strategies used in their construction and how does invention impact the linguistic practices of the users, and our own understanding of multilingualism?
- What are the metadiscursive regimes (Bauman and Briggs 2003) used in the construction of “languages”? Drawing on examples from different parts of the world, but with a particular focus on Africa, we further ask how diverse communities talk about their languages and what light these metalinguistic framings shed on the “world views,” and “orientations” of these communities. What is the impact of particular metalanguages on our understanding of multilingualism?
- If languages do not exist as discrete entities, and language is not universal in the sense of unified systems, how does communication occur in the absence of languages as things?

Framing invention/disinvention: language myths and ideologies

A number of theoretical positions coalesce around a critique of language as discrete, unified systems. Prominent among these is Integrational Linguistics (Harris 2009), and the key claim that the idea of language is a “myth” (see Harris 1980, 1981, 1998, 2009; Harris and Taylor 1997; Pennycook 2007b). In Integrational Linguistics “people use signs in order to communicate,” but the signs are not pre-assembled and there is a sharp dissonance between form and meaning. Language from this point of view is so deeply embedded in context that it cannot be separated from it. Communication occurs through a process of mutual adjustment: “when we speak or write, we take those imperfectly remembered prior (a priori) texts and reshape them into new contexts” (Becker 1995:15). Communication may be understood as “multidirectional, interactive, (and) participatory” (Khubchandani 2003), a position quite at odds with a sender/receiver model or “fixed-telementation” in which the thoughts of one person are transported to another through the use of a particular code (Toolan 2009). As Harris (1990: 45) remarks, “linguistics does not need to postulate the existence of languages as part of its theoretical apparatus.” Once we make communication central to our thinking, languages may be a “variable extra” (Harris 2009: 44).

A related orientation that also undermines the idea of language as a preformed object is Hopper’s (1998) *emergent grammar*, a term borrowed from anthropology (Clifford and Marcus 1986). For Hopper the apparent structure or regularity of grammar is an emergent property that “is shaped by discourse in an ongoing process. Grammar is, in this view, simply the name for certain categories of observed repetitions in discourse” (1998: 156). This is not merely an observation that languages are always changing and that grammar is always therefore, in the longer term, temporary, but rather that the notion of systematicity embedded in the concept of grammar is itself a product of repeated social activity. Language use draws on “lingual memory” shaped in part by each individual’s life experiences (Becker 1995; Johnstone 1996). Hence

there is no natural fixed structure to language. Rather, speakers borrow heavily from their previous experiences of communication in similar circumstances, on similar topics, and with similar interlocutors. Systematicity, in this view, is an illusion produced by the partial settling or *sedimentation* of frequently used forms into temporary subsystems.

(Hopper 1998: 157–8)

From this point of view, then, linguistic structure is seen not as an independent set of pre-given laws but rather “as a response to discourse needs” (Bybee and Hopper 2001: 2). “The notion of language as a monolithic system,” Bybee and Hopper (2001: 3) go on to argue, “has had to give way to that of a language as a massive collection of heterogeneous *constructions*, each with affinities to different contexts and in constant structural adaptation to usage.”

Whereas linguists such as Harris, Hopper and Bybee have thus shown good cause to understand language as integrated and emergent (rather than independent or preordained), Yngve’s (1996; Yngve and Wasik 2004) critique of linguistics from the point of view of the philosophy of science suggests that unlike other scientific enterprises, linguistics creates its objects anew and shapes the nature of the object of its analysis. According to Yngve, the irony is that language research can make substantial progress when it frames itself not as a science, but situates itself as part of a long tradition of philosophy and grammatical analysis, a tradition that does not claim the existence of language as an object of analysis in advance of its metalanguage. Once we situate linguistics within specific rhetorical or grammatical traditions, rather than a putative science that invents the objects of its descriptions, the culture-specific nature of linguistic inquiry becomes more evident. The immediate relevance of sociolinguistic concepts such as multilingualism thus becomes suspect in diverse contexts (Love 2009). Multilingualism from such a perspective is therefore not a universal category; indeed the very idea that multilingualism could refer to the same thing in diverse contexts of communication is revealed as an absurdity.

Linguistic anthropologists and others studying Creole languages have also cast suspicion on the ways in which languages have been described and mapped onto communities. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985), for example, argue that in extremely complex heterogeneous contexts not every speech event or language will necessarily belong to a nameable language system. Furthermore, speakers may not necessarily have a clearly defined idea of what language they are speaking, and what does or does not constitute “a language.” As a result, rather than focusing on languages and their users, we would be better off focusing on the “acts of identity” involved in different interactions. In a related vein, Schieffelin’s (1990) research on Kaluli demonstrates that children are not taught language or verbal behavior as such, but rather are taught appropriate social behavior during interactional movements. This perspective echoes research into other post-colonial contexts (see Makoni and Makoni 2010; Pennycook 2010) that suggests that to study language, we always need to incorporate social activity, location, movement, interaction and history, as well as, wherever possible, users’ perspectives. The focus of such work is therefore on a human-centered multilingualism as opposed to a language-centered multilingualism. The latter makes a multiplicity of language systems central to its analysis; the former takes the social grounding of human interaction as central.

From the perspective of linguistic anthropology, with a particular interest in the notion of language ideologies, or regimes of language (Kroskrity 2000), the question becomes one of asking how it is that languages are understood locally. As Woolard (2004: 58) notes, such work has shown that “linguistic ideologies are never just about language, but rather also concern such fundamental social notions as community, nation, and humanity itself.” For linguistic anthropologists, the problem was that the “surgical removal of language from context produced an amputated ‘language’ that was the preferred object of the language sciences for most of the twentieth century” (Kroskrity 2000: 5). By studying language ideologies as contextual sets of belief about languages, or as Irvine (1989: 255) puts it, “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests,” this line of work has shown the significance of local knowledge about language. At the very least, this sheds light on Mühlhäusler’s (2000) point that the notion of a “language”

“is a recent culture-specific notion associated with the rise of European nation-states and the Enlightenment. The notion of ‘a language’ makes little sense in most traditional societies” (Mühlhäusler 2000: 358). Because of the centrality of Eurocentric concepts of language, mother tongues and other monoglot perspectives and related notions “what has passed for a science of language (*including multilingualism*) over the past 150 years has been nothing but an exercise in culture maintenance” (Love 2009: 31, emphasis ours).

Although starting from different theoretical vantage points, these and many other approaches to language study are highly skeptical of the idea of languages as discrete, preformed and independent objects. In order to construct itself as a respectable discipline, linguistics had to make an extensive series of exclusions, relegating people, history, society, culture and politics to a role external to languages: “If the history of a language and its users is not factored into the theory as a primary standpoint” argues Nakata (2007: 37), “then any knowledge generated about that language is flawed.” This is not, as Nakata points out, to reject the whole body or work carried out by linguists—this would be foolish in the extreme—but it is to point to the problem that a linguistic focus on formal aspects of a language “fundamentally separates the language from the people; it falsely separates the act of speaking from what is being spoken.” For Nakata, at the heart of the problem is the linguistic assumption that languages are “floating in a vacuum, ‘ready-made’ within a system of phonetic, grammatical and lexical forms and divorced from the social context in which the speech is being uttered.”

Such studies assume that language is a “solved problem, a stable and determined entity” (Harpham 2002: ix). As Harpham argues, attempts to pin down languages are hampered because there is both too much and too little information:

Somewhere in the vast domain of linguistics can be found tokens of virtually anything at all, including order, arbitrariness, social cohesion, individual creativity, freedom, the unconscious, excess, nature, culture—anything. That is why all characterizations of the essence or true nature of language are tendentious.

(2002: x)

This critique of the notion of separable languages, or the idea that there are “language-free communities” (Heryanto 2007) does not of course in any way suggest that some people do not use language, or because they do not have a view of “a language” that they do not communicate in language. There is very good reason to question common assumptions about the existence of separate, nameable and numerable languages. And thus there is also good reason to question the assumptions that underlie the notion of multilingualism to the extent that the term refers to little more than a plurality of languages. If the status of languages as objects is questionable, so too is their pluralization.

The development of languages: language invention

The construct of “language itself as an all or nothing affair” (Rajagopalan 2007: 194), as well as many of the ideas that are part of this metalinguistic package—standard language, dialect, acrolect, mesolect and basilect, language varieties and so forth—need to be understood as an invention. They are excellent examples of nineteenth-century social and scholarly invention in Europe and colonial contexts (Mudimbe 1988; Spear 2003; Errington 2008). Language invention happens at several levels: the very notion of languages as entities linked to nations, ethnicities, peoples, territories is first of all transported into unfamiliar territory. The local linguistic chaos is then sorted out to fit languages onto categorizations of people, and, where

extra work is needed, languages are specifically created and renamed in order to fit preferred linguistic conditions. Shona in Zimbabwe, for example, was created on the basis of a two-stage process: first, a codification of dialects associated with different missionary stations. Second, the unification of the dialects by colonial linguists (Makoni *et al.* 2007). Similarly, Mannheim describes the emergence of Quecha in Latin America as a product of Spanish invasion. Prior to the Spanish invasion, the Quecha did not need a construct of language, indeed like many other communities they did not have any specific names to refer to what they spoke (Mannheim 1991). Once this sorting out has been achieved, this invented world of languages and ethnicities is reported as if it were an objective reality that has always been in place (Harris 2009).

Similarly, in Indonesia Heryanto (2007) demonstrates how the notion of “language” did not exist in pre-colonial Indonesia leading him to claim that “language is not a universal category.” Of course this does not mean there was no communication prior to the emergence of Bahasa Indonesia as a language, but rather that the idea of language brought in with its introduction, and the appropriation of the notion of *Bahasa* in the process, was a major shift in how language was understood in the region. If language was relevant at all, it was something that was the possession of each individual and not necessarily shared by social groups. From such an individual perspective languages cannot be construed as a collection of objects (Love 2009).

Looking at language descriptions in the same region, van der Tuuk (1971) condemns the pointless attempts to “find a strict system in such language ruins as Javanese and Malay.” It is impossible, he suggests, to “represent a language well” unless we disabuse ourselves of the attempt to describe

a complete system, for every language is more or less a ruin, in which the plan of the architect cannot be discovered, until one has learned to supply from other works by the same hand what is missing in order to grasp the original design.

(ibid.)

If van der Tuuk’s view of languages as “ruins” perhaps seems unduly negative, and suggests a possible progression from language to decay, it nevertheless highlights well the fruitless search for order amid a much more chaotic linguistic reality. We also have to appreciate in these and other contexts that many languages, such as Igbo or Yoruba in the nineteenth century had different meanings prior to colonial encounters (Irvine 2009), and that what was understood by many people as their language was simply their description for how they spoke (Crowley 1999).

The process of invention is a complicated one consisting of transforming dialogical and “heteroglossic” material into monological texts (Blommaert 2008). The invented linguistic artifacts were textualized in a wide range of genres: grammatical outlines, grammatical sketches, word lists, orthographies, and so on (Blommaert 2008; Errington 2001, 2008). In this codification process, the serious complexities of different sociolinguistic contexts were reduced through the technical apparatus of monological sociolinguistics into “equally serious simplicities” (Dasgupta 1997: 21). In most colonial contexts, local languages were standardized by outsiders without the direct involvement of the local population, except as informants based on a series of texts, folklore, narratives, and so on (Blommaert 2008). The objective was to produce European bilingual speakers “competent” in the varieties of African languages, which they had created in conjunction with European languages (Fabian 1986; Jeater 2007). The overall effects of this intervention were a European appropriation of and creation of African standardized languages by non-native speakers.

In a bid to regain control of their languages from colonial dictionary makers, local language users increasingly produced monolingual dictionaries, grammars, and so on. Monolingualism

became salient as a consequence of an imposed multilingualism when local speakers felt they had lost control of how they were to represent their languages. Such resistance to outsider multilingualism, however, was more random than systematic. The attempts to regain the representation of sociolinguistic situations were limited by the fact that resistance to multilingual grammars and dictionaries by the use of largely monolingual ones was nevertheless conducted by linguistic elites along the lines already laid down for the description of languages. Thus

the modern language elite, in his role as a liaison between western language values and indigenous language patterns, has appropriated for himself the gatekeeper's privilege of approving or disapproving various shifts being introduced in verbal repertoire. Mostly the elite cartels manage interactions among themselves, very little realizing the indifference of the masses to such endeavors in their everyday speech activity.

(Khubchandani 2003)

This process then becomes naturalized so that, for example, the sociolinguistic truism that multilingualism is the natural and common condition for the majority world obscures the implicit language categorizations that lurk behind such apparently descriptive categorizations. What is often overlooked is that multilingualism is a way of thinking, a world view, an intellectual orientation that forces us to look backwards under the burden of a backward-looking metalanguage, which was never designed "for our modern priorities" (Harris 2009: 33). The sociolinguistics of multilingualism is thus all too often akin to driving a car on a highway while looking only at the rear view mirror, an activity with the potential to see only what has gone before (which may be catching us up) while risking the dangers of crashing into the diversity of what lies ahead.

Multilingualism or monolingualism of humanity

A central argument in many contemporary accounts of multilingualism is that language research has tended to work with monolingualism as a norm, and that such a construct is inappropriate because a majority, if not most of the people, are multilingual. This line of argumentation, which celebrates the shift or break from monolingualism to multilingualism, does not, from the point of view of disinvention, do enough to question the underlying premises of its own position. It underestimates the social impact and intellectual resilience of monolingual philosophy. Although we share many of the concerns over the monolingual bias at the heart of much research on language, therefore, we are also concerned that the resultant ideas of enumerable languages have the effect of promoting a form of plural monolingualism (Heller 2007; Makoni 1998). The case we wish to make here, then, is that although the critique of monolingualism has taken us some distance, the focus on multilingualism does not take us far enough. One way forward here, in fact, may be described as a return to monolingualism, but a very different monolingualism from the narrow vision that was developed as part of the alliance between linguistics, colonialism, and the nation-state. Rather, a new sense of monolingualism might be envisaged that has at its heart an understanding of diversity that goes beyond the pluralism of multilingualism.

Even if we accept that there has been a conceptual and administrative shift from a focus on monolingualism to multilingualism as reflected in the discourses of much established scholarship (see many contributions to this volume), there is, however, another strand of research that is relatively less well known in colonial and post-colonial contexts, the current impulse of

which consists of running by contrast not from monolingualism to multilingualism, but the reverse. The idea of “a language” creates a philosophical bind for sociolinguistics. If we accept the construct of “a language” (albeit a product of complex interplay between sociohistorical factors and politics), then multilingualism may be made up of different autonomous objects, a plural or multiple monolingualism. If, however, we grasp the full implication of the impossibility of the central construct of “a language,” it becomes clear that we cannot in fact critique monolingualism as there can be no such thing.

The irrelevance of the monolingual/multilingual dichotomy has also anecdotally been reported in some European contexts. Harris (2009) reports the following anecdote told by Nabokov. He tells us that, when he was a boy, for a number of years he did not grasp that French and Russian were different. “Without realizing it, he was equally fluent in both” (Harris 2009: 29). Most students in early years of schooling attend school without knowing that they are multilingual. Being multilingual is something they discover at school through a radical process that alters their self-perception and identity when pedagogy forces them to discover languages as separate entities. Pedagogy entails teaching a specific view and understanding of language. In such cases pedagogy creates objects: language reinforced by the presence of “subjects” like English, Shona, Yoruba on the timetable alongside mathematics, biology, health science, etc. The idea of “a language” as an educational construct is also reflected in debates as to whether Caribbean Creole (CC) is a variety of English or a separate language. Nero (2006) cites examples of some Jamaican speakers of CC who thought they spoke English until they were assigned to ESL classes, thus challenging their sense of being native speakers of English.

Although sociolinguists have long had to acknowledge the messiness of the category “language,” and have used, for example, notions such as continua to account for the impossibility of imposing borders between creoles and related languages, the Caribbean Creole (CC) example illustrates further how languages are constructs of the frameworks that make them. Clearly, for Jamaicans, Caribbean Creole (CC) was English, whereas their experience when assigned to an ESL class undermines that very same belief. So CC gets caught between speakers’ beliefs about what they speak (English), institutional language ascriptions (ESL classes as English is a second language for CC speakers), a fully fledged creole language from the point of view of creole studies, and a subvariety of English that cannot be counted as a world English on a par with Indian or Singaporean English from the point of view of the world Englishes framework. As Mufwene (2001: 107) has noted, “the naming practices of new Englishes has to do more with the racial identity of those who speak them than with how these varieties developed and the extent of their structural deviations.” In Liberia, speakers of what some linguistics might call Liberian Pidgin are adamant that what they speak is a variety of English. In Ghana, educated Ghanaian speakers find the reference to what they speak as Ghanaian English as offensive since they perceive their English to be indistinguishable from standard English.

These examples point to several concerns about the linguistic analyses on which many accounts of language in the contemporary world rely. Although the serious study of creoles by linguists and the concomitant acceptance of creoles as languages like any other has been a great advance from earlier views of Creole languages as somehow deficient, the incorporation of these languages into a standard linguistic framework has also caused what Grace (n.d.) calls “collateral damage.” By turning them into languages like any other, the very distinctiveness, diversity, and creativity of creoles is reduced to questions of uniformity, origins, and substrata. A similar point is made by Branson and Miller (2007) with respect to sign languages. Although much was gained initially by finally treating sign languages as languages like any other, rather than as mere gesture or the gestural representation of pre-existing languages,

much has also been lost by the inability to see their uniqueness as gestural languages that operate spatially and temporally in ways quite different from other languages. The example of Ghanaian English also draws our attention to the need to incorporate local perspective and the locus of enunciation into any analysis of language use: When Ghanaians and indeed other Third World-educated individuals insist that what they speak is English, this does not suggest that they are unaware of linguistic differences between them and other users, but rather that at times the differences are insignificant to them (Rajagopalan 2007).

Lurking behind many of the arguments made in this chapter is the perennial controversial notion of the native speaker. If Indigenous languages were invented and are a fiction, then the languages created cannot have native speakers. They will, however, have people who may claim to be experts in them, and others who resist their formation as part of a prolonged process of disinventing them. The constructed languages may be legitimate in the eyes of political administrators and those who are experts in them, but the notion of a native speaker may be unnecessary. The myth, however, of the native speaker is reinforced by plural monolingual models. The idea of autonomous languages may correspond with that of native speakers but when multilingualism is viewed differently in terms of a lingua franca in which diverse features are blended together, reflecting each individual's personal experiences, which are inevitably different from one another, then the only reasonable conclusion is to say that each person is a native speaker of what they speak, no more no less.

Plural monolingualism is a powerful ideological position because it is supported by powerful discourses. Plural monolingual discourses are mutually reinforced and complemented by discourses of language rights, which assign rights to individual and autonomous languages (May 2005). The individuality and autonomous nature of language is further consolidated by discourses of language rights in which it is individual languages that have rights assigned to them, which then creates an impression of a language-centered universe where human concerns are of secondary significance (see Blommaert 2008). If the idea of independent languages is not readily applicable to some global contexts, advocates of language rights find themselves in an invidious position of supporting very specific and culturally grounded views of both language and rights as if they were universal.

By promoting "alien" concepts without accommodating the specificities of local interpretation of variants of those concepts, advocates of language rights undermine interests of the communities they seek to serve (May 2005). To some extent human rights discourses are imperialistic insofar as they tend to override other world views and discourses. The language rights discourses sidestep the languages they are seeking to promote by not examining how language rights are interpreted by the vernaculars whose rights they are seeking to advance. As Heller and Duchêne suggest, we need to

rethink the reasons why we hold onto the ideas about language and identity which emerged from modernity. Rather than assuming we must save languages, perhaps we should be asking instead who benefits and who loses from understanding languages the way we do, what is at stake for whom, and how and why language serves as a terrain for competition.
(2007: 11)

Lingua franca, grassroots and urban multilingualism

Although, as we have suggested, the burden of current research tends towards a pluralization of monolingualism, there are also a number of different ways in which we can move towards a more productive understanding of language use. Fardon and Furniss (1984), for example, propose that multilingualism is "Africa's lingua franca." The view that multilingualism is a

lingua franca is in sharp contrast to concepts such as plural/multiple monolingualism. In plural monolingualism languages are distinct, and autonomous, whereas in lingua franca multilingualism languages are so deeply intertwined and fused into each other that the level of fluidity renders it difficult to determine any boundaries that may indicate that there are different languages involved. Hence plural monolingualism is consistent with a model that renders it possible to choose between languages; multilingualism as a lingua franca, by contrast, militates against this trend and conjures a very different notion of “language.” In lingua franca multilingualism language is viewed as a multilayered chain that is constantly combined and recombined and in which “secondary” language learning takes place more or less simultaneously with language use. In describing lingua franca multilingualism, Fardon and Furniss point out that language is conceptualized as

a multilayered and partially connected. ... chain that offers a choice of varieties and registers in the speaker’s immediate environment, and a steadily diminishing set of options to be employed in more distant interactions, albeit a set that is always liable to be reconnected more densely to a new environment by rapid secondary learning, or by the development of new languages.

(1984: 4)

This makes the notion of language that forms the basis of all analyses in linguistic theorizing of dubious validity. It is worth observing too that this idea is very different from the current thinking about English as a lingua franca (ELF) (Jenkins 2006; Seidlhofer 2001). Although this understanding of flexible, multiple English may provide a more dynamic model of English than some of the current analyses of varieties of English along national lines, it still keeps in place a notion of English as a language with core and variant properties. As Pennycook (2007b) has argued, there are good reasons to do away with these myths about English (or any other language): to speak of English (as international language, a lingua franca, a second/ foreign language and so forth) is not so much an act of description of linguistic reality as it is a discursive act that brings ideologies of English into being. Canagarajah (2007: 91), by contrast, offers a version of lingua franca English (LFE) that is closer to the position we are arguing for here, suggesting that “LFE does not exist as a system out there. It is constantly brought into being in each context of communication.” From this point of view, “there is no meaning for form, grammar or language ability outside the realm of practice. LFE is not a product located in the mind of the speaker; it is a social process constantly reconstructed in sensitivity to environmental factors” (Canagarajah 2007: 94).

Grassroots multilingualism is evident in popular culture, the study of which creates opportunities to advance an analysis of multilingualism that links music, language, paintings, and at times public transport in taxis driven largely by young males in Africa with low levels of formal education. An analysis that combines these diverse modalities has to be transmodal (Pennycook 2007a; Makoni and Makoni 2009) rather than multimodal (Kress 2003; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). It has to be transmodal because meanings or communication in such situations are borne out by a complex reading of different modalities, at times reading them against each other, and not separately, which would echo a plural monolingualism. A transmodal analysis should capture the dynamic and evolving relationships between languages and other modalities. The meaning is an evolving art and drama of communication because the semiotic systems are constructed in context and are always in a state of being, inchoate, fragmented, and historically contingent.

From this point of view, an understanding of multilingua francas incorporates not only the linguistic resources speakers draw on but also elements of the accompanying soundtracks. Language use in parts of South Africa may be interwoven with *kwaito* (a version of South African hip-hop) and its various associations. In such contexts, sampling of sounds, genres, languages, and cultures is the norm (Pennycook 2007a; Alim *et al.* 2009; Makoni *et al.* 2010). This view of language is human-centered insofar as it stresses agency (albeit with constraints) and explores how individuals and communities express “voice” (Blommaert 2005), “playing” around with semiotics with fragmented and open designs, which can be manipulated to clarify, obfuscate or make meanings ambiguous (Khubchandani 1997: 70, Makoni and Makoni 2010). This ambiguity or meaning obfuscation contrasts sharply with the type of multilingual school language practices “which puts premium on the explicit, unambiguous, overt manifestation through language by laying undue stress on its rationale and overt use” (Khubchandani 1997: 226). This dynamic and fluidity calls for a need to reimagine new metaphors to describe multilingual density. One way of describing them is to borrow from Illich and Sander’s description of vernacular grammars in the late fifteenth century, “lingua or tongue was less like one drawer in a bureau than one color in a spectrum. The comprehensibility of speech was comparable to the intensity of a color” (1989: 62–3).

Bosire argues that the

hybrid languages of Africa are contact outcomes that have evolved at a time when African communities are coming to terms with the colonial and postcolonial situation that included rapid urbanization and a bringing together of different ethnic communities and cultures with a concomitant exposure to different ways of being.

(2006: 192)

At the same time, “young people are caught up in this transition; they are children of two worlds and want a way to express this duality, this new ‘ethnicity’.” Out of this mix emerge new language varieties, such as “Sheng,” a Swahili/ English hybrid, which provides urban youth with “a way to break away from the old fraternities that put particular ethnic communities in particular neighborhoods/estates and give them a global urban ethnicity, the urbanite: sophisticated, street smart, new generation, tough” (*ibid.*). Higgins’ (2009) work on English as a local and multivocal language in East Africa destabilizes some of the dominant conceptualizations of English as a distinct code, as a global language, as an entity bounded by particular domains of use. Instead, she suggests, we need to grasp the implications of the hybridity and linguistic bricolage in which English so often participates.

The next step, therefore, is to move towards an understanding of the relationships among language resources as used by certain communities (the linguistic resources users draw on), local language practices (the use of these language resources in specific contexts), and language users’ relationship to language varieties (the social, economic, and cultural positioning of the speakers). From this point of view, therefore, we can start to move away from both mono- and multilingual orientations to language, and take on board recent understandings of translingual practices (Jacquemet 2005; Pennycook 2010) across communities other than those defined along national, ethnic, geographic, or cultural criteria. The interest here is in “the communicative practices of transnational groups that interact using different languages and communicative codes simultaneously present in a range of communicative channels, both local and distant” (Jacquemet 2005: 265). These transidiomatic practices, Jacquemet explains, “are the results of the co-presence of multilingual talk (exercised by de/reterritorialized speakers) and electronic media, in contexts heavily structured by social indexicalities and semiotic codes.” For Jacquemet, such practices are dependent on “transnational environments,” the

mediation of “deterritorialized technologies,” and interaction “with both present and distant people” (ibid.).

Such language use can also be usefully be described in terms of *metrolingualism* (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010), a product typically of modern and mainly urban interaction. Drawing on the notion of metroethnicity that seeks ethnic reconstitution by challenging ethnic and language orthodoxities through the possibilities of a new ethnic *cool* (Maher 2005), metrolingualism describes the ways in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through language; it does not assume connections between language, culture, ethnicity, nationality, or geography, but rather seeks to explore how such relations are produced, resisted, defied, or rearranged. Although Jørgensen (2008) and Møller (2008) have posed similar questions about language reifications and proposed the notion of *polylingualism* in place of multilingualism, the notion of metrolingualism, like the idea of a multilingua franca, has the advantage of avoiding the pluralization strategies of parallel terminology (multilingualism, plurilingualism, polylingualism) and instead posits mixed language as the singular norm where the notion of language in time and space (metro), rather than countability, becomes the language modifier.

The rise of new forms of urban multiple language use has a long history. These new *urbi- or metro-lingualisms* pose challenges to the study of multiple language and render it necessary to construct new metaphors to capture the unfolding social, political, and linguistic complexity. They draw on and use a wide range of local and non-local languages, and create new and fragmented semiotic systems; they are constantly in flux; they are predominantly oral; they are street languages, and as such are often linked to popular culture, crime, and urban unrest. To speak these languages, it is necessary to draw on multilingual resources, and yet these urban languages are also multilanguages in themselves, diverse, shifting, constantly evolving, and unpredictable in their usage. They may vary according to who is using them to whom, while at the same time each speaker may retain a form of multilingualism peculiar to them: a form of idiolectal multilingualism. The variability in the use of and facility in the use of multilingualism as play compels us to reintroduce the idea of individual creativity within multilingualism.

Conclusions and new research directions

Recent research has started to question whether these old categorizations of language—varieties, codeswitching, bilingualism, mother tongue, multilingualism, and borrowing—as well as the identities that are assumed along lines of language, location, ethnicity, culture really work any more. Developed in contexts very different to those in which language analysis is now being carried out (urban, grassroots, popular culture), many of these concepts simply do not seem to address the forms of hybrid urbilingualism that are common across the world. Indeed, there are strong reasons to question the very notion of language as a discrete entity that is describable in terms of core and variation. On the one hand, then, there are the changing realities of urban life, with enhanced mobility, shifting populations, social upheaval, health and climate crises, and increased access to diverse media, particularly forms of popular culture. On the other hand, is the growing concern that we need to rethink the ways in which language has been conceptualized.

The assumption that monolingualism and multilingualism are two important pillars which might be used to frame sociolinguistic analysis, and that studies of multilingualism are attempting to move beyond the blinkered monolingualism that has constricted a lot of thought about language use, takes us a certain way but then stops short. For many people—whether the Quecha in Latin America (Mannheim 1991) or different people across Africa and Asia—the

critical issue is not whether one is monolingual or multilingual but that one uses language. This is why the ultimate move here may not only be from monolingualism to multilingualism but also back to monolingualism, where the latter is understood in very different ways from the monological, one-variety concept that linguistics has been trying to escape. This is the monolingualism of humanity, which can be better captured not by pluri-poly- or multilingualism but by non-pluralized ideas such as urbilingualism, metrolingualism, or a *multilingua franca*.

Treating languages as socially and historically constructed provides space and latitude for social and political change, and takes cognizance of individuals' social and adaptive strategies and their resistance to some of the constructed languages. If Indigenous languages are socially constructed through a complex interplay of philosophy and politics, they are more akin to other artificial constructs such as customary law, which is a form of codified traditional law rather than any naturally occurring tradition. Joseph's (2006) reminder that languages are "political from top to bottom" is useful here as it draws attention yet again to the point that both the invention of languages and their disinvention are steeped in relations of power and politics.

In conclusion, we now return to the questions we posed at the beginning of the chapter. If languages are not "primordial," under what conditions did they emerge, and what are the implications of the processes of invention that brought them into being? Although research discussed above has started to document the histories of language invention, particularly in colonial contexts (Errington 2008), there is clearly a great deal more work that could be done here. In order to understand the metadiscursive regimes used in the construction of "languages," we need both a critical history of linguistics in its many contexts, as well as a great deal more work in linguistic anthropology in order to understand the ways in which languages are locally used and understood, and the effects of particular metadiscursive regimes on the workings of local languages. And finally, if we can do away with our language enumerations that sit so often at the heart of multilingualism, a great deal of productive research could start to open up the real complexities of grassroots metro- or urbilingualism.

Related topics

Lessons from pre-colonial multilingualism; discourses about linguistic diversity; language rights; heteroglossia.

Further reading

Errington, J. (2008) *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning and Power*, Oxford: Blackwell.

(*Linguistics in a Colonial World* gives a significant account of the role of linguists within colonialism, showing how the political and epistemological orientations of empire worked together to produce particular ways of thinking about language(s).)

Heller, M. (2007) *Bilingualism: A Social Approach*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

(Monica Heller's collection opens with an illuminating chapter in which she does a powerful critique of bilingualism, proposing a strong social approach. Her critique is similar to the one laid out in this book on issues about the limitations of constructs such as codes and boundedness as bases for the analysis of language. In addition to her introduction, there are a number of other chapters dealing with a wide range of topics from minority language movements to language rights and bilingualism in the mass media.)

Khubchandani, L. (2004) *Balance of the Current Sociolinguistic Research: New Trends and New Paradigms*, Linguapax Congress, Linguistic Diversity, Sustainability and Peace, Congress Report (19–23), Barcelona, April 2002, www.linguapax.org/congres/plenaries/khubchandani.html

(Khubchandani provides an excellent example of post-colonial Indian interpretation of multilingualism.)

Ranger, T. (1983) 'The invention of tradition in colonial Africa', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(Ranger's work on the invention of tradition in Africa is an early key text for thinking about invention. Although he subsequently had concerns that it downplays the agency and significance of local traditions, preferring instead Andersen's (1983) *Imagined Communities*, invention is preferable because the construct of invention neatly encapsulates the constructed nature of major African social formations. The social formation takes place over a long period of time, and indeed at times there is controversy about which features are relevant and how they should be represented, and interpreted.)

Williams, G. (1992) *Sociolinguistics: A Sociological Critique*, London and New York: Routledge.

(Williams provides a particularly incisive critique of some of the central concepts in sociolinguistics of multilingualism, corpus and state planning, and the limitations of language planning as an instrument of social change.)

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