

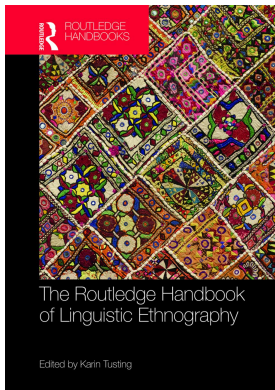
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### Elite multilingualism

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# Elite multilingualism

*Charlotte Selleck and Elisabeth Barakos*

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## Introduction

Multilingualism is ubiquitous. We encounter multilingual practices from early childhood contexts, via schools, to higher education to workplaces, the media and the public sphere. Globalisation, superdiversity, intensified transnational population flows, changing socio-political constellations and economic systems have shifted perceptions from seeing multilingualism as a problem to treating it as a resource (Ruiz, 1984) which provides added value and serves as a marker of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). At the heart of globalisation are discursive struggles over positioning and repositioning of languages and actors as a result of the changing conditions of production and consumption of goods, services and identities. Within these complex constellations, language and communication skills have regained currency. More strikingly, a growing language-centred eliteness has materialised that attaches greater and lesser value to different shapes and grades of multilingualism, and treats some types of multilingualism as more equal than others. Such evaluations have shaped educational bilingual programmes (García, 2009), the nature of language work processes (Heller & Duchêne, 2016), access to services and the labour market, and the complex identities of language learners and users. In contemporary times, not all people are multilingual for the same reasons. Rather, multilingualism has been rendered an object of privilege and prestige for some whilst creating vulnerability and injustices in access to eliteness for others under particular socio-economic conditions.

What then are elites and eliteness? These concepts have been defined in different ways across sociological, educational and applied linguistic scholarship (see the “Historical perspectives” section for a fuller review). What we share here in this chapter is an understanding of elites and eliteness as discursive and agentic, so grounded in the discourses and social practices of people. Following Thurlow and Jaworski (2017, p. 244), eliteness is “something people do, not something they necessarily have or are”. Crucially, they go on to argue, it is “the semiotic and communicative resources by which people differentiate themselves and by which they access symbolic-material resources for shoring up status, privilege and power”.

Inspired by Bourdieu’s accounts of language, capital and distinction (1982), and drawing on Barakos and Selleck (2019), we define elite multilingualism as “a phenomenon that brings

social and/or material capital, a sense of belonging, prestige, excellence, privilege, and access through the use of specific linguistic resources for certain social groups and individuals” (p. 362). In this sense, elite multilingualism positions language as an access code to a distinct perceived or aspired elite way of living and being. Whilst we will further contextualise this concept from various angles, we would like to emphasise that our aims here in this chapter are to situate research on language and elites/eliteness in the context of linguistic ethnography. Whilst we introduce elite multilingualism as a new label, we believe that the label per se is less important than the range of concepts it makes possible to think through and deal with. Elite multilingualism offers us new lines of thinking about how language connects to other forces of social life – an agenda that is shared by linguistic ethnography (Snell et al., 2015).

The chapter is structured as follows. First, we provide a historical overview of ‘elites’ and ‘elite multilingualism’ by reviewing how different scholars have talked about these phenomena in different contexts and points in time. Subsequently, we turn to critical issues that, we argue, nurture the (re)production of elite multilingualism, such as the commodification of language, ideologies, choice and hierarchies. Then, there will be a discussion of selected studies that offer an understanding of various elite sites and current understandings of ‘elite multilingualism’. We also highlight two case studies that trace eliteness in terms of multilingual language trainers in Austria and bilingual language education in Wales. We then chart the implications of elite multilingualism and raise the central question of ‘who wins and who loses’ in the claims over access to linguistic resources. The final section will summarise key points and highlight future directions for research at the crossroads of multilingualism and eliteness through a linguistic-ethnographic lens.

### Historical perspectives

A specific interest in elites emerged in the fields of sociology, social theory and political theory in the early 20th century. Scholars were mainly interested in the interrelationship of power, held by institutions and individuals, and the political and national systems of the ruling class (Maxwell, 2015). Within the sociology of education, there has been a thriving interest in elite education and its link to social hierarchies and power structures at a national and global level (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2010; Khan, 2012; Maxwell, 2015; van Zanten, 2018). Most of this research is inspired by Bourdieu’s (1982, 1991) sociological focus on language, capital and differentiation, to address the key question of what constitutes elites and social class and who controls the value and distribution of resources.

Since there are different entry points to defining elites, Sonntag (2003) offers a useful avenue from a political science perspective: to consider elites as something that is not monolithic and static but multifaceted and dynamic. There are different overlapping clusters of elites (political, economic, cultural and linguistic) that mobilise different types of capitals to acquire and retain their elite status (Sonntag, 2003, p. 8). Thurlow and Jaworski (2017) orient their work towards elite discourse and mobility and define elite identities as not only material or actual but also ideological and aspirational. If we follow Bourdieu’s practice and resource-centred approach, then we can argue that

- a eliteness is linked to beliefs and ideologies, power and influence;
- b elites inherently involve classifications and hierarchisation;
- c elites are formed through social contact, i.e. they are a (self)defined and perceived social group of individuals who share a common range of characteristics based on perceived superiority and patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Barakos & Selleck, 2019).

In the earlier literature on elite bilingualism, eliteness is often depicted in somewhat contradictory and mundane binary terms. There is, for example, a common distinction between ‘elite’ and ‘folk’ bilingualism that has been prominent. Paulston (1978) uses the term ‘elite bilinguals’ to refer to individuals who become multilingual through free choice, most commonly as a result of schooling. Folk bilingualism, often treated as a condition of ethnic minorities, depicts a situation where individuals involuntarily learn a new language for survival and resulting from migration (see also Butler & Hakuta, 2004). Such a distinction is often premised on the assumption that an elite bilingualism is unproblematic for the speaker, since it is driven by intentional choice (Rydensvald, 2015, p. 214).

De Mejía (2002) defines ‘elite bilingualism’ from a more critical, power-based perspective as a type of bilingualism that “represents a definite advantage, socially and economically” for people who choose to learn more than one language because of their “lifestyle, employment opportunities, or education” (De Mejía, 2002, p. 41). De Mejía (2002) and Guerrero (2010) also discuss an array of neighbouring terms that are circulating, such as ‘additive bilingualism’, ‘voluntary bilingualism’, ‘privileged bilingualism’, ‘prestigious bilingualism’, ‘optional bilingualism’ and ‘enrichment bilingualism’. To a greater or lesser extent, these terms rest on a notion of ‘choice’ that enables people to become bilingual from a position of privilege and power (see later discussion of the notion of ‘choice’ in Section 3). However, as Guerrero (2010) argues, elite bilingualism is not a voluntary phenomenon in non-European, less developed countries such as China, South Africa and Colombia, where “children are ‘forced’ by circumstances to receive instruction in English” (2010, p. 174) to enable upward social mobility.

Paulston’s (1978, p. 35) binary distinction and understanding that elite bilingualism is without problems compared to folk bilingualism is limited and ignores the complexities, nuances, privileges and precarities of all multilinguals involved. Furthermore, definitions are always the product of specific moments of time and place. In the 21st century, critical language scholars have started to address the current complexities of globalisation; internationalisation; the erosion of nation states; the rise of neo-liberalism and migration; and what this means for language, education and work. With these processes intensifying, scholars have begun to articulate their concerns over the linguistic and social consequences of global English and other dominant languages, the increased cosmopolitan celebration of (linguistic) diversity and the preservation of endangered and minority languages at the same time.

Jaspers (2009) speaks of two different types of multilingualism to depict the paradox of valuing some types of language (varieties) and language users more than others: a prestige (or ‘pure’) multilingualism vs. a plebeian (or ‘impure’) multilingualism. Whilst these two terms are also binary, Jaspers depicts the shades and grades of multilingualism, its hierarchies and social conditions: from highly educated, mobile, transnational individuals in command of mostly Western European, high status, global languages learned formally to less privileged, often working-class, urban, minority, heritage, migrant communities whose linguistic repertoires are much more varied, often learned in less formal school settings (for a similar distinction, see Blommaert, 2011). Similarly, Jaworska and Themistocleous’s (2018) work is another important example of public discourses on multilingualism and its intersection with eliteness. They investigate mainstream media representations and people’s lay beliefs of multilingualism through an attitude survey and a corpus-based discourse analysis of British press. Essentially, their findings reinforce the prevalence of an ‘elite multilingualism’ – the term they use to capture a type of multilingualism “which values prestigious languages, formal education and qualification, and which devalues or excludes languages spoken by immigrants” (Jaworska & Themistocleous, 2018, p. 21).

In discussing eliteness and language, Heller's critical sociolinguistic and ethnographic work has been influential in examining the role of language in the construction of social difference and social inequality (Heller, 2011). Her work highlights the transformations of the nation state, language ideologies about bilingualism and linguistic practices in the context of a globalised new economy. In her work on the commodification of bilingualism in Canada, Heller (2002, p. 49) discusses a bilingual elite that has emerged and is capable of dealing with monolingual anglophones in powerful positions equally as well as with more marginalised 'working class' bilinguals. Here, she specifically contrasts the term 'elite bilingualism', which captures the dominance of "standard and monolingual forms and practices largely acquired through literacy" (Heller 2002, p. 49), with a 'working-class bilingualism' that draws on mixed-language forms and mostly orally acquired practices.

In terms of eliteness in the world of work, Day and Wagner (2007) capture the linguistic situation of professionals in the international marketplace. With the term 'bilingual professional', they describe the communicative competencies and practices of transient workers who voluntarily migrate for professional purposes to improve their work-life chances (Day and Wagner 2007, p. 381). Garrido (2017) describes the work and multilingualism of elite humanitarian transnational professionals who mobilise their own 'cosmopolitan capital' (a type of cultural capital that involves solidarity, openness and certain linguistic competences) to achieve and maintain an elite trajectory and status. Relatedly, Thurlow and Jaworski (2012, 2014) explore elite status and luxury travel in an era of global mobility. They trace the ways marketers and commercial agents use visual, spatial, material and linguistic resources to perform eliteness and the ways 'luxury labour' gets visibilised and invisibilised (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2014).

Based on this review, we build on our definition of elite multilingualism as a discursive, ideological, enacted, emotive and socially constructed phenomenon. Elite multilingualism is also grounded in banal conceptualisations of language as bounded, homogenous, commodifiable and measurable entities, along with mundane understandings of language as a vehicle of access to valued resources. Elite multilingualism may be a material or economic status quo. Yet, whilst income or wealth privilege may constitute one aspect of eliteness, it does not paint the full picture. Elite multilingualism may also be an aspiration and an ideology that ordinary people buy into.

In the next section, we will debate the conditions, processes, influences and constraints that enable elite multilingualism and allow for its (re)production across various sites.

### Critical issues and debates

We first take a step back to address the processes by which something or someone is constructed and legitimated as an 'elite'. We often characterise today's world as globalised and interconnected in order to "account for a multiplicity of processes and practices, namely an increase in quantity and rapidity of the circulation of people, identities, imaginations and products across borders" (Da Silva et al., 2007, p. 183). In recent years, the term 'commodification' has entered the sociolinguistic lexicon, used varyingly to refer to language being treated as "an objective skill, acquired and possessed, that affords status, recognition legitimacy, and ultimately material remuneration, to those who possess it" (Block, 2017, p. 6). This is not in itself new; Bourdieu's classical conceptualisation of linguistic capital (1982, 1991) posits language as a set of attributes that a person can accumulate in order to establish or improve their social position (Eckert, 1989). More recently, Hogan-Brun (2017) talks of 'linguanomics' to assert that languages can have a "market-value" (2017, p. xii) and that

language competency can be discussed in terms of “assets” (2017, p. xii). These ‘attributes’ or ‘assets’ are available to be exchanged in the ‘marketplace’ of social interaction.

That said, language itself has no tangible value. The commodification of language relies on and is shaped by people’s “beliefs about language” and their “rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein 1979, p. 193), their language ideologies. Irvine (1989) argued that ways of speaking are not always “merely an index of some independently generated social differentiation” (p.255) but may indeed *effect* social differentiation. Language ideologies, therefore, play a “crucial mediating factor” (Irvine, 1989, p. 255) in the link between the language and the economy, insofar as beliefs people have about language are inseparable from other elements of their lives and their social experiences. Blackledge, in arguing that “ideologies of language are... not about language alone, but are always socially situated and tied to questions of identity and power in societies” (Blackledge, 2000, p. 27), draws on notions of inequality. Heller picks up on this suggesting that language ideologies are “discourses in which processes of attribution of value to linguistic forms and practices are inscribed, along with the processes of construction of social difference and social inequality within which they are associated” (Heller, 2007, p. 15). The socially positioned and contestable nature of language ideologies means that they contribute to inequality and social hierarchisation, and they are thus about asserting the relationship between language and power and social structure. The notion of inequality and social difference is salient to the notion of eliteness, as discussed here, in that eliteness can be used as a lens through which to view certain linguistic contexts as well as the lived experiences of people active within these contexts, how people frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and the difference amongst them (see below for further discussion of methodological concerns).

So if language itself has no tangible benefit, what then is happening? Gal (1989) argues, “because linguistic practices provide access to material resources, they become resources in their own right” (p. 353). In other words, the ‘value’ of a linguistic variety is dependent on its standing in a linguistic marketplace and its ability to give access to desired positions in the labour market.

If we accept that languages are, at least for some people, commodified, then it follows that sociolinguistic hierarchies may emerge; languages, if seen as commodities, become valued and ordered accordingly. Consequently, decisions are made based on the perceived usefulness of a language, whether understood in terms of pragmatic or commercial currency or their value as a symbolic resource. This hierarchisation results in a “paradoxical situation of valuing some types of languages and language users more than others” (Barakos & Selleck, 2019, p. 368). Muth and Del Percio (2018) have suggested that changing “market demands result in shifting values of linguistic repertoires” (Muth & Del Percio, 2018, p. 33); thus, the hierarchy for elite multilingualism is constantly shifting, faster than institutional and legal frameworks, and is context-dependent (see Hornsby, 2019, on the multiple stratifications and authenticities of Breton speaker-hood). The hierarchisation is not limited to the ordering of languages (as bounded structures) but can also, as Sharma (2018) notes, be evident in a desire to become more competent (or to acquire certain competencies) in linguistic codes, to improve fluency levels (see also Barakos, 2018 for similar aspirations in adult language training). In this sense, commodification of language and hierarchisation operate in tandem and underpin the notion of eliteness/elite multilingualism.

### Current contributions and research areas

Although critical ethnographic research on multilingualism as a site of unequal encounters and social injustices is abundant, explicit work on elite multilingualism as a force perpetuating social inequities has only recently been gaining currency. The complexities of

today's multilingual requirements and aspirations call for other perspectives that generate new research questions and that address “the other end of the class spectrum” (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2010; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2017). In what follows, we will review some current contributions and research areas for elite multilingualism, mainly concentrating on eliteness in education and eliteness in economic and social life.

### *Eliteness in education*

When languages and language users come to be treated as economic commodities, approaches to language education change. Changes are twofold; first, they can be seen in the “choices made by institutions in allocating resources” (Hogan-Brun, 2017, p. 120), and second, changes are evidenced by those choices made by individuals (or on behalf of individuals) “for learning particular languages (or not)” (Hogan-Brun, 2017, p. 120). To exemplify one discourse-ethnographic case study from the field of education, Selleck (under review) tracked the relative value of both Welsh and English in order to understand what linguistic varieties were capitalised by students at two secondary schools in Wales and for what purpose. It was demonstrated that students make multiple associations between language, education and employment and invest in a variety of strategies to secure resources for themselves. Selleck establishes that the choice to learn Welsh is largely one of “aspiration and enhancement, of recognizing the value of Welsh in a linguistic marketplace and investing in language learning for this reason” (Selleck, under review). Students (or their parents) invest in Welsh as a skill, like any other, something that they perceive has a value and that they hope will give (or believe has given) them a competitive edge in their life beyond compulsory education. In this sense, she suggests that Welsh-medium education has “become associated with an exclusive group of people” (Selleck, under review) with a new bourgeoisie, a “Welsh-speaking elite” (Aitchison & Carter, 1997, p. 357), emerging. On the other hand, students also position English as a form of linguistic capital, a means of escape from parochialism and a demonstration of having embraced the ‘modern’ way of life. Students, whilst agreeing about the ‘advantages’ of individual bilingualism, question the relative merits of different routes to bilingualism (i.e. English- or Welsh-medium education).

Education has always been an institution that provides (or limits) access to “valued symbolic resources, such as bilingualism” (De Mejía, 2002, p. 37). Preece (2019) argues, for example, that Anglophone higher education acts as a gatekeeper of eliteness and stratifies linguistic diversity. In this sense, education is “a powerful means through which to push through various policy aims and aspirations as well as the norms, values and power of the socially ‘elite’” (Selleck, under review) and through this process, certain varieties of language (and therefore certain individuals) are given more legitimacy (Gal, 1989). For this reason, educational establishments can be viewed as linguistic marketplaces. Parents, in making a “planned and purposeful” (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998, p. 15) decision to opt into a bilingual/multilingual education, are recognising (or perceiving) that certain languages represent a definitive advantage, socially and economically, and in choosing a school for their child, believe that they will gain access to power by “committing... (them) to particular media of instruction and ways of learning languages” (Martin-Jones & Heller, 1996, p. 129). Middle-class and upper-middle-class parents are increasingly aware of the transnational scope of optimising schooling and career trajectories for their children (Weenink, 2008; Doherty et al., 2009).

We start to see a shift towards the “marketisation of language education and education in general” (Selleck, under review) and as a result of this, language learners become positioned as, subjected to and treated as consumers, and are therefore required to ‘choose’ certain codes

over others. Selleck (under review) has argued that the ideology of choice is “a reflection of the market-driven demand for certain types of education and is inextricably linked, ideologically at least, to consumerism”. Paquet and Levasseur (2019) and Codó and Sunyol (2019) portray people quite literally ‘buying into’ languages by ‘choosing’ to acquire one or more ‘prestigious’ languages and/or language varieties and in this sense align with McGroarty (2006) who suggests that “effective and socially just language policies must recognise the moral, as well as material aspects of education” (p. 3).

Rydenvald (2015) explores, via a sociolinguistic survey, reported language use and language attitudes of Third Culture Kids (TCK), the children of expatriates and transmigrants, an elite and privileged set of individuals from “upwardly mobile middle-class backgrounds” (De Mejía, 2002, p. 303) who frequently study on elite or prestigious, bilingual education programmes (De Mejía, 2002; García, 2009). The research suggests that whilst the multilingualism of this group of elite teenagers could be concluded to be uncomplicated (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998), lacking the struggle often attached to many multilingual groups of teenagers (De Mejía, 2002), the “drawback seems to be the marginal use of the local majority language” (Rydenvald, 2015, p. 226) which could be an asset to their multilingualism. Whilst this paper is an important contribution and something we will return to later, there are obvious methodological limitations to the research, not least because the ‘on the ground’ reality cannot be fully appreciated via a survey which does not easily allow for the complexities of lived experiences amongst these mobile individuals. What, for example, does reported marginal use of the local majority language mean in terms of their actual practices?

The ethnographic work of Relaño-Pastor and Fernández-Barrera (2019) focusses on an elite school in Castilla-La Mancha, Spain. They sought to understand how the school had come to rely on native speakers of English as guarantors of educational elitism, distinctiveness and linguistic prestige in the highly commodified market of English. The analysis brings to the fore how the inclusion of English native teachers in a bilingual programme has had an immediate effect on the current English-medium teaching practices, resulting in asymmetrical partnerships between content and native English teachers and causing tensions and dilemmas amongst teachers participating in the bilingual programme. In another ethnographic study, Codó and Sunyol (2019) demonstrate the ways in which an international school in Barcelona identifies the learning of Mandarin Chinese as a distinction practice, with Englishisation clearly no longer sufficing to provide an elite education. In doing so, these contributions add a political economic approach to their analysis, drawing on the three processes developed by Del Percio et al. (2017) to understand the valuation of languages and their speakers – the production, distribution and consumption of resources.

### *Eliteness and economic and social life*

To exemplify one discourse-ethnographic case study from the field of economic life, Barakos (2018) analysed the discourses, ideologies and practices of multilingual, mobile language trainers working for an elite institution of education – an Austrian language and intercultural communication business. In this work, she positions the language trainer as neo-liberal language workers, i.e. someone who needs to act increasingly “adaptable, subject to certification and who embodies entrepreneurial values” (Barakos, 2018, p. 3). She used a discourse-ethnographic approach, grounded in institutional ethnography and critical discourse studies, to capture the trajectories of these multilingual language workers, the routine nature of their work, i.e. teaching exclusive language and intercultural communication courses to business



clients, and ask what it means for them to work with language as a resource for securing their jobs and as the object and product of their work.

Findings show that these trainers get caught up between rather elite and precarious working conditions. While the trainers value their language work under the banner of flexibility and freedom, the non-linear, non-permanent, largely unmonitored and unregulated working hours and pay confirm that their language work is carried out under conditions of increasing uncertainty, and feelings of insecurity. Barakos's study also shows that despite the institutional diversity ethos, adult language learning and teaching is imbued with reference models, processes of evaluation, classification and legitimation. Native speakerism is a pervasive ideology that permeates the work of the trainers and the institution's marketing and staffing approach. Certain 'language desires' and affective stances are instilled for using non-native trainers for teaching grammar and native speakers for teaching more advanced and 'authentic' communication skills. Such practices reproduce the essentialist strengths and weaknesses of the native and non-native speaker self as regimes of truth and commodify native speakerness as authentic and elite capital that can be sold on the education market.

### Implications for practice

It was established above that a chain of commodification emerges – a ripple effect. As people start to treat language as a skill, it follows that people start to build hierarchies; they start to order the languages and the users of those languages and, in turn, institutions start to cater for the aspirational desires of a social and linguistic elite.

Elite multilingualism contributes to unequal power relations not least because the success of a few relates to the failure of many (Howard & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2010). Selleck (under review) argues that a sense of eliteness “shifts the power to the already more powerful in society”, and existing linguistic regimes are “simply reinforced and re-created” (Kelly-Holmes & Pietikainen, 2013, p. 224). In this sense, language is the medium through which the elite regulates the periphery. This has a palpable effect on various social actors. De Costa (2019) suggests that “elite multilingualism can hurt teachers, pedagogically and professionally” (p. 456), arguing that teachers are deskilled and their linguistic knowledge is devalued. Rydenvald (2015) alleges that the apparent free choice afforded to the TCK does not result in multilingualism more superfluous and less complicated than that of other multilingual teenage groups but that the multilingualism of TCK individuals has implications not only for the teenagers' own lives but also for social, migrational and educational aspects. In other words, the social and educational elite still have perceived limitations (albeit relative to other less privileged individuals). We can thus argue that in this age of globalisation and linguistic commodification, nobody is exempt from the hierarchisation and the marginalisation that comes hand in hand with it. Tarc and Tarc (2015) go one step further in suggesting that it is these elite international schools that are “transnational spaces of agonist social class-making” (2014, p. 34); they are causing a change or a shift in “national, cultural and economic affinities” (2014, p. 36) and often emerge as sites of struggle, where “numerous historical and social factors...collide and produce moments of disjuncture” (2014, p. 42).

But these intrinsic arguments seem to miss the moral perspective; what about the important connection between language and culture and language and identity? Calhoun (2007, p. 286) raises the possibility that the reification of elite individuals comes at a high price and argues that it can eclipse local and national identities, and De Costa (2019) suggests that, under more adverse circumstances, elite multilingualism can potentially erase minority and community languages all together.

And what are the challenges for the elites themselves? Elite multilinguals strive for excellence and perfection; there is an aspiration for broader and ‘better’ linguistic competency but Flett et al. (2016) argue that the pressure inherent in perfectionism is a hindrance to language learning and contributes to language learning anxiety not least because of the social comparisons that are frequently made (Ommundsen, 2001). There seems to be a marked shift away from the linguistic repertoire literature associated with discussions of translanguaging (García & Li Wei, 2014; although Jaspers (2018) reminds us that “authorities and translanguaging scholars are generally agreed that language is key for pupils’ success at school and for reducing social inequality – it is only the type of language they disagree over” (p.5)). We appear to no longer be discussing competency in terms of flexibility and creativity but instead as a skill-based, regimented construction that can be acquired should you have the resources to do so. This leads us, as linguistic ethnographers and sociolinguists, back to discussing language learning in terms of separate bounded codes, ideologies of standardness and purity. Structured forces that nurture eliteness don’t appear to allow for the sociolinguistic ideal (to put the translanguaging and repertoire approach into operation). So where does this leave us today? We can keep producing work on translanguaging but how do we build a bridge with eliteness? Or perhaps we do not need to? Jaspers (2018), in critiquing the translanguaging movement, suggests that we are living in times of “dilemmas” in that “societies adhering to liberal, enlightened principles value linguistic separation and diversity” (Jaspers, 2018, pp. 8–9). Perhaps then, it is for us, as academics, to recognise that once again, there is a gulf between our own idealistic approaches and debates and the reality “on the ground” (Hornberger & Hult, 2008, p. 285) where students will continue to “be evaluated for their skills in a monolingual, academic type of language” (Jaspers, 2018, p. 9) and where education will continue to be a “social credentialing system” (Jaspers, 2018, p. 5) that whether fairly, or unfairly, works to distinguish learners by ability. In sum, irrespective of which ideological position one adopts (an ideology of flexible or separate bi/multilingualism (Blackledge & Creese, 2010)), the fact remains that education will continue to “make new winners replace, or join, old winners” (Jaspers 2018, p. 9), but winners always require losers.

### Future directions

Current scholarship has begun to explore the dialogic ways in which eliteness and multilingualism mutually shape ways of thinking and being. Through mainly discourse-analytic, sociological and ethnographic explorations, emergent work has taken up critical sociolinguistic angles to detail the ways that language serves as an access code to a local, national or globally perceived elite (way of life). Yet we still need to grasp a fuller understanding of the ways that eliteness is interlocked with issues of social class, race, ethnicity, religion and gender. Linguistic ethnography has much to contribute conceptually, methodologically and empirically to a systematic investigation of language, elites and intersectionality. Examining eliteness through a linguistic ethnographic approach strengthens the link between the micro and the macro, “the small to the large, the varied to the routine, the individual to the social, the creative to the constraining, and the historical to the present” (Copland & Creese, 2015, p. 26). Such an approach is also grounded in interdisciplinarity. Indeed, as we have shown in this chapter, much of the scholarly work has been shaped by interdisciplinarity, drawing on political theory, sociology and education studies. Future detailed accounts on elite multilingualism are needed that cross over to neighbouring disciplines.

Future research should also consider the aspirational and affective dimension of eliteness and language, and pay attention to people’s desires and anxieties across the social spectrum.

The current affective turn in the social sciences and humanities (Clough & Halley, 2007; McElhinny, 2010) has started to engage with the connection of emotion and the body to reason and passion. Yet more substantive work is needed on the centrality of language and emotion in social life. Ultimately, research on eliteness and language still needs to grapple with the question of how (and by whom) elites and elite multilingualism are made and, more importantly, how they can be unmade to achieve a more equitable society and linguistically less marginalised speakers. Such reflexive questions lead us back to our own positions as academic knowledge producers. We are in a powerful position to decide and choose what aspects of language in society we want to examine and understand, and what to ignore at different moments of time. There is a need to cultivate greater reflexivity and criticality in times where the gap between privilege and precarity is widening in all aspects of social life – including language. We need to be more aware that academia plays an instrumental role in nurturing new elites, some of whom then proceed with steering the powerful political, economic, media and educational landscapes of our world. Choosing elites and eliteness as a window into the ways that linguistic and social hierarchies, difference and inequities are created and persist is one way of doing critical research on pressing language and social issues that matter.

### Further reading

- Barakos, E., & Selleck, C. (Eds.) (2019). Elite multilingualism: Discourses, practices, and debates. *Special Issue of Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. (The collection of articles in this special issue conceptually and empirically grapples with the concept of elite multilingualism and its diverse manifestations in different educational and social settings.)
- De Mejía, A.M. (2002). *Power, prestige, and bilingualism: International perspectives on elite bilingual education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd. (This seminal book is one of the first to explicitly deal with the formation, dispersion and types of elite bilingual educational provision in majority and minority contexts, with a specific focus on South American countries.)

### Related topics

Sociolinguistic ethnographies of globalisation; Discourse analysis; Social class.

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