

A SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF MOBILITY, MUNDANE TRANSLINGUISTIC PRACTICES AND SPEAKERS' RESOURCEFULNESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR ELT

Setiono Sugiharto

Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia

setiono.sugiharto@atmajaya.ac.id

Abstract

The idea of language deterritorialization has radically revolutionized the way we perceive, use and teach the entity we call *language*. Language has become porous and borderless, making its users capable of crossing borders at ease. Furthermore, language users can adeptly and creatively shuttle and mesh different linguistic resources either to index their new identities or to accomplish their communicative goals. Driven by the concept of mobility typified by the movement of people, ideas and objects from one real geographical or symbolic social space to other spaces, language is not only borrowed, but is also blended, remade, repurposed and even localized. Drawing upon the notion of 'a sociolinguistic of mobility', this article will illustrate the mundane sociolinguistic phenomena in diverse settings as exemplary instances of translanguistic practices, and then show that the quotidian linguistic practices in these settings reflect speakers' resourcefulness. The article ends by discussing some implications of mobility for teaching English in a local context.

Keywords: *Language deterritorialization, a sociolinguistic of mobility, translanguistic practices, speakers' resourcefulness*

INTRODUCTION

The notion of superdiversity, initially proposed by Vertovec (2007), has of late become a popular catchphrase that contributes to our understanding of language contact and linguistic diversity in a globalized world. Gaining insights from this notion, we now can witness the fluidity of communicative forms and shared linguistic repertoires as a result of people from diverse national and ethnic groups bringing their own linguistic resources and meshing them with other resources in a new formed community often referred to as a diasporic community. Superdiversity is rooted to the idea of mobility which is characterized by the movement of people, ideas, and objects from one geographical or social space to other spaces. The mobility of human also entails the

mobility of cultures and ideologies, as well as “the mobility of linguistic and other semiotic resources in time and space” (Blackledge & Creese, 2017). When language enters and moves to a new territory beyond its place of origin, there is the possibility that it is not only borrowed, but is also remade, repurposed and even localized by the inhabitants of the new territory. Mobility also allows people to easily cross borders, to creatively stylize and to mesh linguistic resources either to index their new identities or to accomplish communicative purposes. Sociolinguist Ben Rampton (2008) calls such an activity as *styling* or *crossing*. There are also occasions in mobility where speakers use bits and pieces of different languages to fulfill their communicative needs without necessarily having advanced competence in the borrowed language. This phenomenon has been termed *truncated multilingualism* by Blommaert (2010). What the mobility of language tells us is that language is no longer rooted to its place of origin (i.e. territorialized), but instead undergoes deterritorialization which transcends its localized and fixed physical boundaries. Mediated by the social dynamics and advanced technologies, the notion of mobility has made “territorialized (i.e., spatially rooted and circumscribed) ways of conducting social ties, identities, and community life are receiving less significance” (Canagarajah, 2017, p. 2). Mobility, as contextualized from a sociolinguistic vantage point, signifies the idea of “a trajectory through different stratified, controlled and monitored spaces in which language ‘gives you away’” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 6).

Drawing upon the idea of mobility, or to be precise *a sociolinguistic of mobility* (Blommaert, 2010), the article will illustrate the mundane and quotidian linguistic practices in diverse settings as exemplary instances of language always in motion effecting mundane translinguistic practices, and then show that such practices reflect speakers’ resourcefulness. Finally, implications of these linguistic practices for English language teaching will be discussed.

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC OF MOBILITY: FROM IMMOBILE LANGUAGES TO MOBILE RESOURCES

Vehemently critiquing Saussurean synchrony which defies the spatial and temporal features of language functions practiced in real life, Blommaert (2010) argues for a more dynamic model of sociolinguistics which can elucidate the complexity of globalized modes of communication, namely

a sociolinguistic of mobility. The objects for analysis in this model are certainly “not the traditional object of linguistics, but something far more dynamic, something fundamentally cultural, social, political and historical” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 2). What becomes the crucial emphasis in the model then is not on linguistic objects commonly construed in the structuralism paradigm, but rather on the dynamic flows of language. In other words, while the structuralism paradigm sees language as sedentary (i.e. language-in-place), a sociolinguistic of mobility orientation focuses language as moving and travelling (i.e. language-in-motion) (Blommaert, 2010). Blommaert’s point is to shift our perspective from understanding a particular location of language and its use to its dynamic flows to other location. Here what is crucial is not the stable positionality or location of language, but the “dislocation of language and language events from the fixed position in time and space attributed to them by a more traditional linguistics and sociolinguistics (Blommaert, 2010, p. 21).

Another distinctive feature of a sociolinguistic of mobility is that it is concerned primarily with “concrete resources” rather than with the linguistically defined notion of “language”. Blommaert’s preference of opting for the former is because it is more nuanced than the latter in that it can capture various semiotic signs that speakers use at their disposal in communicative events. As regards to the travelling linguistic codes (language in a traditional sense), they can no longer be able to account for the complex phenomenon of mobility. Here we see the changing sociolinguistic perspectives from “immobile languages” to “mobile resources.”

To illustrate his argument, Blommaert (2010) provides a compelling case of language use in a marketplace in Japan, a chocolate shop bearing the name *Nina’s Derrière*. For those who know and speak French, they would immediately recognize the word as a French word, that is a word stemming from the French language. Yet, when used as a shop name in a Tokyo department store and read by the Japanese and probably by other visitors who know no French at all, the French name may dramatically lose its function as a language or linguistic sign. The name can instead function very well emblematically or symbolically in this specific context. Certainly, one cannot find any associative meaning of *Nina’s Derrière* with the object called ‘chocolate’ sold in the department store, despite its use as a name in the store. Such is an instance of mobile resources or semiotic mobility, rather than immobile languages.

It is important to note here that the notion of mobile resources is inextricably interconnected to what Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) call “practices in place” or “spatial repertoires.” The terms refer to the (re)organization of an assemblage of linguistic and other semiotic resources as occurring in a particular space. Communicative events, in other words, can be shaped and reshaped by the space in which they are carried out.

LANGUAGE MOBILITY IN MUNDANE TRANSLINGUISTIC PRACTICES

The French name *Nina’s Derrière* chocolate store in Tokyo Department store described above reflects the everyday translinguistic practices or “the ordinariness of translinguistics (Dovchin & Lee, 2019). People encounter it as a usual or normal use of semiotic sign displayed in the public space. As such, there is nothing novel, special, exotic and even significant in it. As the effect of “transcultural flow” (Pennycook, 2007), linguistic borrowing, remaking, and repurposing, and even mixing always take place in our everyday life, making translinguistic practices banal, ordinary, mundane, and unremarkable (Dovching & Lee, 2019). In this section, I will provide further illustrations regarding the idea of a sociolinguistic of mobility which effects the transcultural flow and results in the everydayness or ordinariness of translinguistic practices. With such examples, I show that language users are in fact resourceful in that they are adept at assembling their linguistic repertoires with other non-verbal semiotic resources in actual communicative practices.



Figure 1: Tous les Jours

When one visits a shopping mall in big cities in Indonesia, one is likely to encounter a South-Korean bakery franchise with a French label *Tous les Jours*. This situation resembles the *Nina's Derrière* chocolate store in Tokyo Department store described previously. Just as not many Japanese are familiar with such a French word, so too are not many Indonesians acquainted with *Tous les Jours*. Transported to other contexts of use, the French name however is less likely to be construed linguistically; it thus carries less linguistic meaning, but more emblematic meaning. It can function linguistically only by those who have competence in French, or at least have studied French before. Yet, for those who have insufficient command in French, such a name can only serve as an emblematic function. Irrespective of what *Tous les Jours* means, local Indonesian visitors having no competence at all in French can still grasp its symbolic meaning by associating it with the bakery store offering assortments of baked goods and beverages. The shift of meaning and function of the name in this mundane translinguistic practice happens because the name is made mobile from one geographical space to other spaces. It thus becomes *mobile*, rather than *linguistic*, resources (Blommaert, 2010, p. 31).

Consider another quotidian and convivial translinguistic practice; this time is in the busy Sydney Produce Market. Three people are involved in the dialogue: Muhibb (M), Talibb (T), and Passerby (P). Both Muhibb and Talibb (Lebanese Australian) are bothers and own a small stall selling fresh fruits. As occurring in a public space, the communicative exchange of the speakers is also influenced by the interplay of the work or activity in the market, the linguistic repertoires of the speakers, and the objects available in the surrounding space.

1. M: Hey! Johnny fix up the stand! Here move these cherry tomatoes put them with them. Let them do it. Let them do Hog's Breath ... If you wanna do anything ... if my dad's not doing it start here.

2 *Morning markets and metrolingual multitasking*

2. T: *Ed da calaphak? Etnan?* (How much did it cost you? Two?)
3. M: Sorry. *Eh tnanan dollar!* (Yeah two dollars)
[Ten seconds pause]
[phone conversation]
4. T: Joe ... good morning, Can you send me one ras one blues please. Thank you very much. See ya buddy! Coles is on special. Dollar seventy and dollar sixty on u::mm on on what do you call it ... two dollars.
5. P: *Salamu alaykum mate* (*Peace be upon you, mate*)
6. M: *Wa alaykum assalam* (*Peace upon you too*)

(taken from Pennycook and Otsuji, 2015, pp.1-2).

We see in this ordinary and convivial market conversation a mixture of English and Arabic. There is however no something exotic or novel here in term of traslinguistic practice such as this, as we normally encounter it in our everyday life not only in the market, but also in other public places. Mixing languages in a public space such as this is what we and other people usually do whether we are aware of it or not. In fact, this has been part of our linguistic repertoires –our everyday linguistic practices. As seen in the dialogue above, both Muhibb and Talibb, given their mixed linguistic background, adroitly shuttles between Arabic and English at ease (Sorry. Eh tnaman dollar!), as does the passerby in greeting them (*Salamu alaykum mate*). It is also interesting to see in the dialogue the use of “a particular local variety of ‘market talk’” (*ras* and *blues* for raspberries and blueberries, respectively, and *caulies* for cauliflowers) (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015, p.2). Despite the linguistic mixing and the convivial use of typical local variety of market talk, the

market goers from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds can grasp this typical variety and mixing. It seems that intelligibility and communicative success can still be guaranteed even without sharedness in grammatical conventions and norms (Canagarajah, 2013).

The deployment of a wealth of linguistic resources in the market exchange above is obviously affected by the activities or tasks performed, as well as by the social space. This urban linguistic phenomenon has been termed “metrolingual multitasking” (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015, p.2). The interwoven of these aspects can be seen from the way linguistic resources is organized, or “the management of linguistic resources” (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015, p.2). This includes the organization of the talk to the market space (fixing up the stand), the task (calling suppliers), and greeting workers (salamu alaykum mate).

One might wonder what makes language speakers able to decipher the travelling linguistic codes in such instances as *Nina's Derrière* and *Tous les Jours* even when they are less likely to construe the linguistic meanings of the words? Similarly, how can the language speakers in the convivial market conversation above adeptly style themselves by shuttling from one linguistic resource to other resources without a breakdown in communication? This is because they engage in ‘language practices’, drawing their linguistic repertoires, taking up their styles, and partaking in different discourses and doing genres (Pennycook, 2014). In such an engagement, the language users enact their own communicative strategies in a particular situation by aligning themselves with a wealth of semiotic resources surrounding them. Communicative practices then become situated, local, and ecological. Language users’ success in interpreting both verbal and non-verbal linguistic resources, as well as in communicating messages are not because they rely on the pre-given grammatical norms and conventions, but because they are able to do languaging by assembling various semiotic resources to fulfill their communicative needs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

As language teaching in most non-native English speaking countries still fervently clings to norm-providing Kachurian inner circles, the shifting paradigm brought about by a sociolinguistic of mobility has certainly cast constructive light that impels us language teaching practitioners to

rethink our pedagogical knowledge, practices and attitudes toward language as we aspire to keep abreast of the new paradigm and apply it in our local teaching contexts.

In considering language as no longer a stable, territorialized, and bounded entity, we language teachers need first of all treat it as a resource which is always in motion and is subject to be remade and repurposed to suit a particular speaker's communicative goals. Teaching English (especially in a multilingual setting), therefore, is tantamount to teaching an unbounded and unfixed resource along with other semiotic resources. As a resource, language however cannot stand in its own autonomously devoid of its contexts and spaces where communicative events take place. Thus, in keeping with what contemporary sociolinguistic studies have insightfully revealed to us, language teaching goals need to equip the students with communicative strategies or the ability for practices in place as part of the effort to enhance their spatial repertoires. This includes considerations of helping students to strategically align their acquired linguistic knowledge or competence (acquired through years of formal classroom instruction) with the diversity of semiotic resources in an attempt for making and producing meaning.

It is worth noting that the established notion of competence in the “linguistic cognitive paradigm” (Ortega, 2014) may no longer be adequate to account for the sociolinguistic phenomenon of mobile resources and speakers' resourcefulness. In its expanded version, competence has been redefined and later construed as a meaning-making activity in any communicative practice which includes the embodiment of mind, body, and material objects (see insightful studies on this redefined notion of competence in Atkinson, 2014; Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, and Okada, 2007; Churchill, Nishino, Okada, & Atkinson, 2010; Canagarajah, 2018 a,b; Kim & Canagarajah, 2021).

Closely related to this is the importance of teachers' appreciation of diverse emergent varieties of resources which students bring with in classroom learning and interaction. Alternative varieties or discourses (both in speaking and writing) students may exhibit in their learning should not be hastily judged as mere deviant forms or linguistic deficit hampering language acquisition process. In an actual communicative classroom practice, there may be occasions when learners use bits and pieces of different linguistic resources (the instance of truncated multilingualism) to convey their intended messages. Despite being

‘ungrammatical’ in forms, the messages can still be meaningful and functional in this situated context of use. The competence then should be judged “in terms of the outcomes of the communicative activity rather than grammatical correctness” (Canagarajah, 2018a, p. 37).

This, nevertheless, by no means implies the repudiation of the privileged standard variety which students might be passionate to learn. In fact, a dominant discourse community compels student to master the standard variety; otherwise, they will be marginalized and ostracized in entering the new community. Conversely, simply dismissing the emergent varieties students might unpredictably employ during classroom learning and interaction “can actually work against the goal of helping students develop an accurate understanding of how the English language works and how it changes over time.” (Matsuda & Matsuda, 2010, p. 372).

What should then the eventual goal of language learning be, if students are faced with different kinds of language varieties? The answer is clearly not to exhort students to favor and valorize one variety over other varieties. Even when the standard English variety has been the dominant discourse in formal learning context, the sole goal of language education should not be to achieve proficiency in this variety. The goal of language education, as Pennycook (2014) has argued, “may be less towards proficient native speakers..., and to think instead in polycentric terms of *resourceful speakers*” (p. 15) [*italics in original*].

What students ought to do is to strategically negotiate this dominant variety by shuttling borders with a critical consciousness. To illustrate this, the metaphor of ‘contact zone’ is helpful here. Defined by Pratt (1991) as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today (p. 34), contact zone offers an important vantage point for language learning as a site of struggle amid different power positioning. As related to language use in an educational setting, this is the zone where language norms and conventions are subject to be renegotiated as language users dynamically interact with each other in ‘highly asymmetrical relations of power’. No less important, it is the site where students as language users are encouraged to be ‘resourceful speakers’, that is “people who have both good access to a range of linguistic resources and are good at shifting between styles, discourses, registers and genres (Pennycook, 2014, p.1).

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