Fixity and fluidity in language and language education

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The papers collected here present research and analysis related to the concepts of *fixity* and *fluidity* in language and language education, where fixity points to the persistence of boundaried and standardised language practices regarding named languages and fluidity points to language and semiotic practices that overflow boundaries, cross, merge or mesh resources from what have been thought of as separate languages. Multilingualism was mostly a topic on the fringes of language studies until about 60 years ago (Jaspers and Madsen, 2020) and this recent attention to language diversity has at least partly been in response to changing socio-economic and political conditions around the world. A major feature and engine of such changes has been the heightened globalised dynamics of trade and commerce since the 1980s, along with market-oriented political strategies at national levels and rising socio-economic and political inequalities within and between nation-states and regions (Castells, 1996). These dynamics have produced or drawn attention to global movements of people, both as economic migrants and political refugees, so people along with languages and other semiotic resources, since the 1980s, and particularly in Western Europe, have come to be more frequently seen as border-crossing phenomena than in the past (Vertovec, 2007; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). An effect of these developments are said to be signalled by the increasingly multi-ethnic and multilingual nature of many urban communities in major European cities (Blommaert, 2014). Under such conditions, researchers have come to focus more on this diversity where people in one location often do not share common social nor language backgrounds to the extent that they did before the 1990s. Blommaert (2014) and Blommaert and Rampton (2011) characterise the scope and complexity of this relatively recent diversity of people and language resources as a 'superdiversity', one feature of which is fluid languaging practices amongst people who do not share common cultural or linguistic backgrounds. Pavlenko (2019), however, criticises superdiversity scholars for giving insufficient specificity to the concept and argues, following Silverstein (2015, 9) that that there have been numerous previous waves of migration and conquest over hundreds of years that have produced changes in languaging practices and language resources available to speech communities. At the same time researchers in the South have pointed out that such prolific multilingualism and fluid languaging has long been a feature of pre- and post-colonial settings, though not always noticed by linguists in the North (Makoni, 2011).

Attention to bilingualism from a 'dual grammar' or code-switching perspective (Auer, 1984) has been followed in the last decade or two by a proliferation of foci that flag more fluid language (or languaging) practices, marked by such terms as translanguaging, metrolingualism, and trans-semiotizing, amongst others (Otheguy and García, 2015; Otsuji and Pennycook, 2010; García and Li, 2014). Such fluid dynamics have generally been

researched on and argued for in contrast to what are described as more fixed, rigid, generalised or standardised ideas of languages as distinct from each other and as relatively stable or slow-changing phenomena that are enacted by state-designed national education systems, in particular, and by other state institutions. There has also been further attention to transformed, mutated, flexible and dynamic varieties of major European and other languages in their uses as *lingua franca* in contexts other than their original location, and attention to other changes to 'major languages', as in the focus on and debates over *World Englishes*, as diversified and diversifying phenomena (Widdowson, 1997; Erling and Seargeant, 2013; Hamid, this Issue).

One of the earlier moves towards a fluid languaging focus was to raise questions about the limited value of a focus on 'named languages'. Blommaert (2005, 390) thought that language names such as English, French, Swahili or Chinese should belong to "the realm of folk ideologies of language" and should mostly not feature in sociolinguistic inquiry. What was salient in his view were registers, styles and genres. He bemoaned the use of such named languages to refer to what he saw as a variety of linguistic and stylistic channels and practices, which produced crucial *differences* of language use and practice, and he was concerned that attention to this variety was getting blotted out through the endurance of a problematic "monolithic, uniform and homogeneistic conception of *the* language" (Blommaert, 2005, 391). The question as to how such named languages became hegemonic was addressed in related research. Heller (2007) described how 19th century modernist projects of nation-states in Europe and North America created standard registers of previously vernacular languages and marginalised others. Gal (2018, 227) similarly identified the development of modern western linguistics as "an Enlightenment project that inferred grammatical patterns on the basis of denotative distinctions" and abstracted these grammatical patterns away from the conditions and ways of speaking that produced them, along with the claim that this abstracted language was autonomous from social and cultural matters. Makoni (2011), Makoni and Pennycook (2007) and Errington (2008), among others, attempt to "provincialize" this "modernist, European understanding of language" and to go beyond it's language-nation dictates. Harries (2007), Errington (2008) and Makoni (2011) described the production of named African languages as the work of colonial linguists, missionaries and administrators. Makoni (2011, 682) described their 'fixing' of languages as a strategy that extracted static forms from fluid language practices and assigned meaning to them, "based on a bifurcation of form and meaning and a creation of a stable relationship between the two, downplaying the fluidity and indeterminacy of language". He described this as a "mythical uniformity" because it failed to recognise the multiple meanings of single forms, as well as "heteroglossic, fluid, and fuzzy language practices" but he recognised that these linguistic and administrative interventions did at least somewhat succeed in fixing these languages and generating practices that are considered instantiations of them. The reimagining of language to focus on fluid or heteroglossic practices then also needs to take account of the persistence and effect of these standardisation effects. Both fluid and more fixed uses of language endure as socially sanctioned practices under varying conditions.

So while those earlier understandings of languages as systems with stable arrangements of form and meaning across contexts has been challenged in favour of a view of language as

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doing, as performance and as heteroglossic (Bailey, 2007; Pennycook, 2008), and of language as social practice (Heller, 2007), that certainly does not mean that standard languages in the form of 'named languages' do not also endure, as practices. Ideas around standard can pervade people's consciousness of their own language practices and deviations from standard can be thought of in negative terms (Silverstein, 2017). Standardisation dynamics rest on the institutional practices of schools, state bureaucracies, mass mediated publics and credentialling processes which display the endurability and hegemonic social value of standards, even where their contradictions are visible and they are challenged (Gal, 2018). Processes of *enregisterment* (Aga, 2005, Johnstone, 2016) of standard and other languaging practices, where sets of linguistic resources get recognised as distinctive 'registers' or styles, lead to presuppositions about types of speakers, their relations, interests, values and social standing and tell people what language forms go with what occasion as they align themselves well or badly with those processes, or they resist them in various kinds of ways. One example of such language forms is by way of *chronotopes,* which point to the way meaning is compressed through the use of lexicogrammatical patterns that enforce cultural expectations by way of already available meaning-making routines and resources (Blommaert and De Fina, 2017).

The standard register, as Gal (2018) argues, presents itself, or is taken as, the anonymous voice of everybody within its domain, despite individuals' and groups' idiosyncratic variations within the standard, while non-standard forms, she suggests, index particular kinds of user "authenticity" ('this kind of person') and the two (standard and non-standard) are part of the practices, she argues, that constitute a modernity as well as a post-modernity where nation-states still endure and groups of people are identifiable as certain kinds of people within and across national settings. Jaspers (2015) made a related point about countries in the Eurozone, whom, he said, displayed an unequivocal love for multilingualism, paradoxically coupled with an equal affection for monolingualisms, where linguistic diversity is located in individuals' multilingualism while the national territory is zoned off as monolingual, particularly in its self-presentation to other states, at least partly because of the associative link between a national language and its viability as an independent nation-state, notwithstanding the global flows around it and within it. Smith, Early and Kendrick (this Issue) identify similarly entangled and sometimes conflicting commitments in the policies and teacher practices around language education for refugee youths in Sweden. Also, Ollerhead, Melo-Pfeifer and Chik (this Issue) show instances of both essentialist views on named languages and national identities in Germany and Australia, as well as reflexive views on polylingual individuals and reflexive language practices in those settings.)

The standard, as Silverstein (2017, 135) described it, echoing Gal's point above about anonymity, "seems like a fixed and non-situational way of using language" to its users, "a form of language spoken or written 'from nowhere' – that is, from anywhere and everywhere". Standards tend to be "rhematized', that is, identified as the virtues of the very people who can display them properly. Silverstein (2017, 148) asks us to think of the power of educational organizations in this regard, "as agents of nation-state projects", to draw people, particularly the young, "into anxieties of enregisterment before a state-sponsored standard register of one language" where this is the ticket to socioeconomic success and social mobility. That doesn't mean that creative and personalised use are not available to competent users of the

standard, but it points to those social dynamics where embarrassment or mockery can be directed at people who try and fail to use standard resources successfully. In one example, as Bohman (2016) described it, the normative status of Standard Jamaican English leads on occasion to variably unsuccessful attempts by Jamaican creole speakers to speak the standard register at particular moments, which get labelled derisively by observers as 'Speaky Spoky'. What 'counts' as speaking a language, or speaking a language 'well,' varies from context to context. Billings' (2011) study shows that the specific model of English language use acquired in school in Tanzania by upwardly aspirant young woman does not actually enable students to achieve the status and mobility they desire, because it is markedly not the same English as children of the elite acquire, particularly by way of overseas schooling. In contrast, the standardisation of named minoritized languages, such as African languages in postcolonial contexts, is complicated by their relative lack of status and function because of the persistence of colonial languages in administrative and educational activity (see McKinney, this Issue).

The persistence of standard languages is sometimes discounted in research on fluid languaging practices research, despite the early recognition in such research that both fixed and fluid languaging practices were characteristic of most research contexts, so that researchers were urged to "not construe fixity and fluidity as dichotomous, or even as opposite ends of a spectrum, but rather to view them as symbiotically (re)constituting each other" (Otsuji and Pennycook, 2010, 244).

Individual repertoires

In several studies, Otheguy and García, along with research partners have made the case for fluid languaging as stemming from the unitary nature of the language repertoire of individuals, regardless of whether they are seen to be monolingual, bilingual or multilingual (Otheguy et al, 2015; 2019; García, 2019). García, Otheguy and colleagues define translanguaging as "the use of one's idiolect or linguistic repertoire without regard for the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages") and see the idiolect as "the collection of individual (ordered and categorized) linguistic features of the mental grammar" (Otheguy et al, 2015, 303). García (2019, 635) argues that "named languages" exist as social constructs but have no reality in the minds of speakers, in their internal linguistic system", whereas the "linguistic system of individuals" is "a single system and freely available as a single repertoire". In this view, then, 'repertoire' refers to the internal grammar of the individual, comprised of lexical and structural resources that are used to engage in linguistic practices. Otheguy et al (2019, 14) are critical of sociolinguists working with translanguaging. They see them as limiting their discussion to linguistic practices whilst not mentioning, or explicitly denying, "the underlying grammar that enables practices even as it is shaped by them." They see such sociolinguistic attention to practices to be about metalinguistic knowledge that tells individuals "when it is appropriate to say what to whom". However, they see this as secondary to their focus on individual translanguaging as stemming from a unitary grammar repertoire residing in the individual.

Social repertoires

Sociolinguistic approaches to fluid languaging generally do not make this move to an individualised grammar repertoire, and land up with a different focus on fluid languaging practices. Interactional sociolinguistics offers a view of language as comprising linguistic resources that do not carry inherently stable and context-free meanings from one setting to the next, but rather as resources invested with social and cultural interests. Silverstein (1985, 220) drew attention to the array of potential connotative features of any instance of language use, to all the other things that are at play at such a moment regarding who is communicating with whom about what. Any such instance, he says, presents "an unstable mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms, contextualized to situations of interested human use and mediated by the fact of cultural ideology". In this view, fixed and fluid languaging happens in the daily practices of persons who, in acting, take for granted an account of who they are and what other people are doing. Under some conditions their communicative practices will tend towards homogenisation (in Bakhtin's terms, towards centripetal dynamics of the social and the sign) and, under other conditions, towards diversification, heterogeneity and multiple meanings (Bakhtin, 1981). From a performative perspective on languaging, to speak and to write (to language — or, indeed, to use other media or meaning-making resources to perform actions) is to realise a version of self in the world (Butler, 1993) because language "is something we do" (Pennycook, 2010, p. 8).

Indeed, the first reference to repertoire by linguists saw repertoire as primarily social and distributed through social interaction in specific contexts. As Hymes (1996, 33) suggested,

> one think of a community (or any group, or person) in terms, not of a single language, but of a repertoire, comprising a set of ways of speaking with speech styles, on the one hand, and contexts of discourse on the other, together with the relations of appropriateness

Otheguy et al (2015, 8) acknowledge that individuals have "a subtle and nuanced metalinguistic knowledge that tells them when it is appropriate to say what to whom" but insist that this is "irrelevant to the debate (about the form of the linguistic system of individuals and whether it is a single system and freely available as a single repertoire)". (See Slembrouk, this issue, for further engagement with this debate around fluid and fixed languaging, as well as individual and social repertoires; see also Edwards, 2022, for a critique of translanguaging and fluid languaging theorisations and research).

Spatial repertoires

Some translanguaging scholars have most recently shifted the idea of repertoires to 'spatial repertoires', to refer to the way fluid (and also more seemingly fixed) languaging practices take on particular, localised forms and functions. This shift relates to a marked 'spatial turn' across the humanities and social sciences in the late 20th century that aims to be more than just the play of spatial metaphors, but is a rethinking of spatial relations, where space is not seen as an empty grid of mutually exclusive points, but as a qualitative context that situates particular behaviours and activities, where space is 'folded into' social and material relations through practical activities and communicative social-material practices (Massey, 2005). Space is both local in its specificity as well as shaped by influences and resources that come from

beyond the local but become localised in distinct ways. Spatial repertoires are differentiated and dispersed in their sources and resources where the language and semiotics involved are the products of socially located activities. And they are "part of the action" (Pennycook, 2010). One way to summarize is to say that spatial repertoires refer to the "throwntogetherness" (Massey 2005: 140) of linguistic and other semiotic resources in particular places.

In their studies of restaurant kitchens and producers' markets, fluid languaging researchers examine how people communicate and get things done with language resources in particular spaces or contexts. Such languaging resources can be multiply sourced, unequally available and interwoven with other semiotic resources such as gestures and other uses of bodies as communicative resources. Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) argued that the concept of 'spatial repertoires' helped them to account for all the language and other resources that were mobilized in a restaurant kitchen where chefs and others from diverging language backgrounds drew on a range of linguistic, performative, gestural and artefactual resources to communicate and get food produced and consumed.

> The repertoires of these kitchens are organizations of the totality of linguistic resources (including menus, the name of the restaurant, labels on wine bottles and so on) brought to this place through the linguistic trajectories of the people and space (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015, p. 84).

Along similar lines, Blackledge and Creese (2017: 256) described how, at a Chinese butcher's stall in the Birmingham City Market, "(g)esture, mime, and physical performance were part of the spatial repertoire of the market hall". The 'throwntogetherness' of fluid languaging is purposeful and organised in this setting. The activity here is not about "deliberately breaking the artificial and ideological divides between .. target versus mother tongue languages" (Li, 2018) but about using the range of linguistic resources strategically, for communicative, interactional purposes (see Krause-Alzaidi, this issue, for the application of a spatial repertoire perspective in a Southern schooling setting) .

Fluid languaging: multimodality, creativity and criticality

Baynham and Lee (2019, 107) argue that the notion of repertoire must be extended to include not just languages, language modalities (spoken/written), and registers but also a range of other semiotic possibilities (visual, gestural, etc.) "because virtually anything in our world can be enlisted to signify". Li (2018, 26) also makes the case for translanguaging as an all-encompassing term for diverse multilingual and multimodal practices, as "a multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource for meaning making that human beings use for thinking and for communicating thought". Li draws on Gunther Kress's work on the social semiotics of multimodality to incorporate other resources besides language into meaning-making (Kress, 2010; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Multimodality is the field that takes account of how individuals make meaning with different kinds of modes. Image, moving images, sound, gesture and other bodily movements, artefacts, layout and the organisation of space are identified as modal resources along with and distinct from language in this model of trans-semiotics. (See also Lin, 2019; and Ollerhead, Melo-Pfeifer and Chik, this issue).

Li (2018) and García and Li (2014) make the case, and Baynham and Lee (2019) agree, that translanguaging, particularly in its trans-semiotic or multimodal form, is, or can be, a creative and critical activity. They point to "the creative, resistant character of translanguaging, understood as language from below, which is liable to be subjected to regulation and censure from dominant monolingual language ideologies" because of its "border-crossing" of linguistic and semiotic resources and they identify creativity and criticality as key elements of such translanguaging practices. There is a risk, however, of what might be described as a form of modal determinism regarding claims about criticality and creativity in translanguaging and -semiotics, where assumptions about translanguaging as a transcendent phenomenon (Li, 2018, 27) are thought of as an effect of translanguaging itself, as if it is in essence an inherently transgressive and progressive modality. Modal determinism was what was argued about in the earlier debate over whether written language was a transcendent form of language in relation to spoken language. The *literacy thesis* of the 'great divide' theorists of literacy (Goody, 1975) was that alphabetical literacy, as developed, finally, in Greece around 650 to 550 BC, initiated a unique and pivotal development in social history, where the uncertainties of speech were supplanted by the precision of writing, with language increasingly able to stand as an unambiguous or autonomous representation of meaning, and making possible philosophy, historical study and scientific thought for the first time. In criticism, Literacy Studies scholars (Street, 1984; Gee, 1996; Baynham and Prinsloo, 2009) made the case that absolutely nothing follows from literacy *per se.* There were no empirical grounds for assuming an automatic, causal or universal relationship between literacy and social development of various kinds. Rather, different histories of exposure to certain ways of communicating, valuing, reading and writing yielded different forms of reading and writing as practices. Situated individuals and groups of people produce and take hold of such resources as language, print and other modes of acting and communicating in situated and distinctive ways and it is a mistake to place undue importance on the modes and media of communicative social activity at the expense of its purposes and location under particular circumstances. In a similarly resonant criticism, Kubota (2016) points out that the enthusiasm for fluidity in translanguaging and related scholarship, overlaps with neoliberal enthusiasms for diversity and difference, that are accompanied by market-centred political strategies that reduce social services and produce heightened social inequalities within and between nations. Kubota (2016, 486) points to "flexible, pragmatic, and truncated language repertoires as essential competence for transcultural workers" in globalised enterprises. She is concerned that "inequality is often solidified or intensified within multiplicity and fluidity" (206, 477) so that one should not simply assume that fluidity is a cause for celebration. "Without addressing power and ideology, advocacy of multi/plural approaches and hybridity in language use can become complicit with domination and will fail to solve real problems" (206, 482). Santello (2022), in dialogue with Baynham and Lee's (2019) ideas around creativity and translanguaging, suggests that language creativity in everyday life, particularly for the weak in the field of the strong, can be about when what is given is re-used in a tactical way:

> (O)ne can say that multilingual language use in everyday life becomes creative
> precisely because it is bound by limits and, at the same time, can relate to these

> limits by adding elements that do not appear to fit within them. Boundaries themselves do not constitute a barrier to creativity. (Santello, 2022, 688)

Such creativity is achieved within constraints, and can be about not simply ignoring boundaries, but using awareness of boundary practices and their porousness in a tactical way that is creative (see Smith, Early and Kendrick, this issue, for examples of Swedish teachers of refugees from Asia who combine both standardised language and translanguaging activities in tactical ways; see also McKinney, who makes the case for teaching named South African languages in schools, based on a strategy of 'strategic essentialism'). We might say, in conclusion, that nothing follows directly, or simply, from either fixed or fluid languaging practices. Through attention to situated specifics, to practices and to what is being performed, rather than to modalities in isolation, we can get a better sense of who and what are being enacted by particular kinds of languaging and semiosis.

Introducing the research papers in this Issue

Michelle Bernice Smith, Margaret Early and Maureen Kendrick in 'Teachers' ideological dilemmas: lessons learned from a Language Introduction Program in Sweden' provide a study of secondary school teachers in Sweden teaching refugee youths mostly from Asia and Africa, in the context of pressure on students to assimilate and find employment in order to attain residency. The study identifies teachers' entangled and sometimes conflicting commitments to both fixed monolingual and fluid multilingual pedagogies, along with dilemmas regarding teaching standard academic language, particularly in Swedish, and also their interests in enhancing the youths' identities and wider communicative repertoires. The researchers identify a similar, confusing entanglement at a policy level with commitments to the national language, as well as to linguistic diversity in individuals. The study suggests ways in which these divergent intentions might be productively met through approaches by way of structured curricula and pedagogical strategies that combine formal language instruction with translanguaging activities.

Carolyn McKinney's study is titled 'Coloniality of language and pretextual gaps: a case study of emergent bilingual children's writing in a South African school and a call for *ukuzilanda*'. She points out that the contrast between affluent class and precarious or sub-elite education is marked in South African, African and ex-colonial, African contexts and argues that it is necessary to strategically recognize fixity with regard to local 'named languages' such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, SetSwana and others in order to validate their inclusion and use, as well as the use of so-called non-standard varieties, in educational contexts. Her examination of note-making in English on chalkboards and in children's books shows a prioritisation of the visual elements of writing over writing as encoding of meaning, because of the gap between what the children are expected to produce and what they are able to produce in English. In response, she makes the case that the teachers' well-established translanguaging in talk around the monolingual English materials can be productively supported by bilingual learning materials that draw on both the fixity and fluidity of language in innovative ways that make sense to the teachers and learners.

Lara Krause-Alzaidi's study is titled 'Relanguaging: Sorting things out and bringing things together in Khayelitshan English classrooms'. While spatial repertoires have mostly been applied in urban studies in northern settings , Krause-Alzaidi describes how teachers in Khayelitsha, Cape Town (sometimes in collaboration with their students) sort out complex spatial repertoires with various heterogeneous linguistic resources to produce English as a recognizable, teachable and learnable entity. The study describes an intensely local set of practices and routines where fluid languaging and fixed language resources are used strategically in the language classroom by teachers and students. The close detail of the study shows teachers using awareness of boundary practices and of their porousness in a tactical way that is transgressive, creative and productive, as well as constrained by the limits associated with sub-elite schooling in that setting.

In his study, titled 'Various guises of translanguaging and its theoretical airstrip', Stef Slembrouk provocatively suggests that there is a problem in translanguaging discourse of 'overshooting' and landing up 'in a cornfield'. In particular, he engages critically with the translanguaging theorists' claim regarding the unitary repertoire of individuals (Otheguy et al, 2015) and the non-existence of discrete languages except as social constructs. He argues, instead, that a language (or, a variety of language) is both "a set of structural and patterned regularities" AND it is a social construct. A key move he makes is to restore boundaries in language and languaging as not simply constraining but also productive resources in situated language practices and particularly in language learning activities.

Sue Ollerhead, Silvia Melo-Pfeifer and Alice Chik in their study 'Building a virtual transnational space for initial teacher education with Australian and German students' describe an intervention aimed at language and literacy student-teachers in Hamburg and Sydney, who share online visual biographies on their language histories with each other. The authors describe this as a transnational space and reflexive activity aimed at enhancing student teachers' awareness of language and socio-cultural practices in another part of the world. Their analysis of student-teachers' responses to the biographies of the corresponding group show them reflecting on the monolingual nature of education policy and the polylingual nature of some of the students' backgrounds. Their responses include both essentialist ideas being expressed around language identities of individuals and countries and also instances of 'cognitive dissonance' where they engage further with ideas about linguistic and cultural diversity and complexity.

In a departure from her preceding studies on English language users in Japan, Akiko Katayama studies non-English users in Japan in her paper here, titled 'Being and Staying "Monolingual": Rhizome of Life and Languages Narrated by L1 Japanese Speakers'. In contrast to their self-representations as 'monolinguals', her study traces her subjects' variable learning and using of different Japanese registers, or 'social languages', for different reasons at various points and stages in their lives. 'Social languages' (Gee, 1996) as reflexive models of language use point us to the ways situated, distinctive types of meanings are shared by groups of people who sustain and modify them as part of their collective social practices. Their shifting language practices are influenced by their experiences and social positions and are partly individual, but also characteristic of their environment and their, sometimes emergent, place in it. She

describes these processes of language development tied to identity practices at work, home and other sites as rhizomatic in their fluid unpredictability, where language development was situated in specific localities and in particular times in personal and wider histories.

In his study titled 'Englishes, secularisation, and de-secularisation: Examining English language textbooks in a Muslim society from the perspective of language as situated practice' Obaidul Hamid examines the complex relationship of English language practices and ideologies with Islam, in the context of both secular and religious schooling contexts. He examines how the local development of English language textbooks in Bangladesh for secular mainstream education, on the one hand, and for religious education, on the other, show an inconsistency in the way secular language and representations get transplaced and translated to religious schools while carrying over some of their secular, modernist language and imagery, including their portrayal of children.

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