# Language, Migration and Social Inequalities

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## A Critical Sociolinguistic Perspective on Institutions and Work

Edited by
**Alexandre Duchêne, Melissa Moyer and Celia Roberts**

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**Cécile B. Vigouroux** is Associate Professor of Sociolinguistics at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada. For the past 15 years, she has been exploring different ethnographic aspects of Francophone African migrations to Cape Town, South Africa. Among these are issues of transnational identity formation, reshaping of linguistic ideologies, and sociocultural transformations triggered by new forms of mobility. Her work aims at bridging sociolinguistics with other disciplines such as geography and, more recently, economy.

# 1 Introduction: Recasting Institutions and Work in Multilingual and Transnational Spaces

Alexandre Duchêne, Melissa Moyer and Celia Roberts

This volume on *Language, Migration and Social Inequalities: A Critical Sociolinguistic Perspective on Institutions and Work* appears at a time when linguists concerned with the social meaning of language are asking questions arising from its role in a changing social, economic and political context (Blommaert, 2005; Duchêne & Heller, 2012) and searching for new conceptual and explanatory frameworks to answer these questions (Coupland, 1998, 2010). The institutions and workplaces described here are all realms where the daily lives of migrants are regimented and controlled. They are also illustrative sites for looking at ways social inequality is (re)produced and challenged. Language in these contexts includes a focus on multilingualism and on normative modes of talking in the dominant language. Both sites play a central role in processes of categorisation and legitimation of migrant groups as well as in exercising agency in the organisation of and access to resources. Language, it is argued, is key in selection, social mobility and gatekeeping processes as well as being the object of organisational responses to these wider institutional processes. It is through language that the complex relationship between the material and symbolic capital of migrants is played out on a local scale, as power institutions of the nation-state interact with the globalised economic order.

## Language in an Era of Globalisation

This book examines how social and political changes brought about by transnational migration and the new economic order, which are themselves the outcome of globalisation, produce new ways of regulating language and establishing what counts as 'linguistic capital' (Bourdieu, 1991). An explicitly critical ethnographic sociolinguistic stance provides an account of the overt and covert ways language and institutional practices address core questions concerning power and the place of migrants in various national contexts.

Specifically, the new conditions resulting from globalisation force us to reconsider the articulation between *language*, *migration* and *institutions*. In terms of *language*, the shift to the tertiary economy and so to the increased number of jobs in the area of services has made communication and language key. The chapters in this volume demonstrate how this actually works in various national, occupational and institutional contexts. Linguistic marketplaces are currently being shaped by global forces beyond the control of the individual. In many contexts and geographical spaces, there are new demands on competence in the dominant language. But in many other spaces, single language speakers no longer can get by in their local daily lives in the same way as they did in the past. Here, multilingualism and knowledge of more than one language have become almost a requirement.

Many of these changes affecting the heightened role of language are connected to *migration* and the manner in which people are mobile today. Migrants in the past tended to have limited connections with their country of origin, as travel was more expensive and contact was difficult to maintain. The internet, along with the inexpensive communication technology now available, has created improved means for migrants to communicate more frequently with family and friends all over the world almost instantaneously. Close-knit networks are facilitated and sustained because of the new ways migrants communicate and are in contact with each other through frequent travel. This in turn has led to the growth of new businesses and services to meet these new requirements.

The linguistic and cultural diversification of national populations in countries around the globe has led to the creation of a wide variety of services that target these new citizens as clients or receivers of welfare. *Institutions* such as those providing health, legal assistance, consumer goods and social services, to mention just a few, are facing new linguistic and communication challenges. These are also sites where control, selection and regimentation of these newcomers take place. Institutions are places where we can still encounter contradictory ideologies and practices concerning

language. In some organisations, especially from public sector institutions, traditional ideologies connect a national language with institutional identity (see Allan, this volume). Here, social processes of exclusion are carried out on the basis of a person's competence and linguistic performance which can be identified and traced to localised micro-level social practices (see Codó *et al.*, this volume). However, in the private sector, multilingualism related, for example, to the marketing of consumer products constitutes an added value and contributes to the way private enterprises make a profit (Piller & Takahashi, this volume).

There is a constant and complex dialectic between what a host society considers to be regimented (language being one of the terrains on which control can be imposed) and the way migrants' linguistic resources can serve economic interests which benefit either large institutions or small-scale minority ethnic businesses. The regulation and the capitalisation of language work goes hand in hand with the blurring of boundaries between the state, the NGO and the private, or between the local and the ethnic businesses (see Sabaté on *locutorios*, this volume). This is a dynamic that invites us to constantly question the way language operates as an instrument of power across and beyond institutions. New conditions of language use and new forms of interests (re)produce new and old forms of inequalities and resistances to them. These are always based on the value that certain languages and varieties of language have over others – the hierarchisation of languages – which endows some with added value within particular domains of use. This critical stance can seem overly abstract, bleaching out the speakers from their speech. But inequalities of language are also embodied in speakers' experience of linguistic regulation and capitalisation. They are positioned by these processes but they also actively engage in resisting them. For this reason, in order to challenge the notion of migrants as victims and to focus on their active agency, we have included a separate section on resistance.

## Sociolinguistics: Continuity and Change

The theme of this volume, *language* and *social inequality*, is not new to the field of sociolinguistics. This area of inquiry has always addressed, to different degrees, issues of linguistic inequality in examining the relationship between language and social life. Although taking different ontological and epistemological stances (Moyer, 2008), both variationist, language system-focussed sociolinguistics (Labov, 1963, 1966) and practice-based, culturally and ethnographically informed sociolinguistics (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972) are concerned with the way in which language indexes, or points out to,

social phenomena and ideologies beyond their denotative meaning. Labovian correlational studies showed that variation and linguistic differences were regular and patterned and that stigmatised varieties served as stereotypes, identity markers or indicators of social group categorisations. While variationist sociolinguistics had shown the significance of the indexicality of the language system, Hymes and Gumperz started not with structuralist systems but with speakers and their communicative practices, drawing on the functional approach of Jakobson (1960) and Pierce (1977) and on the linguistic philosophy of Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Grice (1989).

For Gumperz and Hymes, only an activity and practice-based view of language can account for linguistic diversity and multilingualism and any other approach, 'feeds into monoglot ideologies of language standardisation (. . .) and (. . .) into oppressive language and educational policies' (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2005: 271). Their concern with the linguistic production of social inequality stems from this approach of cultural difference in understanding, linking the fine-grained detail of the poetics (Hymes, 1981) and rhetorics (Gumperz, 1982a, 1999) of language use to social categories and powerful ideologies. Gumperz's interactional sociolinguistic theory (Gumperz, 1982a) explicitly focuses on the communicative dimension to racial and linguistic discrimination when interpretation or inferencing strategies in ongoing conversations are not shared by interlocutors from different sociocultural backgrounds. Interactions for Gumperz are, therefore, the substance of social relations of power and are where linguistic ideologies are played out (Eerdmans *et al.*, 2003: vi; Gumperz, 1982b).

Hymes and Gumperz were laying down their pioneering theories at a time when the nation-state, communities and class and ethnic categorisations were treated as unified, integrated and fixed systems (for example, Gumperz's notion of 'speech community', which he has subsequently critiqued (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2005; Rampton, 2000). Relationships between language use and social labelling and processes of belonging and exclusion seemed more straightforward than they do today. The connection of language to theorisations of power and to a wider social, political and economic order were not a question of concern (Gal, 1998). Today, with the social and economic changes brought about by globalisation and the instabilities of late modernity, such concerns can no longer be ignored and require more wide-ranging ethnography as well as more detailed and nuanced understanding of interpretive processes.

During this period, the role of linguistic ideology in understanding the relationship between language and social stratification was also being developed, much of it linked to American linguistic anthropology and to the early work of Gumperz and Hymes. The central role of ideology in understanding