Superdiversity and Language

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Text prepared for Canagarajah, S. (ftc May 2017), *The Routledge Handbook of Migration and Language.* Routledge

Introduction/Definitions

Since the term 'superdiversity' first caught the attention of researchers in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, it has enjoyed a quick and broad appeal. Scholars have adopted the 'superdiversity lens', considering it a useful and generative concept to approach new conditions of cultural and linguistic contacts arising in relation to new migration patterns and new possibilities for communicating across spatial and temporal borders. It is thus not surprising if over a very short time span, an already prolific literature referring to 'superdiversity' has found its way into publication in the field of language sciences (Arnaut, *et al.* 2011; Duarte & Gogolin, 2013, Androutsopoulos & Juffermans, 2014).

To understand the appeal of the term 'superdiversity', it is useful to grasp where it comes from, the terrain that led to its emergence and what it originally meant. The term 'superdiversity' was initially introduced by Steven Vertovec in 2007 in the field of social anthropology, with the aim to understand changes in the composition of immigrant groups that can be seen to begin in the late 1980s-1990s (Vertovec, 2007). This period is characterized by two major changes from a geopolitical and communicational perspective. The first is the development of a globalized economy and new mobility patterns. While before the 1980s, migrants tended to settle in one host community and had only sporadic links with the home community, at the end of the 1990s, migrants began to experience more complex migration trajectories, moving to more places but also keeping ties with their different places of dwelling, which led to new forms of transnationalism. The second change is the progressive development of digital technologies (the Internet, Cable TV, mobile devices) affording both the migrants to keep stronger links with home and to remain active on two or more national stages simultaneously and those staying immobile to engage in more transnational relations than before. All these changes begin to upset significantly our understanding of 'migrant communities' and their relation to the 'host community'. While in the pre-1990s, governments could cultivate the illusion that migrants formed rather homogeneous groups (coming from a limited number of countries, and sharing more or less similar economic, social, cultural, religious or linguistic backgrounds), post-1990s, this perception became increasingly problematic, challenging also the discourses and policies of "multiculturalism". With the term 'superdiversity' thus, Vertovec (2007) meant to capture that with more individuals migrating, and with migrant trajectories developing in more complex patterns (e.g. people traversing and moving to more places), our contemporary world shows a 'diversification of diversity' (Hollinger 1995). It is not just society that is becoming more diverse but also the composition of the immigrant groups themselves which have become more

differentiated in terms of social stratification, internal organization, legal statuses, plurality of affiliations, rights and restrictions (Vertovec, 2007: 1048). With these changing patterns and social conditions, Vertovec considers that there are important stakes in understanding and appraising the nature and extent of this diversity, if policy makers and practitioners want to provide more just structures and policies to respond to this complexity of a new scale and different quality in civil society (Vertovec 2007, p. 1050).

Following up on the pioneer work from Vertovec, the term 'superdiversity' has subsequently been picked up in disciplines as varied as sociology, business, studies, anthropology, education, social work, geography, law, management, media studies or linguistics (Vertovec, 2013) This appeal has surged, on the one hand, from the fact that the term touches something of the 'zeitgeist'. In a globalized world, there is hardly any domain or geographical area not concerned by diversity as it results from migratory movements. On the other hand, the term also manages to crystalize incredibly complex phenomena under a very simple term that has caught on across disciplines. This deceiving simplicity, Vertovec notes himself, has led to the term being used with a variety of meanings, not all intended initially by him (Vertovec, 2013). Thus, 'superdiversity' as a research term sometimes means 'very much diversity'; in other contexts it means 'more ethnicity' or, moving beyond ethnicity as a category of analysis. Yet, in other contexts, it is used to refer to more scattered geographical distribution of migrants, variegated forms of networking and mixed cultural identities. Some researchers have also heralded superdiversity as a new paradigm. They talk about a 'superdiversity turn' in their disciplines and how it generates the need for new methodological approaches. The notion also has its detractors who question 'what it really means and who profits from the term' (Westermann, 2014). In any case, the concept has become so transversal that it seems difficult to ignore or to dismiss without closer examination. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to provide such an examination, looking more critically at how the idea of 'superdiversity' has caught up in the field of language studies, particularly sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, and what it brings, does, reveals—or obscures— in this context.

Overview of the topic
That the agenda developed by Vertovec in social anthropology appeals to applied and sociolinguists may not come as a surprise. After all, particularly sociolinguistics have had a long term interest in 'analyzing and interpreting (linguistic) diversity' (Parkin & Arnaut, 2014). Issues linked with migration, mobility or language contact have moreover been at the core of the sociolinguistic project since its early endeavors (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Gumperz, 1982). In fact, the notion of 'superdiversity' as Arnaut & Spotti (2014:1) argue, fits with a certain naturalness with the post-structuralist view on diversity and identity adopted by many linguistic anthropologists or sociolinguists—a view that considers for example that identities and speech communities far from being static and immutable are the contrary complex, hybrid, unstable and changing much as the 'ethnic communities' considered by Vertovec.

In sociolinguistics, the term first appears in 2010, in a paper by Creese and Blackledge (2010) entitled '*Towards a sociolinguistic of superdiversity*'. In this

text the authors suggest that studies in superdiversity would benefit from including a gaze on the linguistic (p. 549). They propose to investigate language practices where they become the "site of negotiations over linguistic resources" (p. 549). What becomes interesting in such diverse environments is thus to investigate how people articulate belonging to different social worlds and communities simultaneously through language practice. They invite to look at situations where multilingual speakers cross over from one language to another—borrowing from more than one repertoire and transforming these repertoires as they use them—, and to consider the 'histories, geographies, and indexical orders' which shape those crossing practices (Creese & Blackledge, 2010: 570). To investigate them, the authors recommend to make use of two existing concepts in sociolinguistics. One is the concept of 'translanguaging', first proposed by García (2009: 140). They recommend to examine the different linguistic features and linguistic resources that speakers borrow from what could be described as different 'national' 'autonomous' languages and to see how they mix and play with them in order to enhance their communicative potential as they see fit. The second concept is (second order) 'indexicality' (Silverstein, 2003) which refers to social meanings, evoked by languages users, that lay beyond the referential meaning of language (or first order indexicality). For example, beyond the content of what they say, the features speakers use (intonation, accent, tempo, idiomatic expressions) might be revealing of their age, gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, race, sexual orientation, etc. For Creese and Blackledge (2010) thus, the study of translanguaging and indexicality is suggested as a means to locate and disentangle more complex patterns and social configurations, akin to the 'superdiverse' social fabric that Vertovec describes.

Blommaert and Rampton (2011) broaden this research program in a text widely cited among superdiversity researchers: *'Language and superdiversity'*. The text is an articulation of different layers of ideas.

Epistemologically, the article proposes that the superdiversity lense allows tying together a number of previously disparate threads in sociolinguistics. It functions a bit like a 'meta-term' under which roof different strands of research that have contributed over the years to de-reifying traditional notions such as language, community or communication can be housed. With regards to language, sociolinguists work on *urban spaces*, for example, considered as laboratories for the study of complexity and heterogeneity in social organization, has contributed to the final demise of a view of language as a stable, bounded entity. These sociolinguists have introduced terms such as *metrolingualism*' (Pennycook xxx), '*polylanguaging*' (Jorgensen *et al.* 2008,), '*crossing'* (Rampton 1995) or 'translanguaging' (García, 2009) to take issue with the naturalness of (imagined) boundaries of language, community and communication. Others (after Bakthine (1981) have also made fashionable again the concept of h*eteroglossia* (Busch 2012, Blackledge & Creese, 2012) that points to the inherent diversity existing in each act of communication, always assembled out of multiple layers of internally differentiated voices, genres, styles, discourses, social norms. Related to *communication*, social semioticians and their mutimodal approaches to discourse have probably made the strongest dent on viewing communication as predominantly 'language-centered'. They propose instead to reconnect to the idea that language is only one of the multiple

modes people can coopt to make meaning, act and communicate (Kress, et al. 2001), thus placing again here too diversity and multiplicity of semiotic practices at the heart of communication. As for *community*, Blommaert and Rampton (2011) echo Vertovec's critique to the term 'ethnic communities' and project it onto 'speech community' or 'ethnolinguistic group' as key concepts in sociolinguistic studies. They contend that these concepts are too static and bounded to be useful and invite instead to consider the myriad ways in which

> 'people take on different linguistic forms as they align and disaffiliate with different groups at different moments and stages' and to 'investigate how (people) (try to) opt in and opt out, how they perform or play with linguistic signs of group belonging, and how they develop particular trajectories of group identification throughout their lives' (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011: p. 5).

On a first level thus, the text aims to articulate a contribution to superdiversity scholarship from sociolinguistics. The authors argue that notions such *language, community* and *communication* cannot be usefully understood as homogenous and predictably patterned entities, even less so in times of increased physical mobility, virtual connectedness and social semiotic complexity. While, in essence, such a critique is not new and has been voiced since the 1970s and 80s in linguistic anthropology (Gumperz & Hymes 1972, Gumperz 1982) and postcolonial studies (Pratt, 1987), the 'superdiversity' lens is said to bring these conceptual developments into focus even more sharply. As Arnaut and Spotti (2014: 3) put it:

> To some extent, this 'new kind of sociolinguistics' is heir to a 'linguistics of contact' (Pratt 1987) which has been steadily moving away from the idea of languages and speakers as discernable units towards that of sociolinguistic resources and repertoires. Overall, this implies a double shift (a) away from unitary, localized and quantifiable speech communities to transnational ones, both 'real' and 'virtual' (Leppänen 2012a; Pennycook 2012; Rampton 2000), and (b) away from presupposed fully-fluent native speakers' competence to a sociolinguistics that looks at the individual whose competences consist rather of a plurality of 'registers' (Agha 2004), 'styles' (Rampton 2011b) and genres (Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 6) that constitute 'super-diverse repertoires' (Blommaert and Backus 2013).

From a conceptual standpoint, the text (and the scholarship that later builds on it) moreover seem to suggest that research on 'superdiversity' in sociolinguistics can best be understood as crystallizing around four intertwined notions: *mobility, complexity, unpredictability* and *governmentality.*

The focus on the first notion – **mobility** – leads first researchers to highlight that if we take into account the trajectory of real people across time, space and borders, simplistic, stationary, static and predictable perspectives about human lives and interactions are no longer possible (Wolf, 1964: p. 96-97). Examining interactions thus cannot limit itself to looking at what happens in the here and now between interactants but must include taking into account their histories, geographies, the discourse formations that influence their contributions and the dissipative nature of the organization of all these dimensions. Mobility does not only affect individuals trajectories, it also reorganizes social fabric. Under conditions of social diversity, 'older diversities superimpose upon newer

diversity', leading to 'their mutual re-articulation in the process' (Parkin and Arnaud (2014, p. 2):

> 'Everywhere around the world, the interaction of 'the' autochtonous population with different generations and groups of migrants, engenders the cultural differentiation of the former. In South Africa the collapse of the racial boundaries has in itself given rise to new configurations which Nuttall (2009:20) calls 'entanglements'

These entanglements and re-articulations, Parkin and Arnaut argue (2014, p.2) redefine drastically the very possibility for population to 'self-recognize' themselves as simple, unitary wholes. They thus require ways to analytically unpack complexities that do not lay open to superficial gaze. This leads Arnaut and Spotti (2014: 3) to propose *simultaneity* as an analytical lens to do justice to these new complexities:

> "(...) the metaphor of simultaneity combines the idea of (a) *superimposition, nesting, and palimpsest* –of earlier and later 'generations' of migrants in particular neighbourhoods, [...] with the idea of (b) *intersection* and *entanglement* – for instance the combination of different codes or idioms carrying different national class-based or ethnic indexicalities into one 'urban vernacular' (Rampton 2011a).

What makes the new situation **complex** surges thus from three sources for them: (a) the *multiple embeddness of migrants*, which engage in a variety of differentiated social fields and networks of relations; (b) *intersectionality* or the idea that in any historically specific contexts, a complex nexus of economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential axes come together ; (c) *scalarity*, or the fact that each social level presents its own forms of coherence but which have sometimes contradictory dynamics (Arnaut & Spotti, 2014: p. 3) .

When we combine mobility and complexity, another term emerges: 'unpredictability'. **Unpredictability** arises from a) the complex trajectories of people that, emerging from unscripted configurations of experience, produce unexpected meanings; and b) unprecedented forms of social organization, unconventional alliances among people with different backgrounds who would not easily fit the definition of a 'speech community'. This leads to c) the perception of a misfit of existing descriptive categories and vocabulary which seem unsuitable to capture the kinds of complexities to be discovered in 'superdiversity'.

If one begins to acknowledge the full 'breadth of 'differences' that comprises 'diversity' (Arnaut, 2012: p.6), then new challenges are also posed to '**governmentality**'. First, old ways of thinking about 'multiculturalism' or 'diversity management' appear more and more inadequate as the nation states find themselves in a position where they cannot easily hide or tame the diversification of diversity (Martín Rojo, 2013). Here the question becomes how does the nation state deal with – and regiment– diversity, complexity and unpredictability in this new world order when easy simplification do not work anymore; secondly the very idea of 'the nation/state/society [as] the natural social and political form of the modern world'' (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller, 2002: 302) comes also to be put in question. Authors in the superdiversity paradigm are prompt to observe that, with new technologies in particular, we have entered a 'post-panopticon state' (Bauman, 2000; Arnaut, 2012, p.6; Arnaud and Spotti 2014: 3). The idea of the state as the all seeing and controlling 'panoptical state' (Foucault, 1975) is progressively being challenged by new forms of

governmentalities from below. As Arnaut (2012: p. 8-9) argue these new forms of governmentalities particularly found in cities and cyberspaces, can take the form of 'auto-governing' groups or 'counter-governmentality' (Appadurai 2001: 34, in Arnaut 2012) as when the wider public appropriates the Internet -- a panoptical technology originally developed for the US military and transforms it into an ever-differentiating structure for communication, learning and socialisation. In the post-panopticon society, it is said that 'the machinery of surveillance is now always potentially in the service of the crowd as much as the executive' (Boyne 2000: 301; in Arnaut, 2012:9).

Finally, from a methodological standpoint, Blommaert and Rampton's (2011) research program emphasizes the need for researchers interested in superdiversity to move away from the study of larger (community) patterns, shifting to a focus on individual practice and 'repertoires' (Agha, 2004). To unravel complexities linked to superdiversity, the authors recommend ethnography that enables to observe instances in which the re-integration of multiple variables (such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, being a gamer or vegan) becomes palpable. Such instances can be discovered more accurately in the varying practices of individuals and in their engagement with multiple communities across time and space, rather than by seeking out broader generalizations about the behavior of presumably homogenous groups. Consequently, the program proposes to investigate 'the linguistic signs of group belonging' as a key unit of analysis and to focus on the trajectory of individual across national, linguistic and cultural borders. The focus on trajectories moreover includes a need for long-term, multi-sited research that investigates connection and connectivity between contexts.

Beyond the research agenda unraveled by Blommaert and Rampton (2011), there is an increasing number of case studies which take up their ideas on superdiversity and seek to illustrate or tease out some of the points we just developed. In the remainder of this section, we would like to discuss a selection of them, focusing more specifically on how they address two important questions in our view:

- What is being learned about social complexity by studying the complex language/semiotic practice that these studies investigate?
- How and for whom does "unpredictability" emerge as an issue/analytical or interpretational challenge in these studies?

Our focus will be on a number of sites, social spheres, activities and players, including (a) practices controlled by the state (e.g. language citizenship testing, interviews with asylum seekers), (b) civil society (schools and neighborhoods), (c) virtual spaces on the internet (e.g. webpages, blogs and youtube).

(a) **Practices controlled by the** state. A first area which has been extensively covered by the literature on superdiversity is the domain of language and citizenship testing – an increasingly fortified arena of state control in European Nation States, and a domain in which the reign of the all-seeing eye of the state remains uncontested, despite ongoing social complexification (see among others Extra, Spotti & Van Avermaet 2009; Milani 2007; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006; Mar-Molinero, Stevenson & Hogan-Brun, 2009, Blackledge ...??). Citizenship testing is one of the ways nation-states have developed to 'regiment' diversity:

that is to control, monitor and, ultimately, reduce incoming migration and social complexity. The literature shows that in a number of countries (Extra et al. 2009), systems of deterritorialized language practices are put into place - language tests have to be taken by the applicants over the phone in their country of origin. Through this apparatus, the homogenizing ideology of the nation state with respect to language and culture becomes reinforced exemplarily. Unpredictability of the encountered 'other' is deliberately ignored. Those who do not fit the required standard simply will not pass the test. On the other hand, as Spotti (2014) states, the selection that is achieved retains a certain element of predictability (which may or may not have been intended by those who designed the test): the test usually plays out in favor of people with higher literacy skills and better access to the test sites.

Another topic investigated from a 'superdiversity' angle are interviews between government officials and asylum seekers to determinate their status (see also antecedent work by (Blommaert, 2009; Maryns, 2006). Jacquemet (2015) explains how in these interviews unpredictability arises when the asylum seekers' migrational trajectories and interactional moves are at odds with what is expected from the governement officials and the legal system of the host country. For example, while the officer might have the 'referential meaning' that a migrant from Algeria should speak Arabic, but not Berber or Amazigh, the history of migration of the asylum seeker might well mean that he has incorporated these repertoires. Conflict over meaning also arises from culturally different interpretation of kinship relations (such as who counts as a cousin or a brother in different cultures). These differences can lead to an interpretation that disqualifies the narrative of the claimant as incoherent and the claimant himself as not trustworthy, a judgment on which his request for asylum may then be denied. However, the research also shows that, occasionally, interpreters act as cultural mediators and that they are able to clarify the ambiguity and mend the conflict. Here, a focus on 'what is unpredictable' and how to go about 'expected unpredictability' is indeed, an interesting and important perspective to explore.

(b) **Diversity in schools and neighborhoods.** A second area in which state control retains a tangible influence is (state) schools. It is a truism that school curricula tend to ignore or, at least, streamline the diversity in classrooms (Duarte & Gogolin, 2013), and there is little will or serious engagement of most 'self-declared-monolingual' nation states to change this orientation in the near future. Evaluation, in most cases, remains based on the standard of the 'monolingual competent speaker', and recalling the inappropriateness of such principles does not seem to induce much change. The study by Kapia (2013) is a laudable exception which actually attempts to challenge this logic in concrete, empirical ways. She suggests that when assessing the narrative competence of speakers in 'superdiverse' environments, monolingual norms should be used only to assess macro structural elements which are acquired at the same rate by first and second language learners (and which can be transferred by the learners across languages, such as knowledge about literacy or textual genres.) but that schools should refrain from evaluating micro structure elements (such as morpho-syntactic structures or forms of verbal morphology) that second language learners take longer to acquire.

Since such claims and the search for more equitable treatment and evaluation of multilingual students are not new (Menken, 2008), 'superdiversity' does not seem to offer much of a new perspective on the diversity in schools. However, the term has been adopted by some scholars whose work on inclusive pedagogy stood out, even before the advent of superdiversity. Such an example is multilingual bookmaking (Busch, 2013) which offers children with complex backgrounds a space to become aware of and to express 'the unknown and unpredictable' in their trajectories, and to lay it open to themselves, to their teachers, co-students, parents and the researchers.

Other researchers have focused on a more specific domain in education: complementary schools that are run and supported by migrant communities. Creese & Blackledge (2010) have investigated the diaspora of Bangladeshi community in Birmingham and followed individuals from the first and second generation from school to home. Their study highlights that the language practices of the learners in complementary schools reveal complex and intersecting indexical orders. In their data for example the learners resorted sometimes to Bangla (the national language of Bangladesh representing heritage and prestige in school and community) or to Sulheti (a spoken, informal language, representing poverty and a low level of education) in their speech. But they also noticed that these meanings were not consistent across space, time and interactional frames, but varied. New meanings emerged, for instance as stylization of Sulheti is used by UK born 2nd generation girls to exclude newcomers from Bangladesh. Thereby stylization indexes a social boundary even among people who have a shared repertoire. In the work of Creese and Blackledge, 'indexicality' and stylization are used as an analytical tool to show how meanings can be intersecting and how the same linguistic form – emphasized in a differently nuanced tone – can mean either social inclusion or exclusion. This example points to the inner differentiation of the local Bangladeshi community articulated along the lines of generational belonging and migrant status (newcomer or UK born), rather than to multiple belongings of the same individual.

Beyond school, investigations have also focused on 'superdiversity' in neighborhoods – an area of reduced state control compared to some of the previous scenarios. To capture new forms of demographic and social complexity in mixed neighborhoods the term 'conviviality' is often employed. For Padilla et al. (2015) the term provides a framework to understand how interculturality is lived and experienced at the local level. The notion focuses on how (new) relational patterns among groups are emerging and how interactions between residents of different origins and backgrounds unfold, in which notions such as race, ethnicity and gender are being renegotiated. Conviviality thereby requires studies of interaction around a thematic focus that touches on issues of social peace, solidarity, hinting to alternative policies that can usefully replace "multiculturalism".

In sociolinguistics, the notion of conviviality has been adopted by Blommaert (2014). Focusing on multilingual signs in a multiethnic neighborhood in Ghent (Belgium), Blommaert reconstructs the increasing heterogeneity of the local Chinese speaking community for which he finds evidence in the complexification of the linguistic repertoire of local Chinese speakers. These chinese speakers adapt to the changes brought forth by new

waves of immigrants by learning varieties of the Chinese newcomers, namely Mandarin and simplified characters, in addition to their already existing repertoire of Cantonese and traditional ideography. With a linguistic landscaping approach, Blommaert's analysis concentrates on written artefacts, such as shop signs or billboards, which are contextualized with socio-economic and demographic data. The absence of any ethnographic data involving interaction of and with the producers of this data, leaves however the task of interpretation solely to the researcher who, on the basis of singular instances makes assumptions about a trajectory of learning and what restructures of the linguistic repertoire of individuals. Furthermore, the reliance on concepts such as 'orthographic norm' and 'error' which are used to describe the written artefact leaves the reader pondering: whose normativity is at stake?

(c) **Digital practices.** The third area in which researchers have used the 'superdiversity gaze' is the domain of new technologies of communication. New technologies allow for the complexification of participation patterns, and the diversification of language/semiotic practices, with more or less short- or long-term socially structuring effects.

One set of studies focusing on 'superdiversity' in this domain relates to the *global diaspora* (Heyd, 2014 for Nigeria; McLaughlin, 2014 for Senegal, Sharma, 2014 for Nepal). These studies observe communities where people share an interest in political and sociocultural events in the home country but where the participants are spread globally – often across various continents. While we could expect that this spread would lead to a diversification of individual linguistic repertoires in the context of migration, one observes that on the contrary there seems rather to be an homogeneization of language use in the platforms observed. The varieties used are often reduced to the languages and language varieties common in the home country, which becomes assumed as a common communicative denominator among participants. We see that geographic diversification, in this context, is linked to linguistic homogenization reflecting a normative stance of the sociolinguistic situation "back home". A similar case related to immigration is reported by De Bres & Belling (2014), who describe the linguistic homogenization of a consumer platform in the Luxemburgish context where participants converge towards the Luxemburgish language (instead of the other official languages of the country –German or French, English as a lingua franca, or languages of migration such as Portuguese, Italian or others, who would also be possible in that context) due to pressures of the local sociolinguistic economy (De Bres & Belling, 2014).

Studies by Dong (2012) and Staer (2014) provide examples for how affinity circles are formed around a particular interest in life style (e.g. in Saab-cars (Dong, 2012) or globally circulating semiotic resources of youth culture (e.g. the illuminati (Stæhr, 2014) that shape new communities of practice in on-and-offline encounters.

Yet others examine multiply-authored, multimodal performances (e.g. buffalaxing. (Leppänen & Häkkinen, 2014) and investigate experimental semiotic practices in which authors alter existing material (mostly music-videos) by recombining semiotic modes in unconventional ways, challenging to conventional interpretations. For instance, sounds related to one language (e.g.

Hindi) are mapped on and written down in English words which creates distorting effects readable as a critique of the visual content presented or, to a certain extent, a self-mockery of the "second" authors. Here, the unconventional assemblage and play with rules of semiotic composition for sound, writing, visual image (e.g. traditional dance performance) clearly stretches conventional stereotypical depictions of gender, race, and ethnicity.

Careful examination of these cases shows that the engagement with linguistic/semiotic practice in these studies contribute to understand particular aspects of communicative practice in on- and offline environments. Yet, we learn relatively little about the "diversification of diversity" and how the complexification of social patterns is reflected in concrete linguistic practice. What emerges rather clearly, however, are the homogenizing tendencies and a, presumably, self-selected reduction of linguistic variety to communicative patterns that are shared, predictably, by a specific community of practice, be it local or translocal. In addition, it seems that, rather than revealing the 'unpredictable or unknown', multiple linguistic resources are drawn on by the interlocutors (and interpreted by the analyst) in ways that we would call predictable. Maybe it is this kind of disjunct between the claimed object of inquiry and the empirical facts that has led to much debates and discussion to be prompted by superdiversity research in sociolinguistics and applied language studies. We review some of them in the next two sections.

Debates and discussions

For many researchers, including the ones who have imported the notion of 'superdiversity' as part of the analytical toolkit of researchers of linguistic and semiotic practices, 'superdiversity' is still seen "as a zone of academic development with an "explorative, tentative and unfinished character" (Blommaert, 2014, p. 15). Further conceptual and empirical consolidation is to be expected with the forthcoming publication of several monographs on this topic (Arnaut, Blommaert et al., forthcoming; Arnaut, Karrebæk, & Spotti, forthcoming; Rampton, et al., 2015; Vertovec, forthcoming). These will aim to enhance the institutionalization of 'superdiversity' research and, most likely engage with the criticisms raised so far by the detractors of the term. Some of these critiques relate to the term 'superdiversity', and its scope and meaning. Others engage with the project of developing a new – more fine-grained – language of description in view of capturing complex phenomena more adequately and serving as an analytical toolkit that can enable a 'new way of seeing'. Yet others relate to the kind of purchase the term 'superdiversity' has for the political agenda of engaging policy makers in new thinking for diversity management.

With regards to the term 'superdiversity', ambiguity has been detected on several levels. Makoni (2012) notes that 'super' in 'superdiversity' can be understood as referring to both 'hyper' – as in highly layered and socially stratified local neighborhoods (Blommaert & Backus, 2013), and 'trans' where it pinpoints to translocal practices such as in internet communication across contexts and territories. If the term covers both dimensions we could ask to what extent it provides an increased analytical purchase, and whether the relationship between 'locally complex' and 'translocal' would need to be clarified more explicitly. Furthermore, a 'superdiversity' perspective is said to include also

'subdiverse' areas (Blommaert, 2013) to which none of the complexities observed in other contexts apply (e.g. language revitalization programs of the Wasco language in the Warm Spring Indian reservation in the US, see (Moore, 2012). Here, it would be useful to investigate further what conceptual and real links exist between 'super' and 'subdiverse' environments.

Some scholars have raised concerns about 'superdiversity' as a Eurocentric perspective – seen as hardly meaningful in post-colonial contexts and settler societies that have been composed of highly diverse, socially complex populations for generation, if not centuries. Makoni (2012) notes that the term 'superdiversity' is a white European invention, similar to the terms 'migration' and 'nomadism' which are used selectively to refer to specific phenomena of mobility at specific (pre- and post-colonial) time periods. 'Superdiversity' therefore resonates with the position of a privileged elite of white researchers, guilty of a certain "social romanticism" risking to obscure the social conditions enforcing mobility, at least on the African continent, and covering up issues of great social division and injustice. It also has been criticised as aligned with a neoliberal rhetoric praising the 'supersize' and 'big' society' (Reyes, 2014).

Yet other researchers (*source?*) have refuted 'superdiversity' as being a-historical and as focusing on older phenomena as 'something new', without considering seriously the historical antecedents of these same phenomena. Taking into account these criticisms, Blommaert (2014, p. 3) concedes that 'superdiversity is best described "as a space of synthesis, a point of convergence or a nexus of developments long underway".

Another area of indeterminacy requires clarification. While in some contexts 'superdiversity' scholars identify specific 'superdiverse' phenomena (e.g. globalized youth culture or forms of internet communication, Blommaert 2013; Varis & Wang, 2011), in others they highlight 'superdiversity' rather as a theoretical perspective – an emerging discourse (Arnaut, 2012) or even a new ontology (Parkin, 2012) – which has no specific objects, but rather depicts a researcher's stance that pays heightened attention to issues of complexity (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) and the growing awareness of such complexity among researchers and lay persons (Blommaert & Varis, 2011). This leads us to another ongoing discussion among 'superdiversity' scholars, which is about developing a more fine-grained language for describing complexity. While there have been attempts to suggest such new vocabulary – (e.g. 'supervernacular' see Blommaert, 2011; Varis & Wang, 2011, Blommaert & Velghe, 2012) – the conceptual work is still ongoing and the vocabulary to make explicit the changes observed in 'superdiverse' language and semiotic practice does not yet exist (van der Aa & Blommaert, 2015). While recent work suggests a distancing of the authors from the notion of 'supervernacular', we still find it useful to trace its conceptual development and empirical use.

The term 'supervernacular' has been proposed by (Blommaert, 2011) and adopted in a number of case studies. These explore global youth culture and hiphop (Varis & Wang, 2011) textspeech on mobile phones (Velghe, 2011; Blommaert & Velghe 2012), and the use of Nigerian Pidgin on an internet platform (Heyd, 2014). Building on the notion of 'vernacular' – the everyday style of a particular group--, a 'supervernacular' is characterised by three criteria; its emergence is related to mobile technology (e.g. mobile phones or the internet), there is a clearly identifiable set of linguistic/semiotic features and

rules attached to the 'supervernacular'; however, 'supervernaculars' only exist as local or translocal dialects, without a written/codified standard. The notion of 'supervernacular' has been critiqued for a number of reasons. Makoni (2012) first points to the polysemy of the term 'vernacular' (see also Mufwene *et al.*, 1998) and the ambiguity of its uses. This raises a fundamental question about the usefulness of building new terminology on (contested) old terms and shows the challenges of dealing adequately with the history of one's own discipline. Another critique, voiced by Orman (2012) relates to the conceptual idea of a 'supervernacular' as developed and applied by Blommaert (2011). While 'superdiversity' scholarship aims to break away from the logic of structuralism, Orman sees in the conceptual development of a 'supervernacular' undeniable closeness to the principles of structuralist linguistics. He compares the 'supervernacular' to concepts such as the 'archephoneme' or 'archemorpheme' introduced as conceptual cover terms, under which distributional variants occurring in specific phonetic or morphological environments (e.g. different realisations of ..) could be subsumed. For instance, 'textspeech' that emerged with the use mobile phones and text-messaging, in Orman's terms, is considered such a 'archetype'. It includes a recurrent inventory of features that is grouped and distributed translocally and across user groups, according to a set of fixed rules. The second point of his critique relates to the actual analytical practice that looks at short examples of decontextualised speech in search for regularities of coding that are embedded in technology, rather than investigating the social practices that underlie the use and meaning of local practices generated by local users.

The example of 'supervernacular' demonstrates that developing a new vocabulary can be a thorny road. Some have therefore argued that 'superdiversity' should be seen primarily as an analytical lens (Blommaert, 2011) or a conceptual device, rather than an empirical fact (Androutsopoulos & Juffermans, 2014; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) or descriptive category (Blommaert 2013a, in Deumert, 2014)).

Yet, the question remains how meaningful a theory or ontology can be if it is not coupled with methodological strategies that can be operationalised in concrete research, particularly in an empirical science which is said to derive important meaning from generating observational, qualitative data. This is by no means to say that the existing tools would be adequate. However, if one considered them insufficient, the question remains what new tools could or should look like.

Implications: for policy, research, and pedagogical practice

To recap, what surges from the review conducted in the previous sections is that 'superdiversity' as a lens has the merit of allowing sociolinguists to pursue the long tradition of asking questions such as: what are sites of engagements (Scollon 1997) where migrants and host community members meet? How can we conceptualize migrant/non-migrant social spaces and their strategies of negotiating meaning in different languages and across different social settings? What vocabulary is best suited to talk about language use and social relationships in these sites? How can we capture and comprehend interactions in these sites of engagement through suitable methodologies? In addition, we could

add: what are the consequences of participation for individuals? And what are consequences for society when contact zones multiply? A strong departure from how similar questions were asked in the past resides in the fact that research now unpacks what 'community', 'language', 'practices', 'social setting', 'identity', 'group belonging' or 'governmentality' means rather than taking these terms for granted and stable and that new communication technologies sustain new kinds of communities which do not imply co-presence, but can be articulated over wide-scattered places and times. It is also that complex migration flows and developments in the field of communication technologies leads to 'contact' going both ways. Not only are the groups of migrants diversifying themselves, but also those who would have considered themselves a generation ago 'monolingual', 'monocultural' 'members of the majority' now find themselves exposed regularly to multilingual and multicultural texts and practices (Barton & Lee, 2013), in the media, in their neighborhoods, or their schools, and that this reconfigures social space, whether they find it comfortable or not. A last difference is that in a globalized world, certain kinds of multilingualism and multiculturalism are less and less viewed as a problem and more and more viewed as an asset for creativity and innovation. Commodifying linguistic and cultural repertoires, the economic world also is a driving force for making more visible and more acceptable certain kinds of multilingual and multicultural practices, while denying others. It is thus not only the practices that are diversifying themselves but also some of the discourses around diversity which are changing – at once celebrated or heavily resisted in different public and private contexts. The research, thus, makes clear that it is complex frames of understanding we are in need of, rather than overly simplifying ones, frames that are able to show resolvable tensions and contradictions as well as irresolvable paradoxes of sharing lives together.

In terms of implication for research, the analyses we have reviewed leave us however with a number of conceptual and methodological questions: For example, are multilingual language practice and social complexification intrinsically linked, and where and how can we actually observe social complexity through forms of linguistic/semiotic practice? Heyd (2014) combines methodologies such as mapping (by locating participants across the globe), corpus analysis, and qualitative analysis of life trajectory narratives. This seems a promising avenue to pursue for the future. However, at the moment, studies we examined leave singular instances of practice and larger patterns of social complexity rather unrelated. An exception is the study by Juffermans *et al.* (2014) who look at facebook discussions among young people of Chinese speaking descent in the Netherlands and their views on language policy decisions in mainland China. The analysis is interesting as it reveals lived and imagined trajectories of language learning of these young people including different varieties of Chinese. Here, the notion of trajectory, recommended as a research focus (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011) is taken more seriously, shedding light also on hopes, fears and the predicted worth of linguistic resources for their lives and in different scenarios.

While well-established analytical concepts such as 'language ideologies' and 'indexicality' are used very fruitfully in the aforementioned studies, the perspective of 'simultaneity' (see Arnaut & Spotti, 2012) seems also largely underexplored. Here is certainly scope and potential for development to make an

analytical purchase of 'superdiversity' research more visible. A further research agenda therefore would be to go beyond paying mere lip service to this question of the 'diversification of diversity' and delve even deeper into understanding both superimposition and nesting of earlier and later 'generations' of migrants as well as the 'entanglement' and cross-sectional transaction between migrants and host community members and the cultural frictions, tensions or new convivialities resulting from them. How to go about studying those dimensions empirically still remain however at present to be imagined.

In addition, most studies keep a focus on the 'linguistic sign of group belonging'—continuing to prioritize language over other modes of representation (such as images, music or dance) which poses certain limits to exploring semiotic practice as a vector for understanding social complexity.

Finally, despite all critical efforts to reframe 'community' conceptually, either as a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) or a social (physical or virtual) network of people, it needs to be noted that 'community' remains a key concept to which individuals adhere. Therefore, it seems important to investigate what new forms and meanings 'community' takes on, how people live and talk about them, and what these understandings of community mean for us as researchers whose work remains committed to people and community institutions as social players and research partners (Li Wei, 2014).

As for policy and pedagogy, while the majority of case studies investigate multiple language practices as an illustration of social complexification in various areas of civil society, only few of them go as far as formulating recommendations that could be relevant for policy makers and practitioners. Since a social agenda is not explicitly proposed in most of the studies, it still needs to be spelled out how a linguistic focus on 'superdiversity' can inform policy in meaningful ways.

Future directions

Vertovec asks in a discussion of superdiversity and 'civil integration' what "meaningful [communicative] interchanges look like, how they are formed, maintained or broken, and how the state or other agencies might promote them." (2007, p. 27). Surely, sociolinguistics and applied language research have an important contribution to make to this agenda. At present, however, we recognize that we ultimately lack the temporal perspective to assess whether the 'superdiverse' approach is the best way to do that. We also do not know whether this term will make date in the history of the field or is just another temporary stepping stone in the history of conceptualizing 'linguistics of contact' (Pratt, 1991), especially given that some of the most engaged researchers of 'superdiversity' acknowledge themselves some of the 'shadows of superdiversity' (Rampton *et al.,* 2015), and propose to view the term as a temporary place-holder ready to be replaced whenever, more relevant, categories come of age.

With or without the term 'superdiversity', the phenomena that it seeks to address seem however real and deserving our attention and we do believe that language sciences can contribute to the more global agenda of imagining 'more just structures and policies' to respond to the 'diversification of diversity' of the new migration flows for which Vertovec first imagined the term (Vertovec, 2007,

p. 1050). From a research perspective, we believe that contributing to this agenda will require to open up to continuing interdisciplinary dialogue, engaging for example with social policy studies, social geography, moral philosophy, education, or gender and race studies. These have started to examines topics such as the 'ethics of living together' (Jensen 2011) and the 'art of living in parallel' (Chimienti & Van Liempt, 2011); sensuous and sensory materialities in multicultural contexts (Rhys-Taylor, 2011), circulation and movement, mobility and immobility (Juffermans & Tavares 2014); power, gender, race relations, commodification and 'white privilege' (McIntosh, Lee 1998); governmentalities from above and from below, memory practices and historical representations, multilingual pedagogies (ref) and economic and political forces, diversity discourses and practices of *vivre ensemble.* We believe language and discourse to accompany these different dimensions and we find important to investigate what role language plays at these different levels to sustain or undermine practices of conviviality and to draw barriers of inclusion/exclusion. We also find that if we pursue these lines of research, we will need to interrogate even more than ever the very positions from which we write and speak, and the contact zones which exist in our own academic institutions and academic lives which at present do not seem to show the same diversification of diversity as other pockets of social life do.

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