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Multilingualism and heterogeneous language practices: new research areas and issues in the Global South¹

This paper first presents recent works in the study of multilingualism and its linguistic and social consequences, focusing on methodology. It is based on Southern case studies and heterogeneous language practices which invalidate traditional descriptive categories. It focuses then on domains with striking socio-political issues of the Global South: linguistic citizenship rather than linguistic rights, multilingual and multicultural Education and Health.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Global South, Postcolonial studies, Multilingual education, Social justice, Health

Introduction

Linguists and anthropologists have conducted fieldwork in every corner of the world during the last two centuries. At the same time that their academic disciplines were being established in the West, they were engaged in describing and constructing languages and cultures (Gal and Irvine 1995) in an “elsewhere,” the Souths (generally characterized by means of the tropes of exoticism and inferiority, such as former colonies, the Third World, etc.), which functioned as a reservoir of “unprocessed data” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012: 113) for Western theories. In fact, the Global South seems to prefigure what happens in every country in the throes of a recession or economic crisis, with respect to population movements, social exclusion, and social unrest, and also to the racialization of social relations (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). Although this presentation might seem to imply that the world is split in two geographically, we should rather understand the Souths – or the Global South – as “a metaphor for human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on the global level, as well as for the resistance that seeks to overcome or minimise such suffering” (Santos 2011: 39), a phenomenon that exists both in the North and in the countries of the South.

¹ This paper is deeply indebted to the readings and exchanges of the “Language Practices as social practices” seminar, which were contributed by the invited participants, doctoral students, and my colleague V. Muni Toke.

Léglise, Isabelle. « Multilinguisme et hétérogénéité des pratiques langagières. Nouveaux chantiers et enjeux du *Global South* », *Langage et société*, vol. no 160-161, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-266. Translated into English.

One of the major linguistic features of this Global South is the region's societal multilingualism and the plurilingualism (or individual multilingualism) of its population. From a linguistic point of view, this is manifested in heterogeneous language practices to which our conceptual apparatus has to be adapted. From a social point of view, this multilingualism, understood as the coexistence in a given context or area of languages, practices, and varieties, with varied economic and symbolic status, is manifested in an uneven distribution of resources among the population. This especially raises issues of equity and of access to health care and education for entire sections of the population.

Doing fieldwork in these areas, from a postcolonial perspective requires two types of decentering: first, the abandonment or alteration of traditional descriptive categories, and second, a different relation to the "field" and to scholarly expertise, recentered on endogenous perspectives and perceptions in order to make those voices heard. Western theorizing has in effect silenced both the local experiences of whole populations and alternative theorizing. As a result *Southern Theory* (Connell 2007) has been massively erased, discarded on the periphery of the system of knowledge production. Studying the Global South today requires "revealing the epistemic silences" of Western epistemologies, by affirming "the epistemic rights of those who are racially devalued" (Mignolo 2009: 4). We shall see here how it is possible for this knowledge and these practices to become visible.

1. From language contact to heterogeneous language practices

While these regions (whether the colonized zones or remote rural areas) have always been multilingual, the massive scholarly undertaking that began to be developed in the nineteenth century, namely the description of their languages and dialects, was based on the study of individual languages, and neglected their multilingual context. As we know, this enterprise, caught up in the pervasive Orientalism of the day, was contributing to the construction of these exotic practices as simultaneously "languages" and "exotic objects" in the same period when the European nation-states were emerging through a process of political differentiation (Gal and Irvine 1995). Critical work on colonial linguistics has also shown how, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, the naturalizing force of linguistic descriptions and the imposition of colonial categories as models of ethnocultural identity (Errington 2001) strengthened the geographical assumptions of the colonial powers, contributing, for example, to the "invention" of Africa and African languages (Mudimbe 1988, Makoni and Pennycook 2007).

Léglise, Isabelle. « Multilinguisme et hétérogénéité des pratiques langagières. Nouveaux chantiers et enjeux du *Global South* », *Langage et société*, vol. no 160-161, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-266. Translated into English.

Furthermore, this focus on languages (actually in each case on a single language) also meant neglecting their social or sociocultural context while assigning to their speakers the cultural identity supposedly conveyed by the “mother tongue,” “local dialect” or “native language” they spoke. What Gal and Irvine call “the persistent use of language as a synecdoche for community” (ibid.: 968), a use that relies on the unquestioned correlation in which “a language equals a culture,” is manifested as a particularly significant ideological construct: everyone has assumed that languages are spoken within monolingual and monocultural communities. Although this construct was criticized fifty years ago for ignoring questions of variation, multilingualism, and the social construction of language (Hymes 1967), it still forms the foundation of a number of approaches, for instance in the description of languages and the formulation of language education policies.

In the same way, a number of works on languages and cultures in contact presuppose first the existence of isolated linguistic and cultural communities in order to investigate, then the consequences of contact between them. Such contacts are in fact viewed as marginal phenomena arising when “normal” monolingual situations become more complex (Nicolai 2007). Thus, work on code-switching requires first separating out the “codes” in question, before it can be shown how they switch. The various approaches are all based on the identification of languages in contact, in corpora that are generally bilingual and sometimes plurilingual (Léglise forthcoming).

In the context of the Global South, the concepts of language, language contact, and code-switching thus seem particularly inadequate, because of the colonial history they are permeated with and also because of the multiplicity of language practices actually observed in the field. Postcolonial studies have made their contribution to the dis-invention of the myth of languages (Makoni and Pennycook 2007), by showing how, in the view of speakers and researchers from the regions in question, the existing conceptual tools – and especially the names given to languages – fail to correspond to their own perceptions. By contrast, in order to take account of the cases of “superdiversity” they encounter (Vertovec 2007) and of practices marked by multilingualism and by what has been called hybridity, many researchers have sought to classify their subject of study in different terms in recent years: as crossing (Rampton 2005), super-diverse or truncated linguistic repertoires (Blommaert and Backus 2011, Blommaert and Rampton 2011), polylinguaging (Jørgensen et al. 2011), translanguaging (García 2009b, Garcia and Wei 2013), and so on (see Léglise forthcoming, for a review of the literature). These various terms have all been criticized, although

Léglise, Isabelle. « Multilinguisme et hétérogénéité des pratiques langagières. Nouveaux chantiers et enjeux du *Global South* », *Langage et société*, vol. no 160-161, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-266. Translated into English.

translanguaging seems to be the most frequently used at present. For example, the notion of hybridity or hybridization has been criticized on the grounds that it is still cast in terms of the identification of discrete entities and assumes that two separate codes or entities exist which are then combined (Makoni 2011: 683).

But this concentration on practices rather than languages is not new in sociolinguistics. In our quest for the best term to describe the practices we encounter, the term "heterogeneous language practices" ("pratiques langagières hétérogènes") seems to me the most appropriate, firstly because the adjective *language* rather than *linguistic* avoids designating discrete entities, and secondly because it includes the phenomena of variation and pluri-accentuation. The first work to propose the phrase "language practices" (Boutet, Fiala, and Simonin-Grumbach 1976) exposed the social heterogeneity of monolingual language practices and their pluri-accentuation. The language practices studied in the context of the Global South are heterogeneous, in the sense that they are not only pluri-accentuated but also plurilingual. They are produced by plurilingual speakers with varied linguistic skills, resources, and repertoires. Rather than describing these practices as code-switching or code-mixing, we observe the use of language resources by social actors, a use that could be described as "linguistic bricolage" (Lüdi 1994, Mondada 2012) in which these actors use a group of existing – sometimes quite old – resources to construct new meanings.

These practices can, for example, index and contribute to constructing a modern urban identity among young Maroons in French Guiana and Suriname who draw on their resources to insert lexical and structural features of international languages (French, English, Dutch) into the varieties of Creole they speak daily, in other contexts – a unique practice which might refer back to a rural culture from which they want to distance themselves. The shifting designation of these practices also derives from both local and global viewpoints and ideologies (Migge and Léglise 2013).

2. From mother tongue education to taking heterogeneous language practices into account

Trapped between decolonization and globalization, educational systems constitute one of the battlefields of the Global South. These systems were mostly established during the colonial period, and whether in Africa or in Latin America they were designed in accordance with European models. To this day they continue to implement, on a larger or smaller scale, many of the cultural and linguistic policies inherited from that era, thus perpetuating colonial

Léglise, Isabelle. « Multilinguisme et hétérogénéité des pratiques langagières. Nouveaux chantiers et enjeux du *Global South* », *Langage et société*, vol. no 160-161, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-266. Translated into English.

ideologies and hierarchies of languages and language varieties (Migge and Léglise 2007). For example, in most Creole societies, despite the major social changes of the last fifty years, educational systems have overall changed very little. Although students are no longer punished for using their Pidgin or Creole languages in class, as had long been the case, few of these languages are officially recognized as mediums of instruction, except as transitional mechanisms to facilitate the acquisition of official, European languages, and then often purely orally (Migge, Léglise, and Bartens 2010). As we have shown, using Pidgin and Creole languages purely orally sets up a vicious circle, because it leads to the lack of development of literacy and manipulation of the written language, due to the underlying assumption that Creole languages are unsuitable for writing. This in turn reinforces the same assumption that Creole languages are inadequate for writing, on the part of teachers and politicians who sometimes come from the same "linguistic communities."

Research shows that teaching children in a language they do not understand leads to educational failure (García 2009b), while using the language of children's early socialization as a medium for teaching and as an introduction to literacy is a major contributor to reducing the percentage of children who fail in school (Cummins 2009). The integration of minoritized languages and language varieties into educational systems is thus one of the most important areas of study, and of challenges for future research. The scientific issues have, however, gradually changed. Linguists, traditionally involved with the communities whose languages they describe, have often been asked to participate in the grammatization (production of grammars) of minority languages with a view to using them in educational systems, in accordance with either of two models of multilingual education based on mother tongues ("Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education"), in order to achieve greater social justice (Skutnabb-Kangas et al. 2009). Whether these languages are to be sustained by focusing on bilingual (minority language-majority language) teaching or by immersion programs, research has shown the importance of drawing on local experience to implement the envisaged solutions. Solid local involvement is important, and not only in the production of authentic teaching materials: their authenticity also makes them usable by a wider readership and helps to restore the minority language speakers' sense of ownership of these languages and varieties (Stroud 2001), which in turn can contribute to the speakers' empowerment.

Let us take the example of French Guiana, a French overseas region where the principles of the French National Education system, initially designed for mainland France, are applied.

Léglise, Isabelle. « Multilinguisme et hétérogénéité des pratiques langagières. Nouveaux chantiers et enjeux du *Global South* », *Langage et société*, vol. no 160-161, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-266. Translated into English.

For a long time the gap between the languages spoken at home and the language spoken at school was seen as the reason for educational difficulties and the high numbers of children who left school without certificates. It is true that, despite the large-scale project of Frenchification, launched in 1946 during the change of French Guiana's status from colony to department, and despite the compulsory schooling dating from 1970 (Puren 2007: 284-sv.), more than two thirds of schoolchildren do not speak French before entering school. French is in fact not very present in some contexts and geographical areas, where other forms of communication (other languages or heterogeneous language practices) function as vehicular languages. For about forty years, linguists and anthropologists have criticized "inappropriate schooling" (Grenand 1982) and have also fought, with some success, for the introduction of mother tongues into the educational system (Launey 1999), paralleling the Creole activist movements (Prudent and Schnepel 1993) and in support of the Amerindian or Maroon leaders. Here is an excerpt from the foundational speech in which the Amerindians laid claim to sovereignty (Tiouka 1984):

Today, we believe that the recognition of this sovereignty must form the basis of the urgent and necessary redefinition of our relations with the dominant society. This redefinition should be an opportunity for us to establish control over the institutions and decision-making processes that affect us most directly in the areas of economic development, education, health, and social services, as well as local and regional political organization, and so on. In a word, building on our thousand-year-old traditions, we seek to restore and strengthen our own cultural values within the institutions that concern us.

This appeal to our traditional values makes it clear that we refuse to accept the validity of the option of gradual assimilation into dominant society, which is happening insidiously and is encouraged directly or indirectly by all the political, administrative, and economic representatives who interact with us.

We want to remain Amerindian and keep our own language, our culture, our institutions.

Because of the restrictions imposed by the National Education system, these combined efforts have, after much back and forth (Goury et al. 2005), succeeded in developing only some transitional bilingual education programs (at first a few hours weekly, then more recently with

Léglise, Isabelle. « Multilinguisme et hétérogénéité des pratiques langagières. Nouveaux chantiers et enjeux du *Global South* », *Langage et société*, vol. no 160-161, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-266. Translated into English.

as many teaching hours as the French classes²). The goal of the implemented programs continues to be mastery of French, leading after a few years to teaching only in French. The program thus relies on a conception of bilingualism that has been described as "subtractive" and can be represented schematically, following García (2009b), as $L1 + L2 - L1 = L2$. However, although these programs do now exist, an analysis of the discourse of teachers and inspectors shows that, even when they accept the idea of introducing certain languages into their classes (which is not a given), they still insist on the obligatory separation of the languages. This separation is embodied much of the time by different people (one person, one language), special teaching schedules, and differentiated – and hierarchical – spaces in the classrooms: the back of the class for folk art objects that make reference to the Creole or Amerindian space, and paintings in the French space (Alby and Léglise 2014). We have shown that the educational system in French Guiana, based on a national ideology that foregrounds monolingualism and the French language, in fact ignores the real everyday plurilingualism of the school population; it is not only the gap between the school language and the home language that is problematic, but also the gap between a form of language segregation linked to exogenous monolingual norms and the lived experience of language – in the sense used by Busch (2015) – which is daily, local, heterogeneous, and plurilingual. We know that if the teaching language allows no room for “the students’ *linguaging*, and if the teacher does not maximize communication by using the students' own language practices, we can be sure that there will be a failure of communication and education" (García 2009b: 152). No doubt seeking to avoid such permanent failure, we have observed, students – and sometimes teachers, who are then at odds with their superiors – use their plurilingual abilities in the classroom in order to maximize their chances of communicating and learning (García 2009a). Thus, in spite of the ideology of the separation of languages in institutional discourse, the plurilingual reality of the students – and their teachers – surfaces in classroom interactions in the form of heterogeneous language practices, and locally demonstrates a degree of agency on the part of both students and teachers (Alby and Léglise 2016).

² Initially implemented on an experimental basis, a bilingual French-Creole system with as many teaching hours as the French classes has been in existence since 2008. Extending this system to other Creole and Amerindian languages seems to be a live option since the 2013 amendment to the Educational Code, which now specifies that "In the overseas academies, specific pedagogical approaches are planned for the teaching of oral and written expression and reading, for the benefit of students from mainly Creole or Amerindian backgrounds (Article L321-4 modified by Law no. 2013-595 of July 8th, 2013 - Article 46)." The actual implementation of this measure in other languages of French Guiana is currently uncertain. (See the question put to the government by the deputy C. Berthelot on "bilingualism in the primary schools in French Guiana" in June 2016: https://www.nosdeputes.fr/14/seance/6794#table_16438.)

Léglise, Isabelle. « Multilinguisme et hétérogénéité des pratiques langagières. Nouveaux chantiers et enjeux du *Global South* », *Langage et société*, vol. no 160-161, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-266. Translated into English.

It is therefore not only the integration of languages and minority language varieties into educational systems that is a challenge for future research in the Global South; so also is a better understanding and taking into account – and pedagogical integration – of the personal language experience and heterogeneous language practices of the schoolchildren, the population, and the teachers, viewed as agentive social actors.

3. Giving visibility to minoritized language varieties and unacknowledged literacy practices

One way to remove the stigma affecting minoritized groups is to make minoritized varieties visible, and to develop a critical awareness of normalized varieties and acknowledged literacy practices. Alim (2011) has proposed the term *ill-literacies* for the hybrid, transcultural literacy practices of hip-hop, both local and global. In making “ill-” into a prefix, he emphasizes not the “lack of literacy” implied by a concept like illiteracy – a concept that is sociopolitically constructed and defined in terms of dominant forms of literacy – but the presence of specific literacy skills among minoritized groups in some North American neighborhoods and in Africa. These literacy practices are typically creative and counter-hegemonic, and must be “intimate, lived, and liberatory” (ibid.: 123). Such heterogeneous practices enable young people not only to question power relationships and the identification of languages with cultures, but also to give voice to their intimate personal experiences as sources of possible social transformation on a wider scale. There are many examples of the use of hip-hop literacy practices for the expression of protest and of multiple identities. For instance, Omoniyi (2006) shows how young Nigerians use hip-hop and the heterogeneous language practices linked to it by adopting different languages and local varieties (Yoruba, Igbo) and local forms of American English, but especially Nigerian Pidgin. Through these literacy practices they can explore and reinvent multiple identities and challenge the dominant ideology inherited from the colonial period, which imposes English as both a vehicular language and as the official common language for all, whereas their practices draw especially on Nigerian Pidgin as the vehicular language form.

Critical hip-hop language pedagogies have been developed with the aim of expanding students’ meta-literacy consciousness, drawing on the awareness of their own position in the world and of what they can do there (Alim 2004). The goal of research on literacy in the Global South is to enable students to “critique the hegemonic practices that have shaped their experiences and perceptions in order to free themselves from dominating ideologies,

Léglise, Isabelle. « Multilinguisme et hétérogénéité des pratiques langagières. Nouveaux chantiers et enjeux du *Global South* », *Langage et société*, vol. no 160-161, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-266. Translated into English.

structures, and practices" (Morrell and Duncan-Andrade 2004: 250). This politically engaged research seeks to define a literate being as one who is "present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history, and future" (ibid.: 249). By giving visibility to forms that are usually invisible, or "languages of color," these authors hope to investigate the ways in which teachers and educators, for example, by inculcating white middle-class norms in the speakers of heterogeneous language varieties, impose white ways of speaking and seeing the world (Alim 2011: 133). The goal then is to try to subvert the mechanisms of reproduction, naturalization, and legitimation via the school (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970, Heller and Martin Jones 2001) and those of social and racial inequality, in the same way that focused work on classroom interactions can reveal the construction of social inequality in the classroom (Rojo 2015) and the construction of what counts as legitimate knowledge. Much remains to be done in this area to make the invisible visible (Kerfoot and Hyltenstam 2017) among populations who are silenced or marginalized – like refugees and migrants in Western countries, for example – and to make different forms of knowledge visible and legitimate.

4. Language practices in hospital and their relation to knowledge

How a population is treated in public service contexts is an excellent indicator of whether or not the state and its various concerned institutions are taking account of minority languages and language varieties. These are sites where multilingualism is made visible or reduced to silence, a choice that often goes hand in hand with the denial of users' knowledge and expertise, especially in the case of marginalized populations. The field of health services is particularly revealing. In a hospital, there are a number of possible strategies (translation, mediation, or learning the other's language) for avoiding the consequences of exolingual communication. These consequences are clearly recognizable in the process of diagnosis, delays in admission, and communication with patients, as well as in how far their self-reports are taken seriously, how well they follow their treatment, how they participate in decision-making, how satisfied they are, and so on (Bischoff 2003). Providing plurilingual manuals for diagnostic assistance, for example, is not necessarily an easy task. Collins and Slembrouck (2006) have shown how, in a clinic in Belgium, these manuals were supposed to enable the doctors to (try to) read translations in different languages to their patients, but not to take account of their answers – a good illustration of how the ideal patient is constructed as silent

Léglise, Isabelle. « Multilinguisme et hétérogénéité des pratiques langagières. Nouveaux chantiers et enjeux du *Global South* », *Langage et société*, vol. no 160-161, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-266. Translated into English.

and at the same time of how uncertain it is that this type of literacy practice helps with communication.

In French Guiana, I have shown that the language policies applied in hospitals do not take account of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the patients, who rely for this purely on the goodwill of the caregivers; in the best case scenario there is provision for minimal communication of instructions to patients by the medical team, but reliance is placed mostly on the assignment of identity, exposing the racialization of social relations (Léglise 2007). The patients, speakers of minoritized languages or language varieties, are a doubly fragile population, who are effectively silenced (Muni Toke 2017), with few situations where they can make their voices heard. Carrying on parallel conversations in a hospital room, with the patient's family and with the medical team (felt to be very rude), in which the interaction constructs hermetic boundaries (of languages and knowledge), and medical expertise is expressed in French, can indeed become an occasion for the family to claim the epistemic right to take care of their mother, bedridden and given over to Western medicine (Léglise forthcoming). These moments of misunderstanding, lack of real communication, the expression of a form of resistance through heterogeneous language practices, are valuable. Kanj and Mitic (2009) have shown how important it is for patients to participate and have their voices heard. In their view, literacy in the area of health is achieved when individuals understand their rights as patients, know how to navigate the health system, and make informed decisions and communicate them verbally. This is a powerful emancipatory tool, and the various languages can help encourage such full participation in decision-making and the emergence of health citizenship (Thutloa and Stroud 2013).

Conclusion

Dominant global trends seek to close off rather than open up our knowledge of our own society: in this context, the social sciences have a vital democratic role to play (Connell 2007). In the multilingual world of the Global South, making language practices visible, including the practice of minoritized varieties, as well as empowerment via certain types of language practice, form part of the same social justice challenge. From the point of view of language policy, one possible pathway is the granting of linguistic rights to languages, in order to encourage linguistic and cultural diversity – or rather the granting of such rights to citizens, including the right to receive a decent education in one's own language, in one's usual language environment, and to be understood during visits to hospital. According to

Léglise, Isabelle. « Multilinguisme et hétérogénéité des pratiques langagières. Nouveaux chantiers et enjeux du *Global South* », *Langage et société*, vol. no 160-161, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-266. Translated into English.

Stroud (2001), although the granting of linguistic rights enables the participation of citizens belonging to minoritized groups, these concepts in fact exclude the minorities for whom they were created. The alternative, he argues, is linguistic citizenship: that is to say, in a situation where different resources and language practices are available within civil society, "the speakers themselves exercise control over their language, deciding what languages are, and what they may mean, and where languages issues (especially in educational sites) are discursively tied to a range of social issues – policy issues and questions of equity" (ibid.: 353).

In his view, the crux of the problem is to find out how stigmatized identities can be emancipated – empowered – and become able to share more equally in society's symbolic and economic resources. Blommaert (2001) argues that such emancipation is only possible when the varieties of power in languages (whatever these languages may be) become accessible to all citizens; but we have seen that other avenues seem possible, such as giving visibility to different minoritized voices and practices. Given that "overlooking internal inequalities within what is commonly defined as 'languages' [we could add, overlooking the pluraccentuation of language practices] is overlooking the political economy of linguistic-communicative resources in a society" (ibid.: 137) –especially if that society is multilingual and its citizens are plurilingual – research that takes a social approach to language definitely has a vital democratic role to play in the context of the Global South.

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