

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *International Journal of Multilingualism*, February 2020
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14790718.2019.1682245>

Special Issue: Transnational Trajectories of Multilingual Workers: Sociolinguistic Approaches to Emergent Entrepreneurial Selves

Introduction: Transnational Trajectories of Multilingual Workers: Sociolinguistic Approaches to Emergent Entrepreneurial Selves

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Today, the globalized new economy and its intensified labor mobilities have transformed what counts as ‘work’ (i.e. as forms of labor conducted in exchange of material goods like salaries) and what we understand as ‘citizenship’ (i.e. as the right to be considered a legitimate body occupying a particular socio-political territory/space, within a nation-state logic). Traditionally, citizenship has been associated with nationality, and the ideal citizen linguistically forms part of an imagined, homogeneous community bounded by the nation-state standard language and state sovereignty (Anderson, 1983). This common-sensical, though highly ideologized and essentializing, connection has been increasingly questioned by labor migration, which in turn destabilized and morphed the central role that official language(s) play in the selection and stratification of nation-state citizens (see Martín-Rojo & Moyer, 2007). In late capitalism, neoliberal discourses and practices have resulted in major transformations of models of speakerhood. Apart from a flexibilization of the labor market,

with a scenario of global competition marked by insecurity, temporality and self-responsibilization (Flubacher, Duchêne, & Coray, 2018; Harvey, 2005, 2010), we witness an extension of market rationalities to other spheres of life, which create entrepreneurial subjects with their linguistic correlate: ‘the self-made speaker’ (Martín-Rojo, 2019). This new figure is materialized in newer speaker profiles that inscribe language (learning) in/for a social and geographical mobility in the global marketplace and ‘fuse’ different ways of being and of earning a living into transnational ‘entrepreneurial citizenship’ (Allan, 2016, p. 622). These new entrepreneurial profiles foreground the role of language in promoting (self)-investment in particular language forms and language learning practices for an economic convertibility or return (Duchêne, 2016) as well as in attaining social and geographical mobility as a ‘citizenship resource’ and as an ‘employability asset’ in the late-capitalist marketplace (Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Gao & Park, 2015; Martín-Rojo, 2019; Urciuoli, 2008). One’s success in accessing this marketplace with the right ‘linguistic competence’ and the right ‘world experience’ also depends, as Bourdieu (1991, p. 61) reminds us, on one’s ‘social trajectory’; that is, on one’s personal, educational, cultural and socioeconomic background and historicized lived experiences. In late capitalism, ‘market mechanisms, as in other domains, have now come to some extent to organize speakers’ trajectories and practices and to govern their conduct’ (Martín-Rojo, 2018, p. 546). This Special Issue seeks to explore past, present and future ‘trajectories’ as an analytical methodological tool to provide an array of complex critical sociolinguistic ethnographic accounts of how certain policies and regulations on multilingualism shape transnational work and mobility trajectories in ways that orient individuals towards the aforementioned entrepreneurial-minded selves invested in self-training and self-regimentation (communicative and otherwise) for (global) legitimate citizenship status and employability (see, also, Flubacher et al., 2018).

Nation-states have modernized their governmental institutions (e.g. immigration offices, work departments, educational entities), and offloaded certain services to business corporations as well as to non-governmental organizations, in order to manage these newer entrepreneurial citizens in ways which maintain their power and territorial sovereignty in the international arena by establishing the rules of ‘legality’ of their ‘country’ (Sabaté-Dalmau, Garrido Sardà, & Codó, 2017). These transformations have been justified on the grounds of a politics of ‘individual freedom, liberty, [and] personal responsibility’ (Harvey, 2010, p. 10). As a result of this, newer local, national and supra-national ‘regimes’ (Kroskrity, 2000, p. 3) have emerged and transformed such governmental institutions also into entrepreneurial-like bodies that follow free-trade, free-mobility market rationalities and meritocracy logics (Del Percio, 2017). This has propelled the gradual dismantling of state welfare structures and the simultaneous precarization of work conditions (Harvey, 2005). On the other hand, it has led to the privatization of social life in different types of service provision for (mobile) citizens and non-citizens. That is, in this socioeconomic context and neoliberal political structures, individuals are now conceived of as being responsible for their own subsistence and success. These conceptions include judgments of which linguistic resources benefit individual work and life trajectories, both in terms of individual and family citizenship rights as well as wellbeing, and of past (i.e. accomplished), present and future employability opportunities and constraints.

This Special Issue contributes to current critical sociolinguistic, discourse-analytic and linguistic anthropological research on three intertwined lines of research which problematize nation-state and suprastate neoliberal regulations and policies, including linguistic requirements, that enable, limit, or enforce spatial, socioeconomic and linguistic im/mobilities of people across the globe (Coupland, 2003; Inda & Rosaldo, 2002). Firstly, it develops the argument that present-day post-Fordist rationalities have turned individuals (e.g.

students, employees, job seekers) into economicized marketed/marketable selves. Secondly, it understands public/governmental institutions (e.g. employment services agencies or Higher Education centers) and private/privatized institutions (e.g., multinational corporations or non-profit organizations) as being regulated simultaneously at the local, national and global levels; that is, in connection to, but in tension with, the aforementioned classic nation-state frameworks which assume that political units are territorially, culturally and ethnolinguistically homogeneous and indissoluble (Park & Wee, 2017). Thus, the contributions in this Special Issue envision practices of social organization of individual and institutional agents as being transnational (i.e. simultaneously ‘locally’ and ‘transnationally’-informed), without assuming that nation-state power has disappeared with globalization (Fairclough, 2006).

Thirdly, it assumes that language is at the core of global, mobile entrepreneurial citizenship as well as of citizenship regimentation since it departs from the idea that the tertiarized new economy is languaged and that late-capitalist markets are supported by a ‘wordforce’ (Boutet, 2008) of ‘workers of the world’ (Lorente, 2012). In this vein, language is here understood as practice and as ideology; that is, as situated, historicized practices in which individuals organize and get organized in society, and as indexes of the norms which get materialized, shape and govern individual/collective sociolinguistic behavior (Heller, 2007; Schieffelin, Woolard, & Kroskrity, 1998). This approach to language includes the valuation of dominant language practices, ‘standard’ forms, (self)-learning and teaching modes and, overall, of communication behaviors as part of ‘skill bundles’ (Urciuoli, 2008), envisioned as the regulating principle for legitimating ‘proper’ citizenry and personhood, today intertwined with one’s socioeconomic, geographical and linguistic mobility indexing ‘employability abilities’ (Codó & Patiño, 2017; Pujolar, 2019). The structuring role of language in the organization of citizens’ lives is epitomized, for instance, by language testing

regimes in ‘national’ languages officially established by nation-states upon ‘foreigners’ who wish to access citizenship rights or work permits (e.g., Hogan-Brun, Mar-Molinero, & Stevenson, 2009). It is also observable in particular standardized, styled, gendered communication frames imposed upon employees and job-seekers who navigate the global workplace (Cameron, 2000); or in newer education policies credentializing particular language-learning trajectories and foreign-language ‘levels’ in order to provide students with career credentials (Sabaté-Dalmau, 2016).

We engage with the literature on language, work and mobility that explores emergent profiles of entrepreneurial citizenship with a critical political economic lens (Del Percio, Flubacher, & Duchêne, 2017) on the discursive and material construction of transnational trajectories of multilingual worker identities that respond to (that is, comply with, resist, subvert, or partially adopt) the tenets of the varied market-driven processes and practices that have been described in this Introduction to the Issue (i.e., (linguistic) entrepreneurship, precarization, accountability, flexibility and rationalization), which we will understand as being part of global neoliberalism (as theorized in Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Harvey, 2005, 2010). However, we concur with Allan and McElhinny that ‘it is critical not simply to undertake studies which try to spot neoliberalism, since such studies many over-emphasize neoliberalism, but rather contextualize moments where neoliberal ideologies and practices arise alongside other policies’ (2017, p. 92), by understanding micro practices and macro processes as being mutually constitutive. We take a critical interpretive perspective on these ideologies in the sense that all contributions, quite innovatively, document and address ways in which an array of individual and institutional social actors make sense of and navigate the global marketed/marketable regimes of the self (mentioned above) as past, present or prospective transnational employers, employees or employment seekers. We place the emphasis on the individual (and therefore mostly draw on individual case studies or ‘telling

cases’) as the mobilizer of work/language resources. We argue that individuals are key social agents of sociolinguistic change (Pujolar & O’Rourke, 2016) whose compartments at different stages of life are crucial to understand their biographical, educational, professional and linguistic trajectories interplaying with the opportunities and challenges for accessing citizenship and work in the neoliberal transnational arena.

For this reason, we approach language investment (and marketability) for and through transnational work and citizenship by focusing on the trajectories of individuals as neoliberally-oriented worker selves. Thus, in this Special Issue, trajectories constitute a methodological tool that allows us to follow language practices and learning across spaces and over time and to attempt to move away from territorialized ‘fixed’ state-based ways of imagining and accounting for ‘mobile’ or ‘relocated’ people in transnationally-oriented networks (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). The focus on a variety of world workers’ (narrated) biographies allows us to uncover the junctures at which transnational workers’ socioeconomic, spatial and temporal mobilities interplay with language investments in the ‘accumulation’ of multilingual resources, frequently in unexpected ways. These often non-standard, unconventional communicative repertoires (which amalgamate local and global language practices and resources) encapsulate and bear the traces of spaces, networks and boundaries in which individuals navigate (Blommaert & Backus, 2011), enmeshed in ‘physical and mental contact with other people and other discourses, practices and ideas’ (De Boeck, 2012, p. 81), and understood as the materialization of the individuals’ reactions to socioeconomic, and political neoliberal employability and citizenship demands in their situated time and space.

In this regard, in this Special Issue we argue that sociolinguistic research should capture not only the complex linguistic repertoires in speakers’ socioeconomic and spatial pathways in neoliberal economies, but also – crucially for us – ‘a new mode of governing

linguistic conduct and as a response to newly coined models of speakerness that celebrate multilingualism' (Martín-Rojo, 2018, p. 548). The focus on trajectories allows us to ethnographically trace and document the rationales behind the choices and mobilization of all sorts of employability resources in relation to structures of socioeconomic and political power and of citizenship governance (Blommaert, 1999). In this sense, we claim that trajectories help us to problematize the newer strategies (communicative and otherwise) whereby transnational multilingual workers comply or self-discipline into, and adapt or even subvert 'fused' work-language-personhood regimes interplaying at local, national and supranational levels in order to gain access to particular entrepreneurial labor and citizenship profiles. As a methodological tool, tracing trajectories allows us to show and de-essentialize the dominant citizenship, labor and sociolinguistic regimes that individuals are oriented to and, to different extents, and that are (re)produced in the institutional and personal pathways (or 'trajectories') that constitute our ethnographic data. Ultimately, we suggest that the socially-engaged emphasis on individual trajectories is a productive venue of investigation to understand older and newer social categorization, social difference/distinction and, ultimately, social inequality in late-capitalist Europe.

The contributions to this Special Issue draw on different sociolinguistic methods to grasp a variety of (socio)-linguistic trajectories in relation to life and work; namely, (1) biographical and in-depth interviews with (temporary) transnational workers, work-seekers, and workers-to-be; (2) ethnographic (participant) observations of naturally-occurring interactions in different institutions; and (3) discursive analysis of institutional documents, including language policies and archives that provide a wealth of data on the constructions of neoliberal multilingual workers/entrepreneurial selves. We situate the contributions in Europe, a 'suprastate power bloc' (Harvey, 2010, p. 200), now managing the consequences of a financial recession and an economic crisis of global reach which are closely connected to

current debates on citizenship and mobilities at a supranational level. This is a research space where multilingual employability resources are socially stratified in different ways and may provide a multifaceted picture of how workers construct multilingualism differently and carve diverse linguistic investments for citizenship and employability for themselves at a time of ‘uncertainty about the future of one’s livelihood’ (Bauman, 2001, p. 41). Our research loci include Austria, Catalonia Norway, and Switzerland, de facto multilingual societies. These offer a varied picture of diverse governmental dynamics in Europe concerning engagement with supranational political regulatory activity and global economic weight and leadership, as well as local and state neoliberal citizenship mobility registration/management, market-driven ‘multilingual’ language policies (Piller & Cho, 2013), and ‘multiculturalism’ regimes based on moral conceptions of ‘democracy and civility’ (Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2011).

The guiding research questions in this Special Issue address (1) the political economy behind the emergence of these variety of past, present or future projected transnational world workers, whose heterogeneous sociolinguistic profiles and trajectories are presented below; (2) the informants’ (de)legitimizations of certain trajectories, linguistic resources and investments, (3) their reactions to national as well as global sociopolitical and institutional demands on language/mobilities and, ultimately, (4) the (re)creation of new and older social stratification practices and inequalities on the basis of legal and labor profiling based on language and (im)mobilities in the informants’ diverse trajectories. These research questions are detailed as follows:

- (1) To what extent, and how, do the local, national and supranational regimes of mobility, labor and language shape an increasingly diverse array of transnational multilingual workers? What are the political-economic and sociolinguistic conditions which account for the emergence of such transnational workers? Overall, how can our diverse individual case studies

help us refine the basis of late capitalist discourses and policies of employability and citizenship within critical sociolinguistics?

- (2) How are diverse mobile employers, employees, students and job seekers constructed on the basis of their life trajectories and language investments in different (educational/training) workplaces? What professional, linguistic and moral personhoods are (de)legitimized, why, under what conditions and with what consequences, in the globalized new economy?
- (3) How do heterogeneous individual social actors make sense of and navigate such professional and linguistic (de)skillings? To what extent, how, and why, do entrepreneurial multilingual selves comply with, adapt, subvert or resist individual self-actualization, retraining and even personality profiling in their workplaces?

We try to offer a selective array of multilingual actors and transnational institutions by focusing the analysis of the conceptualizations of past, current and prospective entrepreneurial selves in five different institutions which complement each other, and which provide a comprehensive picture of multilingual workplace/citizenship realms and of contemporary transnational investments in particular forms of geographic mobility and of language resources.

Individual Contributions

The first contribution by Maria Sabaté-Dalmau explores a public Higher Education institution in Catalonia (the UAB, or Autonomous University of Barcelona, in Catalan) which attempts to 'profile' middle-classed students undertaking an experimental Multilingualism degree into workers-to-be with excelling 'employability resources'. She draws on narrative

interview data on the informants' projected work/life trajectories collected over a two-year participant-observation ethnography. She shows that students enroll in such pioneering program to access niche transnational workplaces as privileged, intellectually elitist, self-made language workers. They invest in competitive cosmopolitan presentations of the self by fusing neoliberal-minded academic, professional and leisure trajectories which intersect with individually self-attained dominant multilingual resources, including English-proficiency credentialization and further language-based education at MA and PhD levels. She argues that this provides evidence that students invest in the academic/work-based lifestyles and employability regimes of neoliberalism as self-actualized, responsible language workers. She concludes that the described mobility/language trajectories may be a lens on stratification practices among future multilingual professionals, left unproblematized (and even legitimized), both by those who obtained qualified teaching/research positions as well as those who were unemployed or hired as underpaid temporary or precarious tourism/services workers upon completion of their language degree.

The second contribution by Mi-Cha Flubacher focuses on a job search training programme on how to apply and interview for a job administered by the public employment service in Fribourg (Switzerland). Drawing on ethnographic observations and materials, Flubacher analyzes how jobseekers were taught how to narratively package their mobile trajectories monolingually in French to 'sell themselves' by applying marketing mechanisms against the backdrop of activation policies. Her analysis of their 'narrative trajectories', as entextualizations at a particular moment, foregrounds that *how* informants narrate their past trajectories is more important than *what* the actual trajectory entails. The aim is to present oneself in 'likeable' ways, which encompasses not only specific linguistic strategies such as providing concrete examples for one's skills or using 'verbs of the heart', but also embodied aspects of self-presentation, like smiling during a job interview. Additionally, a veritable

monolingualization was administered in the framework of this programme, in the process of which the multilingual repertoires of the (migrant) participants were erased due to an imagination of a monolingual French marketplace, regardless of actual workplace requirements and practices. This paper shows that the narrative trajectories of these ‘enterprise-subjects’ are inscribed in a logics of ‘verbal hygiene’ (how to speak positively, formally, etc.) and in a monolingual regime in French. On a more positive note, the program created solidarity dynamics among the participants which boosted self-confidence and gave them some hope for employment.

The third contribution by Jonas Hassemer focuses on transnational migrants’ citizenship regimes concerning access to employability constraints and opportunities in the Austrian volunteering sector; more specifically, in the unpaid language work conducted in the non-governmental provision of refugee assistance to citizens/workers-to-be by current and former asylum seekers. By drawing on an in-depth analysis of two semi-formal interviews with two volunteer interpreters gathered in the course of two years of ethnographic fieldwork at an Austrian counselling center (CC), he shows that asylum seekers volunteering in the NGO mobilize individual language investment in dominant lingua francas required in the global neoliberal marketplace (e.g. English) presented through effortful volunteer-work trajectories. At the same time, these narrated trajectories denote that informants also participate in the credentialization of ‘proper citizenship’ practices (‘markets of integration’) expected to be ‘convertible’ into market assets; that is, in certificates of ‘proper’ citizenship conduct, ultimately imagined to be leading to employability. All in all, Hassemer explores the social meanings of non-remunerated language work in the form of volunteering (i.e. ‘the economics of volunteer work’) and argues that the social agents involved in it follow the socially-stratifying organization practices of the NGO. These are based on market

rationalities and citizenship targeting techniques regulated by supranationally-informed state governance practices which subject them to social positions of non-fully-fledged legality.

The fourth contribution by Maria Rosa Garrido analyzes the discursive construction of mobile, multilingual humanitarian workers at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The data analyzed in this paper include institutional documents and in-depth interviews. The ICRC is a nonprofit international humanitarian agency with delegations in over 80 countries that requires mobile staff with linguistic repertoires made up of ‘strategic’ *linguas francas* and ‘international experience’ linked to previous geographical mobility. In the light of fluctuating institutional linguistic requirements and needs, Garrido explores the trajectories of three (former) ICRC delegates as a window into the different values attributed to language resources and investments before and during humanitarian work. The delegates narrate a ‘cosmopolitan’ interest in other cultures and mobilize their multilingual repertoires, both anchored in their transnational families, in order to respond to unplanned linguistic needs in the field, such as learning ‘bits and pieces’ of a language like Kurdish. Investing in languages that were not required for employment rarely translates into a direct asset for promotion at the ICRC, as was the case with Arabic as a key strategic language for operations today, but it constructs a ‘fused’ professional identity as a flexible, entrepreneurial humanitarian who has ‘international experience’ that meets the hiring criteria of the agency.

The last contribution by Kamilla Kraft analyses a private construction company in Norway relying on, and maximizing, the rationalization of ‘language brokerism’ tasks of temporary multilingual labor migrants ‘solving’ communication problems and acting as the mediating link between managers and non-permanent workers (‘peripheral’ blue-collar teams), very much needed in that particular workplace. By analyzing detailed in-site interactional data, she shows how individual migrants’ mobility and language-investment trajectories allow informants to self-attain, and engage in, task-based employability

resources. This provides them with some degree of empowerment at the workplace over other migrant employees as well as to make employers dependent on them. This is so despite the fact that most linguistic brokerism and, therefore, language-investment practices, are underpaid or non-recognized (despite the fact that, continually leased/hired on temporary contracts, key social actors remain temporary workers with a high degree of job precarity). This demonstrates that precarious temporary workplace conditions may also interplay with some employability attainment and entrepreneurial-citizenship personhood categorizations/profiling – a complex interplay between precarity and empowerment which tends to be under-researched among manual workers.

The final discussion by Miguel Pérez-Milans takes us back to the foundation of the International Telegraph Union (ITU) in 1865 to discuss the continuities and transformations in international relations among national governments, private companies and other stakeholders through the ‘kaleidoscopic framing of neoliberalism’ (p. XX) that the five papers offer on the mutations in citizenship and sovereignty. Pérez-Milans looks into the migration flows of workers from the viewpoint of ‘trajectories’ as a form of ‘ethnographic tracing’ (Heller, Pietikäinen and Pujolar, 2018, p. 11) that takes two different forms: on the one hand, as a biographical object of analysis that allows us to trace the workers’ social and professional experiences in time and space and on the other, as a metapragmatic construct in situated encounters in which social actors negotiate meaning and position themselves. Our discussant takes a step forward and closes with a call for more research into ‘specific circuits of circulation of multilingual professionals, ideas of language, and capital’ (p. XX); in other words, into ways of exploring how to map these trajectories onto the wider patterns of circulation of professionals, ideas about language and resources.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for this Special Issue for their comments and insights on the individual contributions. Our gratitude also goes to Luisa Martín-Rojo, who provided feedback on this Introduction. We would also like to thank the participants in the panel '*Local, nation-state and international linguistic regimes at the crossroads: Transnational trajectories of languaged world workers in globalised labour spaces*' at the 21st Sociolinguistics Symposium (University of Murcia, 15-18 June 2016) which was the genesis of the current volume. Our work has also greatly benefited from the discussions conducted within the Language and Work Group. All misunderstandings and shortcomings are of course our own.

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