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Superdiversity and sociolinguistics

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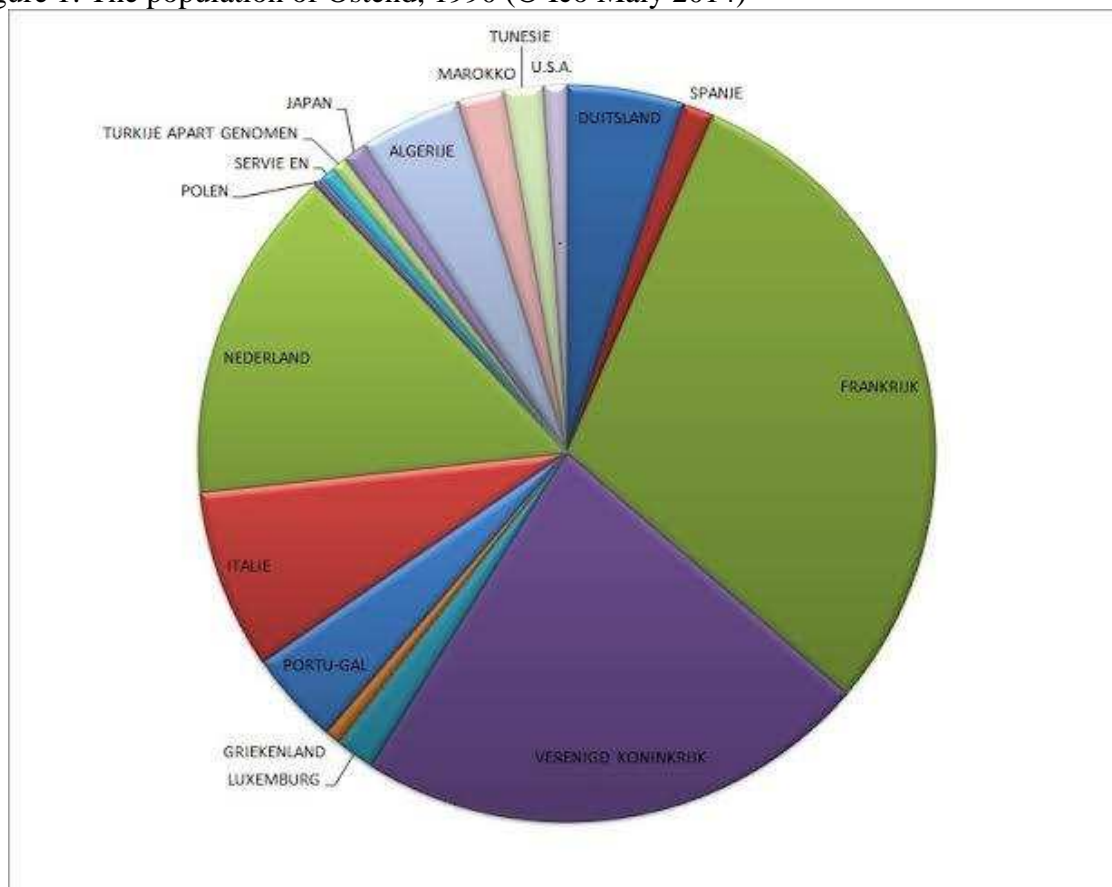
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This book brings together some of the work developed in a network of sociolinguistic research groups that have collaborated for several years with ‘language and superdiversity’ as a broad thematic heading.¹ This introduction sketches (1) what we mean by ‘superdiversity’ and why we see it as a useful cover term; (2) key features of our approach and our collaboration; and (3) areas adjacent to superdiversity where further work seems especially important (securitisation and surveillance).

1. Superdiversity: What and why?

Over the past two and a half decades, the demographic, socio-political, cultural and linguistic face of societies worldwide has been changing due to ever expanding mobility and migration. This has been caused by economic globalisation and by major geopolitical shifts – the collapse and fragmentation of the Soviet communist bloc, China’s conversion to capitalism, India’s economic reforms, the ending of apartheid in South Africa. The effects are a dramatic increase in the demographic structure of the immigration centers of the world. These places are also now no longer restricted to ‘global cities’ such as London or Los Angeles, but also include smaller provincial locations. The following charts show these evolutions in the Belgian coastal town of Ostend between 1990 and 2011 (Maly 2014).

Figure 1: The population of Ostend, 1990 (© Ico Maly 2014)



¹ Further papers produced by participants in the InCoLaS network will be found in a companion volume, *Engaging with Superdiversity*, edited by Karel Arnaut, Martha Karrebaek and Max Spotti, and published by Multilingual Matters.

Figure 2: The population of Ostend, 2000 (© Ico Maly 2014)

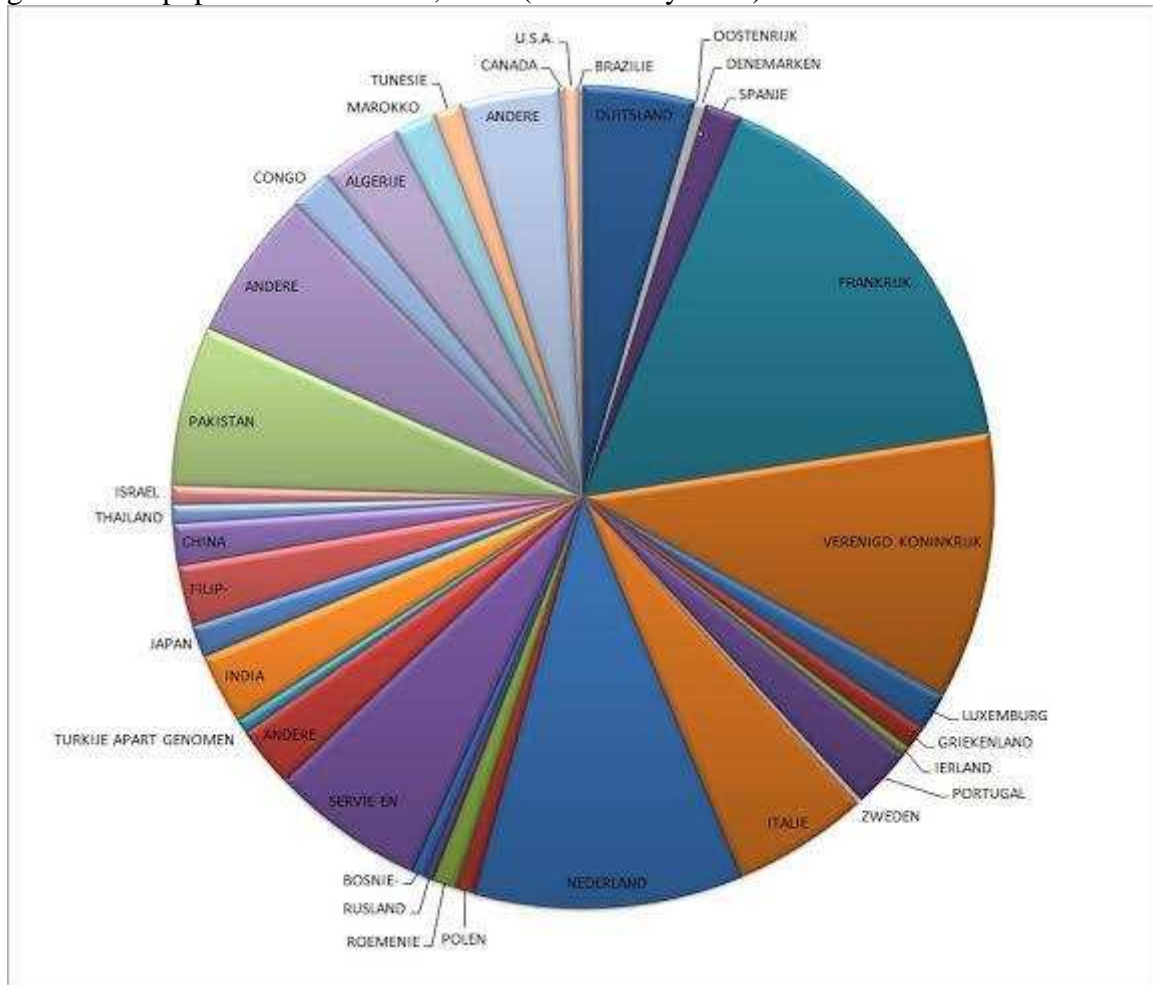
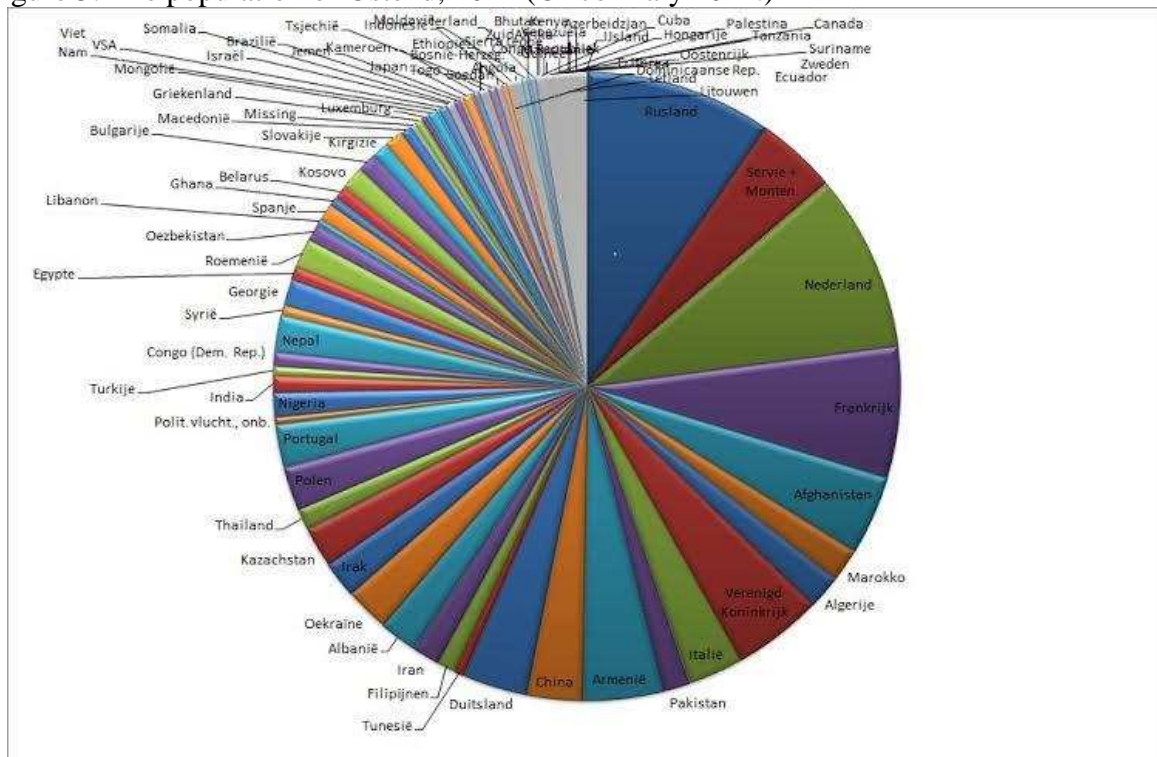


Figure 3: The population of Ostend, 2011 (© Ico Maly 2014.)



The quantity of people migrating has steadily grown, the range of migrant-sending and migrant-receiving areas have increased, and there has been radical diversification not only in the socio-economic, cultural, religious and linguistic profiles of the migrants but also in their civil status, their educational or training background, and their migration trajectories, networks and diasporic links. To capture all this, Steven Vertovec coined the term ‘super-diversity’:

“**Superdiversity**: a term intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything... previously experienced... a dynamic interplay of variables including country of origin,... migration channel,... legal status,... migrants’ human capital (particularly educational background), access to employment,... locality... and responses by local authorities, services providers and local residents” (2007:2-3).

And whereas many accounts of global change post-1989 have focused on spatial and economic transformations and on national and ethnic groups moving across borders and boundaries, Vertovec sought closer attention to the human, cultural and social intricacies of globalisation, focusing on very specific migrant trajectories, identities, profiles, networking, status, training and capacities.

In addition, faster and more mobile communication technologies and software infrastructures have affected the lives of diaspora communities of all kinds (old and new, black and white, imperial, trade, labour etc [cf. Cohen 1997]). While emigration used to mean real separation between the emigré and his/her home society, involving the loss or dramatic reduction of social, cultural and political roles and impact there, emigrants and dispersed communities now have the potential to retain an active connection by means of an elaborate set of long-distance communication technologies. These technologies impact on sedentary ‘host’ communities as well, with people getting involved in transnational networks that offer potentially altered forms of identity, community formation and cooperation (Baron 2008).

There is of course a very large, rich and wide-ranging literature covering contemporary social change,² and this raises the question: Why choose ‘superdiversity’ as a cover term for the social processes studied in a book about language? Our answer is as follows.

When compared with the range of other terms on offer – for example, ‘translocality’ (Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013), ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman 2000) or ‘global complexity’ (Urry 2003) – Vertovec’s ‘superdiversity’ comes across as a primarily descriptive concept, limited in ‘grand narrative’ ambitions or explicit theoretical claims, committed instead to ethnography (see Vertovec 2009; <http://www.mmg.mpg.de/departments/socio-cultural-diversity/research-focus/>). It spotlights the ‘diversification of diversity’ as a process to be investigated but it doesn’t pin any particular explanation onto this. Indeed, the term ‘super-diversity’ is itself relatively unspectacular – ‘super’ implies complications and some need for rethinking, but ‘diversity’ aligns with a set of rather long-standing discourses. Proposing change while invoking continuity like this, there is nothing very radical or dramatic here. But this has two advantages.

² The ideas underpinning classic multiculturalism and identity politics – ideas about groups being culturally distinct and about gender and ethnic identities being fundamental and unwavering – are challenged by scholars and writers like Gilroy (1987), Hall (1988), Mercer (1994), Brubaker (2002) and Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah (2010), and accounts of intersectionality have drawn attention to “the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 76). The perspectives underpinning talk of ‘communities’ and ‘societies’ have been deconstructed as ‘methodological nationalism’ and the ‘ethnic lens’ (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003; Glick Schiller, et al. 2006), and critiques of essentialism in anthropology date back to the 1960s and 70s (Wolf 1964, Hymes 1980, Fabian 1978; 1998 - see Arnaut 2012). Studies of globalisation, diaspora and transnationalism document and theorise the processes and formations that are altering contemporary experience (Castells 1996; Appadurai 1996), and these are taken further with ideas like, for example, ‘translocality’, which goes beyond transnationality in being “less scripted and more scattered” (Lionnet and Shu-mei-Shih 2005), allowing for finer, intra-urban distinctions in connectivity and scale (Van Dijk 2011), opening up to spaces far beyond global cities, in rural towns and in seemingly more marginal sites worldwide (see Arnaut and Spotti in press)

First, it gives the term strategic purchase in the field of social policy. In the “normative discourses, institutional structures, policies and practices in business, public sector agencies, the military, universities and professions” (Vertovec 2012:287), the word ‘diversity’ has very considerable currency. Superdiversity goes beyond this and points to major problems facing traditional multicultural understandings of diversity – social categorisation has itself become a huge challenge for policy and politics, and according to Kenneth Prewitt, former Director of the US Census Bureau

“classification is now a moving target. [There are] two possible outcomes: either a push toward measurement (like censuses) using ever more finely-grained classifications, or system collapse – the end of measurements of difference. In either case, it is increasingly doubtful that policies aimed at making America more inclusive will center, as they did in the 1970s, on numerical remedies using statistical disparities as evidence of discrimination” (reported by Vertovec 2012:303-4)

But in suggesting change-with-continuity instead of radical overturn, Vertovec’s formulation makes it easier for policy to embrace these issues,³ and its effectiveness is evident in its adoption in a wide range of different local government arenas (e.g. Amsterdam, Birmingham, Frankfurt, Ghent). Of course this adoption is itself a complex process deserving close critical analysis, as Arnaut emphasises in his contribution to the collection, and there is much more involved than just an authentication of civic diversity.⁴ Even so, the capacity to engage with local political and institutional discourse is important for the research covered in this volume, and in this respect, superdiversity is a useful banner. It offers “an awareness that a lot of what used to be qualified as ‘exceptional’, ‘aberrant’, ‘deviant’ or ‘unusual’ in language and its use by people, *is in actual fact quite normal*” (Blommaert 2015: 2).

Second, for sociolinguistics itself, it is also fitting that superdiversity marks a shift of footing without disconnecting from what went before – a desire for synthesis rather than for a new subdiscipline. Diversity has been a central concern in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology for much of the 20th century, both as the focus for empirical description and as a political commitment - “[d]iversity of speech has been singled out as the main focus of sociolinguistics” (Hymes 1972:38; also e.g. Boas 1912). Furthermore, sociolinguists are now very familiar with the problems of group identification and the critiques of essentialism that give superdiversity much of its relevance. In 1969, Dell Hymes called the idea of discrete sociolinguistic groups into question when he said that “the relationship of cultures and communities in the world today is dominantly one of *reintegration* within complex units” (1969:32), and twenty years later, Mary Louise Pratt reiterated this in the deconstruction of what she called the ‘utopian linguistics of community’, proposing a ‘linguistics of contact’ in its place (1988). Indeed, terms like ‘hybridity’, ‘heteroglossia’ and ‘fluidity’ proliferate in the contemporary sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological literature. But as an encapsulation of these concerns, ‘superdiversity’ not only has greater currency in public policy discourse but is also often associated with an interrogative stance, openly proposing that new forms of understanding are now needed to make sense of the contemporary social landscape (e.g. Fanshawe & Sriskandarajah 2010). Well-established social categorisations are now being challenged, the argument runs, along with the macro-theories and models of society built around them, and in their place, superdiversity calls for meso- and micro-scale accounts, focusing on lower levels of social organisation. So here we hear calls for social scientists to turn their attention to informal processes, seeking new principles

³ Easier, at least, than terms that are either broader or more theoretically encumbered such as ‘neo-liberal globalisation’ or ‘intersectionality’.

⁴ As Rose notes, there is often a neo-liberal logic underpinning the reassertion of local community: “Government of the social in the name of the national economy gives way to government of particular zones - regions, towns, sectors, communities - in the interests of economic circuits which flow between regions and across national boundaries. The economic fates of citizens within a national territory are uncoupled from one another, and are now understood and governed as a function of their own particular levels of enterprise, skill, inventiveness and flexibility.” Rose 1995:338, 339

for social cohesion in local ‘conviviality’ and low-key ‘civility’ (Gilroy 2006; Vertovec 2007; Wetherell 2010). For sociolinguists, who specialise in the rigorous and disciplined description of smaller scale processes like these, this sounds like a summons, and the challenge to traditional sociological analysis potentially ends up enlarging the agenda of linguistics.

Of course, if it is correct that more of the responsibility for producing plausible descriptions of contemporary cultural processes now falls to disciplines like sociolinguistics, we need to double-check that our apparatus is actually equal to the role. Blommaert and Rampton start to do this in their opening chapter, and they begin their review of the sociolinguistic *instrumentarium* by invoking “the pioneering work of linguistic anthropologists like John Gumperz, Dell Hymes and Michael Silverstein [starting in the 1960s, as well as] the foundational rethinking of social and cultural theorists like Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Foucault, Goffman, Hall and Williams”. They go on to say that “with this kind of pedigree, ‘robust and well-established orthodoxy’ might seem more apt as a characterisation of these ideas than ‘paradigm shift’ or ‘developments’”. But contemporary conditions have repositioned and intensified the relevance of this apparatus, and once again, the encapsulation of both continuity and change in ‘superdiversity’ seems particularly apposite. Everyone in sociolinguistics is familiar with ‘diversity’, but ‘super’ signals something more, requiring a retuning or realignment of parts of the machinery, sometimes even the shaping and development of new elements. So in signalling selective renovation rather than wholesale reinvention in this way, ‘language and superdiversity’ is an apt and indeed rather parsimonious reformulation of the sociolinguistic enterprise, adjusting it to new times.

So what can the ‘sociolinguistic enterprise’ be expected to look like in a book with ‘language and superdiversity’ in the title?

2. Our approach and our collaboration

As already indicated, our work seeks to integrate linguistics with ethnography, with ethnography understood as an epistemology rather than simply a method of data collection. So it is assumed, for example, that the meaning of a form or practice involves an interaction between a number of different dimensions of socio-cultural organisation/process; that the researcher’s own cultural and interpretive capacities are crucial in making sense of the complex intricacies of the situated activities being studied; that tuning into these takes time and close involvement; and that questions may change during the course of an enquiry, with a dialectic between theory, interpretation and data being sustained throughout (cf Hymes 1980 [1996]; Blommaert & Dong 2010; Rampton, Maybin & Roberts 2014). One of ethnography’s key characteristics is its commitment to taking a long hard look at empirical processes that make no sense within established frameworks, often because of an intrinsic complexity that defies inclusion in well-known categories (Van der Aa & Blommaert 2015). So if superdiversity announces the collapse of traditional classificatory frameworks, then ethnography is a vital resource.

The combination of ethnography and language analysis is of course central to north American linguistic anthropology (LA), and the tradition of Hymes, Gumperz, Ochs and Silverstein is an absolutely vital reference point for the papers in this collection (cf. Silverstein 2014). But in terms of academic positioning, perhaps there are two notable differences between LA and the work reported here, highlighting the value of transatlantic dialogue.⁵

First, in the socialisation of linguistic anthropologists in north America, the study of field sites away from home plays a crucial role, but in this book and its companion volume, most of the papers focus

⁵ For further discussion of the relationship between north American linguistic anthropology and linguistic ethnography, see Rampton 2007, 2008, 2009.

on environments where researchers work and/or have grown up or spent much of their lives.⁶ So they have often been motivated by an interest in linguistic configurations, inequalities and divisions noticed locally, more or less ‘on the doorstep’. Across the studies in these two collections, there is engagement with, for example, local refugee centres and immigration and asylum procedures, work-place production and interviewing processes, complementary schools, primary and secondary education, literacy programmes and popular cultural production (cf Hymes 1980 and Van der Aa & Blommaert 2011 on ‘ethnographic monitoring’). The authors and/or their research groups have often been involved in turning research findings into support material for non-academic stakeholders, and in fact this reflects the influence of a lot of the funding policy in Europe, where the potential practical ‘impact’ of research is an increasingly prominent funding criterion.

Second, linguistic anthropology has very little institutional presence outside the US, and it is hard to find any graduate programmes in linguistic anthropology in Europe. Intellectually, this potentially increases the need for non-US linguists interested in society and culture to talk to other kinds of social scientist, while at the same time, it also means that there is less oversight of the reproduction or revision of canonical frameworks and procedures, leaving quite a lot of room for innovation (even though this may be quirky and short-lived). Organisationally, sociolinguists in Europe have responded to this gap by setting up the Linguistic Ethnography Forum (LEF), which started in 2001, now has over 600 members, and builds inter-disciplinarity as well as practical relevance into both its rationales and its training programmes.⁷ Within this book and the collaborative network that informs it, virtually all of the contributors received their research training in Europe, a substantial group received their initial research training in applied linguistics, and only a small minority are trained anthropologists.⁸

Admittedly there is always a risk of exaggerating the differences between US LA and the linguistic ethnography developed in Europe.⁹ But whatever the actual extent of this divergence, the projects informing this book have drawn a great deal of impetus (a) from personal everyday experience of the major changes associated with superdiversity, and (b) from a collective feeling that to make sense of the societies we live in, we can and should rework/update our analytic vocabularies. Since 2009, these sentiments have gained greater collective momentum with the formation of the *International Consortium on Language & Superdiversity* (InCoLaS).

Although there was already a very substantial track record of bi- and multi-lateral collaboration between the research groups that formed InCoLaS,¹⁰ superdiversity first moved centre stage at an ESF Exploratory Workshop convened by Blommaert and Vertovec in Tilburg in October 2009. Since then, InCoLaS has met at two-day sessions approximately twice a year, supported with funding from *inter alia* the Göttingen Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious & Ethnic Diversity, the Danish Council for Strategic Research, the Dutch National Science Foundation, the Finnish

⁶ So for example, Blackledge, Rampton, Roberts and Spotti all came into research through teaching in schools or adult education.

⁷ For LEF rationales, see e.g. Rampton et al 2004, Rampton, Maybin & Tusting 2007, and Rampton, Maybin & Roberts 2013; for training programmes, see [Key Concepts into Ethnography, Language & Communication](#) (ESRC 2007-;) and [Researching Multilingualism: Multilingualism in Research Practice](#) (ESRC 2010-13).

⁸ We have also played a significant part in LEF. Rampton, Blommaert, Roberts, Blackledge and Creese have all taught on the LEF-affiliated training courses, and Rampton, Creese, Madsen and Woydack have been or are members of the LEF executive committee.

⁹ After all, the idea of ‘bringing it all back home’ was central to Hymes’ proposals for *Rethinking Anthropology* (1969), and there are very powerful examples of this in, for example, the work of Ochs and associates (e.g. Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik (eds) 2013), as well as in linguistic anthropological research on education (e.g. Wortham & Rymes (eds) 2003). Specifically on superdiversity, Blommaert recently that we saw “less of a European-American divide in addressing diversity as a field of inquiry than several other observers. In fact, much of what is presented as a chasm between both ‘worlds’ seems to revolve around differing opinions about the “center” of a dialogue (...)” (Blommaert 2015: 3).

¹⁰ Attendance at InCoLaS meetings has varied, but the individuals and groups participating most regularly have been based at the University of Tilburg, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious & Ethnic Diversity at Göttingen University of Copenhagen, University of Jyväskylä, King’s College London, University of Birmingham, the University of the Western Cape, and University of Pennsylvania, and most recently, Leuven University.

Academy and a range of local sources. Attended by 15-25 researchers from at least 5 or 6 of the constituent research groups, half of the programme at InCoLaS meetings has usually been dedicated to organisation (projects and project applications; publications; meetings, conferences and panels; visits and exchanges), and half has focused on substantive research, with papers presented by PhD researchers, post-docs, junior and senior faculty as well as other invited contributors. Debates within the group were and are by agreement exploratory, less focused on what is already known than on what remains to be examined and established. The consortium is supported by several local publications, two of them on-line – *Copenhagen Studies in Bilingualism*,¹¹ *Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies*,¹² and *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*¹³ – and this has facilitated the publication of ideas and reports at a much cheaper and faster rate than is possible through the usual book and journal outlets. InCoLaS has also organised an international conference on Language and Superdiversity attended by over 250 people in Jyväskylä in June 2013, and this book and its companion, *Engaging with Superdiversity*, edited by Arnaut, Karrebæk and Spotti, present a cross-section of our theoretical and empirical thinking.

3. Superdiversity and its shadows

Superdiversity is certainly not a flawless concept, but in this introduction we have attempted to answer some of the most common criticisms (see e.g. Makoni 2012; Reyes 2014). So to the challenge that superdiversity is a banal idea, we say that it is *accessible*, as attested by the municipalities that have adopted it. What some see as theoretical vacuity, we see as an *openness* to the kinds of exploratory sociolinguistic theorisation that we have tried to elaborate. Against the charge of ethnocentricity, we reflexively accept the inescapability of our historical particularity and embrace the opportunities for local engagement. And when people say that superdiversity is naïve about inequality, we can point to sorting, stratification and/or exclusion as central issues in chapters in this book. Indeed, if the continuing circulation and application of anachronistic social categories contributes to the old and new inequalities that mark contemporary globalization, superdiversity invites us to dissect these categories critically, and to try to replace them with descriptors better tuned to complexity.

That said, we have adopted ‘superdiversity’ as a timely rather than enduring notion, aware that alongside the timestamp, there is sure to be a sell-by date. Indeed, we can already see that to make better sense of contemporary environments of intensified migration, mobility, inequality and exclusion, ‘superdiversity’ needs to be supplemented with close attention to two other burgeoning processes, that in many respects act as its shadowy counterparts: securitisation and digital surveillance. With varying degrees of emphasis, these feature, here and in our companion volume, in the papers by Arnaut, Khan, Spotti, Varis and Wang as well as, elsewhere, in Varis (forthcoming) and Rampton 2014. But as well as growing alongside the diversification of diversity, securitisation and surveillance themselves present sociolinguistics with substantial challenges, and it is worth briefly turning to these.

As noted above, the onset of globalised superdiversity in recent times is often linked to the fall of the Berlin Wall (e.g. Blommaert & Rampton 2011:2). But this period is also associated with emergence of a huge transnational field of security professionals, which is “larger than that of police organizations in that it includes, on one hand private corporations and organizations dealing with the control of access to the welfare state, and, on the other hand, intelligence services and some military people seeking a new role after the end of the Cold War” (Bigo 2002:63,64). In this context, migration and superdiversity are

¹¹ <http://www.webshophum-en.ku.dk/shop/copenhagen-studies-in-127s.html>

¹² <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/research/institutes-and-research-groups/babylon/tpcs/>

¹³ <http://kcl.academia.edu/WorkingPapersinUrbanLanguageLiteracies>

“increasingly interpreted as a security problem. The prism of security analysis is especially important for politicians, for national and local police organizations, the military police, customs officers, border patrols, secret services, armies, judges, some social services (health care, hospitals, schools), private corporations (bank analysts, providers of technology surveillance, private policing), many journalists (especially from television and the more sensationalist newspapers), and a significant fraction of general public opinion, especially but not only among those attracted to ‘law and order’.... The professionals in charge of the management of risk and fear especially transfer the legitimacy they gain from struggles against terrorists, criminals, spies, and counterfeiters toward other targets, most notably transnational political activists, people crossing borders, or people born in the country but with foreign parents” (Bigo *ibid*).

And while the development of new communication technologies has major implications for the maintenance and development of diasporic networks and other types of collectivity (Blommaert & Rampton 2011:4, this volume; Tall 2004), it also plays a major role in surveillance. As we have noted, superdiversity presents a huge challenge to the forms of social classification with which states and institutions have traditionally monitored their populations, and scholars argue that instead of relying on essentialist identity categories, research should focus on *practices*. But with ‘transactional surveillance’, digital technologies overcome these problems:

“[s]ubjects... are very active consuming, swiping credit cards, walking streets, phoning. These activities and transactions are an immediate interaction with and through technology. The interaction creates data that are used to govern subjects and their activities... As Amoore and de Goede state in their exploration of the increasing importance of transactions for security practice and its political implications: ‘[T]ransactions people make are, quite literally, taken to be traces of daily life, they are conceived as a way of mapping, visualising and recognising bodies in movement’ (2008:176). Ruppert and Savage speak of transactional governance (2011). While traditional data sources engage subjects as identities or fixed populations, transactional governance derives information directly from the interactions and transactions. ‘Subjectivity or identity is less an issue and instead associations and correlations in conduct are deemed more empirical and descriptive than subjective and meaningful’ (Ruppert 2011:228). Transactional governance decentres subjects into transactions: what matters is not subjects with opinions or identities but transactions that take place. It is a mode of governing that seeks to quickly adapt delivery of services, control and coercion to changing behaviours deriving and processing information directly from the everyday ‘doings’ of people. Transactional surveillance is increasingly important in security practice” (Huysmans 2014:166-7)

Certainly, there are major struggles, inefficiencies and disjunctures both in digital surveillance and in the field of security professionals, and neither amounts to Orwellian totalitarianism (Haggerty 2006; Bigo 2006; Bauman et al 2014). Even so, the implications for sociolinguistics are very considerable.

First, if superdiversity sometimes tempts us to foreground Bakhtin, heteroglossic translanguaging and creativity in public culture, securitisation and surveillance emphasise the relevance of Foucault’s ideas about control, normativity and subjectification.. Foucault’s continuing significance is evidenced in vigorous debates about new forms of post-panoptic governance, combining a capillary web of small-scale practices that deliberately “attempt to shape conduct in certain ways in relation to certain objectives” (Rose 1999:4) with the systematic cultivation of fear and unease as modes of control (Lyon (ed) 2006; Haggerty 2006; Los 2006; Arnaut (this volume); Khan 2014; Rampton 2014).

Second and much more radically, the study of digital surveillance presents a huge challenge to the semiotic repertoire of contemporary sociolinguistics, dependent as it is on verbal and visual signs. As Haggerty and Ericson explain, digital surveillance

“[breaks the human body] down into a series of discrete signifying flows... For example, drug testing striates flows of chemicals, photography captures flows of reflected lightwaves, and lie detectors align and compare assorted flows of respiration, pulse and electricity. The body is itself, then, an assemblage comprised of myriad component parts and processes which are broken-down for purposes of observation... [The body’s] movements through space can be recorded, [and] a person’s habits, preferences, and lifestyle [can be reconstructed] from the trails of information which have become the detritus of contemporary life. [The practices of surveillance visualise] a host of heretofore opaque flows of auditory, scent, chemical, visual, ultraviolet and informational stimuli. Much of the visualization... exists beyond our normal range of perception... The capture of flesh/information flows of the human body [is standardised], ... transforming the body into pure information, such that it can be rendered more mobile and comparable. Such processes are put into operation from a host of scattered centres of calculation... Such centres of calculation can include forensic laboratories, statistical institutions, police stations, financial institutions, and corporate and military headquarters. In these sites the information derived from [surveillance is] reassembled and scrutinized in the hope of developing strategies of governance, commerce and control”. (2000:611,613)

Cheney-Lippold 2011 elaborates on what this means for something like ‘gender’:

“[o]nline a category like gender is not determined by one’s genitalia or even physical appearance. Nor is it entirely self-selected. Rather, categories of identity are being inferred upon individuals based on their web use. Code and algorithm are the engines behind such inference[, constructing] identity and category online. We are entering an online world where our identifications are largely made for us. A ‘new algorithmic identity’ is situated at a distance from traditional liberal politics, removed from civil discourse via the proprietary nature of many algorithms while simultaneously enjoying an unprecedented ubiquity in its reach to surveil and record data about users.” (2011:165)

Digital surveillance certainly doesn’t exclude the human processes of interpretation traditionally studied in sociolinguistics, and “[r]ather than being accurate or inaccurate portrayals of real individuals, [algorithmic identities] are a form of *pragmatics*: differentiated according to how useful they are in allowing institutions to make discriminations among populations” (Haggerty & Ericson 2000:614; emphasis added). Indeed, the multitude of designers, analysts and clients operating in these ‘centres of calculation’ are prone to the full range of human bias and error in their construction and construal of surveillance data (cf e.g. Bauman et al 2014:125; Liddicoat 2008:132-3). Nevertheless, in social media for example, “[s]ociality is not simply ‘rendered technological’ by moving to an online space; rather, coded structures are profoundly altering the nature of our connections, creations and interactions” (van Dijck 2013:20).

If we are to assess the accuracy of such claims, it is first necessary to gain access to the ‘algorithms’ and ‘coded structures’ concealed in these spaces, and then to try to understand their computational reasoning. But this is not at all easy, and it lies quite a long way beyond current sociolinguistic training and practice. Of course there is still plenty to keep us very busy, and even in the state of development reached in the exploration of superdiversity, sociolinguistics and linguistic ethnography can generate a lot of insight into issues like the lived everyday experience of surveillance and securitisation, which are still relatively under-researched (Ball 2009:640; Goldstein 2010:488; Bauman et al 2014:141-3). Nevertheless, the frameworks and procedures that we have updated and applied to superdiversity will only take us so far, and may falter when we seek to understand the influence of algorithmic identities and “‘data subjects’ [with] a conditional form of existence whose rights are dependent up its behaviour within digital networks” (Bauman et al., 2014:129). If the critical illumination of contemporary life continues to feature as an aspiration for sociolinguistics, then the development of tools for delving far deeper into the dynamics of securitisation and digital surveillance is now one of our biggest methodological challenges.

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