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Superdiversity and linguistic ethnography: Researching people and language in motion

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Abstract

This paper discusses a linguistic ethnographic (LE) approach to superdiversity in three steps. First, it lays out some basic assumptions of LE. Secondly, it demonstrates how superdiversity pairs with LE methods and perspectives and describes some domains of research. Finally, it presents two examples of LE research in Cyprus and Denmark, taken from research projects carried out by each author. Both cases come from classrooms in which similarity and uniformity is –to an extent– aspired to, but where difference turns out to be fundamental to the participants. Both cases illustrate situations resulting from people’s movement in space and discursively in time (e.g. talking about the past), and they put into focus the struggle between different discourses on diversity, and between existing structures and emerging discrepancies. They also highlight issues of security, precarity and conflict which are important, yet often overlooked effects of mobility and technological and societal changes.

1. Introduction

In their position paper on language and superdiversity, Blommaert and Rampton state: “Rather than working with homogeneity, stability and boundedness as the starting assumptions, mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding are now central concerns in the study of language, language groups and communication” (2011:3). Blommaert and Rampton’s main point is that increased and more varied mobility to and within Europe, together with rapidly increasing technological innovations and modes of interconnectivity, have led to new social formations, including new forms of commonality and differentiation, and that this requires new perspectives in (socio)linguistic research. A ‘state-centric’ approach (Moore 2015; Silverstein 2015) is no longer adequate and instead researchers must embrace a condition of constantly changing social realities, expect the unexpected, learn to understand the unfamiliar, and accept a lesser degree of uniformity and agreement across the board. Blommaert and Rampton argue that language is a particularly sensitive instrument for capturing these dynamics of social transformations (also Blommaert 2014: 432). Specifically, the combination of linguistic ‘tools’ with ethnography, what is known in the UK and Europe as ‘Linguistic Ethnography’ (Rampton et al. 2015b: 4), appears as a particularly adept way to move “beyond pattern analysis – no matter how detailed, delicate and fine-grained [the]... description – and respect (...) uniqueness, particularity and creativity just as much as convention and structure” (Deumert 2014: 118). Before expanding on this, we will say a few more words on the sociolinguistic uptake of the notion of superdiversity.

The term superdiversity was originally coined to formulate a range of multi-layered societal – particularly European - changes (Vertovec 2007, 2010), later to call for new methods to approach them, and seriously consider their political and policy implications (Meissner and Vertovec 2015). Yet, within socially oriented linguistics the meaning of superdiversity is contested and there is no

agreement on how or if it should be adopted (e.g. Flores and Lewis 2016; Reyes 2014). Superdiversity attempts to capture in a single term the proliferation of variables needed to understand and describe contemporary people's lives, including the variety of communicative resources in use. Some sociolinguists primarily take superdiversity as an objective descriptor to characterise a certain type of 'species richness' (i.e. linguistic and social variation) (Deumert 2014: 117), others point out that heterogeneity and hybridity are not new phenomena (e.g., Reyes 2014), especially when the gaze is turned away from European metropolises to historical processes of language contact and development (Silverstein 2015), or to non-Western contexts (May 2014). In addition, the 'diversity positivism' is argued to fail because diversity categories are inevitably local, ideological, and historical – in Deumert's words "second-order cultural and ideological constructs" (2014: 117; also Arnaut, Karrebæk, and Spotti Forthc.) – and therefore cannot simply be counted.

Other sociolinguists adopt superdiversity as a perspective, lens or discourse in order to scrutinize the "complex dynamics of diversity both as social and cultural practice and as (hegemonic) discourse and regulation" (Arnaut 2012: 12). In effect, the very notion of superdiversity indexes "one kind of crisis of the contemporary European nation-state" (Silverstein 2015: 7) as the nation-state no longer constitutes normative hegemony; accordingly, researching language communities, i.e. groups of speakers that orient to the same denotational norm (Silverstein 2010), needs to take into account that such communities intersect in fundamental (and irreversible) ways.

Socially oriented linguistics including LE have scrutinized many of the issues of concern to superdiversity research – diversity, change, hybridity, non-state-centric points of view - for a long time (Rampton et al. 2015b: 5). One of the superdiversity term's main contributions to linguistics has perhaps been to bring these discussions into the mainstream and invite a general discussion of the relation between societal conditions and sociolinguistics. Also, it has invited attention to the interplay between creative communicative processes and normative or perhaps constraining or suppressive environments and structures (Arnaut 2012; Arnaut et al. Forthc.; Jacquemet 2015).

In what follows, we will discuss an LE approach to superdiversity research. We will do so in three steps: Firstly, we lay out some basic assumptions of LE; secondly, we demonstrate how superdiversity pairs with LE methods and perspectives and describe some domains of research. Finally, we present two examples of LE research in Cyprus and Denmark, taken from research projects carried out by each author. Both cases come from classrooms in which similarity and uniformity is –to an extent– aspired to, but where difference turns out to be fundamental to the participants. Both cases illustrate situations resulting from people's movement in space and discursively in time (e.g. talking about the past), and they put into focus the struggle between different discourses on diversity, and between existing structures and emerging discrepancies. They also highlight issues of security, precarity and conflict which are important, yet often overlooked effects of mobility and technological and societal changes.

2. Historical Perspectives and Basic Assumptions

LE emerged from British Applied Linguistics during the early 2000s, following many language scholars' long-term engagement with social and societal issues¹ (see Maybin and Tusting 2011; Rampton 2007; Rampton et al. 2015a). The combination of ethnography and sociolinguistics has a longer tradition in US Linguistic Anthropology (Duranti 1997; 2004; Wortham and Rymes 2003).

¹ The most important strands which were incorporated were the Ethnography of Communication (Hymes 1964.), New Literacy Studies, Critical Discourse and Interactional Sociolinguistics.

However, LE is more of a ‘discursive space’ than a ‘paradigm’ (Rampton 2007: 585) and invites appropriation by fields outside of anthropology and linguistics (Rampton et al. 2015b; Zembylas, Charalambous and Charalambous 2016; Swinglehurst 2015). LE draws on well-tested approaches for analysing language and interaction from linguistic anthropology, discourse analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, conversation analysis etc. Yet, when used within LE the analytical concepts are ‘sensitising’ rather than ‘prescriptive’ (Rampton et al. 2015), which means that researchers pay equal attention to what does not fit the analytical categories in use and what is left out. Although we cannot review all available tools and concepts in detail in this chapter, we do provide examples of how they are used for conducting research related to superdiversity concepts.

LE’s interest is social in nature, and language is the key to understanding social phenomena, including social changes. For instance, in order to analyse properly the adoption of English or Arabic or minority vocabulary by Danish background youth in Copenhagen (Karrebæk 2016; Madsen 2013), or the use of pronouns such as *we* and *they* to create categories of Cypriots and non-Cypriots in Cyprus (Charalambous, Zembylas and Charalambous 2016), we need to understand that this concerns more than language. The linguistic observations are signs of social phenomena but *which* phenomena and *how* to understand the meanings attributed to signs by participants take careful consideration.

LE works on the basis of three key assumptions (Creese 2008; Rampton 2007). First, language and social reality are mutually constitutive. This entails that language is regarded as a contextualized system and understood and studied in context; conversely, language shapes, constrains and influences social meanings. Second, the contexts of communication and meaning making processes should be ethnographically investigated. Through the ethnographic approach we can identify the participant (*emic*) perspective and determine what analytic (*etic*) categories are relevant for participants, rather than decide what is important in a particular setting and for particular people based solely on theory or a researcher’s preconceptions. Third, to understand how social and historical structures and positionings are enacted, re-created or contested in everyday talk, we need to study carefully the internal organization of linguistic and interactional data. This point argues for meticulous analysis of language and interaction, and for analysing language as an entirety of form (e.g. linguistic structure), use (e.g. communication) and ideology (norms), i.e. Silverstein’s (1985) ‘total linguistic fact’ (Rampton et al. 2015b). This includes e.g. looking at how participants organise communicative events in terms of *turn-taking* (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974), how they orient to each other as types of participants, i.e. *participation frameworks* (Goffman 1981), to the activity and its possible frames and genres (Bakhtin 1981; Goffman 1972; Hymes 1964), or how linguistic elements (pronunciation, lexical resources etc.) are used to signify (dis)affiliation (Gumperz & Roberts 1991; Rampton 2006), etc., or how features are grouped together and tied to cultural models and stereotypes in processes of *enregisterment* (Agha 2007). Such analyses of interactional and linguistic data are linked to wider social, institutional and ideological processes to reveal how aspects of the social world constitute contextual affordances or constraints in interaction, and how institutional structures and social relations are interrelated through discourse.

One of the essential concepts used to connect the details of talk with wider processes is *indexicality* (Silverstein 2003). Indexicality refers to the non-denotational (non-lexical / non-propositional) meanings produced in communication. Such meanings inform social and power relations, stances, identities, etc., and their interpretation is based on shared experiences (Blommaert 2006, 2009). For example, young Copenhageners’ peer group use of lexical items associated with minority languages can index associations with ‘street-wisness’, a stance of convivial friendliness (Madsen 2013) or a non-nerdy identity (Madsen and Karrebæk 2015).

Polycentricity, another key concept for LE and superdiversity, refers to the multiple normative centres to which participants may orient and which may allow for different behaviours (Blommaert et al. 2005). For instance, Stæhr (2015) illustrates how adolescents use official norms of orthography, emulate non-standard pronunciations in playful writing, and make unintentional orthographic mistakes with and without being corrected. Polycentricity guides our analytic attention towards the ways in which different discourses, ideologies and norms are juxtaposed in everyday life through people's orientation to different centres of authority (Blommaert 2010; Blommaert et al. 2005; Silverstein 1998). This phenomenon is not unique to superdiversity, but accounts like Stæhr's demonstrate why we need to approach norms and normativity as situated phenomena tied to different scales (Blommaert 2010), means and modes of circulation. Normative centres on a higher scale-level (state, national educational systems, global media) have more power to determine young people's access to important societal resources and institutions (e.g. higher education, citizenship etc.), but other normative authorities (such as peer group, religious community, family) may exert influence too. Polycentricity is central to an LE and superdiversity approach, because it allows us to analyse the tensions between creative exploitations and normative structures.

3. Core Issues and Topics: Superdiversity from an LE perspective

In this section we look at some of the ways in which LE research has contributed to topics relevant to superdiversity. We focus on language ideologies and language use, and social domains such as urban spaces, the Internet and social media, markets, and asylum seekers.

LE (and linguistic anthropology) has a long-term interest in nuancing ideas about named languages. The nation-building processes during European Enlightenment were central to the development of an understanding of languages (in the plural) as natural phenomena and as bounded and mutually exclusive categories ('Danish' is not 'Greek'), corresponding to stable language communities (Danes, Greeks) delimited by national boundaries (Denmark, Greece) (Makoni and Pennycook 2006). Such understandings are socially consequential because what is regarded as alternative denotational systems present within a national territory are routinely ignored, devalued, or erased in official and public contexts - educational, medical and legal (Møller 2015; Sarangi and Roberts 1999). Yet, as people have access to a range of linguistic resources that they put to use, such starting assumptions are increasingly problematic. So-called monolingual ideologies have even permeated (socio-)linguistic research (May 2014) and the notion of superdiversity alerts us to the necessity of moving beyond such perspectives.

Many LE (and other) studies have demonstrated how mixing linguistic resources assigned to different languages is an unspectacular everyday practice (Blackledge and Creese 2010; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015; Rampton 2005, 2006, etc.). Essentially there are no inherent restrictions in language that hinder the combination of resources. Also language users deploy the linguistic resources they find to fit their communicative goal – whether these resources are associated with one or several denotational codes, or registers (Agha 2007; Jørgensen et al. 2016). It is argued that *in particular* in times of mobile resources and people where we cannot take a common understanding for granted, we should examine what language use means and accomplishes at a particular juncture in time rather than start by a conclusion of whether there is or isn't an instance of hybridity. Also, it may be difficult, if not impossible, to assign features to languages in a satisfactory way. Karrebæk (2016) shows how *khabakhalæ*, used by a Danish background boy with his non-Arabic speaking peers, is accepted as Arabic, albeit non-existing in standard Arabic. The use of this lexical item shows his affiliation and positive stance towards a group of peers named 'Arabs', it creates hybridity in the sense that it is used in the course of a conversation otherwise

carried out in what is recognized as ‘Danish’, but it is a hybridity that defies regular language designation. Equally, a young Danish student created the compound *limsteife* ‘glue stick’ to index ‘German authority’, from *lim* ‘glue’, associated with standard Danish, and *steife*, probably inspired by standard Danish *stift*, sounds German to Danish ears (although not to German); the entirety is certainly neither German nor Danish but interactionally very efficient nevertheless (Jørgensen et al. 2016). A proliferation of terms has arisen to avoid monolingual starting-points and move away from languages-as-objects to languages-as-doing, e.g. *crossing*, *heteroglossia*, *translanguaging*, *metrolingualism*, *polylanguaging* (Blackledge and Creese 2010; Rampton 1996; García and Wei 2014; Jørgensen et al. 2016; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015; also Graber 2015). However, the abandonment of named languages as analytical primes in no way means that this is a meaningless construct. People certainly use languages as categories which they adhere to, identify with, structure the world around. The point is that despite this emic relevance “‘a language’ is not an object in the world... And as such it is located in the domain of beliefs and ideologies” (Deumert, 2014: 117). From a superdiversity perspective, this underlines the need to look ethnographically at language use in order to understand local significances of linguistic resources, and see if, how and why (hybrid or non-hybrid) language use challenges existing structures – without taking such structures and regimentations for granted (see Creese and Blackledge 2010; Madsen et al. 2016).

The European metropole is central to the emergence of discussions on superdiversity. Indeed, an increasing number of city dwellers warrants linguistic and social diversity, and hybridity is also more manifest when performed close to the power centres (Silverstein 2015). As a case in point, the numerous LE studies of *linguistic landscaping* (Blommaert 2013; Stroud and Mpendukana 2009; Peck and Stroud 2015, etc.) analyse visible linguistic practices (e.g. public signs and signs on bodies) in cities to gain insight into power relations, ideologies, demographic and socio-political understandings and changes. Extending the relation between urban space and (super)diversity, Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) focus on complex linguistic repertoires of workers in the food and construction industries. They argue that rather than orienting to a nation-state ideology, these repertoires function as spatially embedded ways to accomplish practical tasks by creative use of available resources. Indeed, smaller and larger businesses, and professional encounters more generally, (Coupland and Coupland 2014; Heller and Duchêne 2012; Vigouroux 2011; Woydack 2016), are interesting arenas for LE and superdiversity research, with the economic motivation as a different type of rationale than the educational setting which has often been in focus and which we will return to.

Digital media diminish the significance of physical locations and affords seemingly endless possibilities and seemingly state-independent authority centres (Stæhr 2015; Varis and Wang 2011). Common interests and identifications allow for wide-ranging global communities to emerge, whose members may interact frequently without knowing each other outside the social media context (McLaughlin 2014; Androutsopoulos 2014; Souza 2015; Kytola and Westinen 2015; Schulties 2015; Stæhr and Madsen 2014). The LE perspective asks us to investigate the range and integration of semiotic resources that digital communication affords in order to gain an insight into how digital online formats change current language practices, community building and identification processes.

Regardless of this, ethno-national understandings of the language-community-place trinity still have significant real-life implications. For instance, official understandings of citizenship tend to be based on monolingual conceptions of nations, and naturalization processes increasingly include language tests (Khan 2014; Khan and Blackledge 2015; Spotti 2011). Asylum seekers meet out-dated, sometimes utterly wrong, assumptions regarding language repertoires, linguistic and cultural competences attributed to their countries of origin (Blommaert 2009; Jacquemet 2015); these form the basis for the evaluation of their applications. In such cases, LE insights could have important practical and policy level implications (cf. Meissner and Vertovec 2014).

4. Case studies: Dealing with conflict and insecurity in classroom interaction

Education is another domain where an LE and superdiversity perspective could have important implications. With schools becoming increasingly diverse, classrooms are crucial sites for struggles around the production and re-arrangement of relations between language, culture, and ethnic identities. On the one hand, institutional authorities try to uphold a monopoly of exercising control over the use of resources, constructing models of ‘legitimate’ language and identity in accordance with state agendas. On the other hand, students bring along a less predictable range of linguistic, cultural, communicative resources, and may orient to different normative centres. Not surprisingly, classrooms have figured prominently in discussions of superdiversity and LE research (e.g. Blackledge and Creese 2010; Heller and Martin-Jones 2001; Madsen et al. 2016; Maybin and Tusting 2011; Moore 2016; Rampton 2006; Charalambous, Charalambous and Zembylas 2016).

Classroom talk escapes the limits of here-and-now subject-matter; social relations, cultural experiences, and socio-political ideologies are always present (Zembylas, Charalambous and Charalambous 2014, 2016) as different policies, discourses, experiences and practices of diversity can be relevant simultaneously. Close attention to the discourses and practices through which models of educational success are constructed or contested may reveal a great deal about the “ideological discourses about citizenship or moral education that connect regional, national and international policies of economic reform” (Perez-Milans 2015:12). The following two LE-based classroom studies approach superdiversity both as ‘discourse’ and as ‘practice’. Thereby they illustrate how “diversity discourses are essentially local” (Arnaut 2012: 7). In one case, the nation-state of Cyprus forms the territorial and educational context, in the other the surrounding territory is Denmark, but the class focuses on the teaching of Persian to Iranian background children. Both classes have an institutional aim of community building, that is, creating a shared ‘we’. Yet, this ‘we’ is opposed by the participants and their diverse experiences, and the attempts at creating unity bring to the surface issues of insecurity, instability and conflict that are part of socio-political transfigurations relevant to superdiversity.

4.1 Case study 1: Superdiversity and a conflict-affected society

In the first case study we look at what happens when societal changes take place in a conflict-affected society that struggles to preserve linguistic, ethnic and cultural boundaries. This study explores the relation between discourses on (super)diversity, and the reality of interethnic conflict in Cyprus, which reproduces hegemonic dichotomies between ‘us’ and ‘others’ (for extended discussion, see Charalambous et al. 2016).

During the last century, Cyprus has suffered intense conflict between the two largest ethnolinguistic communities on the island: the Greek and Turkish-Cypriot. Interethnic violence spread in the 1950s when Greek-Cypriots struggled for Cyprus’ unification with Greece, and continued even after the establishment of Cyprus Republic in 1960, as both communities imagined themselves as incompatible and as parts of Greece and Turkey respectively. In 1963 there were outbreaks of interethnic violence which culminated in 1974 with a pro-Greek coup and subsequently Turkish military action and occupation. Since then, the island has been *de facto* divided into a southern part (Cyprus Republic) and a northern part (non-government controlled

areas where Turkish-Cypriots and Turkish settlers reside).² Both Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities have been dominated by strong ethno-national discourses emphasising ‘Greekness’ and ‘Turkishness’ respectively (Bryant 2004).

In the last few decades, the Republic of Cyprus has experienced rapidly increasing migration – mainly workers from Eastern Europe, East Asia and the Middle East. This adds to existing diversity³ within society and classrooms. Although the issue of intercultural education is not new, there is a paucity of research on how children from migrant backgrounds experience interethnic conflict and are socialized into conflict discourses⁴. Focusing on a conflict-affected society highlights some serious questions that have not been sufficiently explored in recent superdiversity work: How does diversity relate to conflict-affected contexts (e.g. Cyprus, Israel, Northern Ireland) or contexts with strong nationalist discourses, and how is diversity experienced by local and mobile populations? As shown below with linguistic ethnography, we may find out how tensions play out during classroom interaction. This serves as a point of departure for reflecting on the implications for teachers and students.

We use data from a 2-year LE project (2009-2011) investigating the possibilities for intercultural education, reconciliation and social justice in Greek-Cypriot primary schools.⁵ We draw on ethnographic data and classroom recordings from literacy lessons in a Year 2 class (for further details, see C. Charalambous et al. 2016). Particular analytic attention was paid to the organization of interaction and the micro-details of teacher-students talk. The researchers first examined everyday practices in classrooms, and selected all instances where a collective identity (collective ‘we’) was constructed and/or negotiated in the classroom, e.g. through the use of pronouns or verbs that indexed a ‘we’, ethnic adjectives etc. Then, the analysis focused on two lessons for which the teaching objective was the conflict narrative itself.

The analysis of classroom interaction revealed that in ordinary lessons, diversity was treated as normal and negotiable, whilst it could often be explored as a classroom resource. Yet, when the teaching focused on conflict, then diversity, plurality and hybridity became problematic both for students and teachers. The conflict discourse indexed essentialised identities of ‘Greeks’ and ‘Turks’ and a violent past that was assumed to be shared, not allowing for students’ diverse experiences, practices and hybrid identities to be expressed and explored in classroom interaction. Students were thus taught to categorise along simplistic binaries of ‘us’ and ‘others’ that could not, for example, include ‘Greek-Turkishness’. Even when teachers tried to introduce ideas of peaceful coexistence, they reproduced identities based on blood ties which did not correspond to children’s experiences. More importantly, students with characteristics that could place them in the category of ‘Others’ (e.g. non-Cypriot Turkish-speaking students) risked stigmatization (see Theodorou and Symeou 2013; Zembylas 2010). The following example is particularly illustrative.

² In November 1983 the Turkish-Cypriot authorities declared the northern part an autonomous state (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus); however this has not been recognised by the UN or any other country but Turkey.

³ According to the constitution the minorities comprise: Greek-Cypriot, Turkish-Cypriots, Maronites, Armenians, Latins.

⁴ In addition, peace education literature that treats conflict discourses tends to focus on the two sides of the conflict (e.g., Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, Israeli and Palestinians, etc.) and does not take into much consideration the diversification of today’s societies and classrooms (see Zembylas et al. 2016)

⁵ The project, funded by Open University of Cyprus, was conducted by Michalinos Zembylas, Constadina Charalambous and Panayiota Charalambous. Data comprise 40 semi-structured interviews with Greek-Cypriot teachers, 3-month ethnographic fieldwork, classroom recordings in 6 primary school classrooms (October-December 2009), and a peace education intervention (see Zembylas et al. 2016).

Example 1a: “what are we all”

The teacher, Ermioni, summarises the main point of a previous discussion on the commonalities between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot protagonists of a story she has narrated, but she is having trouble getting the 7-year old pupils involved in a discussion on shared identity.

- 01 Ermioni: So these two {protagonists} are Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots but they are
02 both?
03 (Few): Turks {T`urki}
04 Ermioni: What are we all?
05 (Few): [Turkish-Cypriots {Turkok`iprii}
06 Student: [Turks
07 Ermioni: Are we all Turkish-Cypriots?
08 (Few): No::
09 Student: And Greek-Cypriots {Ellinok`iprii}
10 Ermioni We are all...?
11 Student: [EllinoT`urki] {Greek-Turks}
12 Student: [EllinoK`iprii (Greek-Cypriots)
13 Ermioni: Ts! ((sigh)) What is the common part of the words Ellinikiprii and Turkokiprii?
14 ((very angry)) Anastasia, the board is over here honey!

In extract 1, Ermioni wants to conclude the discussion by saying that both Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots are actually Cypriots, yet the children do not follow. In order to help, she reformulates the question (which initially referred to the protagonists of a story she had narrated earlier) to “*what are we all*”, expecting the children to reply ‘Cypriots’. Nonetheless, the children still fail to answer, perhaps being confused over who ‘all’ includes (see also extract 2). A student enthusiastically constructs a ‘Greek-Turks’ category (l.10) which causes a disapproving reaction from Ermioni (l.12). Although there might be people with such hybrid identity, here she does not treat ethnic categories as negotiable. Instead, she gives up her initial identity question (what are we) and rephrases her question to concern vocabulary: ‘*what is the common part of the words Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots*’. She then stops and reprimands Anastasia, who is looking out of the window, for not paying attention. Ermioni thereby again marks the topic as one that needs full attention by all students, failing to consider that Anastasia, as well as several other students, has a non-Cypriot background, and therefore do not necessarily fit into her “we are all [Cypriots]”-category. Anastasia does not reply, and the teacher gives the floor to another student:

Example 1b: troubling ethnic categories

- 15 Ermioni: Say it!
16 Student: the [part] “Cypriots”
17 Ermioni So we are all...?
18 Student: Cypriots
19 Ermioni: Cypriots
20 Nikos: M- (.) Miss?
21 Ermioni: Because our homeland [(.) is... (2) Cyprus
22 Nikos: [what about Becjan’s (dad who is) Turkish(-Cypriot)?
23 Ermioni Tell me?
24 Nikos: Eh::
25 Ermioni: Becjan comes from Kurdistan

26 Student: Yes!
 27 Ermioni And is
 28 Student [Kurdish!
 29 Ermioni. [partly located in Turkey
 30 we talked about it another time
 31 ((Emilios whispers to Becjan “you Turk!”))

After a student finally provides the hoped-for answer regarding the common element of the two words, Ermioni repeats the identity question -“so we are all...?” - in order to extend the discussion of the fictional protagonists to the lived experiences of the students in the classroom. However, Nikos quickly spots a problem. He points out that Becjan is not ‘Cypriot’; Becjan has a Kurdish background and recently arrived from Turkey. Students occasionally pointed out inconsistencies in teachers’ talk and discussed their different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, but here talking about Turkish-speaking Becjan is treated as a troubling topic, which is evident in the organization of the interaction: Ermioni invites Nikos to repeat his question (l. 23) which overlapped with her talk, as if she did not hear it; Nikos does not respond and there is a lengthened hesitation marker (l. 24); Ermioni does not leave much time for Nikos to reply and quickly reassumes the floor (l. 25) to correct Nikos and restate Becjan’s ‘Kurdishness’, thereby reducing his relation to Turkey (“only partly located in Turkey”). Turn-taking structure and hesitations indicate that Nikos and Ermioni realise that during this lesson Becjan’s background becomes difficult to talk about, as being identified as a Turk within the activity of discussing the conflict has unavoidably negative associations. Indeed, Ermioni does not use her student’s comment as an invitation to expand on classroom diversity, as she did on other occasions, but quickly closes the subject (after emphasising Becjan’s Kurdish rather than Turkish identity). Her preoccupation with avoiding the topic of Becjan’s background is put into perspective by Emilios’ whispered comment to Becjan (l. 29) - “you Turk” - which Ermioni did not hear.

In conclusion, we see that although Ermioni tried to introduce ideas of peaceful coexistence between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, focusing on a shared Cypriot identity, she reproduced state-centric identities and did not include children’s diverse experiences. Talking about the conflict, even within a ‘peaceful coexistence’ discourse, did not leave much space for negotiating diversity, as the two primary identities available were ‘us’ (Greek-Cypriots/Cypriots) and ‘them’ (Turkish-Cypriots/Turks). The interactional episodes analysed show how the conflict discourse poses barriers for a renegotiation of traditional cultural, ethnic and emotional boundaries. At the same time this study points to the potential affordances of superdiversity as a lived reality for challenging conflict discourses, as children’s everyday interactional practices reveal that they might understand the world through more flexible identity categories than those dictated by present national paradigms that reproduce conflict.

4.2 Case-study 2: Superdiversity, insecurities and non-homogeneous categories

In this section we engage with discourses of insecurity among a group of individuals with Iranian background. The case is part of a larger study of Farsi mother-tongue classrooms in Copenhagen, Denmark.⁶ In the Danish context, mother-tongue education refers to the instruction of a societal minority language to children of backgrounds associated with the language. The children are

⁶ The study was conducted by Narges Ghandchi and Martha Karrebæk, financed by the Danish Independent Research Council, grant no. 12-125553. It involved two different classes, and data consist of +120h of audio-recordings, 21 interviews, fieldnotes.

required to speak the language at home, but in reality they might have varying degrees of experience with it. Iranian immigrants in general, have widely different regional, linguistic, professional, political and religious backgrounds. Some left Iran because they opposed the political and religious establishment, others due to a lack of professional or educational opportunities, due to poverty, or to join a spouse. The reasons for leaving Iran are thus dissimilar, and immigrants may orient to opposed political and religious ideologies. The recognition of this created challenges in the classrooms observed. We made three important initial observations during lessons. First, the language (Farsi or Persian) was taught with almost no inclusion of recent Iranian cultural themes. Second, language was overwhelmingly treated as a decontextualized system consisting of grammar and vocabulary. Third, Arabic loanwords and indexes of Islam (pictures of hijabs, names of religious figures, etc.) were dispreferred. The teacher and course-organisers told us in interview that they sought to establish the classroom as an ideology-free and neutral space. As argued elsewhere (Karrebæk and Ghandchi 2015, forthc.), this was part of the attempt to erase the group's internal differences, thereby making the classroom space equally hospitable to all, regardless of ideological background.

Mother tongue classes often build (to some extent) on an idealized image of the 'country of origin,' which aligns with the language and unites the children. Here the relation between language, country of origin (Iran) and participants was far less transparent and straight-forward. This resulted in a range of topics being treated as 'unmentionables'. Example 2a illustrates a situation in which different conceptualizations of Iran were voiced, and one was treated as contextually inappropriate. More specifically, a father with Danish background talked in broken Persian about, and showed pictures from, the family's recent trip to Iran, emphasising the hospitality of the Iranian people and the wonders of the country. A boy (Pouria) interrupted and suggested threat and insecurity as alternative indexicalities in relation to Iran. There were a number of others in the classroom in addition to the teacher: the father, Pouria, the two researchers, a couple of mothers (including the wife of the narrating father), and a number of pupils. Keeping in mind the difference between the situational context and Pouria's interruption, the analysis focuses on the interactional patterns, and particularly on the emergence of (participant formulated) difference, the demonstration of (in)appropriate understandings, and the introduction of insecurity as a relevant concept.

Example 2a: "The father and the priests"

Participants: Pouria (7 years old, boy), Narges (researcher and co-teacher), Parsa (6 years old, Pouria's brother), Mehran (9 years old, boy). Translated from Danish by Martha Sif Karrebæk.

- 27 Pouria: if we travel to Iran (.) then dad won't be with us
- 28 Narges: what do you say
- 29 Pouria: if we travel to Iran then Dad won't come with us
- 30 Parsa: shu:t you
- 31 Narges: aha no that's why okay
- 32 Pouria: becau(haha)se then he'll be killed
- 33 ((general laughter))
- 34 Parsa: o:h no:
- 35 Pouria: oh yes
- 36 Parsa: no:
- 37 Mehran: why will he be killed
- 38 Parsa: yeah (.) I have the same question (1.0) will he be killed
- ...
- 44 Pouria: do you realize how many (.) do you realize how many in

In the extract above, Pouria's contribution creates difference and tension. Difference is also indexed by his switch into a Danish linguistic register – in contrast to the father's talk in Persian. Pouria's outburst comes during a presentation that glorifies Iran, but Pouria appears to have entirely different representations of the country, related to serious democratic problems and death-threats to his father. His understanding seems to be in accordance with a different centre of authority than that of the father. As Pouria voices oppositional understandings and indexicalities, he creates an additional type of difference, but his contribution is met with silence from the adults, something that indicates tension. A couple of children respond, one by asking for a further account of Pouria's remarkable claim, another by fooling around. The latter is Pouria's younger brother who may not be comfortable with the topic. The extract is followed by a short silence, then the class continues as if nothing has happened. The lack of response to a student contribution differs from regular encounters recorded in the same classroom (and elsewhere). On other occasions even inappropriate contributions received a response by adult authorities pointing out their inappropriateness. In this way, Pouria's contribution is treated as an interruption rather than an accepted alternative perspective that could foster a discussion about different aspects of contemporary Iran.

Pouria's intervention brought to the surface, even passingly, the topics of danger, insecurity and undemocratic political processes in Iran. These topics were never taken up again in class during our fieldwork, but came to the researchers' attention during a process of distributing questionnaires to parents. The questions were on education, occupation etc. and the teacher objected strongly to this, as he was concerned that such information would reveal the participants' identities. He also had doubts about the safety of data. Example 2b comes from a conversation between him and the research assistant, Narges, following a discussion on these issues with Karrebæk.

Example 2b: “The very sensitive question”

(translated from Farsi by Narges Ghandchi)

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 01 Mansour: | (...) the:n (1) the very ↑sensitive and (1) question (1) |
| 02 | is that (.) if these informations will be safely kept |
| 03 Narges: | ye:s |
| 04 Mansour: | Martha answered yes (.) to the same ((question)) |
| 05 Narges: | aha |
| 06 Mansour: | I said (.) haven't you thought that the Islamic Republic (1) |
| 07 | could ↑hack into your thing ((i.e., server)) xxx |

Although the researchers found the information they asked for harmless, Mansour was concerned about issues of safety and confidentiality. Even though the source of his anxiety (the Iranian State) was far away from the location of the research project and the participants' present home, his concern suggests that (in)security was very relevant to the participants, even though it remained mainly unsaid, or when voiced in the classroom, was interactionally treated as an unmentionable topic, being silenced and not discussed further (Fleming and Lempert 2011) - as shown in 2a. In this example, (in)security is explicitly formulated as a concern in the Danish setting, not being limited to the physical space of the Iranian territory, as new technologies make information reachable regardless of distances and national borders etc. (lines 6-7).

Examples 2a & 2b show that groups - such as '(exile-)Iranians' or 'mother-tongue speakers of Farsi' - should not be taken for granted. They may conceal fundamental and participant-relevant differences. They illustrate how an ethnographic perspective - e.g. listening closely and spending

time with participants – helps us discover participant-relevant concerns. It also informs the linguistic analyses which can show how such concerns influence interaction and pedagogies. Language choice (shifting from Farsi to Danish) together with linguistically formulated contrasts (Iran as a hospitable or threatening place) were used to create difference, and we have thus shown how similarity is sometimes (attempted to be) accomplished through interaction formats (here with silence as a response). Yet, the attempts at creating an inclusive group may in fact have the opposite effect. Pouria's understandings were certainly demonstrated to be incompatible with the dominant classroom regime of 'neutrality'. The reaction to Pouria's outburst points to this regime, as does the teacher's preferred teaching method – that is, to teach Farsi as a decontextualized system of communication detached from cultural meanings. The engagement with Iranian politics (and other systems of belief) could cause serious disagreement among the families, and in order to avoid it, any indexes of political issues became unmentionable in class, together with the themes they pointed to. Similarly, our own attempts at collecting information about the families made ideological differences salient and thus (potentially) relevant to the participants. This invited feelings of insecurity. The teacher was perhaps unsure if he could trust the researchers, and he was clearly uncertain whether the parents could or would trust them, and whether he would lose students because of the research project.

This case study illustrates the key concerns that Blommaert and Rampton (2011:3 – quoted in the beginning of this chapter) set as priorities in research on language and superdiversity. Mobility, instability, history and political dynamics were all relevant in the mother-tongue classrooms in Copenhagen, and we showed how LE could help us bring them to the foreground. This example also points to the need to (re)conceptualize social diversity in more refined ways than as relations between minority and majority citizens. Finally, we also showed how the arena of international (in)security, ripe with divisions, intelligence, and distrust, is potentially relevant even in unexpected everyday places, and how the Internet - often praised as a potential for creativity and a resource for creating and maintaining social relations and meanings – is certainly polyvalent, also allowing for authorities to track their emigrants.

5. Summary: Complexity in language and social meaning

Superdiversity has been a useful reminder of differences and struggles between old normative structures and creative uses and abuses of linguistic resources, communicative norms and ways of identification. New questions emerge when researchers are no longer interested in people's language behaviour as mono-lingual or multilingual, but rather in when people use what linguistic resources, with whom, for what purpose, and with what consequences. To reply to such questions we need context-sensitive analyses which do not take particular and traditional power hierarchies for granted.

Blommaert (2013: 6) argues that contemporary societal changes have generated a situation in which two questions have become hard to answer: "who is the Other? And who are We?" Both are moving targets, of which very little can be presupposed, as we all live vastly more complexly organized lives, on- and offline, "involving worlds of knowledge, information and communication that were simply unthinkable two decades ago" (Arnaut 2012: 7). Societal and digital changes urge us to re-work the fundamental understandings of language, of the different social formations that language participates in, and the role language plays in these formations. We cannot take for granted shared understandings and single normative centres – such assumptions should be under continued scrutiny. Superdiversity invites researchers to take into account the various forms of existing and emerging diversity *and* to rework their understandings of the concept of diversity in

itself (cf. Reyes 2014: 367).

Linguistic ethnography suggests ways to operationalize the humbleness towards participants and their worlds in research designs. Through ethnography we approach local understandings, and with meticulous linguistic analysis we can show the ways in which people demonstrate values, aspirations, belongings, frustrations, alignments and disalignments. That is: their lived experiences of self and others in a complex social world. LE presents us with ways to look and see, and it enables us to “deal with the unpredictability as well as the transient and emergent nature of the practices, networks and spaces” (Arnaut 2012: 3). At the same time, it allows us to engage with the creative potential of new configurations of meanings, ideologies, individuals and practices available under superdiverse conditions, *as well as* with power relations, hegemonic discourses, and the complex systems of regulation that are in place (Arnaut 2012).

In the two case studies discussed, we demonstrated the creativity involved in superdiversity, but also some of the dangers and struggles that people face. As we showed, superdiversity in no way means total liberation from hegemonic and powerful structures, associated with political (authority) centres, but such structures remain integral to understandings of the notion. As an academic discourse and as a lens, superdiversity forces LE researchers to abandon assumptions of bounded communities and languages, and to look beyond the ‘nation’ and the ‘state’ as defining categories. Yet, this does not mean that ‘states’ or ‘nations’ have ceased to exist or to function as powerful sources that structure people’s practices, experiences and access to social and linguistic resources.

The two case-studies highlighted some of the consequences of superdiversity when it is set against powerful ideologies aggravated by conflict that do not allow for plurality of experiences. In the case of Greek-Cypriot classrooms, the hegemonic discourses of conflict ran against students’ experience, and this had significant implications for children’s political socialization in conflict environments and especially for Turkish-speaking migrants who faced the risk of being stigmatised and being identified with the ‘enemy’ (also Charalambous et al. 2016). In the Farsi classroom study in Copenhagen insecurity was relevant for people’s everyday life. Still, in both studies these issues were suppressed during classroom interaction and quickly silenced, and close attention to the organization of the interaction and the details of talk revealed how participants constructed deviant discourses as ‘unmentionables’ (see also Rampton and Charalambous 2016).

We argue that both studies point to the need to further rework and reconceptualise in discussions of superdiversity the role of politics, ideologies, and conflict so that we can address social conditions of security, precarity, and fear. As we have shown, LE can have an important contribution in this endeavour.

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