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Educating for Language and Literacy Diversity

Mobile Selves

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Esther Ramani arrived in South Africa in 1992, to help establish the department of Applied English Language Studies at Wits and then moved to the University of Limpopo, where with Michael Joseph, she set up the Academic Development Unit, and an MA programme in English Language Education. They also launched the dual-medium undergraduate degree, BA in Contemporary English and Multilingual Studies (BA CEMS), taught and assessed in Sesotho sa Leboa and English in 2003, which continues to attract growing numbers of students. Professor Ramani moved to Rhodes University in 2013, and has taken up a part-time position at the Institute for the Study of English in Africa to develop an Honours module in Bilingual Education to be offered in 2015.

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Introduction

Mastin Prinsloo and Christopher Stroud

Attention to language and literacy diversity in education is both timely and challenging. Our focus in this introductory chapter is on what to make of this diversity and its impact on education systems and practices. We conclude by introducing the chapters in this volume, pointing out the particular contributions they make to this collection.

We start from the common observation that educators and researchers in very many different locations around the world (though not everywhere) increasingly encounter linguistically and socioculturally diverse groups of students in their classrooms and lecture halls (Gardner and Martin-Jones, 2012; Creese and Blackledge, 2010). Fundamentally, this is due to the changes in recent years in the core dynamics of social, cultural and economic life, one indication of which is the changing language dynamics in particular settings, another the rise in translocal and transnational communication that takes place through electronic media. These dynamics raise concerns of a specifically linguistic and sociolinguistic kind: for example, what happens when people with diverging language histories share the same social or educational space, when their communication involves 'crossing', mixing or 'meshing' of language resources, or where they use 'colloquial' or local versions of standard languages? How do we understand everyday talk and writing in relation to schooling expectations under conditions of heightened linguistic and sociocultural diversity? Not surprisingly, such developments pose a range of social, cultural and material challenges to educational systems, where growing sociocultural and linguistic student diversity is accompanied by intensifying standardisation of assessment practices and often by institutional insistence on monolingual instruction through the medium of a standard national or international language. On the other hand, educational institutions also comprise

vibrant sites of innovation and breakthrough that attempt to address the concerns of this diverse population – a healthy counterpoint to systems that all too easily tend towards resisting change.

Evidence of such diversity would seem to require more dynamic and mobile concepts around language and literacy than is often the case in educational discourse (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007; Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). It is also a question of interest and concern as to whether trends towards an increasing sociolinguistic diversity are happening uniformly across diverse settings across the world or themselves are subject to diverse manifestations: are there important differences between, for example, the nature of the diversities in neighbourhoods and schools in, say, West or East European or North American cities, on the one hand, and African, South American or other cities in the 'South', on the other. And what are the conceptual resources that best help us to make sense of these differences?

In what follows, we review key arguments on globalisation, language and literacy that serve to contextualise the contributions in the present volume. We discuss ideas, first, about sociolinguistic scales, hierarchy, social complexity and systemic views of the global. Then we examine competing models of complexity and scale, and develop a view on how global resources of language and literacy are distributed, assembled and adapted in distinctive ways in particular contexts; how they are 'placed' or territorialised in assemblages that combine mobile and widely circulating forms and resources with locally developed categories and practices, in shifting and often unpredictable combinations.

Globalisation at large

It has become commonplace in recent times to situate research on language, literacy and diversity in educational and wider social contexts by way of references to globalisation as the source of the flows of migrants into local communities, and across nations and regions of the world. These dynamics present 'quotidian and formal public challenges to inherited Western assumptions about linguistic uniformity, cultural homogeneity, and national membership' (Blommaert et al., 2005: 201). However, while globalisation is widely seen as the source of increased cultural contact and linguistic diversity, it is also, in an apparent paradox, the source of centripetal processes of centralisation and homogenisation (Lo Bianco, 2010). In educational contexts, this takes the form of intensifying high-stakes testing of standardised language

and knowledge forms in education institutions. Such testing, a spin-off of the quality assurance resources and processes that were developed for the reorganisation of work in multinational companies around the world, reminds us that globalisation, however we understand it, is more than simply about increasing diversity but also about changing forms of regulation and attempts at regulation, in schools and in social life.

Seen as a multifaceted agent which causes economic, political, cultural and environmental changes in the world, globalisation is primarily and commonly theorised as the global spread of socio-economic processes that Western capitalism has triggered. Globalisation is said to have gathered pace in the late 1980s with the deregulation of markets (Castells, 1996; Collier, 2006; Featherstone, 2006), where marketisation, or the rise of neo-liberalism as 'a logic of governing' (Ong, 2007: 3) becomes the defining characteristic of reorganised social life on a world scale, evident in the ease with which capital investments flow around the world in a supranational world economy. Although these dynamics are in many respects similar to earlier versions of world trade, developments in telecommunications infrastructure and transportation of goods and people (Castells, 1996; Jacquemet, 2005) have made possible a greater level of market coordination than previously. This has allowed an extensive interconnectedness of trade, investment and particularly finance. Sophisticated technologies for rapid human mobility and global communication are also transforming the communicative environment of the globalised social world, allowing the economy to operate as a unit with 'real-time' transactions happening at a global level.

But while the world economy may be global in the production and distribution of goods and services, only a very small fraction of work is skilled work in the multinational companies that account for close to half of the gross world product and two-thirds of international trade (Castells, 2009). Labour, therefore, has not been globalised and many regions, or places within those regions, are outside of the new economic order. This imbalance leads to movements of people, in particular, from parts of the world that are left out of the global network to those areas that are part of it, as well as movements of people across world centres and to different parts of the global periphery. Thus, this broad socio-economic model of globalisation provides an entry point into understanding phenomena such as increasing skilled and unskilled migration and the resulting linguistic diversity in many places as well as the dominance, for example, of particular language resources in others.

Scales theory, superdiversity and language-in-education

Now a ubiquitous term, globalisation is also a central theme of contemporary social theory, but questions remain as to how 'global' and 'local' relate to one another with what kinds of results for language and literacy in education. One influential and productive approach in sociolinguistics for understanding linguistic diversity in relation to globalisation is by way of scales theory (Blommaert, 2007, 2010; Collins et al., 2009) which provides a set of conceptual resources for understanding the way power relations on a global scale shape the uptake of language resources in specific local contexts. This approach pursues the difficult task of integrating sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and social theory to address questions of power, social inequalities, language diversity and social interactions in their situated occurrence while taking account of the interconnectedness of social life across spaces and regions. This work offers a language, a framework and a set of constructs to talk about the remarkable movements of people, language and texts in recent times. The scales model suggests that each context (local, regional, national, global) has its own 'orders of indexicality' which assign meanings, values and statuses to diverse codes. Blommaert and Rampton (2011: 7) explain the concept of indexicality as follows:

> the denotational and propositional meanings of words and sentences lose their preeminence in linguistic study, and attention turns to *indexicality*, the connotational significance of signs. So for example, when someone switches in speaking and/or writing into a different style or register, it is essential to consider more than the literal meaning of what they are saying. The style, register or code they have moved into is itself likely to carry associations that are somehow relevant to the specific activities and social relations in play.

These values or indexicalities are organised hierarchically at a global level in a world that is systemically organised in terms of scales from top to bottom. While local scales are momentary, situated and restricted, the codes and literacies of dominant groupings are valued at a translocal level because they are resilient, highly mobile and they can 'jump scales' (Blommaert, 2010: 36).

World systems analysis or WSA (Wallerstein, 1974, 1991), which this model draws on for a model of the global, argues that a world system and not nation states is the defining feature of contemporary social life and should be the primary focus of social analysis. In this model, the

modern world system, essentially capitalist in nature, emerges out of European capitalism and operates as a social unit that consists of, primarily, core and peripheral regions, as well as semi-peripheral regions which act as a periphery to the core and a core to the periphery. Core countries, or sites within countries, focus on high-skill, capital-intensive production and peripheral sites and regions focus on low-skill production and resource exports to the core. A key point in WSA is that events and processes move and develop on a continuum of layered scales, with the strictly local (micro) and the global (macro) as extremes, and with several intermediary scales (for example the level of the state) in between, with varying degrees of impact and status (Blommaert, 2007). A sociolinguistics of globalisation (Blommaert, 2010) working with this model of the social as systemic pays attention to language hierarchy and processes that are seen as holding across situations and transcending localities. Scales theory thus provides a productive metaphor to analyse the way language resources retain or lose social value depending on where they are placed along spatio-temporal lines within social contexts, where power relations shape the uptake of language resources. Interaction between different scales is a crucial feature for understanding the sociolinguistic dimensions of such events and processes, because language and literacy practices are subject to social processes of hierarchical ordering. This analysis aims to account for large-scale features of language and literacy in particular, for example on institutional, national and transnational levels, as well as their impact on the dynamics of face-to-face interaction (Blommaert, 2007, 2010).

Blommaert (2007: 2) suggests that scales theory helps us to understand how children and adults can become inarticulate and deficient when they move from a space in which their linguistic resources are valued and recognised to a classroom or workplace closer to the economic and political centre, because these processes happen in a way that is shaped by the world system at a global scale. He cites the case of migrant children who possess complex and developed language and literacy skills but who nevertheless are declared illiterate in Belgian immersion classes, where Dutch language and literacy are the only recognised linguistic capital. Such processes of ordering are seen as happening not only at an interregional or cross-state level but also at a national and local level. Societies with pronounced levels of social inequality correspondingly devalue the diverse language and literacy resources of their citizens the further they are from national and local centres of power and authority. In this approach sociolinguistic and discursive phenomena are 'essentially *layered*, even if they appear to be

one-time, purely synchronic and unique events' (Blommaert, 2007: 3), and social settings are seen as polycentric and stratified, with a multitude of centres of authority, local as well as translocal, cohering within a layered and hierarchical systemic global order. Thus, in this model social and linguistic 'norms' are the outcomes of local centres of authority which are 'stratified complexes' that are hierarchically located. Sociolinguistic scales are often both 'nested' within and overlapping with another, reflecting the criss-crossing complexities that constitute social and human organisation, with different linguistic values attaching to different languages in different scales of consideration. From this perspective, scales provide a tool with which to understand the way power relations shape the uptake of language resources.

Competing models of sociolinguistic and socio-material complexity

There is a question to be asked, however, about the appropriateness of the fit between WSA, on one hand, and social and linguistic complexity on the other. One starting point amongst alternative views to WSA is that social life has become too complex and diverse for analysis that employs overarching narratives, such as the concept of a world system. Whatever globalisation is in contemporary times, it might be said to have unfolded in different ways, with a non-linearity about contemporary processes of global integration at least partly because of the ways people intercede in ways that disrupt systemic dynamics. If globalisation does have systemic features, it is not a closed system and, as a system 'open to the environment' it is *not* 'its own sweet beast' (Law, 2003: 13). In this criticism, Wallerstein also overstates the centrality of European capitalism in the new global economic order. His is a diffusionist model in which the significant changes were produced in one place, at the expense of other kinds of influences from elsewhere in the world (Featherstone, 2006).

Indeed, one of the troubling problems about conceiving of globalisation as systemic and hierarchical is the assumption that complexity is synchronous and scaled, that higher scales are more complex and that lower scales and peripheries are simpler forms of social organisation, with developments at the 'top' or the core of the world system having effects at the 'bottom', for example, observations that developments in the field of sophisticated, multimedial and multimodal Internet communication have effects on other, 'less sophisticated' forms of literacy in the periphery. The problem with such observations is that they do

not take account of how these socially constructed resources are 'taken hold of' or refigured as 'placed resources' and as 'global assemblages' in 'peripheral' contexts and within particular networks of association. The suggestion that sophistication is a characteristic of one site and not the other would appear to be a judgement made from 'the centre', based on the assumption that sophistication (which we might read here as a synonym for complexity) is intrinsically an upper-scale phenomenon.

A case in point is the notion of 'grass-roots literacy' (Blommaert, 2008, 2010), a scaled view of writing across low socio-economic sites in Africa. Blommaert describes grass-roots literacy as a 'genre', a characteristic form of writing across poor communities in Africa, describing it as a non-elite form characterised by what he calls 'heterography' – the deployment of graphic symbols in ways that defy orthographic norms: words spelled in different ways, often reflecting the way they are pronounced in spoken vernacular varieties rather than following conventional orthographic norms or prestige language forms. Such texts, he says, will have local value but examined from beyond the local, they appear as inferior examples of writing, pointing to the low status of these persons on a larger stage. This analysis, accurate as it might seem from one perspective, deflects our attention from how these texts might well have a complexity in their uses and meanings which is not apparent from a distance or from a perspective which is not attentive to the complex networks of practice that shape these textual practices in specific ways. Attention to some familiar text features by the researcher such as orthography/heterography does not provide a sufficient account of these texts as literacy practices. To label such practices as forms of 'peripheral normativity' (Blommaert et al., 2005) might deflect our attention from the particularities and complexities at that site, and within those socio-material networks.

Canagarajah (in press), in contrast, argues that while particular communities might display characteristic writing forms, they might not necessarily be 'stuck' at 'one scale-level' or 'locked' into peripheral modernity. Canagarajah's study in a Cape Town school setting, in contrast with Blommaert et al.'s (2005) study in a similar setting, finds in the texts of the students a *recognition* of different norms from outside the local. In their writings on a school Facebook site students' heterography is evident in their mixing of English and isiXhosa, abbreviations and icons. Canagarajah identifies their writing here as a hybrid form of literacy activity, combining spoken, literate and visual resources and diverse languages. In their classroom written work, however, students do not mix codes in the same way and Canagarajah suggests they have

shifted to a translocal norm, approximating to Standard Written English and with an emerging sense of the genre requirements of school essay writing. While student writing displays the types of grammatical problems that Blommaert identified, Canagarajah sees teachers as striving to correct these as they work to help students to develop their translocal English-language writing resources, albeit from a strongly constrained starting point. The scaled and hierarchical view of teachers' and students' struggles emphasises the structural constraints that situate them in a regime of norms and standards that is pre-given as a function of the assumed nature of social complexity. Canagarajah, on the other hand, presents an approach where the emphasis is more on the agentive dynamics that characterise the 'contact zones' between the language and literacy resources that students bring to school and the resources, discourses and practices of schooling in that context.

The view that complexity is produced systemically, that sophistication happens at higher-scale levels and that persons on the periphery are somehow 'stuck' with restricted language and writing resources because of their fixed place in the periphery of the world system offers a view that has been identified as 'romantic complexity' by Law (2003) and Kwa (2002). The researcher or theorist 'looks up' here to make sense of what is observed by examining its place in the larger complex system. Law offers an alternative view, closer perhaps to the ethnographic intentions of Blommaert and colleagues. Drawing on work on a material semiotics (Law, 2009) that treats everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located (see e.g. Callon and Latour, 1981; Latour, 1990), Law finds complexity by 'looking down', at specificity and detail in the concrete and the specific. Our predominant understandings of complexity, he suggests, including the size or scale assumptions that we make, assume that the whole emerges as a result of the interconnectedness of its component parts. One of the outcomes of this sense-making strategy is that located complexity is passed over because, for the researcher who is looking up, the system may be of more interest than the components. Where the romantic intuition is that the global is necessarily large, with the local inserted somewhere down the hierarchy of emergence, Law prefers a view of the global as situated, specific and constructed in the practices included in each specificity. 'There *is* no system, global order or network', he suggests, 'these are, at best, partially enacted romantic aspirations' (Law, 2003: 9). The distinction between big and small is a relational effect, he insists, where scale is tenuous and precarious. Heterogeneous elements need to play their part moment by moment

or it all comes unstuck. This is a view of the global as something that is poorly formed and elusive, that changes size and shape and only travels uncertainly. It is also close to the view that Street (2004) offered in his discussion of literacy practices and whether they are globally shaped or locally produced. Street's point was that the global only exists as substantiated in the local.

Collier's (2006) and Collier and Ong's (2005) discussion of 'global assemblages' is relevant here: seeking an alternative to the categories of global and local, they develop the notions of global forms and global assemblages. They see the idea of global assemblage as 'an alternative to the categories of local and global, which serve to cast the global as abstraction, and the local in terms of specificity' (Collier, 2006: 380). Global forms are seen as widely distributed conceptual and organisational resources that are assembled and adapted in distinctive ways at local and regional levels so as to work in those contexts, articulated in specific situations – or territorialised in *assemblages*. These assemblages define new material, collective and discursive relationships. Collier and Ong (2005) restrict this term to material technology and specialised social expertise, such as ISO standards in the workplace (international standardised quality-assessment criteria) as they are applied in particular locations), but we can certainly think of schooling assessment practices and high-stakes testing as constituting this kind of assemblage, and we can also think of language resources in this way when they become articulated and networked in particular settings – for example, English or Englishes when thought of as a world language or an 'English language complex' (Mesthrie and Bhatt, 2008) where particular mobile resources become 'placed'. These global forms interact with other resources and elements in particular contexts, in contingent, uneasy, unstable interrelationships. In the space of assemblage, a global form is simply one among a range of elements. An assemblage is the product of multiple determinations that are not predictable by a single logic. These interactions might be called the *actual* global, or the global in the space of assemblage. The assemblage is not a 'locality' to which broader forces from the global are counterposed. Nor is it the structual effect of such forces (Collier, 2006: 380). The term 'global asemblage' suggests inherent tensions, forms that are shifting, in formation, or at stake, heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial and situated (Collier and Ong, 2005). In this light, as an illustrative example here, Ong (2007: 3) conceptualises neo-liberalism 'not as a fixed set of attributes with predetermined outcomes, but as a logic of governing that migrates and is selectively taken up in diverse political contexts', including South

American and African contexts. The product of these interactions might be called the *actual* global, or the global in the space of assemblage. The point is that in the space of the 'global', heterogeneous things combine in ways that are hard to pin down with diagnostic resources which stress a global logic. Similarly, Featherstone (2006: 370), drawing on the arguments of Knorr Cetina, refers to such phenomena as major imbalances between cause and effect, unpredictable outcomes, and self-organising, emergent structures as features of globalisation. He suggests that 'the management of uncertainty, task predictability and orderly performances were much easier to facilitate in the "relatively complex" organizations of modern industrial societies'. A global society, on the other hand, he writes, 'entails a different form of complexity: one emanating more from microstructural arrangements that institute self-organizing principles and patterns'. In conclusion, perhaps such a concept of 'the global' is a productive way to think of language, literacy and diversity rather than via a scaled, systemic view of the social as comprising macro and micro dimensions and, indeed, closer to the ethnographic orientations of those scholars who have been using scale as a metaphor for understanding social complexity. Wortham (2012) similarly argues against the macro/micro conceptual frame that is familiar in the sociolinguistic field and suggests that researchers attend to multiple scales with no single scale treated as foundational or determinant. Wortham (2006) studied how students and teachers socially positioned each other in a single classroom over an academic year by drawing upon widely circulating sociohistorical models as well as locally developed categories of identity (such as 'loud black girls', 'disruptive students'), and the curriculum itself. What such an orientation leads to is a concern less with grand theorising but with small and focused research into the *actual* global in particular settings, as presented in the range of studies in this collection.

Concepts of mobility, language and literacy

The chapters gathered in this collection offer a series of case studies or vignettes of the *actual* global in a diverse range of settings and they address a varied but complementary set of topics, from studies of the challenges presented to education by societal multilingualism and social inequalities in Zambia, South Africa, Ethiopia, London, Peru, the USA and Mexico. They examine questions of migration, transnationalism and the relationships between minority and dominant linguistic resources in particular contexts. They draw on and elaborate on recent