Research seminar

Language, social media and migration:
the role of mobile communication technologies in migrants' everyday lives

Friday 2nd February 2018, 10am – 4:00pm

139, School of Education, University of Birmingham

Hosted by the AHRC-funded project [Translation and Translanguaging](#) (TLANG)

This seminar explores the use of social media, particularly as conducted via mobile technology, by individuals in contexts of mobility and migration. It takes into account the fact that digital interactions are usually intertwined with 'offline' activities and that social media platforms are generally embedded into physical contexts, with the result that people move fluidly between online and offline environments in performing identity, building relationships and carrying out everyday tasks and negotiations. The methodological implications include the need for a form of blended linguistic ethnography which explores the situated nature of online communicative practices within individuals' wider lives.

The role of social media in the process of integration into a new country is of increasing significance to many migrants, as they maintain and exploit links to their countries of origin at the same time as making new connections in a host country, and as they seek to resist and subvert the ways in which they can be positioned in a host country. By focusing on how migrants actively exploit digital technology as they integrate into a host country, we also respond to public concern around migration and social integration following such high profile events as the migration crisis in Europe and the UK's vote to leave the European Union.

The seminar brings together sociolinguistics scholars and ethnographers working in these areas, including the TLANG team, in order to share empirical data and insights and to work towards developing theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches.

Invited speakers (confirmed):

Jannis Androutsopoulos, University of Hamburg

Maria Sabate i Dalmau, Universitat de Lleida

Caroline Tagg, Open University (TLANG)

Kristin Vold Lexander, University of Oslo

Stefan Vollmer, University of Leeds

Places are limited. Please register [here](#).

Schedule

All talks 30 minutes with 15 minutes Q&A

10:00	**Arrivals and coffee**	
10:30	Introduction	Angela Creese and Caroline Tagg
10:45	Remediation and resourcefulness: the use of mobile messaging communication by migrant micro-entrepreneurs in the UK	Caroline Tagg
11:35	Subversive mobile communication spaces for undocumented migration in Catalonia	Maria Sabate i Dalmau
12:20	**Lunch**	
1:20	Syrian newcomers and mobile technologies: A visual ethnography	Stefan Vollmer
2:10	Modalities of language and media choice: transnational communicative repertoires of Senegalese families in Norway	Jannis Androutsopoulos and Kristen vold Lexander
2:55	**Break**	
3:15	Round-up and discussion	led by Caroline Tagg
4:00	**Finish**	

Abstracts

Remediation and resourcefulness: the use of mobile messaging communication by migrant micro-entrepreneurs in the UK

Caroline Tagg (Open University, TLANG)

Mobile messaging now plays a central role in the management of many small family-owned businesses. In this talk, I explore the resourceful ways in which (migrant) micro-entrepreneurs draw on mobile technologies and on their linguistic resources in order to address existing needs, overcome perceived problems and meet their business goals. In doing so, I develop the notion of 'resourcefulness' as a way of explaining the human agency that drives and shapes processes of remediation. Remediation is a theory which describes the uptake of new technologies not as representing radical breaks from, or transformations of, older technologies but in terms of how they refashion – or remediate – existing technologies (Bolter and Grusin 2000). Madianou and Miller (2012) show how communicative and social practices can be gradually remediated as users begin to recognise and exploit the affordances

of new technologies. The concept of 'resourcefulness' seeks to explain how and why users initially adopt new technologies and the processes of remediation that usually follows.

The data on which I draw is taken from the four-year AHRC-funded project, *Translation and Translanguaging*. The project adopted a *blended linguistic ethnography* that draws on offline and digital data to explore the use of mobile phones by migrants living and working in UK cities. This approach offers valuable insights into how mobile technologies are incorporated into the migrants' working and social lives, enabling us to argue for an approach to language and social media that recognises how technology use is shaped by resourceful people as they go about their everyday business.

Subversive mobile communication spaces for undocumented migration in Catalonia

Maria Sabaté-Dalmau (University of Lleida)

This talk analyses on/offline language practices, ideologies and identities among undocumented migrants in shelter institutions called *locutorios*; i.e., migrant-regulated cybercafés which offer transnational-life resources (e.g. 'illegal' SIM-cards, information about legality issues, food) below the radar of governmental authorities. The data come from a network ethnography of 20 migrants, aged 27-52, mostly from Pakistan, Morocco, Argentina and El Salvador. They include participant observation, interviews, naturally-occurring interactions and visuals. The *locutorio* was located in a peripheral Barcelona neighbourhood in Catalonia, a bilingual Catalan/Spanish-speaking society where 96% of migrants communicate via SMS (Ros & Boso 2010). The results show that informants mobilise *linguistic subversion*: They communicate via unorthodox multi-lingua francas (Makoni & Pennycook 2012); present these as empowering acts of "self-capitalisation" (Martín-Rojo 2010) defying host-society language policies; and appropriate them as counterhegemonic "we-codes". However, they simultaneously conduct *linguistic regimentation*: They invest in monolingual practices and construct their socialization places as "Spanish-only" spaces; delegitimise their translinguistic talk; and present themselves as "language-less" (Blommaert et al. 2015). We conclude that migrants contest but simultaneously re-produce the nation-state linguistic regimes to which they are subject, when trying to gain citizenship access in emergent emplacement spaces of late capitalism.

Blommaert, J., Collins, J. and Slembrouck, S. (2005) Spaces of multilingualism. *Language and Communication* 25 (3), 197–16.

Makoni, Sinfree & Alastair Pennycook. 2012. Disinventing multilingualism: From monological multilingualism to multilingual franca. In M. Martin-Jones, A. Blackledge & A. Creese (eds.), The Routledge handbook of multilingualism, 439–453. Abingdon: Routledge.

Martín-Rojo, L. (ed.) (2010) *Constructing Inequality in Multilingual Classrooms*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Ros, A. & Boso, A. (2010) La población inmigrante en la nueva era digital. In M. Gimeno (ed.) *2010 e-España Informe anual sobre el desarrollo de la sociedad de la información en España* (pp. 142–148). Madrid: Fundación Orange.

Syrian newcomers and mobile technologies: A visual ethnography

Stefan Vollmer (University of Leeds)

This paper explores newly arrived Syrian refugees' everyday lives and their habitual digital literacy practices; I investigate, how three Syrian newcomers utilize mobile technologies and online resources, such as a multilingual Facebook group and a driving test app, to support processes involved with obtaining a UK driver's license. Drawing on data from my ongoing doctoral research, a visual ethnography of Syrian refugees in Leeds, I examine a range of interactional and visual data, such as informal conversations and screen recordings of smartphones, which give insights into my key participants' strategies to study for and pass the driving test. Here, my analysis is driven by the aim to understand how new arrivals use mobile technologies and how these practices further contribute to processes of settlement. I explore these questions by applying the analytical lenses of *capital* and *space*.

Modalities of language and media choice: transnational communicative repertoires of Senegalese families in Norway

Jannis Androutsopoulos (Universität Hamburg/University of Oslo) and Kristin Vold Lexander (University of Oslo)

In this paper, we present the design and first findings from the MultiLing project "Media and linguistic repertoires in multilingual families" where we study practices of transnational digital communication by four Senegalese-background families in Norway. We use the working term "communicative repertoires" to refer to the conflation of language repertoires and media repertoires for digitally-mediated interpersonal interaction. As far as our key participants (6 adults and 5 adolescents) are concerned, these interactions are accomplished mostly on smartphones and intertwined with co-present offline interaction in various ways. Our analysis of communicative repertoires draws heavily on recent sociolinguistic research on language repertoires under conditions of migration, mobility and digitalization (Blommaert/Backus 2012, Androutsopoulos 2014), but goes beyond this research in that media choices and language/media configurations are considered more systematically, thereby also drawing on polymedia theory, which originates in media studies/media anthropology and investigates social conditions and consequences of media choice in transnational communication (Madianou/Miller 2012, Madianou 2014).

After an outline of the project design, we present our visual representation of participants' communicative repertoires. We discuss the array of media applications and languages that members of the four families co-select in order to communicate with relatives and friends near (at home, in Norway) and far (in Senegal and elsewhere). We then draw on two case studies to examine in more detail the interplay between modalities of language and media choice. The first considers language choice in spoken communication vs. texting within the nuclear family, while the second examines transnational communication with relatives in Senegal. Our preliminary findings suggest that rather than media determining what language

will be used, participants negotiate media choices from the available polymedia repertoire in terms of what modalities of language are afforded by each media platform, thereby orienting to the linguistic resources and media literacy of specific transnational interlocutors.

Androutsopoulos, J. 2014. Moments of sharing: Entextualization and linguistic repertoires in social networking. Journal of Pragmatics 73: 4-18.

Blommaert, J. / A. Backus 2012. Superdiverse Repertoires and the Individual. Tilburg Papers in Cultural Studies, 24 (Online resource).

Madianou, M. 2014. Polymedia communication and mediatized migration: an ethnographic approach. In: Knut Lundby, ed. Mediatization of Communication. Berlin, De Gruyter: 323-348.

Madianou, M. / D. Miller. 2012. Migration and New Media. Transnational families and polymedia. London, Routledge.