Language-use as spatial experience: migrants' non-fluent participation in stabilisations of linguistic practice

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19 June 2012

Abstract: The experiences of migrants arising from their non-fluent language-use have received little attention. Because languages are seen as discrete entities, both as grammatical systems and in terms of their spatial spread, there is little room to investigate experiences of space arising from the use of languages known only in part. In this paper I combine views of language as practice with geographical understandings of embodied experience of space to explore the experiences of non-fluent language use as immersion in the spatial process of language. Based on interviews with international students in Edinburgh, Scotland, I show that organizing linguistic space by practices and viewing migrants' communicative competence as integrating the diverse elements of these practices uncovers their experiences of non-fluent language-use. I end by considering how policy and scientific investigation can better match the spatial reality of stabilisations of practice.

Keywords: language and space, migrants, multilingualism, practice, integrationist linguistics, experience

1 Introduction

This paper explores migrants' experiences arising from their use of languages they do not know fluently. The experiences of non-fluent language-users are obscured by conventional understandings of languages as discrete entities. If languages are discrete entities, they must be acquired in their entirety before they can be used (Ingold 2001), leaving little room for the experiences of migrants having to communicate in languages they do not know fluently. Geographers have recognised that languages are not fixed, discrete entities, but are continually under construction (e.g. Jones & Desforges 2001; Segrott 2001; Valentine et al. 2008). But they accept the default categories of language varieties as the containers for these processes, while linguists are increasingly questioning the relevance of these categories (J Blommaert 2010; Pennycook 2004; Pennycook 2010). We need to consider what the claim that languages are 'inventions' (Makoni & Pennycook 2005) means for their geography. This is not to deny the real social effects of language variation, but to ask whether traditional categories of 'languages' are always the best spatial categories to capture daily experiences for many people.

Thus geographically, this paper is about finding a spatial perspective that matches the experiences of non-fluent language users. To achieve this, we need to think of people's experiences of linguistic space not as moving between territories of different languages but as using language to engage with their spatial surroundings (Hopper 1998; Carter & Sealey 2007). This reverses the direction, with respect to the traditional view, between language as structure and language as activity. According to Hopper (1998), grammatical structure is 'emergent', meaning that distinct linguistic structures are not prior to practice, as conventionally understood, but are the 'sedimented' result of practice. As Pennycook (2010) puts it, language

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is a 'local practice', and meanings and forms of language are always being remade in local interaction. Thus, language varieties may be spatially delineable to some extent, but these entities are really snapshots in processes of ongoing language-use (Carter & Sealey 2007). This 'practice/process' view shifts the focus from languages as entities to people using languages. It situates language-users within the process of space/language by the fact that their practices constitute this process. Thus, this view suggests a rich source of experiences for fluent and non-fluent speakers alike, in that to use language is to relate to one's spatial surroundings.

However, this practice/process approach needs to be refined in two ways to fully engage with migrants' non-fluent experiences of space. First, while the view of language as local practice shows how each linguistic act is inherently spatial – each language act modifies language and locality simultaneously – this idea has not yet been developed further to consider the wider spatial organization of language practices. This needs to be considered if we are to understand migrants' experiences of being in and moving through space. Second, attention has not yet been devoted to the implication that to be a participant in the linguistic process through practices is a source of experiences. An appropriate framework of experiences can be provided by geographical approaches which emphasize humans' bodily involvement in their material surroundings (Bondi 2009; Carolan 2008; Macpherson 2006; Anderson & Harrison 2010) To view language as practice makes language-use very much an active relationship with the environment (Laurier & Philo 2006), suggesting that to understand experiences as arising from bodily immersion in relational space might be very apt for this practice/process approach (see Laurier 2010; Vasterling 2003).

Addressing these two gaps, my central argument in this paper is that to use language is both to participate in creating space by reinforcing or changing stabilisations of practice and expectations, and to experience space by relating to these stabilisations. I begin by showing how the view of language as a spatial process can be extended with this dual role of language-use, making it possible to consider the experiences of migrants in using language. This paper is based on observations and interviews concerning the lives of international students in Edinburgh, Scotland, which I describe in Section 3. In the empirical discussion in Section 4, I illustrate how spoken linguistic practices are organized spatially, and then explore ways in which using language is an experience of participating in such dynamic spaces. In the final section, I discuss how this framework increases our insight into the spatial experiences of migrants. I conclude by considering how such insights challenge research approaches and methodologies, showing how the embodied experience of language-use can be seen to be very much a question of geography, and how this might change the way we plan spatially for multilingualism.

2 Language-use as spatial experience: stabilisations, integrations and expectations

The first thing to consider, then, is how space can be composed of linguistic practices. Pennycook (2010), drawing on a wide range of theorists, argues that practices are bundles of activities. They organize the things we do. Thus, for example, any social field of activity involving language-use, like teaching or online banking, is a language practice. But also, for Pennycook each language act is intertwined in a local configuration of social space. From here it is no great jump to recognize that because each language act occurs in local interaction, and thus is spatial, the regularities of practices are also spatial regularities. When Pennycook uses the analogy of a path being the "sedimentation" of walking to describe how a practice is the sedimentation of activity (p. 138), we could take the spatial element of the comparison quite literally. Just as repeated acts of walking sediment into a path as a route *through space*, so as language practices sediment they also stabilise into spatio-temporal

units. In effect, space is composed of many sedimentations or stabilisations of linguistic practice, side by side but also overlapping at many different scales.

But by the same token, the local intertwining of such practices means that they contain both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. For example, catching the bus may involve reading the timetable and greeting the driver with words, but it may also include running to the bus stop, raising your hand to hail the bus, or maybe waiting in the cold, all combined as an uninterrupted sequence of operations which together compose space (compare Häger-strand 1995; Ingold 2011). Acknowledging that language is fully *integrated* with other semiotic resources in this way, as Roy Harris (Roy Harris 1980; Roy Harris 1990c) has argued, turns language-use into an active relationship with one's spatial surroundings. Harris' 'integrationist' linguistics "holds that communication is communication (winking, nodding, writing, speaking, nudging, stroking), without special privilege to any channels or practices, and that meanings are made on the fly in communicative events" (Harris 2007, p.803). Thus, the ensuing principle of spatial organization of the activities of daily life is not to group practices by their kinds – as linguistic or non-linguistic, as being in one language or another – but by the purpose they combine to accomplish – such as taking the bus.

Taking practices as the spatial category of language-use shows us what to do *geographically* with Makoni & Pennycook's (2005; 2007) call for 'disinvention' of languages. What we are used to calling languages are large-scale stabilisations of practice, essentially no different from the practice of taking the bus, albeit with many more components and sites of articulation and a much longer and wider history. Thus, this practice/process view of language matches geographical ideas of space as being composed of relations and interconnections (Massey 2005). Languages, like cities and regions for Amin (2004, p.34), "come with no automatic promise of territorial or systemic integrity, since they are made through the spatiality of flow, juxtaposition, porosity and relational connectivity". From this perspective, when Makoni & Pennycook say languages are 'inventions', they mean that named languages do not reflect actual divisions in linguistic reality, but are collections of relations – habituations, institutionalizations and ideologies – shaping linguistic practice politically (compare Blommaert et al 2005, Blommaert 2010). In essence, names for languages are shorthand for a set of social *expectations* on linguistic practice. Framed in this way, we can see that languages are not the spatial *containers* in which experiences of language-use unfold, but that as expectations they may play a role *within* spatio-temporal practices. Language practices become spaces replete with relational sources of experiences for people involved in these stabilisations through their linguistic practices.

Thus, the second thing we need to consider is how to understand the experiences that arise from being immersed in language/space. If the view of language as practices is based on a relational understanding of space, it makes sense to consider experiences also from a relational perspective, which suggests 'embodiment' approaches as a suitable framework. However, geographers and other social scientists focusing on embodied experiences have not generally considered language practices as their terrain of investigation (compare Laurier & Philo 2006). The turn to embodied experiences has been seen as a move away from language, but really it is a move away from the view of languages as structural meaning separated from activity in the material world. The emphasis on 'non-representational' modes of knowing, of embodied knowledge through sensory immersion and memory (Carolan 2008), is a reaction to an over-emphasis on the model that languages are simply structures of 'representations' of meanings of the world (Anderson & Harrison 2010). But the view of language as practice and process suggests that such monologic entities do not exist, but that to use language – to understand or not, to be excluded when you do not understand – produce emotional and affective reactions as a result of bodily immersion in fluid stabilisations of practice.

In this way, using language is an embodied experience. Instead of the traditional view's

placing of linguistic competence solely in the brain (Harris 1990b), we see that the mind in fact 'leaks' beyond the skull and beyond the body (Ingold 2011). In fact, for Ingold, the process of the landscape is found in the interaction of person and environment (Ingold 2000; compare Vasterling 2003). In this incorporation there are thus two mutually inclusive sources of variation in the experience of being integrated into linguistic processes. On the one hand, a person participates in multiple and changing stabilisations of linguistic processes. To move and act in space is always to match or mismatch these stabilisations, which continually recreates space and language through a 'fertile mimesis' in which both sameness and difference is meaningful (Pennycook 2010; Thrift 2007). Each of these encounters is a relational experience, and for migrants, of course, the mismatches may outnumber the matches. But on the other hand, a person's knowledge of how to act and speak in different spaces changes slowly over time, so that the tensions of (mis)match between this bodily knowledge and the surroundings is constantly changing.

By developing an understanding of spoken language as spatial experience, we can see that being 'competent' in a language is about successful integrations, and we can see what experiences result from (in)competence in integrated language-use. As Pennycook puts it, "if we want to retain such a notion as competence, it refers not so much to the mastery of a grammar or sociolinguistic system, as to the strategic capacity to use diverse semiotic items across integrated media and modalities" (Pennycook 2010, p.129). If instead of a narrow linguistic competence we can emphasize a more flexible integrative competence, we can see that migrants have a much more communicationally rich experience than limited ideas of discrete languages may have suggested (Blommaert et al. 2005, p.211; Harris 1990a). And this is more than Wei's (2011) call to look beyond the limitations on migrants who do not know the language well and acknowledge the 'translanguaging' experiences of fluent bilinguals. Even Blommaert et al's (2005) Bulgarian immigrant in Belgium, who is "declared to have no 'language'" (p. 213) by students who have no language in common with her, can communicate with them by "gesturing" for them to enter her cafe (p. 210).

This is not to deny that limited language skills eventually lead to communicational breakdown for this Bulgarian immigrant. The point is rather that by means of multimodal practices (Pennycook 2010) which integrate such people into spaces, those with limited language skills are nonetheless constantly communicating to some degree, and experiencing space through their language-use by relating to expectations and sedimentations of practices around them. In the rest of this paper, I will consider the experiences of those somewhere in between Wei's (2011) fluently bilingual youths and Blommaert et al's (2005) immigrant who 'has no language'. The more nuanced partial competence of international students will serve to bring out what is really true for all language users: to use language as integrated practice is to be immersed in the ongoing process of both space and language.

3 The study: participants and methods

I investigated the concerns and accomplishments of translanguaging in daily life for international students in Edinburgh, Scotland, by participating in this life for three months as a visiting student. Taking notes and photographs to record my observations of spaces throughout the city centre frequented by students, I used my own experiences as a student to access some of the feelings and habituations of practice making up these spaces. During my stay I held ten interviews with international students recruited from my circles of personal acquaintance, with an eye primarily for a spread of background in nationality and previous international experience.

I interviewed five men and five women between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four, all doing complete degrees in Edinburgh at the undergraduate and master's level, except for one master's exchange student from Germany, who was abroad for a length of time for the first

time. Three were from China, this being their first time abroad; one student was from Italy and had done an exchange semester in Latvia and lived for a year in Spain; one was from Norway and had come directly to study in Edinburgh after secondary school; one was Finnish and had lived in Estonia and later Germany for the greater part of her childhood; one was Nigerian-born and had lived in the United Kingdom from the age of four, and in Germany for the two years before coming to university; one was from Swaziland and had lived in England for a few years during his early childhood, and after that in South Africa; and one was Scottish-born and had lived most of her life in Peru prior to coming to Edinburgh for university. With this diversity of life trajectories, there was a range of levels of knowledge of different languages, and of previous experience being in a foreign linguistic environment.

I use interviews here because they are accounts by people who have gone and are going through significant adjustment culturally and linguistically. The interviews provide a glimpse of their assessment of this process which extends in time far beyond the present. Thus, as they reflect on experiences over a longer time period, the interviews bring out how experiencing spatial linguistic change itself changes their experiences. However, I am aware that these are 'accounts' – what is said is affected by the situation of holding an interview and the roles of interviewer and interviewee (Rapley 2004). In addition, the theoretical perspective which I bring to the analysis plays a large role in my interpretations. For this reason, it is problematic to treat what is described as straightforward representations of 'what actually happened' in the participants lives, or to try to prove a theoretical position based on these accounts (Laurier 2001). However, in this paper I am not so much trying to give a complete picture of these students' experiences, as to show how viewing language as a process greatly increases our insight into such experiences.

4 Findings

In this section, I will illustrate the two-fold claim which I expanded in Section 3 – that to use language is to create space while simultaneously experience space. I will do so in five subsections, moving from the spatial organization of linguistic practices to considerations of how using language is experiencing these spaces. The theme running through the examples is that practices as a spatial category is more analytically useful than 'languages'. This theme culminates in a consideration of what role 'languages' as such *do* play in experiences of the space/language process.

4.1 The spatial organization of linguistic practices

Let us start by considering the spatial dimensions of a single 'practice' which we have encountered earlier, that of taking the bus. Let us compare taking the bus in Edinburgh and in Lima, Peru, as described by Janet who is Scottish but grew up in Peru:

> **Janet:** ... getting on the bus ((in Edinburgh)), all you have to say is single, please, thank you, the end ... whereas ((in Peru)) you'd have to like, hail down the bus, and get on, and then probably haggle with the bus conductor, or just be like give him your fifty (centimos), and he'd be like, no, that's not, and you'd be like, no, no, that's (all I'm paying), and they'd be like oh ok whatever, and then you get on, and then you're at the back of the bus, and you're like ((yelling in Spanish where you want to get off)) ... and then like, move your way through people, you're like, oh, sorry, excuse me, pardon me ... and then get off, and you're like, thanks, and then off you go, whereas here it's just like, get - on, sit down - silence, DING ((get)) off, like no talking required.[2]

Here, DING represents the bell which rings when the 'stop' button is pressed in Edin-

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2   Transcriptions are verbatim, but have been abridged for clarity. Conventions: single brackets indicate uncertain transcriptions, double brackets indicate editorial aditions.

burgh's buses. There are several ways Lima contrasts with Edinburgh. One obvious difference would be the language this is all done in -- English and Spanish. But that is not the difference for Janet, who is fluent in both. The difference for her is that in each setting language is integrated into the action-sequence of boarding and riding the bus in remarkably different combinations. As Janet describes in detail, in Lima almost every part of the journey involves interacting with others by speaking; in Edinburgh, speaking with others is avoided, and a button-light serves to signal your desire to alight. Further, we see that bounding off the practice of taking the bus is difficult. It extends out in time and space, though differently in each city. In Edinburgh, I may start planning the trip hours ahead of time using a web-based journey planner. In Lima, as Janet described earlier in the interview, bus drivers call out their destinations from their windows, meaning the onset of taking the bus is extended through a very different kind of practice: establishing contact with the driver verbally or with gestures.

Organizing linguistic space around practices lets loose the full complexity of how language is used to create space. It may seem to create chaos, as the boundaries of 'taking the bus' become fluid. It certainly blurs the boundaries of language, since the semiotics of this extended practice integrate the linguistic with other actions and objects. But at the same time, using practices as the category makes clear what is relevant to Janet's perception of space and to her knowledge of how to use language in different contexts to accomplish goals. We lose the certainty of the boundaries, but on the other hand the practice – defined by the goal which the resources are integrated to accomplish – slides along fluidly with the current action at its centre, much like a lens focusing analytical attention on any and all possible actions and resources that may be involved. As such, while the stream of action is fluid and unbroken in time (Hägerstrand 1995), the current goal situates the language-user at a 'nexus' (Scollon & Scollon 2004) from which we can trace out all the relevant elements.

4.2 Experiencing space by speaking

There are two ways we can zoom in on the experiences of being at this nexus. First, to recall the dialectic way I stated my main aim, language practice is both shaping space and experiencing it simultaneously – you know your environment as you move through it (Ingold 2011). For Thomas from Germany, what is remarkable about taking the bus in Edinburgh is the way you greet the driver, something that he is not used to in Germany. Thomas cited this small thing as an example of how he feels people in Edinburgh are "more friendly" to strangers than back home. Thomas notices this and chooses to conform, which produces a positive feeling. He related how a friend who returned to Germany from Scotland automatically greeted the driver and immediately felt out of place. Thus behaving (ir)regularily is a source of feeling in or out of place, a feeling that develops as you make your contribution to defining what a place is.

Second, these experiences are organized just as practices are spatially organized. Both ways of speaking and the effects of speaking are place-specific, such as conversation topics or place-specific vocabularies. For example, both Jessie and Cheng, from China, described how they did not know how to ask a shop assistant how to 'top-up' the credit on their mobile phone:

> **Cheng:** Before I came here, I do not know how to say, top-up ... I bring my mobile phone to the shop, and ask the shop assistant, can you charge my mobile phone ... and he was shocked ... ((he said)) do you mean, power, electricity ...

These experiences of Cheng and Jessie and other international students differ at a much finer scale-level than can be captured by using the categories of languages or dialects. If we analyzed this as a deficiency in 'English' competence, we would be saying that they experience difficulty in communicating across all the space of the United Kingdom where 'English' is used – but this is clearly not the case. In other spaces, it is different aspects of their integrative

competence which play a role. for Cheng, accent of shop-keepers makes it difficult to understand in some shops, but not in others. For both of them, in classroom discussions accent is not an issue but the topic of conversation may be foreign making it difficult for them to participate. As language is broken down and recombined in practices, we obtain much finer insight into which elements of using language contribute to experiences of interactions in space.

4.3 Changing embodied knowledge

So far we have focused on the variation of patterns of stabilisations in space as the source of experiences – as students find themselves in different spaces. But equally important is the competence – understood as skill/experience (Ingold 2011) or integrative profficiency (Harris 1990c) – that a migrant carries along. Learning to use a language is not only the cerebral acquisition of a new linguistic structure, but is the discovery of how to integrate your knowledge and your body into new communicational situations. Learning a language is an ongoing process of discovering bits and pieces in context, which makes interacting linguistic- ally a continuously changing experience. The three Chinese students I interviewed mentioned how their lack of fluency in English (in the past) had them constantly asking people to repeat themselves, and that as this improved they became "more confident" in relationships. Or as Dorte from Norway put it:

> **Dorte:** ... it is tiring, having to say pardon, excuse me, didn't hear you, what, pardon ...
> over and over again ... for a month, on end.

But Dorte also said that she "made an effort not to think" that this was limiting her in relationships with people. Lack of competence may not be the issue, it may the thought that you are incompetent that makes you apprehensive. How well you feel you can communicate can also depend on how tired you are, as Marja from Finland explained. Thus, the experience of using language may change steadily over time in the direction of feeling more confident; but it may also fluctuate in the course of a day.

At the same time, *historical* knowledge contributes to the present interaction (Scollon & Scollon 2003; Ingold 2000). For example, Lizwi from South Africa can transfer his knowledge of social talk in South Africa into many of the settings he encounters in Edinburgh because his embodied knowledge matches patterns in Edinburgh in many ways. But for Marja from Finland using English increases the effort required in social interactions, so that different situations present differing challenges:

> **Marja:** I'm usually quiet in a big group ... because I speak slower than most people and I
> need to think about what I need to say before I say it ... people say that I ... talk more
> when I'm alone with someone than in a group.

But the difference between Lizwi's and Marja's experiences is not simply a matter of knowing 'English' better but is highly specific to particular situations. Marja's slowness in speaking relates to the speed and complexity of a conversation in a larger group, much as Jessie, Cheng and Claudio from Italy mentioned being unable to 'keep up' in classroom discussions. Lizwi, meanwhile, also has moments/places where strong Scottish accents baffle him.

4.4 Performing self as integrative competence

Thus far, I have highlighted how the practices category better captures the complexity migrants' experiences than monolithic languages as categories. In the previous two sections, the redefined view of linguistic competence as integrative has begun to emerge. We can explore this kind of competence in relation to a common theme in studies of multilinguals: the performance of self in relation to others when multiple languages provide a range of

"possible enactments of the self" (Valentine et al. 2008, p.385). In the following example, I am talking with Marja from Finland. She has lived in Germany, and wants to keep up her German, and does so with her German flatmate when they go to the gym together. But this ideal situation also has its problems:

> **Hans:** So do you speak German in the flat?
> **Marja:** We do. If there's no one around – Well, um I guess it's because ... I think that speaking a language that the others don't understand, even if you don't speak to them ... it's not nice. So I think we should speak English when we're around others, but she doesn't always do it, but then I just answer her in English.

For Marja, speaking German alone together at the gym is fine – as she puts it, she "gets to practice" German and her flatmate gets to "take a break" from English. but speaking it around their flatmates who do not understand is something she would rather not do. Marja defines herself as sensitive to this issue (because of her upbringing where she lived with multiple languages), implying that her flatmate is the one who oversteps the boundary of 'taking a break' and starts 'doing daily life' in the flat in German.

This might be seen as a process of spatial organization. If there is a fine line between 'taking a break' and 'doing daily life' in German with its resulting exclusion of others, crossing this line is precipitated more by the presence of others than by the intention of the speakers. That is to say, once German is available to Marja's German flatmate in speaking with her, it is out of Marja's control whether she might be called upon to 'do' the excluding of others. As such the act of speaking German changes as it is relocalized into different relational spaces. Given that the flat is already strongly stabilised with the presence of people who do not understand German, with the established relationships to flatmates exerting considerable force on expectations of behaviour, speaking German is bound to be (for Marja) the exclusion of others. However, going to the gym is a perfect solution to align linguistic practices with different spaces of expectations, while the linguistic action of 'answering in English' is one way of solving a potential conflict, less confrontational than, say, explicitly calling the other to task for being inconsiderate.

To understand this situation, competence in English and German individually is of much less relevance than the integrative competence required to judge how to deal with changing circumstances – how to *integrate* your actions appropriately. Because the practice of talking in the flat is dependent on so many constituents, its stability may in fact change unexpectedly, requiring constant adaptive work to maintain some sort of stability of self the way you want to be perceived. At the same time, we see that Marja has possibilities to influence how situations develop, such as trying to keep conflicting interests apart spatially. She has agency as she contributes to the stabilisation of space and language (Carter & Sealey 2007). This kind of competence reveals that the possible number of 'enactments of the self' is not limited to the number of 'languages' identifiable, but can be different in every new space or stabilisation. As such, seeing competence as integrative is imperative for understanding the experiences of migrants using language, as these arise from having to manage immersion in ever-changing stabilisations of practice.

4.5 'Languages' and stabilisations

We have seen that 'languages' as categories do not capture the spaces migrants experience as well as 'practices', and that consequently linguistic competence needs to be seen as integrative to reveal their experiences as taking part in stabilisations of practice. I claimed that languages should rather be thought of as 'inventions' (Makoni & Pennycook 2005) – interpreting this to mean that as names they index a set of expectations on linguistic practice. The outstanding question, then, is what role languages as 'inventions' *do* play in the process of stabilisations developing in language/space. The situation which Claudio from Italy faces at school sheds

light on this. Because he makes many 'English' mistakes in assignments resulting in a low grade, his identity is performed differently than he is used to, as a good student. But 'English' is just a broad term that refers to many different domains of practice – here it is the very specific 'grammatically correct English' of writing an essay. In other contexts, like talking with friends in the pub, this construct is meaningless, and communication and having a good time can be successful even if English is a 'second language' for all the participants. It is English as a social construct or nexus of expectations that is affecting Claudio's feelings about himself, rather than any linguistic-structural category.

One final example will show how the 'invention' of languages proceeds as a spatial process. Here, I am talking with Moni, who lived for two years in Germany, about how she feels about her German fluency. She brings up 'fresher's week' at the start of university in Edinburgh, where of course people ask where she is from:

> **Moni:** … and then I would say, oh I lived in Germany, and then people would immediately … speak German to me … and I was just like, I actually don't know what you're talking about, but that made me feel really bad because I'd … lived there for a while, like why didn't I know it enough.

Here we see a language acting as an entity: Moni's having lived in Germany indexes the ability to speak German, but she fails this test which makes her feel 'really bad' about this discrepancy. But let us consider a few more details about Moni's being in Germany and Edinburgh. Living in Germany for two years, she did not 'learn German' but she certainly used it in many (small) ways such as in shops. She even worked in a motorway fast food restaurant serving food over the summer: despite not knowing the language, she managed to achieve communication in a particular, localized setting of using language in Germany.

Given what we have seen above about the importance of the locality in determining the meaning of a linguistic practice, it seems that German becomes an entity in the context of expectations in Edinburgh. In Germany, Moni is a foreigner who can communicate to a limited extent, whereas in Edinburgh, knowing German suddenly becomes 'all-or-nothing' under the expectation that having lived in Germany she should be able to speak it. Compare Marja again, who did learn German well enough to relocalize it successfully into communication in any given situation elsewhere in the world; but her knowledge of German propels her into an unwanted situation of being expected to speak German where she feels it will exclude others in the room. Thus, the accomplishments of identities performed in the landscape of relational space can come to depend, at multiple scale levels, on the forces of stabilised expectations on languages as entities – acting as elements within practices, not as a neutral medium for interaction. Certainly, there is a set of linguistic forms which we can classify as related and give the name 'German'. But this classification in itself does not mean anything for spatial categorizations of events and experiences. German is an entity not within the variability of linguistic forms – while we can distinguish isolated utterances as 'German' or 'English' based on phonology and historical developent, that does not predict where and when Moni can and cannot communicate or what the effects of Marja's speaking German will be. German is an entity only as a set of strong expectations on an invented classification 'German', and only sometimes, in particular places.

5 Conclusion

In this paper I explored a neglected aspect of migrants' experiences by showing that non-fluent language-use is itself a rich experience of space. Since each language act is an active participation in continuously unfolding spatial stabilisations of practice, even non-fluent language-users are constantly experiencing space relationally, where the very mismatch of practices to the environment is meaningful. The way I revealed these experiences was by

recasting linguistic competence as integrative communicative competence (Harris 1990c). This gives agency to migrants where judging their narrow linguistic competence would rob them of it (Carter & Sealey 2007), and shows that they are very active in participating in the language/space process. This view makes clear that, as many scholars have been arguing (Pennycook 2010), language is spatial as practices, and not as the units traditionally called languages. In this paper I took this insight further by showing how the continuous reworking of the language process stabilises spatially, and can thus be used as a spatial category to understand migrants' experiences of language variation. But while practices are the appropriate category for understanding experiences of using language, languages as inventions continue do play an important role as they index social expectations on language-use *within* these spatial practices.

Demonstrating that practices are more flexible and powerful categories of linguistic interaction in space than languages raises important implications for approaches and methods in studies of multilingual spaces and people. The main point which I tried to elaborate is the mutual advantage gained by linguists and geographers in integrating embodied experiences with language-use. I showed how geographers' views of experience as embodied turn the integrative competence of participating in stabilisations of practice into a rich source of experiences for migrants who use languages they know only in part. At the same time, the practice/process views of linguists show that the embodiment turn away from language is unnecessary, because language is spatial as practices rather than aspatial semiotic systems and integrative competence implies full immersion in these spatial practices (Laurier & Philo 2006). Methodologically, therefore, investigations of the spatial experiences of using language need to adopt approaches which focus on practice, such as Scollon and Scollon's geosemiotics which analyses language in relation to its surroundings (2003), and their nexus analysis which "takes human action rather than language or culture as its unit of analysis" (2007, p.608). In terms of data collection, the interviews on which this paper relied primarily cannot give a complete picture of the material elements of a practice or event, but they did show how students' experiences change over time and place as they learn to adapt. As such, this paper pointed to the need for both observational data to explore the local elements of an interaction and interview data to relate the local to the historical embodied knowledge of an individual (Wei 2011).

Migrants such as international students inhabit linguistic realities which are not best defined territorially but in terms of stabilisations of practice. How, then, could territorial policies contribute to the integration of these people? What should be understood from this paper is that when 'languages' are taken as the spatial unit, for instance when 'a' language is linked to a state's territory (Carter & Sealey 2007), this is not reflecting the actual practical organization of linguistic space but defines what those in power *want* language-use to look like in that territory. We should not conflate these languages as expectations with the stabilisations of practice in which they play a role. Practically speaking, such languages function as territorial gate-keeping devices as they are used to include or exclude citizens based on evaluated knowledge of a standardized language (Pennycook 2010; see Valentine & Skelton 2007 and Makoni & Pennycook 2007 for examples). It may be that if strict definitions of competence in invented languages are relaxed, the communication necessary to the functioning of organized societies will not deteriorate, given the resourcefulness which many translanguaging people already display (Wei 2011), and integration and mutual understanding of different linguistic groups may increase as people are challenged to reflect on and transcend the boundaries between linguistic groups maintained through discourse (Dagenais et al. 2009; Shohamy & Waksman 2009). The policies and resources of states could be directed at facilitating translation and stimulating interaction.

This is why it matters that geographers stop just short of 'disinventing and reconstituting

languages' (Makoni & Pennycook 2005). Though a language as an entity may exert a social or political force, it may be no use trying to determine or change its course *as* an entity, bcause it achieves this force through mundane practices, relocalizations, and integrations, and as such is continuously under construction. While geographers apply this kind of insight to identities, it has generally been overlooked that language, which is used to perform changing identities, is itself a changing part of the process of space. Languages are often talked about spatially in terms of an ecology of languages. This paper has shown that, as Pennycook (2004) argues, we need to look behind these invented languages and investigate the ecology of language practices. This paper showed that in the case of international students, organizing linguistic space by practices reveals their experiences in a way that categories of languages cannot. Further research is needed to explore what insights we can gain from this approach for other groups, perhaps for all users of language in space.

As Blommaert (2005, p.35) posits, "linguists have no monopoly on theories of language". In this paper I have taken this to mean that theories of language as discrete from the material world are not the final word on how language matters for people's lives, and that an integrated perspective on language as practices constituting relational space as a process relates language-use most to people's experiences of space. Thus understanding language lies very much within the domain of geography.

Acknowledgements

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