Unsettling Language Politics and Practices through Reflexivity: Metapragmatics and Language Ideologies

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The "meta" has always been a productive notion in the investigation of how language, culture, and society intertwine. While the earlier underpinnings of the study of the meta (e.g. metalinguistics, metapragmatics) revolved around the ideational characterization of what the "meta" means and what it entails in sociolinguistic research (e.g. Bateson, 1972; Jakobson, 1960; Lucy, 1993; Silverstein, 1993; Urban, 2001), current research in the field tends to focus on how the meta serves as a resource for people to conduct sociolinguistic activity and negotiate social relations (e.g. Agha, 2007; Jaworski et al., 2004).

This panel aims to contribute to this academic conversation by examining how a specific attention to the "meta" can help sociolinguists further unpack and potentially unsettle traditional assumptions on language politics and practices. This panel aims to explore how metapragmatics and the on-site fabric of language ideologies could spell out new ways of understanding the entanglement of language and society. To do so, the panel members focus on the construction of identities in relation to processes of differentiation (cf. Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Irvine & Gal, 2000)—a potent site for the analysis of potential ways of unsettling language politics and practices.

This panel plans to demonstrate how focusing on people's reflexive processes could effectively unpack processes of differentiation and identity construction, shedding light on specific instances of language politics and practices. While these instantiations may occur at different scales (e.g. individual, professional, national identities) or in different contexts (e.g. classrooms, interviews, counselling centers for refugees), they all reflect new ways of viewing language and society--ways that respond to contemporary sociolinguistic changes and forms of de/reconstruction of established notions such as communities, class, ethnicities, "language," etc. By focusing on the metapragmatic aspects of language ideologies and linguistic performances, this panel shows how reflexivity serves as a viable resource for the understanding of language and society in continuously changing contexts (cf. Coupland, 2016, p. 450).

In sum, our panel emphasizes the need to go beyond the identification of differences and its impact on sociolinguistic phenomena and move attention to the on-site processes of differentiation: how do people partake in or negotiate the process of differentiation? Through what kinds of reflexive activities? What do they do with their perceived/assumed/assigned markers of difference? How do these reflexive activities enrich how we understand language practices, ideologies, performances, and politics?

Keywords: metapragmatics, reflexivity, differentiation, identity, linguistic performances

1. (Un-)settling Roles: Social Work and Linguistic Labor in a Counselling Center for Refugees

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This contribution offers a metapragmatic and political economic view on differentiation within the professional and institutional orders of a counselling center for refugees in Vienna. Based on data from ethnographic fieldwork (audio-recorded work meetings, interviews, field notes), I will analyze the complex differentiation processes of actors and practices — or institutional "roles" — which enable and constrain the actors' positioning in the counselling center. Multiple axes of differentiation (Gal, 2016) are at play in this context, among them types of labor relations (volunteer vs. employed staff member), professional background (untrained vs. social worker vs. legal expert etc.) and linguistic labor (counsellor vs. interpreter etc.). As these axes partly overlap, imply or exclude each other, the actors navigate a complex field of indexicalities (Jaffe, 2016) where indices of the professional blend and compete with languaged and racialized ascriptions. This is consequential as to what counts as (whose) legitimate professional practice. Some of the resulting divisions appear to be rather fragile (e.g. counsellor who speaks Arabic vs. interpreter for Arabic), while others are firmly institutionalized (e.g. paid vs. unpaid worker). In order to understand how such divisions are produced, reinforced, disavowed and challenged, I explore meta-communicative stance-taking among staff members and volunteer workers related to their own work practices. This is to show how professional/institutional "roles" are neither settled in advance nor easily unsettled in practice, but interlinked in processes of differentiation which have consequences for the actors' agency and hinge on the political economy of refugee aid in Austria.

Keywords: *indexicality, differentiation, professional order, social work, language work*

2. A Fleeting Enregisterment? Narrative Ideologies and Reflexive Language in a Language Learning Classroom

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In the study of narratives as social practice (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008), participants' perspectives on what telling a story is and means prevail over the analyst's prior definitions. It amounts to considering the cultural conceptions relating to the telling of stories, namely narrative ideologies. These, alike any language ideologies, are "models that link linguistics [and, more generally, semiotic] features with typifications of people and events" (Wortham & Reyes, 2011, p. 147), taking shape across time and space (Agha & Wortham, 2006) and changing as social life unfold. Reflexive language plays a critical role in this continuous process of enregisterment (Agha, 2007): it assigns values to as well as indexes the meaning of discursive practices and identities (Jaworski, Coupland & Galasiński, 2004; Pérez-Milans, 2016).

Drawing on interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982; Rampton, 2006; 2017) and small stories research (Georgakopoulou 2007, 2015), this paper examines how an ideology about stories' recipiency and the identity of "active listener" is established step by step during an English language-learning lesson gathering 1 teacher and 8 students (data collected in 2013, at the Language Centre of the University of Lausanne, French-speaking part of Switzerland). The paper analyzes the participants' ways of creating a shared model of who to be and what to do when listening to a story, and it details the processes by which they contextualize the (in)appropriateness of their on-going practices and identities. As a result, our analysis shows how the development of an ideology about stories' recipiency and listeners' identity (i.) oscillates between a benevolent regimentation by one individual (the teacher) and a collective effort of co-construction, and (ii.) ends in an only transient enregisterment..

Keywords: *narrative, language ideologies, classroom discourse, interactional sociolinguistics, small stories*

3. Perceiving Eliteness: Enregistered Emblems, Indexicality and Metapragmatics

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Metapragmatic data is often what allows researchers to conjoin discursive behaviour and social value, such as stereotypic personae. For newly met acquaintances, deployment of a single semiotic emblem denoting institutional affiliation or organizational role, has sufficient indexical potency to interpret eliteness in construction of identity in an interaction. This study examines self-presentation sequences at professional networking events in Hong Kong, where in answering 'What do you do?', enregistered emblems (Agha, 2007) discursively deployed such as industry (finance), occupational role (banker), or organizational affiliation (highly ranked universities) serve as powerful forces suggesting meritocratic achievement and being representative of cumulative institutional authorizations through various gatekeeping events. In the interactive data, we can see how these emblems are deployed and see slight suggestions of their uptake by listeners. However, it is only in the subsequent metapragmatic interviews with the participants that the emblems' indexicalities and their resulting real world implications for occupational attainment are made explicit. The data presented here provides insight into elite societal formations and implications for disrupting the reproduction of privilege.

Keywords: *eliteness, indexicality, enregistered emblems, elite discourse, professional discourse*

4. A Metapragmatic Approach to (New) Citizenship in Singapore: New Citizenship and the Negotiation of Difference

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Recent studies on language and citizenship view citizenship not just as a fixed political category but as a product of continuous negotiation that can be mediated by sociolinguistic means. This paper participates in the academic debates on language and citizenship by proposing a metapragmatic approach to the discursive construction of citizenship—specifically, from the perspective of "new citizens" in Singapore. This perspective is important because it reflects the inimitable position of new citizens in society: even though new citizens had already proven their worth as deserving recipients of citizenship, they continue to face social issues because of their transnational connections and visible racial and linguistic differences from local-born citizens. The data used in this paper comes from an ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Singapore in 2015-2016.

In this paper, I use a metapragmatic approach to investigate how new citizens talk about the notion of citizenship: specifically, their articulations of citizenship in relation to their negotiation of difference. This paper views citizenship as a metasign—a sign "…that regiments how it itself and other signs are to be interpreted" (Gal, 2016, p. 114). I argue that my participants were able to present themselves as good new citizens of Singapore by orienting to the metasign of citizenship, as seen in their metapragmatic comments on English and Singlish and their multimodal performances of citizenship. By reconfiguring indexicalities between language and citizenship, my participants were able to claim status as good new citizens in accordance with their affect and lived experiences. These claims reflect how new citizens reflexively and strategically reconfigure dominant social discourses about good citizenship in Singapore. This implies that new citizenship may not be about the complete approximation of (local-born) Singaporeanness; rather, it may be about "enoughness" (cf. Blommaert & Varis, 2015). The view challenges statal narratives about good citizenship in Singapore and elsewhere.

Keywords: *citizenship, metasign, language ideologies, performativity, differentiation*