

SBE 2020 White Paper: Future Research in the Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences

Migration, Multilingualism, and Minorities: New Challenges for the Linguistic Sciences

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1. One of the fundamental questions in the humanistic social sciences has to do with the understanding of the relationship between language and culture; specifically, how the social laws of linguistic conduct appear and efface as communities of different cultural practices come into direct contact with each other—more so now as globalization seems to have made geographic boundaries less relevant and global mobility more intense. In this new modern context of intense mobility, the question that seems pertinent is: What are the new paradigms of understanding of the inter-relationship of language and culture within new configurations of migration settlements? This broad research question invites several inter-related issues of language and culture: (i) how are cultural identities in transplanted contexts linguistically acquired and realized, (ii) what is the role (and nature) of linguistic practices in boundary maintenance or disruption in global, transnational, and translocal contexts, and (iii) how are local practices and processes produced by migrants and other people who cross various kinds of social, linguistic, cultural, economic and workplace borders in socially stratified and ethnically plural social settings. An area that offers ripe opportunities to engage in a dialogue about these topics from a cross-disciplinary and integrative perspective is the study of the different kinds of social systems that have developed in response to the global flows of cultural products (language, people, practices), forcing us to develop new methodological and theoretical toolkit.

Throughout history, humans have been driven to explore and seek out new opportunities for a variety of environmental, socio-economic, and political reasons, and encountered a wide variety of cultural settings along the way. In every circumstance, those on the move managed to develop suitable linguistic systems to communicate with other communities. They forged simplified but effective communicative tools, such as trade languages and pidgins, to facilitate the exchange of goods in certain situations, while in other cases they compromised on languages incorporating fully productive grammatical systems into so-called mixed languages, such as Michif, a combination of French and Cree, and Media Lingua, a mixture of Spanish and Quechua. In other sedentary cultures that erected their languages into rigidly codified and immutable national treasures, the global flow of products and influences channeled alternative linguistic identities into mainstream cultures through cultural and artistic productions, such as global hip-hop, that not only co-exist but enjoy covert prestige alongside the practices of the ruling social elite. In today's late-modern world, there are more people on the move than ever before. The population of the eighteen most foreign-populated cities of the globe is certain to increase manifold in the

foreseeable future. Contact between cultures has become massive and unavoidable. Simultaneously, new forms of physical and virtual movement across linguistic spaces have also arisen. The ability of (im)migrants to use and alternate between several languages—their own and those of the host community— produces new ways of meaning-making, and lead to linguistic and cultural hybridities that are hallmarks of plurality and globality.

In the humanistic social sciences, scholars of cultural and language studies will be expected to explore (i) the many old and new representations of social actors and events, especially in the inter-animation of local and global, (ii) the role of the conventional and new media in introducing new forms of linguistic heterogeneity, (iii) the socio-linguistic identities that populate socio-cultural and political borders, and (iv) the linguistic consequences of longing and belonging, as in the emerging studies of heritage language acquisition and use [1]. The challenge for 2020, then, is to develop precise descriptive apparatus that has the capacity to decipher meaning and function from infinitely small details of communicative behavior.

At the societal level, the challenge for this new generation of issues will be tackled by conducting ethnographic and experimental research on the structure, variation and use of language(s) in new multilingual spaces—real and virtual. The methodological focus will have to shift from Saussurean synchrony to Labov's dynamic synchrony so that new, emerging patterns of language variation and change can be understood in terms of their indexical effects, their meaning-making capacity, and in terms of the formal and functional changes the new patterns encode, e.g. identity shifts and, in the worst case scenario, language loss/attrition/death and revitalization efforts in migrant/minority contexts. The new methodologies will have to be recruited to understand the effect of modern technologies on the sociolinguistics of global mobility of specific genres (pop music, email, text and tweets) and their (e)valuation on different scales (local, translocal, global). In the specific case of world Englishes, for instance, the new methodologies have to develop mechanisms that account for (i) how the value, meaning, and function of a local linguistic production travel along with the form transnationally, (ii) how local linguistic forms fit into local economies of resources; and (iii) how local linguistic forms translate into sociolinguistic inequalities between local speakers/writers (of pop music, email, texts and tweets) and transnational listenership/readership. In short, the challenge is in developing a methodological toolkit that can relate transnational-hierarchical spaces to indexical frames of perception. And, finally, we face a challenge to develop a theoretical framework that is able to offer a nuanced understanding of the linguistic politics of nostalgia, as with the rise of heritage awareness in old and new migrants, especially under pressures of homogenization.

At the individual level, the new challenges will appear in creating experimental methods that will allow us to understand how individual learning takes place in new linguistic contexts of learning, especially where the motivation for learning is to become functionally (not fluently) bilingual, given the widespread bilingualism world-wide. Learning a new (presumably, national) language is a very different task for an adult (im)migrant than for a child, or the child of adult immigrants born in the host country. Adults already possess a native language and a linguistic

identity and typically acquire the language of the new country imperfectly. By contrast, the children are much better second language learners overall, and typically achieve higher levels of linguistic accuracy in the second language than their parents. But this brings a downside: pressured to be accepted by their peers at school, these children and sometimes their families tend to abandon the first language and this state of affairs causes severe language loss of the minority language. While these patterns of incomplete acquisition of a first language, a second language and loss of the first language have been the bread and butter of theoretical linguists and psycholinguists, sociolinguists have focused instead of how these divergences from the norm, which obviously start at the individual level, spread to social groups and social networks eventually creating new dialects or language varieties. Recent studies [2] have argued that immigration, and resulting patterns of second language acquisition, could contribute to shaping and promoting large-scale language change by altering traditionally uninterrupted patterns of language transmission in a variety of language families. Arguably, however, children acquire languages that they speak not just from their family but, starting from a very early age, also from their peers. Similarly, adult immigrant second-language learners' linguistic input is available primarily through diffusion in individuals' social networks, i.e. through informal contacts within one's own age group, rather than transmission by kin. If the linguistic landscape of the learner, at home and in peer groups, is increasingly multilingual, then one important question for linguists and experts in cultural studies is to find out what motivates the selection and adoption of particular linguistic features in the learner's output language, and what the cultural and ideological implications of such choices (acts of identities) might be at the societal level.

From the individual speaker's perspective, simplification and reduction seems to accompany the acquisition process. At the societal level, however, when patterns of use from a very large number of speakers are aggregated, features from all contacting languages, rather than just the host language, might shape the outcome of this acquisition process. Recent extensions of the feature pool model [3] from Creole studies to new linguistic varieties proposed that speakers in multilingual communities preferentially select from a "feature pool", i.e., a large number of synchronically available variants to which all contacting languages contribute. Depending on language-internal factors, such as frequency and markedness, as well as social factors, such as demographic weight, stability of social networks, and prestige (linguistic market value) the contacting language varieties, certain features are selected, while others are not adopted. Thus, it seems that given the right ecological conditions even complex structures can be transmitted and diffused into newly emerging contact varieties. The new challenge then is to develop theoretical models that allow us to (i) extrapolate from individual acquisition to societal selection and adoption, and (ii) show the ways in which discursive construction of identities plays a role in this complex process.

2. Addressing these pressing questions in the coming years will require the integration of multidisciplinary research by faculty already engaged in these issues within their own disciplines, and of the integration of several existing qualitative and quantitative research

methods. This type of research will allow the creation of large data sets from both corpora, surveys, interviews, samples of oral production, and other written and oral elicitation tasks. This research priority will also contribute to the training of graduate students to represent the next generation of researchers engaged in the understanding of language, mind, culture and society.

Word Count: 1545

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