

# Polylinguaging in Superdiversity

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## Abstract

Humankind is a *linguaging* species. This means that as human beings we use language to achieve our goals. Every time we use language, we change the world a little bit. We do so by using language with other human beings, language is in other words social. In this paper we challenge one of the most widely held views of language as a social, human phenomenon, namely that “language” can be separated into different “languages”, such as “Russian”, “Latin”, and “Greenlandic”. Our paper is based on a recently developed sociolinguistic understanding that this view of language can not be upheld on the basis of linguistic criteria. “Languages” are abstractions, they are sociocultural or ideological constructions which match real-life use of language poorly. This means that sociolinguistics – the study of language as a social phenomenon - must work at another level of analysis with real-life language use. The first part of our paper presents such analyses of observed language use among adolescents in superdiverse societies. We show that the level of a linguistic feature is better suited as the basis for analysis of language use than the level of “a language”. In the second part of the paper we present our concept of polylinguaging which denotes the way in which speakers use features associated with different “languages” – even when they know very little of these “languages”. We use the level of (linguistic) features as the basis for understanding language use, and we claim that features are socioculturally associated with “languages”. Both features individually and languages are socioculturally associated with values, meanings, speakers, etc. This means that we can deal with the connection between features and languages, and in the analyses in the first part we do exactly that.

## Introduction

Humankind is a linguaging species. Human beings use language to achieve their goals, and with a few exceptions by using language to other human beings. It is a widely held view that language as a human phenomenon can be separated into different “languages”, such as “Russian”, “Latin”, and “Greenlandic”. This paper is based on the recently developed sociolinguistic understanding that this view of language can not be upheld on the basis of linguistic criteria. “Languages” are sociocultural abstractions which match real-life use of language poorly. This means that sociolinguistics must apply another level of analysis with observed language use. The first part of our pa-

per is based on analyses of observed language use among young languagers in superdiverse societies. We show that the level of feature is better suited as the basis for analysis of language use than the level of language. In the second part of the paper we present our concept of linguaging, in particular polylinguaging. We use the level of (linguistic) features as the basis for understanding language use, and we claim that features are socioculturally associated with “languages”. Both features individually and languages are socioculturally associated with values, meanings, speakers, etc. This means that we can deal with the connection between features and languages. In the paper we do so.

### Real-life Language Use

In this section we present examples of observed language use among youth in a superdiverse environment. To demonstrate the advantages of using linguistic features (and not languages) as the analytical level we describe the linguistic behaviors of young speakers in metropolitan Copenhagen. We show how concepts of languages or “ways of speaking” become meaningful to them, and we show how a feature-based approach to the analysis of behaviors contributes to our understanding of social processes happening in the interaction involving the young speakers.

Example 1, Facebook-conversation between three Danish girls (in the translation we have marked the associations of the features with “languages” as follows: *English in italics*, standard Danish in recte, youth Danish underlined, **other language in bold**):

Maimuna 13:45: har købt the equipment, skal bare finde tid til at lave en spektakulær én kun tje dig morok, den skal være speciel med ekstra spice :P, sorry tar mig sammen denne weekend! insAllah

translation: have bought *the equipment*, must just find the time to make a spectacular one just **for** you **morok**, it must be special with extra *spice* :P, *sorry* pull myself together this (weekend)! **insAllah**

Ayhan 15:20: gracias muchas gracias!! jeg wenter shpæændt gardash ;-)) love youuu...

translation: **gracias muchas gracias!** I am waiting excitedly **gardash** ;-)) *love youuu...*

İlknur 23:37: Ohhh Maimuna, Du havde også lovet mig en skitse... Og du sagde, at det ville været efter eksamener, men??? Still waiting like Ayhan, and a promise is a promise :D :D:D

translation: *Ohhh* (Maimuna), You had also promised me a sketch... And you said, that it would be after exams,

but??? *Still waiting like Ayhan, and a promise is a promise* .D :D:D

In example 1 three girls (all successful university students) discuss a promise which Maimuna, who is quite a bit of an artist, has made to Ayhan and İlknur. She has promised to provide drawings for the other girls. In the immediately preceding context they have begun to criticize her (in a very low key way) for not providing the drawings. The first line in example 1 is Maimuna’s reaction to this. Maimuna uses several words which are English (i.e. which are conventionally associated with the sociocultural construction labelled English), and there are several words which are Danish. Some of these words are standard Danish, but other words appear in forms which are not standard Danish. For instance, the spelling “tje” corresponds to a pronunciation (of the word usually spelled “til”) which has developed among young Copenhagen speakers in recent years. Besides indexing youth Danish the feature may index stylized Turkish accent in Danish. Among Danish second language scholars the feature has traditionally been considered typical of Turkish-accented pronunciation of Danish words beginning with a “t-”. On the other hand the feature has also been documented as spreading among young Copenhageners regardless of ethnicity (Maegaard 2007). When we asked the girls about the feature in this context, whether it was one or the other, their answer was that it was both.

In addition Maimuna uses the word “morok” which historically is an old Armenian word “moruk” (“old man, father”) which has been integrated (“borrowed”) into Turkish (Türk Dil Kurumu 1988) meaning the same. The feature is here further “borrowed” by Maimuna, who does not speak Turkish, to address a close friend, roughly as in “you old geezer”. She closes her line with the Arabic “insAllah”.

In her answer Ayhan first uses words associated with Spanish, and then continues with words spelled in a way that reflects young Copenhagen speech. Next she uses the word “gardash”, an adapted version of the Turkish word “kardeş” which means “sibling”. Among young urban speakers in Denmark it means “friend”. The last

line, Ilknur's contribution, is partly associated with Danish, partly with English, both in vocabulary and in grammar.

It makes little sense to classify this exchange as belonging to one or the other language. It makes no more sense to try to count the number of "languages" involved. There is a gradual shift in association and meaning from Armenian "moruk" to young Copenhagen "morok", and there are several overlaps, for instance between standard Danish and young Copenhagen Danish, such as the words "skal være" ("must be"), and "gardash" can not very easily be classified anywhere.

If we attempted to analyze this short exchange at the level of "languages" we would run into a number of difficulties. Firstly, we could not without quite substantial preparations determine what languages to account for. Would "youth Danish" be one language, separate from "Danish with an accent" and "standard Danish"? We would have to distinguish somehow. Otherwise we would miss some of the crucial meanings of the exchange. Secondly, we would have a hard time determining how many languages are represented. Thirdly, some features would be difficult to categorize in any given language. This exchange can not be analyzed at the level of "languages" or "varieties" without important loss of its content. On the other hand, we can not and should not either discard the level of "languages" as irrelevant. The analysis of features must involve if and how the features are associated with one or more "languages".

That features are not always categorizable in one or more given "languages" can be seen in example 2.

Example 2, Grade 8 group conversation from the Køge Project (Jørgensen 2010), (Danish in recte, **other language in bold**):

- Michael: hvor er der noget lim hernede et eller andet sted.  
 translation: where is there some glue somewhere here?  
 Esen: **eine limesteife** [pronounced as li:mestajfe]  
 translation: **a gluestick**

In the exchange in example 2, Michael asks for glue or paste. Esen answers with the construction "eine limesteife". The word "eine" is associated with German, and this is quite straightforward. However, the word "limesteife" is not associated with any language or variety (that we know of). The element "lim" pronounced with a long high front vowel ([i:]) equals the Danish-associated word for "glue", and the middle -e- may also be associated to Danish as many compounds associated with Danish have an -e attached to the first element as a compound marker. This is not the case of the word "lim", however. In addition, the element "steife" is not associated with Danish, and neither with German in any sense that would give an immediately accessible meaning here. It may sound like a German word to the Danish ear, but not to the German ear. This feature does not lend itself to being categorized in any "language". The word "limesteife" indexes "German" to a Danish person. It would be a possible member of the set of features which a Dane could construct as "German". However, it is highly unlikely to be designated as a member of a set of features constructed by a German as "the German language". It is nonetheless possible to analyze it, to find a meaning in the context precisely because we analyze at the level of features.

These examples could mislead to the idea that speakers do whatever comes to their minds without any inhibitions. This is not the case (as Rampton 1995 shows). Even the young, creative speakers with access to a wide range of resources will carefully observe and monitor norms, and uphold them with each other. In the Amager Project (Madsen et al. 2010) we have collected written descriptions by the young informants, about their relations to language. This material has revealed a vast range of attitudes, insights, descriptions of practices – and norms. A strong norm is expressed by a 15-year old boy in example 3.

Example 3, Grade 8 written assignment from the Amager Project by a minority boy [the word *perker* is a controversial term for a minority member, particularly Moslem]:

*Efter perkersprog skal kun "perker" snakke som de snakker*

*På grund af det vil være mærkeligt hvis nogle dansker med dansk baggrund hvis du forstår hvad jeg mener, talte perkersprog, men (danskere) som er født i en bolig blok med (perkere) må sådan set godt tale det sprog*

Translation:

After perker language only "perker" should speak as they do.

Because it would be awkward if some Danes with a Danish background if you understand what I mean, spoke perker language, but (Danes) who are born in a housing block with (perkers) are in fact allowed to speak that language

This statement assigns the right of use of *perker language* to two specific groups, one the *perkers* themselves, the other one "Danes" who happen to live in areas which are stereotypically seen to

house a relatively high share of minority members. Others are not accepted as users of *perker language*. We know from the Amager Project (Madsen et al. 2010: 92-97) that this is an enregistered concept which is seen as an opposite to *integrated speech*. Integrated speech represents an academically oriented, upscale culture, and also politeness and adult speech. The opposite, alternately labelled as *perker language*, *ghetto language*, and other terms represents street-wisdom, minority membership, and youth. The students give many examples of features which they associate with each of these two ways of speaking. Some of the features associated with *perker language* are typically described as loans from minority languages such as Arabic, Urdu, and Turkish. In example 4 we observe a majority member using precisely such a feature.

Example 4, Facebook exchange involving grade 9 students from the Amager Project. Original comments on the left hand side, translations on the right hand side of the page.

#### Example 4



Have shaved myself

HAHAHAHAHA... then you have no more shaarkkk left :D

hehehe

Then you just need to teach it to [name]

:OO that was diiis :P

Hahahahaha lol cracking.. :)

Oh him [name] Tries to be a Perker Hahaahhaha Cracking :D

Yeah I'm a really cool gangster, cough, cough :D

[name] your dog kill you

Source: Amager Project



In the first line a minority boy announces that he has shaved himself (a contentious issue among teenage boys). A majority boy reacts with a comment which signals loud laughter, and adds “then you have no more shaarkkk left” followed by an emoticon. The use of the word *shark* (English ‘hair’) is found elsewhere in the Amager material, and it is cited as an example of *perker language*, being a loan from Arabic. The fact that this feature is used by a majority boy does not go unnoticed by the participants. Another minority member adds a few lines later that “[the name of the majority boy] tries to be a perker” followed by laughter and the comment “cracking [up]”. The relatively gentle reaction leads the majority boy to a self-ironic remark: “yeah, I’m a really cool gangster” followed by “cough, cough”, a reference to a cliché way of expressing doubt or scepticism.

In example 4 we see references to the norm that was overtly formulated in example 3. The sanction following the majority boy’s use of language to which he is not entitled, is mild compared to other kinds of sanctions. But both interlocutors show that they are aware of the norm and react accordingly. Polylinguaging (the use of resources associated with different “languages” even when the speaker knows very little of these, see below) is frequent among these informants, but it is not a free-for-all.

### Language and Languages

In this section we suggest that the concepts of different “languages” are sociocultural constructs, and we suggest a different understanding of the human activity of using language, based on features.

Over the past decades sociolinguists have increasingly questioned the traditional, structural concept of languages. The idea of separate languages as bounded systems of specific linguistic features belonging together and excluding other linguistic features is found to be insufficient to capture the reality of language use, at least in late modern superdiverse societies, and perhaps altogether. Instead the concepts of languages as separable entities are seen as sociocultural constructions which certainly are

important, but rarely represent real-life language use.

A critical understanding of the delineability of separate languages is not new. It has long been realized that it is not possible, on the basis of linguistic criteria, to draw clear borders between languages such as German and Dutch (see, e.g., Romaine 1994: 136), or for that matter, between what is thought of as separate dialects of the same language (e.g., Andersen 1969: 22). Hudson (1996: 24) concludes that “it may be extremely hard to identify varieties corresponding even roughly to traditional notions”.

The recent critical discussion of the concept of languages as separate and separable sets of features takes this insight further and sees the idea of individual languages as based on linguistic normativity, or ideology, rather than real-life language use. According to Makoni & Pennycook (2006: 2) “languages do not exist as real entities in the world and neither do they emerge from or represent real environments; they are, by contrast, the inventions of social, cultural and political movements”. These sociocultural movements are generally taken to coincide with the nationalist ideologies which developed in Europe in the 1700’s (Heller 2007: 1). Makoni & Pennycook find that the concept of “a language” is a European invention, and one that Europeans have imposed on colonized peoples in other parts of the world. They observe that many names for languages have been invented by Europeans, not by those to whom the languages were ascribed.

While it is interesting at one level to observe simply that the names for these new entities were invented, the point of greater significance is that these were not just new names for extant objects (languages pre-existed the naming), but rather the invention and naming of new objects (Makoni & Pennycook 2006: 10).

Heller (2007: 1) explicitly argues “against the notion that languages are objectively speaking whole, bounded, systems”, and she prefers to understand language use as the phenomenon that speakers “draw on linguistic resources which are organized in ways that make sense

under specific social circumstances". Blommaert (2010: 102) similarly refers to "resources" as the level of analysis. He observes that "[s]hifting our focus from 'languages' (primarily an ideological and institutional construct) to resources (the actual and observable ways of using language) has important implications for notions such as 'competence'". There are indeed a range of consequences to be drawn from that shift, for concepts such as "speech community", "native speaker", and "bilingualism", to mention a few key concepts in sociolinguistics. We return to that below.

The insight of current sociolinguistics is then that "languages" as neat packages of features that are closely connected and exclude other features, are sociocultural constructions that do not represent language use in the real world very well. This insight must of course be extended to *any* set package of features, regardless of the term used for such a package. Rather than being natural objects, comprising readily identifiable sets of features, "dialects", "sociolects", "registers", "varieties", etc. are sociocultural constructions exactly as "languages" are.

We realize that it makes sense to talk about "language", but not necessarily about "a language", at least if we want to base our distinctions on linguistic features. This does not mean that sociolinguistics can not work with the concept of separate "languages". There are good reasons to account for the ways in which "languages" are constructed, and what the consequences of the constructions are. A view of human language which allows categorization of "different languages" considers language as a range of phenomena which can be separated and counted. This is reflected in the terminology used to describe individual language users. Without much consideration words such as "monolingual", "bilingual", and "multilingual" are used to characterize individuals with respect to their relationship to "languages". This terminology is based on the assumption that "languages" can be counted: one, two, three, etc. Bailey (2007) comments on this in his "heteroglossic" approach to language.

approaching monolingualism and bilingualism as socially constructed does not change their social force at the level of lived experience, but it does show that this social force is not a function of formal, or inherent linguistic differences among what counts as languages (Bailey 2007: 271)

Languages are socioculturally, or ideologically, defined, not defined by any objective or observable criteria, in particular not by criteria based on the way language is used, neither by criteria based on who are the users of "the language". The idea of "a language" therefore may be important as a social construct, but it is not suited as an analytical level of language practices. This means that whatever term we use for a concept of a set of features, such a concept can not function as an analytical level with respect to the languaging (Jørgensen 2010) of real people, at least not in superdiversity. If we attempt to analyze language production at the level of separate languages, we will reach conclusions such as "this utterance is in language X", or "this stretch of speech code-switches between language X and language Y (and perhaps more)". Firstly this will prevent us from dealing with language production which can not be ascribed to any individual "language". Secondly, we will inevitably simplify the range of resources employed by speakers, as shown in the analyses of the examples above.

This insight also means that people are unlike to use "pure" language. There are many relevant criteria on which a choice of linguistic features is made by a given speaker under given circumstances. These criteria do not only include with what "language" the features are associated. The features' associations with values, speakers, places are just as important - and they are involved in complex indexicality (see below) just like the association between feature and "language".

### Linguistic Features

In the concept of language we use here the central notion is not that of *a* language, but language as such. We suggest that the level of linguistic features, and not the level of "language", is better suited for the analysis of languaging in superdiverse societies (if not everywhere). Speakers

use features and not languages. Features may be associated with specific languages (or specific categories which are called languages). Such an association may be an important quality of any given feature, and one which speakers may know and use as they speak. Gumperz' (1982: 66) concepts of "we-code" and "they-code" point to that relationship. Minority speakers' use of features associated with their minority language as a "we-code", i.e. the code which is in opposition to majority language, signifies values such as solidarity and closeness. The features associated with the minority language *index* these values. Indexing values is one important type of indexicality.

The notions of "varieties", "sociolects", "dialects", "registers", etc. may appear to be useful categories for linguists. They may indeed be strategic, ideological constructs for power holders, educators, and other gatekeepers (Jørgensen 2010, Heller 2007). However, what speakers actually use are linguistic features as semiotic resources, not languages, varieties, or lects (Jørgensen 2004, 2008, Møller 2009). It is problematic if sociolinguistics habitually treats these constructs as unquestioned facts. Blommaert & Backus (2011) have proposed the term "repertoires" for the set of resources which the individual commands or "knows". Although they still refer to "languages" in the traditional sense (for "didactic" reasons, Blommaert & Backus 2011: 2), they also work analytically at the level of features, in their terminology: resources.

Whether or not a particular word, combination or pattern actually exists as a unit in the linguistic knowledge of an individual speaker is dependent on its degree of *entrenchment*. 'Having' a unit in your inventory means it is entrenched in your mind (Blommaert & Backus 2011: 6)

A consequence of the attention paid to the ideological character of the construction of "languages" would be giving up the focus on identifying varieties in observed language use and the insistence on naming observed behaviors among real-life language users, for instance as it has happened in the discussions about names for the developing youth styles in European cities (see Madsen 2008, a similar criticism is offered by Jaspers 2007, see also Androutsopoulos 2010).

Instead, sociolinguistic descriptions of language use could fruitfully include a focus on the use of linguistic resources and how they come to be associated with particular social values and meanings. Blommaert (2008, 2010) points out that such values are not easy to transport, for instance in connection with migration. Value associations do not travel well. For instance, values associated with "English", "Turkish", and "Danish" by the local majorities in London, Lefkosia, Ankara, and Copenhagen, are probably very different. In addition the value associations may not last very well. Values (and meanings) are susceptible to challenges, re-valuation or even opposition. In other words they are highly negotiable.

The linguistic aspect of the ideological understanding of "separate languages" is a multitude of separate sets of linguistic features. "German" is thought of as all the features, i.e. words, regularities, etc. which are assumed to comprise "the German language", and so forth, with up to 5,000 or more "languages". The features belonging to each set are seen as particularly closely related, for instance as a set of words in the vocabulary of "a language". This vocabulary excludes words belonging to other sets of features (with the possible exception of loan words from "other languages"). The idea of "learning a language" means that speakers acquire a range of these features (both words and grammar). However, human beings do not learn "languages" in this sense. People primarily learn and use linguistic features. While they learn these features they mostly also learn how they are associated with specific sociocultural constructions called "languages". Schools all over the world offer classes with the label "English". What students learn in these classes is by political or sociocultural definition "English". This term turns out to be at best fuzzy if we try to define it as a set of linguistic features or resources (Pennycook 2007), but it makes sense to both students and teachers. These associations between "languages" and features which are gradually becoming "entrenched" in the minds of the students mean that the features are also becoming entrenched *as* features of "English".

### Features and Associations

In this section and the next we take up some of the ways in which features are associated with languages on the one hand, and meanings and values on the other hand. Features are associated directly, as features, with values, but they are also indirectly associated with values by being associated with “languages”. This is because the “languages” are themselves associated with values. It is a crucial point that these associations are fluid and negotiable. There are many other associations with language, for instance with places and times, but we do not go into detail with them.

Learning “a language” is then, with the statements we have made this far, of course impossible in a purely linguistic understanding. One can learn a number of features associated with a specific sociocultural construction, for instance “Spanish”. Since there is no linguistic way to determine precisely what is “Spanish”, schools can not devise a criterion by which their students can be classified as “having learnt Spanish” or having failed to “learn Spanish”. To overcome this obstacle, decision makers in education usually select a number of features which they associate with “Spanish”. The students are tested whether they have entrenched these features the same way as certain official documents require. If so, they are constructed by the authorities as “having learnt Spanish”. If not, they are classified as having failed to. Blommaert & Backus (2011: 4) present a scathing criticism of these practices: “Such practices and methods have met debilitating and crippling criticism from within the profession [...]; yet they remain unaffected and attract more and more support among national and supra-national authorities”. There is an important sociolinguistic task in studying how and what features become elevated this way, and what features are relegated, from for example “Spanish” in schools.

The passing of tests in “Spanish” provides the students with a claim to be in a position with respect to Spanish which allows them to say “I speak Spanish”. Such a position is greatly valued in some places, and it is therefore potentially socially translatable into power and positions

(see more below about the positioning of individuals in relation to “languages”).

The value associated with “learning Spanish” is usually not the same as the value associated with “learning Greenlandic”. As pointed out, values do not travel well, and they are negotiable. It is safe to assume, however, that in most parts of the world more value would be associated with “having learnt Spanish” than with “having learnt Greenlandic”. The Arctic is of course a notable exception, and so are specific other contexts and special places such as the North Atlantic culture house and its human environment in Copenhagen, or perhaps certain academic circles. Our point here is that under any given circumstances “languages” are associated with values, and the use of features associated with a language may index the associated value - as Gumperz describes it. But not only “languages” are associated with values. Individual features are also (see also Hudson 1996: 22).

Linguistic features appear in the shape of units and regularities (Blommaert & Backus’ “word, combination or pattern”). Units are words, expressions, sounds, even phonetic characteristics such as rounding. Regularities are traditionally called “rules”, but they are not rules in the legal sense, or even the normative sense. They are regularities of how units are combined into larger units in processes through which the larger units become associated with meanings.

A consequence of this view of linguistic regularities is that there is no such thing as inherently correct language. Correctness is social convention about the characteristics of specific linguistic features. Correctness has nothing to do with the linguistic characteristics of features - correctness is ascribed to the features by (some) speakers. The notion of “correct language” may index specific features in (at least) two different ways. A feature may be “correct” in the sense that it is used in the way that it is used by speakers who are considered “native” speakers of the given language (more about native speakers below). If a feature is used which “native” speakers would not use, or in a way that “native” speakers would not use it, the feature is by this social convention “incorrect”, and it indexes non-belonging.



The other widely assumed meaning of “incorrect” is that it denotes a use of a feature which violates “the rules of the language” (which people who think of themselves and each others as “native” speakers of a given language do again and again with the very language they think of as their “mother tongue”, but that is beside the point here). The assumption is based on the notion of languages as packages of features which comprise certain features and exclude all others. When it comes to concrete features, the features which are specifically associated with speakers of low education or low socioeconomic status (or with speakers who are categorized as non-native) are typically considered “incorrect”.

### Speakers and Associations

In this section we describe how “languages” are associated with specific speakers, or groups of speakers, and conversely how individuals can position themselves vis-à-vis “languages”. It follows from this and the previous section that features can similarly become associated with individuals.

Speakers ascribe different values to features, some features are “vulgar” or “ugly”, whereas others are “posh” or “poetic”. Some features are “primitive”, others “sophisticated”. Speakers also associate “languages”, “dialects”, etc. with specific other people. A given feature associated with a “variety” will then index these speakers, and possibly a number of values. An addental s-pronunciation is stereotypically associated with superficial teenage girls, or with male homosexuality. This is not, of course, a given association. Maegaard (2007) has demonstrated how the use of addental s-pronunciation may also index oppositional, streetwise, minority masculinity. The values associated with the features - and the “varieties” - are negotiable and context-dependent.

The values ascribed to sets of features may easily develop into stereotypical characters, such as the (Hollywood-propelled) stereotypes of German as rough and rude and Russian representing jovial peasantry. The use of (Hollywood) German may therefore be used precisely to index roughness, to stylize (Coupland 2007) someone

as rough and rude. Such ascriptions are also context-dependent. In the tradition among Danes Norwegian stereotypically indexes happy-go-lucky naivety, and this is indeed possible under many circumstances. However, Norwegian may also index Scandinavian brotherhood. The association in a given context is determined by that context (in a wider sense).

Speakers also position each other in relation to “languages”. Terms such as “Greenlandic mother tongue speaker” and “English learner” are such associations of people with “languages”. Social categorizations of speakers involve stereotypes about their relationship to specific “languages”. In some cases this relationship is (comparatively stable and) described with the term “native speaker”. In this way (and in other ways) concepts and terms of individual “languages” make sense as having relationships with individuals. The notion of “native speaker” denotes such a relation. A “native speaker” can claim a number of rights with respect to the “language” of which she or he is a “native speaker”. The “native speaker” of “a language” can claim to have “access” to that language, to have “ownership” of the language. He or she can claim legitimacy in the use of the language and can claim that the language “belongs” to her or him.

In varying degrees, *non-native* speakers can claim “access”, “ownership”, “legitimacy”, etc., depending on the acceptance by others of their “having learnt” the language. Such accept may be authoritative as happens through language proficiency exams, but the acceptance may also be negotiable and depend on the context.

This underlines the fact that such associations are socioculturally constructed. The “native speakers” of Danish is a group of people who by convention see themselves as native speakers of Danish - and exclude others from the category. In principle there is nothing in nature or the world that prevents, for instance, members of the Danish minority in Southern Schleswig to think of themselves as “native speakers” of Danish, and the members of the German minority in Northern Schleswig to think of themselves as “native speakers” of German. Some of them do in fact, and the minority schools on both sides of the

border treat their children as such. However, in the sociolinguistic literature the two groups are prime examples of minorities whose “mother tongues” are precisely *not* the “languages” associated with their cultural allegiance. The legitimacy of the claim of such groups is negotiable.

The legitimacy of categorizing other people as “native speakers” of Danish may also be negotiable. The then vice president of the Danish Social Democrats in an address to a party congress on September 13, 2000, claimed that: “If one is born and raised in Denmark and intends to stay here, then one’s mother tongue is Danish.” Such a statement’s face value is highly negotiable.

Leung et al. (1997: 555-556) suggest that the traditional concept of “native speaker” has been used with three relevant, but different perspectives (see also Rampton 1990: 100 and Rampton 1995: 339-344), and that these perspectives substitute both the concept and the term. They suggest a perspective “language expertise”, i.e. people’s “ability in each of the posited languages”. Leung et al. are aware of the difficulties with this. In addition they suggest the perspective of “language affiliation”, i.e. people’s “sense of affiliation to any of the languages allegedly within their repertoire”. Finally Leung et al. suggest “language inheritance”, and they ask “Does membership in an ethnic group mean an automatic language inheritance?”, and they characterize such an assumption as “unsafe”. However, as Harris (2006) shows, speakers may indeed “inherit” a language in the sense that they think of the language as “their” language - and at the same time they may regret they “do not know their language”. So, regardless of what perspective we choose, we find that the relationship between an individual and a language is a socio-cultural construction. It is negotiable, and it may become the object of political power struggles (for a discussion of “native speaker”, see Jørgensen 2010).

### Features and Use

Below we emphasize that speakers may use whatever features are at their disposal without regard to norms of linguistic purity. “Purity” is a notion that may involve both an idea of language

use which only includes features associated with one and the same language and an idea of language use which avoids certain features which are considered “impure” or “improper” or “incorrect” in and by themselves. This means that one can violate the purity ideal both by using “foreign” stuff and by using “dirty” stuff. Speakers know the widespread mainstream ideals of “pure” language, but do not live up to them, as demonstrated in the examples above.

In particular, there is nothing in the nature of language that prevents speakers from combining in the same stretch of speech features which are associated with Greenlandic, Tagalog, and Cree. It is entirely possible, and speakers constantly produce speech of such kind (although not often with this combination). However, there are other reasons why speakers refrain from using forms they have access to and may even have “entrenched”. Just as speakers are thought to have “rights” to specific “languages” or “varieties”, there are also people who are thought not to have these rights - all depending on context. This means that speakers may meet and store (“entrench”) features which are in most, if not all, contexts believed to “belong” to others. The “access” may not be restricted, but the usability is. Teachers generally have access to youth language in this sense, but they can only use it as stylization - and preferably flagged. Rampton (1995) describes in detail such a set of rights and options in a group of adolescents.

“The term ‘language crossing’ (or ‘code-crossing’) refers to the use of a language which isn’t generally thought to ‘belong’ to the speaker. Language crossing involves a sense of movement across quite sharply felt social or ethnic boundaries, and it raises issues of legitimacy that participants need to reckon with in the course of their encounter” (Rampton 1998: 291)

O’Rourke & Aisling (2007) describe how Irish university students of Irish Gaelic who consider themselves “native speakers” develop a problematic relationship with fellow students of Irish Gaelic who are not accepted as “native speakers”. Conflicts sometimes lead the “native speakers” to refuse the use of Irish Gaelic to the other group.

“There’s an image that native speakers project, that they have better Irish than you and they speak English back to you. They know that you learned Irish” (O’Rourke & Aisling 2007: 7).

To take stock: Individual linguistic features are taken to be representatives of sets of features. Speakers refer to these socio-culturally constructed sets of features as “languages” (or “dialects”, etc.). Educational systems similarly refer to the teaching of language as “teaching of languages”. It is by now a trivial observation that this does not represent the reality of language use. Nevertheless, language behavioral norms which are firmly enforced by school systems, media gatekeepers, and other powerful forces emphasize linguistic purity, or so-called “monolingual” behavior at all times: Individuals may be so-called “multilinguals”, but their behavior at any given time should be “monolingual”.

### **Norms of Language Behavior**

In this section we describe the different norms of behavior with respect to “different languages” which are oriented to by speakers. We characterize most norms as ideologically based and unable to account for language use as observed in the examples above. We suggest the term polylinguaging, i.e. the use of features associated with different “languages” even when speakers know only few features associated with (some of) these “languages” as a term for the practices in the examples.

Until the rise of sociolinguistics in the 1960’s code-switching was generally considered deviant linguistic behavior, and bilingual individuals were thought of, and described as imperfect language users. The corresponding characterization of a bilingual person often applied in educational discussions is that of a “double semi-lingual”, i.e. a person who is described as not knowing any language “fully”, but having only two “half” languages (Hansegaard 1968).

This leads us to the norms of bilingual behavior, as we can observe them in society, including schools. In public debates, and definitely in the schools’ teaching, one meets a strong norm of bilingual behavior, the so-called double monolingualism norm. This norm is the basic norma-

tive idea about bilingual individuals, i.e. double monolinguals. It is impossible to disentangle this view from the ideologically constructed view of “a language” as a unique and separate set of features. Only with this concept is it possible to maintain the double (or multiple) monolingualism norm.

*The (double or multiple) monolingualism norm:* “Persons who command two (or more) languages should at any given time use one and only one language, and they should use each of their languages in a way that does not in principle differ from the way in which monolinguals use that same language.”

According to the double monolingualism norm, any language should be spoken “purely”, i.e. without being mixed with another language. This is obviously a notion which can be met not only among the general public, but also among some linguists. To give just one example: David-son-Nielsen & Herslund 1999, two language professors whose first sentence runs (in my translation): “The Danish language suffers from the English Disease”, a pun on the popular term for rachitis, i.e., “engelsk syge”, and the paper goes on to lament the use of English loans in Danish, especially among the youth.

In many real life situations we can observe how speakers follow a completely different norm of bilingual behavior. They may code-switch between utterances, in the middle of utterances, sometimes in the middle of a single word, and they may switch back again. It is of course possible to talk about “code-switching” even with our critical view of the traditional concept of “code” - a code-switch is the juxtaposition of features associated with different codes when both producer and recipient of the resulting complex sign are in a position to understand this juxtaposition as such (cf. Auer 1995: 116). Speakers use features belonging to the different languages they “know” (i.e. which are ideologically constructed and normatively considered to be different languages or possibly dialects) without paying attention to any of the monolingualism norms (even though they may at other times carefully follow a monolingualism norm). Such behavior has led to a differently based norm of

language choice behaviors, the multilingualism norm.

*The bilingualism (or multilingualism) norm:* "Persons who command two (or more) languages will employ their full linguistic competence at any given time adjusted to the needs and the possibilities of the conversation, including the linguistic skills of the interlocutors."

In this understanding bilingualism (or multilingualism) becomes a resource which involves more than the skills of using one language in some situations, and other languages in other situations. Bilingualism is more than the sum of competence in one language plus competence in one more language. It also involves competence in switching between the languages. Multilingualism is similarly considered integrated when speakers in their linguistic behavior uses the codes which they somehow "know".

The systematic introduction of features from languages which the speakers do *not* "know" was first described in detail by Rampton (1995). With this we move one step further away from a *Reinheitsgebot* and on to even closer combination of linguistic features.

The Australian speaker who uses a Scots English accent for his refusal to lend a friend money stylizes herself or himself and thus contributes to shape the interlocutor's understanding of the situation and the message. The use of features from languages one does not "know" is not restricted to urban late modern youth, although the examples we have analyzed here involve only such individuals, and most current sociolinguistic studies of such behaviors do in fact focus on urban youth. In this case we assume that the Australian speaker is not very competent in Scots English. At least the exchange is possible without very much Scottish competence on either side. We can all refer to stereotypes by adding just a bit of dialect, sociolect, style, etc. to any utterance. We can also invoke values ascribed to languages, such as the widely associated value of Latin as the language of the learned.

Such behavior follows the *polylinguaging* norm which is different from the multilingualism norm we described above. The multilingualism norm takes it for granted that the speakers have

a minimum of command of the involved languages. With the multilingualism norm follows the concept of "a language" which assumes that languages can be separated also in use, and in this view it is also possible to determine whether an individual "knows" a language or "has" a language. The term multilingual covers the (more or less "full") command of several languages, whereas the term polylinguaging also allows for the combination with features ascribed to other languages, such as described by Rampton.

*The polylingualism norm:* "Language users employ whatever linguistic features are at their disposal to achieve their communicative aims as best they can, regardless of how well they know the involved languages; this entails that the language users may know - and use - the fact that some of the features are perceived by some speakers as not belonging together."

In other words, the behaviors we documented in the analyses of examples 1 through 4 above can be characterized as polylinguaging. The different types of associations contribute to the formation of language norms, i.e. the social expectations with respect to language use that speakers administer to each other, and the rights of language use which people assign to each other. The balance of rights and norms contributes to the uneven access to resources which is also characteristic of late modern superdiverse society. This balance regulates the behaviors of speakers much more than traditional norms of "pure" language, which are routinely violated by speakers who use features they have access to without regard to monolingualism norms, but with a very acute sense of rights and values associations. All of this means that polylinguaging is not a free-for-all. Firstly, certain ways of speaking are not available to some speakers. The uneven distribution of linguistic features among different population groups is frequently accompanied by an uneven distribution of other resources, and the resources accessible to the few tend to become highly valued by educational systems, gate keepers, and otherwise in power centers. Secondly, resources which are available to speakers in the sense that the features are used around them every day may not be at the

service of all of them. If features are associated with a specific group of speakers, this group is also typically seen to have the right to deny others the active use of the given features. In other words, normativity influences linguistic practices in more than one dimension.

### Conclusions

Now let us return to our analyses of the examples 1-4 above. These analyses of language practices make sense, in other words, because they are based at the level of features. Such analysis includes how features are associated with languages, and how these languages are associated with values in the given context. The analysis accounts for any ascription of values to the individual features when such ascription is independent of the ascription of value to the given language. Furthermore, the analysis accounts for the ways in which features and the languages they are associated with, are positioned with respect to (groups of) speakers, and the analysis accounts for the ways in which speakers involved in the given interaction are positioned by themselves and each other with respect to the languages which are being relevant in the interaction (by being used or avoided). All of these lines of analysis take into account that the described associations are dynamic and negotiable. We would be hard pressed to obtain similar insights if we insist on analyzing at the level of "languages" (or "dialects", "varieties", "registers", etc.)

This being said, there is no doubt that the concept of "national languages" is very strong. It is a political fact. The European educational systems would break down overnight, if they were forced to teach language the way people really use language. (This is not only true for language choice patterns: another important linguistic phenomenon is swearing which has rarely, if ever, been taught in schools, but which is nevertheless frequent among real life language users, and which develops and changes just like other patterns of language use). The concept of national languages also has political implications. Some nations (Denmark is an example) prescribe language testing of applicants for citizenship, and interestingly enough such testing can be car-

ried out by amateurs whose only skill is that they "know" the language (for instance, police employees without the slightest trace of training in language assessment, see Fogtman 2007). It seems to be considered self-evident that if you "know" a language, then you can also judge whether other people "know" it. This amounts to a sweeping categorization of large groups of people with respect to specific "languages".

The concept of "languages" as separate and bounded packages also pervades everyday life. The way we, including sociolinguists in everyday conversations, speak about language, language learning, and language behavior is heavily influenced by the concept. If we want to describe language and go beyond this concept, we are sometimes forced into cumbersome expressions, of which we have used a few here (such as "a word, which is generally taken to be English" and not "an English word"). In other cases we have just taken it for granted that the reader would understand our point. For instance, we have said about Maimuna that "she does not speak Turkish". It should now be clear that by this we mean that she "does not (know or) use (very many) features which are generally associated with Turkish (and particularly not grammatical ones)". The traditional way of understanding what "languages" are, is not on its way out. But it gives us problems, precisely because it is unclear how it relates to the behavior of real people in the real world. One thing is socially constructed norms, another is individual behavior.

It follows from our observations that language is both individual and social. Language is individual in the sense that - as far as we know - no two people share precisely the same features, because they have met and now remember exactly the same words and meanings, the same pronunciations, associate the same meaning with everything, etc. For all we know about language, it is individual. On the other hand, language is also social - in the sense that every feature we do "know" or "possess", we share with somebody else. We can not imagine a linguistic feature which is unique to one person (with the possible exception of an innovation which has still not been used by the innovator in interaction



with others), the very basis of language is that it enables us to share experience, images, etc. Our relations to the socioculturally constructed phenomena called “languages”, etc, are thus social categorizations, not naturally given relations, and certainly not a consequence of the nature of language.

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