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'All the people speak bad English': Coping with language differences in a super-diverse context

Susanne Wessendorf

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a surge in studies on immigration-related diversity and, more specifically, super-diversity. This paper gives an overview of recent academic debates on encounters in super-diverse urban contexts, drawing on theories which have focused on interactional principles in such urban spaces. These include the notion of 'civility' as well as theories which look at cosmopolitanism in its everyday practice. Drawing on an ethnographic study undertaken by the author in the London Borough of Hackney, the paper presents examples of how language differences are skilfully bridged in public-space social interactions, for example at markets or in shops. The paper also shows how language differentially influences the kinds of social relations people form when it comes to more intimate social relations, and how knowledge of English as well as cultural capital shape the way in which both long-term residents and newcomers form such closer social relations.

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Introduction

> I'm at a supermarket looking for a hair dryer. As I stand in front of the electronic household equipment, I observe an elderly Turkish woman asking a young white British shop assistant for advice. I hear him say: 'Do you understand?' She says, 'No, no English, only Turkish.' She takes her mobile phone out of her bag and calls someone, indicating to the shop assistant to wait. Once she has spoken to the other person on the phone, she hands the phone to him. The person on the phone now seems to be doing the translation, and the phone is being handed back and forth between the shop assistant and the Turkish woman. It seems completely normal for the assistant to deal with a customer via an interpreter over the phone. He is very friendly all through the interaction and seems in no way surprised about the translation service over the phone (Research diary, August 2008).

This is one of many social interactions which I have observed during my fieldwork in the London Borough of Hackney. The fact that the shop assistant is in no way surprised about the nature of this transaction exemplifies that linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity have become normal for Hackney's residents, a phenomenon I have conceptualized as 'commonplace diversity' (Wessendorf 2014). Importantly, the skilful way in which both the shop assistant and the costumer deal with the situation points to something more than just commonplace diversity, but to the existence of specific skills which facilitate communication across language as well as ethnic, national and religious differences. Such skills have been theorized in various ways, particularly in sociological literature on civility and anthropological literature on cosmopolitanism. These concepts have been developed before the demographic and conceptual emergence of super-diversity. The aim of this paper is to situate the concepts of civility and cosmopolitanism within a super-diverse context, with a particular focus on language. The second part of the paper looks at the interplay of national, ethnic, socio-economic and language differences in regard to more personal social relations and the formation of social milieus.

The paper first summarizes the emergence of the concept of super-diversity. This is followed by a discussion of theories which have focused on interactional principles in diverse urban spaces, specifically focussing on the notion of 'civility towards diversity' in a super-diverse context. I then go on to discuss cosmopolitan theories which look at cosmopolitanism in its everyday practice rather than as a worldview. I exemplify such theories with examples from public space where such practices are particularly relevant, especially when it comes to business transactions. I develop the notion of corner-shop cosmopolitanism, referring to the use of cosmopolitan skills among traders, especially in relation to language. While in public space and in the realm of trade, language and other differences are skilfully bridged in order to facilitate interactions, this is different when it comes to private social relations. The remainder of the paper deals with how, in a super-diverse context, language differentially shapes the kinds of social relations people form when it comes to friendships and more intimate social relations. By drawing on the concept of social milieus, I show how knowledge of English as well as cultural capital shape the way in which both long-term residents and newcomers form closer social relations.

This paper is based on an ethnographic study of social relations in the London Borough of Hackney during the period of 2008 and 2012, as well as an ongoing research project about recent immigration into the borough. Both projects consist of participant observation in local associations, such as

parents' groups, youth clubs and elderly people's clubs, and interviews with long-term residents and recent migrants of various backgrounds.

With its population of 257,379, Hackney figures among the 10% most deprived areas in the UK, but it is currently seeing the arrival of an increasing number of middle-class professionals of various nationalities. It is also one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in Britain, with only 36.2% of the population being white British. Since the 1950s, sizeable groups of immigrants from West Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia have arrived, followed by Turkish, Kurdish and Turkish Cypriot people in the 1970s and 80s (Arakelian 2007) and Vietnamese refugees in the late 1970s (Sims 2007). Among the biggest minority groups are Africans (11.4%), people of Caribbean background (7.8%), South Asians (6.4%), Turkish-speaking people (4.5%), Chinese (1.4%) and 'other Asian' (2.7% , many of whom come from Vietnam). 6.4% of the population identify as 'mixed'. 35.5 % of Hackney's total population are foreign-born, and they come from 58 different countries, ranging from Zimbabwe, Cyprus, Somalia, Iraq, Albania to Denmark, Germany, etc. Recently, there has been an increase in people from Eastern Europe, especially Poland (1.6%), and Spanish speakers from Latin America and Spain (1.5%). Other more recent countries of origin represented in the 2011 census include Australia, the United States, France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Japan and Brazil (London Borough of Hackney 2015).

The emergence of super-diversity research on the local level

The study of diversity has gained much attention in the last few years and in the context of the emergence of 'super-diversity'. Vertovec (2007b; see also Meissner & Vertovec 2015), who coined the term, has described how in the context of the 'diversification of diversity' (Hollinger 1995), we can find a multiplication of social categories within specific localities. These differentiations not only refer to an increase in different ethnic and migrant minorities, but also variations in migration histories, educational backgrounds, religions, legal statuses, length of residence and economic backgrounds, both among ethnic minorities and migrants as well as the majority population. While the notion of super-diversity has been picked up across various academic disciplines to describe these processes of differentiation and their consequences in urban settings across the world, the term 'diversity' has also seen an unprecedented proliferation in public and corporate language and discourse (Vertovec 2012). I here refer to 'diversity' in regard to 'multiple modes of social differentiation and fragmentation' which are 're-ordering society', economically, socially and culturally (ibid. 2012:308).

How do people communicate in such contexts of multiple differentiations? How do they bridge differences in language, religion, culture, socio-economic backgrounds, etc.? An increasing number of recent studies have looked at these questions on the local level, in super-diverse neighbourhoods where no majority group exists. These studies emerged in the context of the 'backlash against multiculturalism' in the 2000s (Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010) in reaction to events such as the riots in northern UK towns in 2001 and the 7 July 2005 terrorist attacks in London, and the resulting government discourse on 'parallel lives' and social cohesion (Cantle 2001; Home Office 2004). As described by Amin (2005) and Tyler and Jensen (2009), the policy shift on cohesion and interaction was closely related to an increasing academic interest in 'local communities'. It is in neighbourhoods where civic pride and responsibility, positive inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations and public

participation are to be fostered. Although neighbourhood studies have been an integral part of urban sociology and anthropology for several decades (see, among many others Baumann 1996; Bott 1957; Mitchell 1969; Young & Willmott 1957), these new studies have specifically looked at multi-group contexts within urban neighbourhoods. While they have shown the existence of both social separation and social interaction, they have primarily focussed on how and whether people interact across ethnic and religious differences, without including other categories of differentiation (Blokland 2003b; Jayaweera & Choudhury 2008; Ray et al 2008; Sanjek 1998; SHM 2007; Tyler & Jensen 2009).

Already in 1999, Stuart Hall spoke of 'creeping multiculturalism' which he conceptualizes as 'multicultural drift', meaning 'the increasing visible presence of black and Asian people in all aspects of British social life as a natural and inevitable part of the "scene"' (Hall 1999:188). He described this development as 'unintended outcome of undirected sociological processes' (Hall 1999:188).

In her historical review of Britain's diversification since the 1960s, Mica Nava shows how by the 1990s, 'race and cultural difference in the UK was normal and ubiquitous, even if not always accepted' (Nava 2007:12). She links this normalization of diversity with the concept of cosmopolitanism and emphasizes that this cosmopolitanism has emerged from a historical 'engagement with otherness and elsewheres in the local zones' (ibid. 2007:13).

> So the continuity not only of co-residence but of interaction, of mutual acknowledgement and desire, is what marks out domestic and vernacular cosmopolitanism, and, importantly, in the case of London today, does so not only for the one-in-four Londoners born abroad (Kyambi 2005) or for the many more whose parents were, but also for the several million native British subjects who inhabit the metropolis and take pleasure in its cultural mix (Nava 2007:13).

Thus, Hall (1999), Nava (2007) and an increasing number of other recent studies have shown the convivial nature of living in a super-diverse context and the ways in which people navigate super-diverse spaces in rather unremarkable or 'perhaps quite banal intercultural interaction' (Sandercock 2003:89; see also Noble 2009, Wise 2009). These studies somewhat deflate the assumption inherent in the discourse on cohesion that the simple co-presence of groups of different cultural backgrounds creates tensions and conflict.

Similarly in my study in Hackney, I have found that diversity has become commonplace. Rather than seeing diversity as something particularly special, it forms part of local residents' everyday lived reality and is not perceived as unusual. 'Commonplace diversity' does not mean that people are not aware of the diversity of the people around them, but they do not think that it is something unusual. Diversity has become habitual and part of the everyday human landscape, and linguistic, religious, ethnic, national, socio-economic and other differences are negotiated on a daily basis in myriad social encounters in public space (Wessendorf 2013a; 2014).

How can these routine interactions be conceptualized and studied? The following section looks at the notion of civility as a way of understanding such everyday interactions across differences, and how it can relate to language.

Civility in the context of diversity

Underlying the skills necessary to communicate with people who differ in terms of their educational, ethnic, religious or class background is what has also been described as 'civility towards diversity'. In her discussions on patterns of behaviour and social life in the public realm, Lofland (1989) defines 'civility towards diversity' as one of the main 'interactional principles'. This principle...

> ... specifies that in face-to-face exchanges, confronted with what may be personally offensive visible variations in physical abilities, beauty, skin colour and hair texture, dress style, demeanour, income, sexual preferences, and so forth, the urbanite will act in a civil manner, that is, will act 'decently' vis-à-vis diversity (Lofland 1989).

Importantly, Lofland states that this civility towards diversity does not necessarily imply a specific appreciation of diversity, but it means treating people universally the same, and it can emerge from indifference to diversity rather than from a specific appreciation of it. Boyd (2006:871) describes civility as a 'moral and sociological requirement'. In contexts where difference is experienced in intense proximity, civility is the lubricant that makes modern urban life possible (Boyd 2006:871).

Buonfino and Mulgan (2009) take the definition of civility a step further and describe it as a 'learned grammar of sociability'. They compare these grammars of sociability with language. Although we are born with the disposition to speak a language, we still have to learn how to speak, read and write. Similarly, civility is based on existing dispositions, but it also has to be learned and cultivated. In a super-diverse context, civility towards people who look, speak or behave differently is learned through everyday contact and interaction in a multiplicity of day-to-day social situations. This civility, or in Buonfino and Mulgan's words, these 'grammars of sociability', are important skills needed to get along in such a context, as most everyday transactions and conversations in public space take place with people of different backgrounds. Vertovec (2007a:33-34) describes the 'acquisition of these commonplace practices of getting-on with others' as a process of everyday 'civil-integration, whereby immigrants, ethnic minorities and members of the "host" or White majority mutually come to practice everyday principles of interaction and civility'.

Civility towards diversity is a feature of public-space interactions which I observed on a daily basis during my fieldwork (Wessendorf 2014). In the context of commonplace diversity, where so many people in the area come from elsewhere, civility towards diversity becomes part of everyday life. Goffman describes the nature of such interactions with the concept of 'facework', referring to necessary mutual respect and recognition in social interactions, no matter across what kinds of perceived group differences (Goffman 1972). What differentiates a super-diverse context from other contexts with less categorical groups is the amount of information available about 'the other', information which could facilitate knowledge about what to expect from the other in a specific social interaction (Goffman 1971). In a super-diverse context, the 'sign-vehicles' (Goffman 1971) available for understanding this information are much more complicated than in other contexts. Despite the presence of large minority groups in Hackney such as Turks, Nigerians, Ghanaians and people from the Caribbean, many of whom share similar socio-economic backgrounds, migration histories and legal statuses, there exists a large number of people who are much more difficult to label. For example, the Muslim woman with a headscarf and Moroccan dress whom I met at a primary school turns out to be a native Italian who had come to London as a student, married a Moroccan and

converted to Islam. Similarly, a black British Muslim nursery school teacher has her origins in Uganda, but her family is Christian and she is the only one in the family who converted to Islam.

One of my informants, a British woman in her 30s who came to Hackney from Northern England said that when you meet a new person in Hackney, you cannot take anything as 'a given'. This was exemplified at one of the drop-in sessions for parents with small children which I attended at a local Children's Centre. Of the 15 parents (primarily mothers) who attended the session, only one black British couple were native English speakers. The rest of us spoke different languages, noticeable in our conversations with our toddlers and babies. Although none of us spoke the same language, there was still plenty of communication happening by way of smiles, remarks about each other's children, help by way of handing each other aprons for the children, handing out snacks, etc. When I tried to initiate a conversation with a southern European looking mother, she apologetically signalled that she spoke no English at all, saying 'Turkish'. Despite being confined to a rather tight space and having to juggle a bunch of toddlers of varying walking/ crawling abilities, we all somehow managed to communicate with civility in order to facilitate a peaceful afternoon. At the same time, partly because of language barriers, communication did not go beyond the smiles and gestures mentioned above, and it was clear that we would each go home separately.

Another example of how language differences are met with skilful strategies of interaction and sometimes hospitality is that of a local knitting group for elderly women. The weekly group is attended by women who are over 50 and who come from various backgrounds, ranging from the Caribbean, to Nigeria, India, Cyprus, Yorkshire, Germany, etc. During the many months I attended the group, the origins of the participants was never an issue of conversation, and, in line with the phenomenon of commonplace diversity, people did not ask each other where they come from (in fact, they probably still do not know my country of origin, despite my accent). Only once did the diversity of origins among the knitters come up as an issue:

> There is a Spanish-speaking woman who attends a different class which starts a bit later than the knitting class. We are all sitting around a table in one of the classrooms, focussing on our work and chatting at the same time. As usual, the door towards the hallway is open in order to make everybody feel welcome. The Spanish-speaking woman walks past the classroom door, and the knitting teacher wants to invite her in. She asks if anyone of us speaks Spanish. One of the women gets up and heads towards the door. She says that she does not speak Spanish but that it does not matter. The teacher is surprised and, as the student heads towards the door, asks her where she's from, and she tells us that she is from Greece. Although she had joined the group several weeks earlier, and despite her accent, I had never heard anyone ask her about her origins. She approaches the Spanish-speaking woman and invites her in without needing any language, but by gesturing. When the newcomer joins us, one of the women says 'ahhhh Spanish! Viva l'España!'. She starts singing a song related to Spain, and the Greek woman joins in. They all laugh, and one of the women mentions the famous singer Julio Iglesias. The Spanish-speaking woman does not react much, which might be due to her old age or her disinterest in socialising with the other women. After these first few attempts to create a connection, the newcomer is left alone and everybody turns back to their knitting and their chats (Research diary, March 2009).

The interesting point about this interaction was that everybody in the group was very welcoming and seemed to find it completely normal that, despite language barriers, they somehow communicated anyways. They drew on their positive stereotypes about Spain, thereby trying to bridge the linguistic and cultural differences.

The examples of this knitting group as well as the playgroup show how the absence of what Lofland (1973) also describes as 'categoric knowing', can lead to a certain cosmopolitan pragmatism, where, in order to get along in a super-diverse (and tight) space, you cannot afford not to be civil towards people who are different. Also, if everybody around you comes from elsewhere, you end up treating everybody the same, independent of their possible background. One of my elderly British informants told me that you cannot treat people differently according to their backgrounds because almost everybody comes from elsewhere. She exemplifies how in the context of commonplace diversity, people develop the ability to cope with the insecurity of de-categorization when meeting strangers. In fact, the difficulty of categorizing strangers is what differentiates a super-diverse context from contexts of 'old diversity' characterized by the presence of more clearly defined large minority groups (Vertovec 2015).

The ability to cope with the insecurity of de-categorization, and the accumulated experiences of meeting strangers from a myriad of backgrounds, form an integral part of commonplace diversity. While people generally do not change their behaviour according to other people's backgrounds, I have observed how people attempt to speak more clearly when confronted with language barriers. However, part of commonplace diversity is that such language barriers are rarely encountered with surprise or resistance. For example, the shop assistant mentioned at the beginning of this paper did not find the translation service over the phone surprising in any way.

A Chilean informant of mine, Francisca, who came to Hackney two years ago, emphasised that her broken English was never a problem in Hackney. When I asked her whether, when she arrived, she liked the fact that there were people of so many backgrounds in Hackney, she answered as follows:

> F: Yes, yes, and all the people speak bad English, for me it was perfect [laughs], because my uncle that lives in the countryside [in Cambridgeshire] like [speaks] super English, said to me 'ahh if you speak bad English, people are not going to talk to you or you have to have a very good British accent blablabla', but I came here, all the people speak bad English, so I feel very comfortable, so that's nice because all the people have an accent and a lot of people don't speak English so I feel like phew, it's not strange to speak bad English

> S: and you don't feel like an outsider…

> F: No. That's the best thing of London, or of Hackney, that everyone is like a tourist, everyone speak bad English, everyone has an accent, that's nice.

Thus, in the context of commonplace diversity, various accents as well as broken English have become commonplace, too, and local residents are used to dealing with such linguistic varieties. Importantly, however, these competencies cannot be taken for granted. In their reflections on civility

as a 'learned grammar of sociability' Buonfino and Mulgan (2009) emphasize that communicating across differences, be they linguistic, cultural or religious, requires a specific effort on the part of the people involved. Although over time they might get internalised and become commonplace, as demonstrated with the examples above, they still require a certain willingness to communicate across differences. Such skills have also been conceptualized in the literature on cosmopolitanism. In the following section, I shortly introduce the theories on 'cosmopolitanism from below', referring to the adaptation to cultural diversity in everyday situations among both newcomers and long-established residents. I then develop the notion of corner-shop cosmopolitanism, demonstrating that the use of such cosmopolitan skills often takes place in business transactions.

Corner-shop cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism has gained much attention in the social sciences in light of globalization, the diversification of immigrant societies and increasing transnational movements across borders (Appiah 2010; Keith 2005; Vertovec & Cohen 2002). It has been broadly defined as a worldview characterized by 'willingness to engage with the other' (Hannerz 1992: 252). Such worldviews and attitudes were originally associated with well-travelled elites, but since the 1990s, an increasing number of studies have illustrated the existence of cosmopolitanism 'from below', for example, among labour migrants, a phenomenon also described as 'working-class cosmopolitanism' (Werbner 1999). This has also been conceptualized as 'banal' cosmopolitanism, a 'pragmatic orientation in which engaging with people and goods from other cultures is everyday practice' (Noble 2009:49). Lamont and Aksartova (2002) describe this as 'ordinary cosmopolitanism'. It is not limited to well-travelled elites, but takes on localized forms of intercultural negotiations between long established residents of various socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds and newcomers.

Vertovec (2009) differentiates between cosmopolitan attitudes or orientations on the one hand, and practices and skills on the other. Attitudes refer to Hannerz' description of 'openness towards others' quoted above. Cosmopolitan practices and skills are related to the adoption of cultural skills that facilitate communication and interaction with others, a phenomenon also described as 'multiple cultural competence' (Vertovec 2009: 7; but see also Swidler 1986). While civility towards diversity forms part of such cosmopolitan practices, it refers to more generalized interactions between people who differ in various ways such as style, class, sexuality, etc. (Lofland 1989). Cosmopolitan practices refer more specifically to interactions across cultural and ethnic difference. These practices are naturally related to language and to skills not only regarding communication across language differences, but also linguistic adaptation.

During my fieldwork in Hackney, it was especially in the realm of local trade in which such multiple cultural competences were most visible and observable. Often, they were accompanied by linguistic skills to communicate across language differences, facilitate trade and make costumers feel welcome. Elsewhere, I have described this phenomenon as 'corner-shop cosmopolitanism' (Wessendorf 2010; 2014). Corner-shop cosmopolitanism resembles Landau and Freemantle's (Landau & Freemantle 2010) concept of 'tactical cosmopolitanism', which is not necessarily grounded in ideas of openness towards others, but characterized by more pragmatic considerations of achieving practical goals. Noble describes this phenomenon as 'strategic everyday

cosmopolitanism' (Noble 2009:57) because it often serves the purpose of keeping friendly relations with costumers and getting some kind of transaction done.

The following quote from my research diary exemplifies how people muddle through language barriers and manage to communicate, all the while being friendly and civil.

> I am at the Turkish supermarket. There is a very well dressed south Asian woman with a head scarf and make up. She has a British accent and she is trying to buy a big piece of meat from the Halal butcher. She tells the butcher to cut it into small pieces. He does not understand. She says it again slowly: 'please cut it into small pieces'. He does not understand. She says it again: 'cut it into small pieces please', and gestures with her hands. He gets it, goes to the machine, cuts off a piece and shows it to her. She nods her head to indicate that it's a good size. He cuts the piece. She does not get impatient at any moment of this transaction, and he doesn't either. He is very nice and smiley, and she's patient. They both seem to be used to such communication problems due to language. In fact, at this Turkish butcher, this kind of communication problem happens all the time because of the butchers' limited English skills. I have never seen anyone lose patience, because it is an integral part of shopping at the Turkish supermarket (Research diary, 19 January 2009)

Vertovec (2009) differentiates between conscious and non-conscious ways of adopting others' cultural practices. The interaction at the butcher could be described as non-conscious as the actors assumed 'others'' ways non-consciously with subtle communication cues to signal commonality or to attempt shared meaning' (Vertovec 2009:7). An example of a conscious way of adapting to others' linguistic and cultural differences is represented by a local market which is visited by many Caribbean and West African costumers. One of the South Asian butchers at the market speaks the Ghanaian language of Twi. He lived in Ghana for a while and now caters to a large Ghanaian clientele who appreciates his language skills. He has even hung up a Ghanaian flag behind his counter, right next to verses from the Qur'an. The Turkish owner of the corner-shop has learned a few words in Polish because of an increasing number of Polish customers. He now also sells Polish beer and Sauerkraut. And the young white British sales assistant at the supermarket, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, sees no problem in communicating with an elderly Turkish customer via a translator whom she has called on her mobile phone.

Another such example is that of a young British Pakistani man who runs a curry stall at the local market mentioned above. The stall is very popular among both market stall holders who regularly buy their English tea there as well as visitors to the market. It has a large variety of customers of many different backgrounds, some of them regulars, others newcomers. The stall holder has very friendly relations with his customers and changes his greetings according to the customers: when a young black man arrives he says 'hey broth' [brother], switching to 'hi Auntie' when an elderly Asian woman comes, and to 'hello Ma'am' when I arrive. He effortlessly changes between these different greetings according to the customers, and makes everybody feel welcome.

Corner-shop cosmopolitanism is sometimes also expressed in the labelling of the products sold in shops serving a super-diverse clientele. For example, the Turkish flat bread (Turkish: Lavaş) sold at the Turkish supermarket mentioned above is called 'Tortilla'. It is made in Poland, for a Turkish clientele in Britain (the labelling is in Turkish and English).

While Turkish shops are well established in the area and are known for serving a wide range of costumers from many different backgrounds, thereby adapting to their super-diverse clientele's needs, there are also numerous shops that service specific national 'communities' who might be struggling with understanding English labelling. These range from Polish shops selling Polish milk and other such products (which are also available in mainstream supermarkets), to Brazilian butchers with meat descriptions solely in Portuguese, who are rather surprised when a non-Brazilian costumer such as me enters the shop. The fact that these shops do not serve a super-diverse clientele is often clearly visible outside the shop with labelling only in the language of the shopkeepers' origin. Thus, corner-shop cosmopolitanism is not a prevailing phenomenon across the borough represented in all shops, but it can be found in those markets and shops which aim at attracting a clientele which goes beyond one's own ethnic or national community.

However, the fact that those Polish, Brazilian and other shops aimed at a nationally defined clientele exist in the area exemplifies that in addition to the relationships people form across linguistic, cultural and religious differences in public space, there continue to exist social milieus defined by nationality and language. In the following section I discuss the co-presence of a myriad of social milieus in Hackney defined not only, but also along language differences, together with differences in socio-economic background, nationality and other factors of super-diversity.

Language and Social Milieus in a Super-diverse context

As shown above, many Hackney residents demonstrate great skills in communicating across myriad differences and in behaving with civility towards diversity when interacting in public space. Not only in shops and at markets, but also on public transport, in libraries, hospitals and at the school gates, these skills are vital in maintaining peaceful relations. However, despite these mostly positive relations in public and semi-public space, people often end up going home separately. Socio-economic and class divisions, followed by ethnicity and nationality are the prevailing categorical dividing lines when it comes to more intimate social relations (Wessendorf 2014). As I will show bellow, language is intertwined with all of these factors.

The notion of 'social milieus' is particularly useful to conceptualise these closer social ties. It refers to collectivities based on shared values and attitudes towards life, shared aspirations and ways of carrying oneself. A social milieu can, for example, consist of people at similar stages in their lives with shared religious believes, or a group of youngsters with the same fashion and music taste, or people with the same political orientation and similar life-styles. Importantly, social milieus are not the same as circles of friends, but they can also include people who are unknown to each other. They are thus more widely defined than social networks. Furthermore, they can be local but also go beyond the locality, which is particularly important in places characterized by international and internal immigration (Dürrschmidt 1997; Wessendorf 2013b). The concept of social milieu is useful because it does not just refer to chosen social affiliations, but it includes historically developed patterns of socialization and experiences. These are directly related to the development of a shared value system. They are thus defined both objectively through the correlation of relationships of, for example, the family, the professional group, political affiliations or religious association, and subjectively through the development of a shared value system (Vester 2006).

The concept of social milieus helps us to move away from describing individuals solely on the basis of social categories like ethnicity, religion or socio-economic background (Cohen 1994). At the same time, it leaves open the possibility that these categories can be the primary criteria for social relations. Thus, while some people relate to each other on the basis of, for example, shared ethnicity, language and history of migration, others build social relations on the basis of shared interests (Wessendorf 2013b).

In a super-diverse context, the kinds of social milieus that can be found are particularly complex and cannot be defined along the more classical lines of milieu theory which identified milieus according to historically grown groups based on social stratification and class hierarchies (e.g. the working-class milieu, or the milieu of the educated bourgeoisie, etc.)(Vester 2006). Rather, a super-diverse context is characterized by a variety of social groupings with different histories of stratification, education, religious affiliations, etc..

Language is an important factor shaping social milieus, with limited English preventing many first-generation migrants from forming relations with people of other linguistic backgrounds, at least during the first years after arrival. Crucial social relations are often formed during these initial years of settlement. Pre-existing networks of family and/ or friends which migrants rely on during initial settlement have also been described as 'foundation networks' (Phillimore et al 2014). In my study on recent migrants in Hackney, those with at least some English language skills (and usually higher cultural capital) tended to enter nationally mixed social milieus from the very beginning of their settlement, for example via work-colleagues, whereas those with no English formed relations with people of the same linguistic background (sometimes of various nationalities, for example among Spanish and Russian speakers). Although both types of migrants often started off with foundation networks, the latter's networks often continued to be confined to speakers of their mother tongue because of limited English knowledge. Access to English language classes and thus opportunities to develop more mixed social relations are directly related to the life-course. For example, many of the female ESOL learners who participated in my research had been living in London for many years, but were unable to learn English because of childcare duties during their initial years of settlement. By the time their children started school and they had the time to access English classes, some of them had lived in Hackney for ten or even twenty years. By that time, they had developed firmly established social relations within mostly co-ethnic (or panethnic) social milieus with people of the same language background. Phillimore et al. also describe this time as 'stasis period' where migrants focus on basic needs such as appropriate housing, schools for their children, etc. (Phillimore et al 2014).

On the other side of this spectrum are, for example, young migrants from Spain, Latin America or Eastern Europe who come to the UK with at least some basic English skills, many of whom do not have childcare obligations and find it relatively easy to access a variety of social milieus (both mixed and co-ethnic) via nightlife, employment or studies. For example, a young Slovakian woman who came to the UK as an au pair at the age of 21, and then moved on to work in cafés and shops, built up social relations with a variety of people of Eastern European and Latin American backgrounds whom she met while partying in East London. Although she initially spoke almost no English and was supported by some Slovakian friends, she quickly managed to improve her English skills within an international social milieu of like-minded people who were at a similar stage in their life-course and shared her interests. Similarly, Francisca, the Chilean woman mentioned earlier, who migrated to

Hackney via Italy, quickly built up social networks via a baby yoga group which she joined shortly after arriving in Hackney and having her first child. Her knowledge of at least some English enabled her to participate in such classes. The friends she made there were of various backgrounds, including Iran and Kirgizstan. At the same time, and via two Chilean friends whom she knew before coming to Hackney, she also accessed an emerging social milieu of Spanish speakers of various national backgrounds, mostly with higher education and access to employment. Although most of these Spanish-speakers are perfectly comfortable with speaking English, they still choose to associate with people with whom they can speak their own tongue.

Language also plays a hugely important role regarding affiliations to various social milieus among British born people of various backgrounds. It is not just shared national languages as such which contribute to a sense of belonging, but shared styles, dialects and registers formed in relation to class-position, age and gender (Agha 2004). Grace, one of my black British informants of working-class background described to me how she felt excluded from middle-class milieus because she felt unable to speak the way they speak. Another informant, Laura, who is of a similar background, managed to cross such boundaries thanks to entering University where she formed social relations with members of middle-class milieus and managed to acquire a more socially accepted middle-class accent.

In his socio-linguistic research in different London boroughs and with people of different ages and ethnic backgrounds, Rampton demonstrates the crucial role language plays in both the reproduction and formation of social milieus, but also negotiations across difference in everyday conversations. He shows how youngsters developed 'a set of conventionalized interactional procedures that reconciled and reworked their ethnic differences within broadly shared experiences of working class position in British society' (Rampton 2013:4). Although unable to do the kind of detailed socio-linguistic analysis undertaken by Rampton and colleagues, my fieldwork in the youth club, primarily frequented by black youngsters, resonates with Ramptons' findings. He shows how kids 'refigured ethnicities within the dynamics of British social class', and that they 'had found enough common ground in the problems, pleasures and expectations of working class adolescent life to navigate or renegotiate the significance, risks and opportunities of otherness' (ibid:4). In her research of an ethnically mixed Hackney secondary school, Kulz (2011) found how young people formed groups along racial and class lines and how they largely explained this with taste and style. At the same time, some of the youngsters of African origin saw social mixing and making friends with the white middle-class children as a way of upward mobility. This capacity to move between groups was also related to language and the ability to speak both what they described as the black children's 'slang' and the white middle-class children's 'standard English'. This was also confirmed by Laura mentioned above. While she spoke with a middle-class accent during our interview at the youth club where she was working at the time, she immediately switched into a more vernacular youth talk afterwards when chatting to the youngsters at the club.

Thus there seem to be two processes happening in regard to language, belonging and exclusion in the context of super-diversity. One is related to class, and the other to international immigration. A class-related English sociolect can be experienced as a barrier to social milieus identified as more middle class, as in the case of Grace. In contrast, a foreign language accent could be described as commonplace in a super-diverse context, because 'everybody speaks bad English', as stated by Francisca. In fact, for those migrants who speak good English, having an accent can be experienced as

advantage, as it precludes stereotyping along class lines when talking to English native speakers. Thus, foreign accents enable people to escape from the continuing class-based categorizations among native English speakers (Blackledge and Creese 2015). When somebody has an accent, it is impossible to know what their socio-economic and educational background is. At the same time, however, also migrants sometimes acquire a vocabulary or way of speaking which can be ascribed to a certain social class. This is exemplified by market traders from various backgrounds using terms such as 'ok darling' with their female clientele, or 'innit' when bantering with their neighbouring British born stall holders. These immigrant market traders have successfully managed to form part of a working-class social milieu consisting of white and ethnic minority traders by incorporating commonly used terms into their English repertoire, paralleled by a continuing foreign accent.

Language plays a crucial role in the formation of social milieus. Importantly, individuals are rarely confined to one social milieu, but often form part of different types of milieus, as exemplified by Francisca above, who forms part of both an international English speaking social milieu of people interested in yoga, as well as an international Spanish speaking milieu of people with similar cultural capital and shared interests. In contrast, mothers with limited English skills might be more confined to an ethnically or nationally defined social milieu, and their ability to expand their social networks beyond this social milieu is highly dependent on access to English classes as well as childcare and their educational background.

Conclusion

Hackney has seen processes of immigration-related diversification over a long period of time. In this context, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity have become commonplace. People are not only used to be surrounded by people of unidentifiable backgrounds, but they are also skilled in communicating across myriad differences in their day-to-day lives, a phenomenon I have conceptualized as corner-shop cosmopolitanism. As I have shown in this paper, these competences are particularly noticeable when it comes to communicating across language differences. At the same time, however, and despite these intercultural and linguistic competences, the formation of private social relations continues to be heavily shaped by language. This not only applies to non native English speakers, but also to British people who have lived in the UK all their lives, but whose ability to switch between different class-defined sociolects heavily shapes their access to different social milieus.

In relation to migrants, it is not only the ability to speak English which determines the formation of ethnic or mixed social networks, but also the opportunity to learn English during the initial years of settlement. The formation of foundational networks during these initial years also shapes access to social milieus at later stages of living in the UK. For example, a migrant mother who has lived in Hackney for ten years and only then managed to take up English classes is likely to have built close friendships with co-ethnics and feel embedded in her ethnically defined social milieus without feeling the need to build new friendships.

Importantly, however, and even if migrants have lived in Hackney for many years and managed to get by with very little English skills, learning English and being able to communicate with a wider section of the population and, especially, with service providers like doctors and teachers, is crucial in developing a sense of independence and belonging to the area beyond one's own social milieu. 'Now

I'm not scared anymore' is a sentence used repeatedly by the ESOL learners I spoke to who expressed anxiety not so much about getting by in Hackney when going out to shop or to the playground, but about more fundamental interactions with, for example, other parents at the school gates, doctors and teachers. Thus, despite the existence of intercultural skills among both new and old Hackney residents, knowledge of the majority language is still crucial in feeling confident in interactions which go beyond the minimal civility of fleeting encounters in public space. It is this transition from merely being present at the school gates, to finding the confidence thanks to increased English language knowledge to participate in activities inside the school, which gives people a sense of settlement or, in their own words, of 'being happy' here.

While the picture of language and super-diversity in a place like Hackney is complex in relation to the formation of myriad social milieus within and across language differences and sociolects, it is also quite simple: knowing the majority language (and in the case of British people, the dominant white middle-class sociolect) facilitates the extension of and access to networks beyond one's co-ethnic or class defined social milieu. Even if close friendships continue to be shaped by ethnicity and class for white British, ethnic minority as well as migrant residents, language determines access and choices not only regarding various social milieus, but also in regards to education and the labour market.

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