



Valuing the multilingual repertoires of students from African migrant communities at a London university

Journal:	<i>Language, Culture and Curriculum</i>
Manuscript ID	Draft
Manuscript Type:	Special Issue Paper
Keywords:	African migrants, multilingual repertoires, non prestigious, social science, widening participation, UK university
Abstract:	<p>Drawing on an ethnographic study of academic literacy practices in the applied social sciences (Odeniyi, 2015), this paper builds on research which seeks to make visible the increasingly complex linguistic diversity in English-dominant universities (Preece, 2009; 2011) by offering a detailed reading of the multilingual repertoires reported by students who identify with London's African migrant communities. The paper analyses data selected from in-depth interviews with under-graduate students who identify as speakers of English, but also Swahili and the other non-prestige language varieties comprising their complex repertoires (Blommaert and Backus, 2011). These repertoires are closely intertwined with life experiences and we argue that there is a need for a more nuanced faculty understanding of this. While the scope of multilingual repertoires poses some challenges for employing plurilingual pedagogies in curriculum spaces separate from linguistically-oriented programmes, in this case the applied social sciences, we suggest that faculty initiatives such as teacher training courses for academic staff could potentially have a role to play in raising awareness of hidden repertoires.</p>



SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Valuing the multilingual repertoires of students from African migrant communities at a London university

Abstract: Drawing on an ethnographic study of academic literacy practices in the applied social sciences (Odeniyi, 2015), this paper builds on research which seeks to make visible the increasingly complex linguistic diversity in English-dominant universities (Preece, 2009; 2011) by offering a detailed reading of the multilingual repertoires reported by students who identify with London's African migrant communities. The paper analyses data selected from in-depth interviews with undergraduate students who identify as speakers of English, but also Swahili and the other non-prestige language varieties comprising their complex repertoires (Blommaert and Backus, 2011). These repertoires are closely intertwined with life experiences and we argue that there is a need for a more nuanced faculty understanding of this. While the scope of multilingual repertoires poses some challenges for employing plurilingual pedagogies in curriculum spaces separate from linguistically-oriented programmes, in this case the applied social sciences, we suggest that faculty initiatives such as teacher training courses for academic staff could potentially have a role to play in raising awareness of hidden repertoires.

Key words: African migrants, multilingual repertoires, non prestigious, social science, widening participation, UK university

Introductory vignette

Maisha¹ speaks Swahili which is the national language of Kenya, but she is not sure whether she actually thinks in Swahili as it is not her mother tongue. Swahili was the dominant language in the place where she grew up but Maisha has her mother tongue called Kikuyu, her Mum's language. Maisha did a bit of French ..., but she cannot remember much of it. She thinks she has three to four languages. However, she tries to think in English because she feels that if you are writing in English there is no use thinking in other languages. So far she has managed to get

¹ Pseudonyms for people, institutions and areas within London have been used throughout the paper.

*good grades, which is positive feedback on what she has been doing. So maybe it's [thinking in other languages] not such a big problem.*²

Maisha is an applied social science undergraduate student at Northcentral University, a pseudonym for a new London university. Maisha is in her thirties with family responsibilities, and as a mature black student, her institutional presence fulfils the remit of widening participation, that is, increased access to university from under-represented groups. She came to the UK from Kenya in 1994 to care for her grandparents and after working in the health and social care sector for several years enrolled on an applied social science degree programme in a new London university³. The paragraph above, illustrates Maisha's rich multilingual repertoire originating from her place of origin and family background. She refers to thinking and writing in English: an official language in Kenya; and a colonial language⁴ for many students from African migrant communities studying in the UK; and a variety which is highly valued in standard forms by universities. Her linguistic repertoire contains Swahili, a regional lingua franca with official status in Kenya, and Kikuyu the language she describes as her mother tongue, also a language of regional importance. In contrast, she 'did a bit of French,' suggesting variation in the range of resources and competencies available to her (see Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert et al., 2005a). Of relevance to this paper is the linguistic diversity students like Maisha bring to university, even though she does not see the value of thinking in languages other than English, as well as the sometimes less than straightforward relationship with the forms of standard English valued in English-dominant university settings.

As a speaker of English, Swahili, Kikuyu and French Maisha's *multilingual* repertoire is of interest as it reflects the complexity of linguistic background interwoven with life experiences. Yet, resources of this kind remain hidden, particularly those associated with students from migrant communities with ties to Africa, an under-researched group within the academy at present. The authors presented a paper on widening linguistic participation in higher education at the ESRC Seminar Series on the Multilingual

² The paragraph is a summary of an interview constructed by the authors.

³ The UK has seen the expansion of the university sector to include former polytechnics, many of which are referred to as 'new' universities to signal differences in status and student credentials.

⁴ See Pennycook (2001; 2017) for a more detailed discussion of English as a colonial language.

University in English-dominant settings (Lazar et al., 2016). This paper builds on some of the rich discussions that emerged with reference to developing ‘a plurilingual lens’ in Anglophone higher educational settings in order to raise awareness of hidden multilingualism ‘... and open up spaces for a plurality of languages and cultures in their classes’ (Marshall & Moore, 2018, p. 22).

The paper seeks to extend conversations around linguistic diversity in English-dominant university settings by offering perspectives on students who identify with London’s African communities (Block, 2006). It also seeks to respond to Preece and Martin’s (2009) call to raise the status and visibility of linguistic diversity in English-dominant university settings and Preece’s (2011) call for the university as a whole to be recognised as a multilingual space. To achieve this, this paper examines data from interviews with two mature undergraduate students who migrated from Rwanda and Tanzania. More specifically, the paper builds on the growing body of language and literacy research with transnational university students in Canada (Marshall, 2009; Marshall et al., 2012; Marshall & Moore, 2013); British born EFL and EAL university students with South Asian heritage on an academic writing programme in the UK (Preece, 2009); and studies within language teacher education (Freitas, 2018; Preece et al., 2018) which call for a responsive pedagogy. Data examined in this paper originate from in-depth interviews conducted during a two-year ethnographic study of academic literacy practices (Odeniyi, 2015) on a social science degree programme in a new university located in London.

We start by providing an overview of a London context influenced by globalisation, migration and urban settlement. We then link the wider context of increased migration and diversity to multi-ethnic and multilingual London and more specifically to university policy known generally as widening participation and its focus on increased enrolments from under-represented groups. Building on Gumperz’s (1965) concepts of linguistic and verbal repertoire, we draw on Blommaert et al.’s (2005a) concept of repertoires in order to analyse interview data in order to illustrate the ways in which the students’ multilingual repertoires are not only complex, but also intertwined with life experiences. The paper highlights the richness of participants’ repertoires and we suggest that these repertoires with origins in Africa ought to be seen as a resource for the participants’ applied social science degree course. The paper ends with a brief discussion of implications for awareness raising amongst faculty whose disciplinary focus is not academic English or academic literacies, in a context of heightened diversity among the student populations.

A context of increased university access, participation and diversity

London's population has increased significantly over the last two decades and, since 1998, migration has been the main source of increase (The Office for National Statistics, 2018). To give a sense of the scale of change, in 2017, according to government figures, 14% of the UK population was born outside the UK; and although the nature of census data has changed and cannot be compared easily, in 2001 476,000 residents were recorded as 'Black African', and by 2011, almost 2.4 million were recorded as "Black/African/Caribbean/Black British" (The Office for National Statistics, 2018). A further influence on London's diversity, according to Wessendorf (2019), is that demographic changes have accelerated as migrants come from a wider variety of countries of origin, which has been linked to an increase in relative poverty, war, famine, persecution and environmental disasters (Blommaert et al., 2005a). Meissner and Vertovec (2015), following Vertovec's (2007) concept of super-diversity, capture the changes to populations arising from migration which they describe as being characterised by increasingly mixed heritages, ethnicities and languages. One consequence of the change in demographics is that migrant communities bring a range of experiences, knowledge(s) and language varieties with them; and it is this "migration-driven diversity" (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015, p. 542) that influences London's population significantly and by extension students resident in London who attend university in London.

A second influence on the diversity of the new London university context is widening participation, which has been a policy goal for a number of years. In its purest form, it encourages the participation of: "...young, full-time entrants to first degree courses in English HEIs whose home area (deemed by their postcode) is identified [as] ... disadvantaged" (Department for Education, 2018, p. 10). One consequence has been an increase in students from London's Black and minority ethnic communities, as well as an increase in mature, female and part-time students. The institutional identity of new London universities like Northcentral are influenced by globalisation and mobility, but also by domestic policies of widening participation and the expansion of the university sector, which Preece & Martin (2009, p. 4) point out is a contributory factor to linguistic diversity amongst student populations.

Simpson and Cooke (2009, p. 59) continue that: "Migrant students, especial those who speak non-prestigious varieties of English or languages other than English, form a

significant section of the widening participation population ...". There is evidence that the multilingual repertoires of students with post-colonial backgrounds are not yet fully understood, and it is our contention that the complex repertoires of African migrant students remain especially buried in higher education discourses. In the case of this paper, the main focus is on the repertoires of undergraduate students attending applied social science lectures and seminars, rather than students attending the linguistically-oriented courses which have recently been a strong focus for much of the growing body of research into plurilingual approaches to university pedagogy.

To date, there is limited research into the linguistic backgrounds of African migrants in a widening participation context. Martin's (2009) study of successful widening participation graduates from the Somali community examined reflections emphasising their "linguistic journeys". He points out that multilingual identities remained underdeveloped during the course of university study. Simpson and Cooke (2009) traced the educational experiences of a single student and user of non-standard English who migrated from Nigeria to the UK. They report the challenges encountered accessing HE and the struggle to gain visibility of multilingual repertoires, especially speakers of non-prestigious varieties who are "... speakers of English-based Creoles and varieties of English such as those spoken in ex-colonies in Asia and Africa (Simpson & Cooke, 2009, p. 59).

This paper analyses data from a two-year ethnographic study conducted at Northcentral University, one of the 'new' universities in London. In common with many institutions in Anglophone higher educational settings, Northcentral was characterised by linguistic and ethnic diversity. Data selected for this paper were created as part of a wider project involving the observation of 50 students and two lecturers across two applied social science modules, in-depth interviews with 11 students and the collection of programme-specific resources. The original study drew heavily on academic literacy/literacies research traditions emerging from ideological approaches to literacy which aim to deepen understandings of language and literacy practices (Lillis, 2008; Street, 1984). The focus of this paper is different: it draws on data from the larger corpus of data with an important shift in focus from academic literacy practices in the applied social sciences to the analysis of students' multilingual repertoires. The primary question we address is:

- What do the multilingual repertoires of a small group students identifying with London's African migrant community look like?

The relevance of multilingual repertoires

Gumperz (1965, p. 85) developed the concept of “linguistic or verbal repertoire” from an interactional perspective:

defined as the totality of linguistic forms regularly employed within the community in the course of socially significant interaction. Repertoires in turn can be regarded as consisting of speech varieties, each associated with particular kinds of social relationships (Gumperz, 1965, p. 85).

The concept was originally developed to compare two distinct speech communities in the US and India. However, as stated earlier, migration brings increased linguistic diversity (Blommaert et al., 2005a; Piccardo, 2013). From the perspective of ever increasing diversity, Lüdi and Py (2009, p. 157) document the move from languages being viewed in terms of achievable linguistic competence(s) to languages being viewed as “situated multilingual resources” (Lüdi & Py 2009, p. 156) and in doing so problematise the notion of fixed competence(s) in different circumstances.

Building on more recent notions of “situated multilingual resources”, and drawing on research in Belgium’s and South Africa’s multilingual neighbourhoods (Blommaert et al., 2005a, 2005b), Blommaert and Backus (2011) discuss how language users draw on a repertoire which, similarly, they suggest is more than linguistic competence and can be seen as a set of resources which are unevenly deployed. They describe further the biographical dimension of linguistic resources which are affected by life and learning experience in a variety of contexts:

Repertoires are biographically organized complex resources and they follow the rhythm of human lives. This means that repertoires do not develop along a linear path of ever-increasing size (Blommaert & Backus, 2011, p. 9).

Blommaert and Backus also suggest that a focus on repertoires enabled the documentation of “the trajectories followed by people throughout their lives: the opportunities constraints and inequalities” (ibid, p. 21) people face.

Several researchers (Council of Europe, 2007; Lüdi & Py, 2009; Marshall & Moore, 2013; Piccardo, 2013) highlight the distinction between the multilingualism of societies/nations and the plurilingualism of individuals where:

plurilingual(ism) [is used] to refer to the distinct aspects of individual repertoires and agency and *multilingual(ism)* [is used] to refer to broader

social language context/contact(s) and the coexistence of several languages in a particular situation (Marshall & Moore, 2013, p. 474).

We acknowledge this distinction between individual and societal language use as we refer to *multilingual repertoires*, which encapsulate the scope and dynamic nature of migration-driven linguistic diversity, on the one hand, but also the complex and uneven nature of individual repertoires, described as non-linear (Piccardo, 2013), incomplete (Blommaert 2010; Blommaert et al., 2005b; Haque, 2011) and imbalanced (Lüdi & Py, 2009) on the other. Thus, these features reflect the complicated life trajectories of people who migrate to Europe from diverse parts of the world. It is the notion of separate languages which is complicated by migration-driven diversity, suggests Busch (2012), and further complicated by the postcolonial contexts from which many migrants to the UK have come. The multilingual repertoires we are concerned with in this paper are conceived as a set of resources influenced by educational circumstance, political instability and migration and comprise a broad range of colonial, regional and local African languages.

THE STUDY

Ethnographic research utilises small-scale, in-depth, open-ended, inductive approaches (Coupland & Jaworski, 2009; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013) in order to “understand a social reality from the perspectives of those involved” (Starfield, 2015, p. 137). The methodological approach adopted in this paper was informed by ethnographic research concerned with the increasingly complex and diverse nature of the UK (Baumann, 1996; Harris, 2006; Preece, 2009; Rampton, 2005). Individual interviews and depth group observation and emerged as significant methods of data collection in the original study, offering different perspectives which helped to create a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1993, p.7). The original researcher made extensive use of fieldnotes for class observations, “the traditional means in ethnography for recording observational data” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.175). Two courses from the same Applied Social Science degree programme were observed. Weekly observations of two to three hours per week took place over 16 months with an average of 14 students attending the first course and an average of 11 attending the second.

The biographical interviews

In addition to lecture and seminar observations, interviews took place over an 18-month period, involved “prolonged engagement with participants” (Starfield, 2015, p. 142), a feature of ethnographic interviewing, and lasted up to an hour in order to gather

contextually sensitive perspectives. The two participants who are the focus of this paper were interviewed between three and seven times each and were observed multiple times in the original study. This paper analyses two semi-structured biographical interviews which aimed to “capture the historical trajectories of speakers” (Mufwene, 2010, p. xii). The interview approach was deliberately open-ended and exploratory and participants were invited to respond to the following three questions: *‘Who are you?’*, *‘Where are you from?’* and *‘Why Northcentral?’* followed up with questioning designed to explore repertoires and biographies. All interviews were conducted in English on the Northcentral university campus and were digitally recorded. Hultgren et al. (2016) refer to research ethics as an iterative process to be considered at different stages of the research process and the process of validating data with participants (see Cameron et al., 1992; Starfield, 2015), was one way of engendering ethical researching while adhering to established practices around research ethics.

The participants

The participants were first generation migrants resident in London (see Table One below). Block (2010) problematises the choices researchers make with reference to the rigidity of labels attached to migrants, and despite the essentialist connotations of labels such as ‘African’ and ‘Africa’ (Cooper & Morrell, 2014), participants referred to themselves as African publicly during observations and privately during interview. The participants were women in their thirties and forties at the time of data collection who reported being single parents with childcare responsibilities, studying full-time and with varying lengths of compulsory schooling completed before arrival in the UK. Table one below provides an overview of key biographical details relevant to an examination of their multilingual repertoires. Participants were not required by the university to undertake any form of academic English or academic literacy provision.

Table One: An overview of three of the participant biographies

	Countries of residence	Background/Education/university course	Multilingual repertoires
Mary			

	Rwanda Kenya UK	From Rwanda, schooled in Kenya. One dependent; unsure of the whereabouts of other children. Completed an 'Access to Higher Education course' at a London university. Came to Britain as an asylum seeker and gained papers for the indefinite right to remain.	English French Kinyarwanda Swahili Luganda Kinyakole Kissi Japadola
Mona			
	Tanzania UK	Parents worked for Embassy in Tanzania and the UK. Compulsory schooling in Tanzania. Living in the UK since 1999. Works as care worker. Daughter in sixth form. Reported insufficient background in English.	English Swahili understands Kyrangi

This paper analyses transcribed biographical interview data which make explicit reference to educational experiences and language use, truncated learning and reasons for migrating to Europe. Thus, building on conceptualisations of linguistic repertoires available to participants, this study illuminates what the multilingual repertoires of two students identifying with London's African migrant community look like. To achieve this, we refer to Blommaert and Backus's (2011, p. 9) "biographic dimensions of repertoires" which guide explanations of *how* life trajectories and experiences contribute to the complex multilingual repertoires unique to each individual. We also include analysis of *what* with reference to the concept of multilingual repertoires as resources.

Following Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) approach to transcription, an orthographic approach to transcription was adopted with use of the following:

[] contextual information

... omission

Additionally,

xxx emphatic speech

/// Overlapping speech (see Moyer, 2012)

Lines are numbered.

THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS: MARY AND MONA

Extract one – Mary

- Start: 5' 42" – End 13'06"
- 1 Victoria: How long have you lived here?
- 2 Mary: Eight years.
- 3 Victoria: For eight years. And where were you before?
- 4 Mary: Rwanda.
- 5 Victoria: Okay, and um, ... could you tell me...?//
- 6 Mary: //About the genocide?
- 7 Victoria: Well, you don't have to talk too much because I'm sure it's very
- 8 painful.
- 9 Mary: [Polite laughter]
- 10 Victoria: That was why you left?
- 11 Mary: Yeah, that's right.
- 12 Victoria: Okay, so you came here as a, as an asylum seeker and then gained
- 13 refugee status?
- 14 Victoria: ... Did you finish your education? What was your education like in
- 15 Rwanda?
- 16 Victoria: Development fits perfectly with that and with many of the issues
- 17 that I think are talked about in 'Social Policy.'
- 18 Mary: Mm, mm.
- 19 Victoria: So would you say that your education in Rwanda was normal? Did
- 20 you have a more privileged education?
- 21 Mary: Yeah, I was above average because I mean our country we don't even
- 22 speak English, I speak Rwandan, I mean, French, but I was privileged to go to
- 23 Kenya and study some of these courses, which put me where I am.
- 24 Victoria: Tell me a little bit [more] about your language background.
- 25 Obviously, you speak English.
- 26 Mary: Yeah I speak a little, a little bit. I speak better English than French. I
- 27 speak Kinyarwanda. I speak Swahili. I speak a few local languages.
- 28 Victoria: When you say a few local languages, are these the languages that are
- 29 spoken//
- 30 Mary: //in other countries like Kenya. Umm, because to work as a counsellor,
- 31 you had to go down to those levels, to know their language, most of them are
- 32 illiterate. So to explain it to them you have to speak their language, and
- 33 probably bit [unclear] learn their language and I describe myself as linguistic.
- 34 Victoria: Ah, you certainly sound like it. Could you tell me some of those
- 35 languages that you speak?
- 36 Mary: Swahili, Luganda, Kinyakole, Kissi, Jopadola. Just reach out to the
- 37 community.
- 38 Victoria: So whatever, whichever ethnic group or region someone's from//
- 39 Mary: //I still connected, yeah, because it's Bantu speaking. East Africa is a
- 40 Bantu speaking country.
- 41
- 42
- 43
- 44
- 45
- 46
- 47

An extensive multilingual repertoire intertwined with life experiences

Mary is from Rwanda and speaks Kinyarwanda (line 33), the principle language spoken in Rwanda (Simons & Fennig, 2018), as well as English and French (line 29), languages with postcolonial histories in the region. She completed her education in Kenya (line 29) and this educational experience would seem to have had consequences for her repertoire. Kenya's two official languages are English and Swahili (line 32-33), while Swahili does not have official status in Rwanda. Mary also reported speaking Luganda, a

principle language of Uganda (Simons & Fennig, 2018), and several languages from the Bantu speaking region, including Luganda, Kinyakole, Kissi, and Jopadola.

Interview data indicate Mary's multilingual repertoire comprises at least eight languages: four languages with official status in the region: English, French, Swahili and Kinyarwanda, as well as "a few local languages" (lines 34) learnt in order to 'reach out to the community' (Lines 43-44) whilst working as a counsellor. It is not possible to know the extent of her knowledge of these languages, but we can surmise that she had at least partial competence within the region in order to carry out her work as a counsellor. Time spent studying in Kenya and working in the field in Rwanda reflects her reported language use. She had a varied professional career which involved learning languages in order to carry out work in the field for an insurance company and for an HIV AIDS organisation" (lines 21-22). The participant appears to have used her considerable linguistic resources, as well as acquiring knowledge of previously unfamiliar languages, in order to engage professionally. It is perhaps not surprising that she identifies as "linguistic" (line 39).

The analysis helps to illustrate the biographical nature of the university student's repertoire, but also its scope comprising postcolonial languages in the region (English and French), a regional lingua franca (Swahili), Kinyarwanda and Luganda, languages of regional significance and "a few local languages" which are less likely to be exportable (Blommaert et al., 2005a) outside the region. It appears Mary had transnational experience within the region of Africa in which she lived and worked before leaving for the UK around the time of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Most striking is the way in which the student's multilingual repertoire appears to be linked to significant and traumatic life events, such as genocide (line 6), the reason she left her home country.

The scope and complexity of language use illustrates how closely the linguistic resources this participant brings to the Northcentral context are intertwined with life experiences. In contrast, these significant multilingual resources were hidden institutionally for the duration of the ethnographic observations from the applied social science lecturers and seminars. Mary was present for a large proportion of the lecture and seminar observations over five months during which she interacted little with peers directly. It was noted that: 'The others students engage quietly, but Mary still has her arms folded with her coat on' (Observation four) in fieldnotes relating to five classroom

observations between December and March of her first year. The participant was recorded speaking English only (Fieldnotes), in spite of the diversity in the class reflecting the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the student population that typified Northcentral.

While lecture and seminar observations provided evidence for students' knowledge and perspectives being viewed as a resource for learning, the same cannot be said for language(s). During a group discussion on poverty which related to the concept of a basic need basket used to track the cost of living (Observation 8), Mary contributes making the point that buying small quantities [of provisions] is more expensive, affecting the poor disproportionately, a comment relevant to core knowledge in the applied social science curriculum. However, she spoke rapidly and was barely audible (Fieldnotes) as a consequence.

A second example of Mary's class interaction, extracted from class observation notes during a scheduled weekly lecture just before the Christmas vacation and attended by six other students, focuses on a response to the lecturer's asked the class related to whether they had any problems with their learning. Mary replied 'Yes' without hesitation, but as she spoke almost inaudibly the lecturer did not hear her, overlooking her attempt at engaging with learning (Observation 6). At this point it must be acknowledged that a limitation of the current analysis is the lack of data which might serve to strengthen our claims that Mary's complex linguistic repertoire is not understood by or visible to the lecturer teaching her. Yet, as the data collection occurred within the multilingual university setting, the point we wish to emphasise is the lack of visibility afforded to these resources. There is nothing deficient about this African migrant's repertoire, biography or communicative ability; yet, it seems significant that her situated multilingual resources remained hidden in the classroom and institutionally; particularly as the student selected a degree which included international development, an area reported as significant during the research interview.

Extract two - Mona

Start 7' 42" - End 15' 56"

- 1 Victoria: ... I'd like to find out a little bit about you. Who you are and
- 2 where you've come from?
- 3 Mona: I came, um, in 1999. My family came over, just for, they were
- 4 working in the embassy ...[unclear speech], and then//
- 5 Victoria: //And where was that? Which country?

- 6 Mona: Tanzania, Tanzania. And when they left I decided to stay back
7 because I was interested, like, in studying to better myself [pause]
8 because back home, um, in Tanzania we use Swahili as our, our official
9 language. It's not English so when I started Standard One, that's when it
10 was, um, we used it, we used English as a communication language//
11 Victoria: //Uhu//
12 //as an official language, and when I started Standard One that's when
13 they stopped it because it was, um, Tanzania's a Socialist country, so
14 they preferred to use Swahili as a, you know.
15 Victoria: Sorry, what's Standard One?
16 Mona: Standard One is like year one. So basically I didn't have a good
17 background of speaking English. I used Swahili for like, for everything,
18 for all the subjects ... And then, because I, I went from, um, I finished my
19 primary school, secondary school and I went for A level there, but I
20 didn't have good background for in English as a, you know speaking and
21 I was better in writing than speaking. ...
22 Victoria: ... okay and just going back you said that your family are
23 Diplomats?
24 Mona: Yeah.
25 Victoria: So do you, is your family background one in which higher
26 education, your parents, do you have siblings who've been through the
27 university system?
28 Mona: Yeah, my parents are okay because the, the system they were
29 using is just like, you know, English and they have no problem. The
30 problem came when I, you know, English was stopped being as a, you
31 know, communicating language, official language in Tanzania. So ...
32 Victoria: Do you speak other language? You speak Swahili, English. Do
33 you speak any other languages that are local to Tanzania as well?
34 Mona: Yeah, a bit.
35 Victoria: Could you tell me what ...?
36 Mona: Uh, like local languages like where [unclear] my, where my Mum
37 and Dad came from?
38 Victoria: Uhu.
39 Mona: That's, um, [sigh] ... [speech unclear] Kyrangi. It's just like, uh, the
40 language my mum and dad use. I don't speak. I understand everything,
41 but I can't speak. I'm fluent in Swahili, ...

Repertoire as biography

The interview extract details the use of English, Swahili and Kyrangi. Mona speaks Swahili:⁵ 'because back home, um, in Tanzania we use Swahili as our, our official language' (line 8-9), also a regional lingua franca used in Mozambique, Somalia and Kenya. Her repertoire includes English, the principal language of wider communication in Tanzania. Mona reports that she uses the language of her parents, Kyrangi; hesitating before expressing some regret that although she

⁵ Also referred to as Kiswahili and Kisuaheli (Simons & Fennig, 2018).

understands it, she cannot speak it: 'It's just like, uh, the language my mum and dad use, I don't speak. I understand everything, but I can't speak [Kyrangi]' (lines 43-44). According to Simons and Fennig (2018), Kirangi is a regional language spoken in the home while Swahili is preferred in public domains, supporting Mona's knowledge of Kyrangi as a language of the home and Swahili as a medium of education.

Mona offers few details of her upbringing but we can deduce it was relatively privileged as she states the reason her family migrated to Britain was associated with Embassy employment in Tanzania and in the UK: 'My family came over, just for, they were working in the Embassy' (lines 3-4). Instead the inequality she voices relates to changes in language policy when the Socialist government came into power: 'When I started Standard One, that's when ... we used English as an official language (lines 10-12) and 'they [the government] stopped it because it was, um, Tanzania's a Socialist country, so they preferred to use Swahili' (lines 12-14). According to Mazrui (1997, p. 35), "the use of Swahili at the primary level ... may have made it more difficult for students to learn in English in secondary school", reflecting Mona's account of her primary school experiences.

Rather than presenting her multilingual repertoire as a resource, with the potential to enrich her life in contexts beyond Tanzania, she describes the negative consequences. First, by emphasising how her English language learning opportunities have been compromised in comparison to her parents: 'My parents are okay because the, the system they were using is just like, you know, English and they have no problem (line 31-32). The participant describes her English use in deficit terms: 'So basically I didn't have a good background of speaking English. I used Swahili for like, for everything for all the subjects' (lines 19-21). Mona underscores the point adding that: 'Even though she was better at writing than speaking, she felt she did not have a good enough background in English' (lines 13-14). There appears to be self-awareness of the incompleteness of her English language learning, but also some reticence to disclose her relationship to Kyrangi which she speaks 'a bit' (line 37).

A multilingual repertoire embedded in time and space

Data illustrates an uneven repertoire with reference to a reported fluency in Swahili (line 44) compared to more limited functioning in Kyrangi (lines 37),

despite the fact that the language is likely to have entered her repertoire before English and Swahili. As Blommaert (2010, p. 103) notes “No one knows *all* of a language” and the exact nature of our repertoires “reflects our own histories and those of the communities in which we spent our lives.” Yet, of note is how this student’s repertoire is influenced by biographical and external events in Tanzania affecting the language practices and competences of family members in different ways. Interview data indicate a complex yet “‘truncated multilingual’ repertoire” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 167) in the sense that her reported competence in English and Swahili has been affected significantly by educational policy beyond her control as a child before migrating to the UK. Yet her knowledge is not truncated as Mona speaks of the effects of Tanzanian language policy on her repertoire.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study illustrates the scope for varied multilingual repertoires among a relatively small group of students attending Northcentral, a new university in London. We argue that the complexity of repertoire, among two university students from a similar region of the world, Bantu speaking East Africa, poses some challenges for employing plurilingual pedagogies. Both participants’ repertoires comprise postcolonial European languages; a regional lingua franca, namely Swahili; national languages and languages belonging to specific ethnolinguistic communities, such as Luganda in Uganda; and other local languages. Many of these languages lack institutional visibility and status in African nations or in the UK. A further layer of complexity is that among the reported African languages spoken and understood by migrant students in London, they are not necessarily attributed equal value or status. The study also highlights the potential unevenness of repertoire in terms of language and literacy attainment and development. For instance, Mona reports she can write English, but does not feel she speaks it well, which has implications for her ability to participate in academic life. For Mary, there is evidence of traumatic life events influencing her life trajectory, and complex ways in which they are linked to the student’s multilingual repertoire. There also appears to be a lack of institutional awareness of the potential ways in which challenging life trajectories may impact on class interaction, significant for developing responsive and inclusive pedagogies.

This small-scale ethnographic study has begun to reveal the extent of hidden multilingualism among university students from African migrant communities in Anglophone higher educational settings, hidden in part due to the low status and

visibility afforded African languages in such settings in spite of recent migratory trends; but also hidden as a result of the low regard some students and faculty may have for languages within their own communities. Thus, the focus on repertoires enables an understanding of 'some of the "opportunities constraints and inequalities" (Blommaert & Backus, 2011, p. 21) influencing language use in diverse university classrooms. For instance, Swahili dominates the East African region, yet lacks visibility in the UK and other English-dominant settings. The study found that some multilingual repertoires are closely bound up with language policies in the case of Tanzania and how government policy reduced opportunity to access prestige forms of English reified in English-dominant universities.

This ethnographic study has focused on students from London's migrant communities from widening participation backgrounds. Their accounts demonstrate rich and varied linguistic repertoires, attesting to the students' sense of plurilingual agency in sometimes extremely challenging circumstances. Yet, these repertoires, as well as the life experiences intertwined with them, seem to remain invisible in the university setting. Despite the changes in student demographics, migration and globalisation, the university continues to be a monolingual space. A challenge to implementing a plurilingual pedagogy is the complexity and range of different repertoires a single cohort may possess. However, while the study findings pose some challenges for implementing plurilingual pedagogy, in a context of migration driven diversity and change, there is scope for these dynamic yet largely invisible situated resources to be mobilised explored/outlined briefly in the next section.

Raising awareness of hidden repertoires

Institutional responses in English dominant settings to deal with what are often framed as the pedagogic challenges of widening participation tend to view linguistic diversity as a problem to be fixed, resulting in a focus on a number of student-focussed institutional measures. Such measures include, for instance, language testing on arrival (Read, 2015), English language and literacy programmes (Marshall, 2009; Preece, 2009); and embedded disciplinary writing development (e.g., Tuck, 2015; Wingate, 2015).

We contend that faculty-oriented initiatives such as teacher training courses for academic staff have a role to play in raising awareness of the multilingual repertoires which students from widening participation backgrounds bring to the university context. For example, a recent study has demonstrated the benefits of

engaging postgraduate students in research in order to investigate plurilingual practices amongst the student cohort (Preece et al., 2018). In this case, the students were located within an Applied Linguistics and TESOL group; and, consequently it could be argued that both staff and students have an interest and level of linguistic awareness not necessarily shared by other disciplinary areas. In our study, as the students were undertaking an applied social sciences degree, it could not be assumed that the faculty involved in the programme would have an understanding of or interest in plurilingualism, or knowledge of the potential benefits of employing plurilingual pedagogy.

Nevertheless, the topic of multilingualism could inform the applied social science curriculum in a more indirect manner, thereby increasing the visibility of the range and complexity of the multilingual repertoires of students identifying with London's migrant communities. For instance, while multilingualism itself may not be a standard concept for the applied social sciences curriculum, there is clearly an argument that societal multilingualism needs to be addressed when dealing with curriculum topics in applied social sciences such as international development. As students from migrant communities are commonplace in universities such as Northcentral University (Odeniyi, 2015), it seems likely that they will have expertise to draw on from their multilingual repertoires that can contribute to creating a more inclusive curriculum in the applied social sciences (see Preece, this Issue). A starting point for faculty, and one that develops research methods central to the social sciences, is to enable students to gain experience of constructing interview or survey questions related to societal multilingualism. An appropriate topic might be the scope of multilingual repertoires among the student cohort developed, reflecting "migration-driven diversity" (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015, p. 542), even though the primary aim might be to develop students' research competences (see Lazar, 2015). The development of these pedagogic strategies across the curriculum may help to counter 'diversity as a problem' discourses by making visible the life trajectories which accompany linguistic diversity.

Conclusion

The multilingual repertoires we are concerned with are conceived as a set of resources influenced by educational circumstance, political instability and migration and comprise a broad range of colonial, regional and local African languages. This paper has applied the concept of multilingual repertoires to the lives and experiences of two students attending Northcentral, a university in London that recruits a significant number of students from widening participation backgrounds, in order illustrate what the

linguistic resources students identifying with London's African migrant community look like. Our intention has been to make these language varieties visible through an examination of data from an ethnographic study of students on an applied social sciences degree. Little research to date has been undertaken on the language varieties spoken by African migrants in English-medium university settings in the UK, and this paper represents a step in awareness raising of the range of languages spoken. Building on existing work with multilingual students with African heritage (Martin, 2009; Simpson and Cooke, 2009), further research is needed in order to make visible the hidden and dynamic multilingual resources of migrant communities which has the potential to contribute to the development of highly situated plurilingual pedagogies, reflecting disciplinary focus as well as language use. Further research is also needed on how the resources of such students on applied social sciences courses can be mobilised to support their studies.

References

- Baumann, G. (1996). *Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Block, D. (2006). *Multilingual Identities in a Global City, London Stories*. Basingstoke, GB: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Block, D. (2010). Problems portraying migrants in Applied Linguistics research. *Language Teaching*, 43, 480-493.
- Blommaert, J. (2010). *Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blommaert, J. & Backus, A. (2011). Repertoires revisited: "Knowing language". In *Superdiversity (Working Papers in Urban Language and Literacies 67)*, London, England: King's College.
- Blommaert, J., Collins, J. & Slembrouck, S. (2005). Spaces of multilingualism. *Language and Communication*, 25, 97-216.
- Blommaert, J., Muylleert, N., Huysmans, M. & Dyers, C. (2005). Peripheral normativity: Literacy and the production of locality in a South African township school. *Linguistics and Education*, 16, 378-403.
- Busch, B. (2012). The linguistic repertoire revisited. *Applied Linguistics*, 33(5), 503-523.
- Cameron, D., Frazer, E. Harvey, P., Rampton B., H., & Richardson, K. (1992). *Researching Language: Issues of power and method*. London: Routledge.

- Cooper, B. & Morrell, R. (Eds.).(2014). *Africa-centred Knowledges: Crossing fields and worlds*. Woodbridge, Suffolk/Rochester, New York: James Currey.
- Council of Europe. (2007). *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe. From linguistic diversity to plurilingual education*. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe, Language Policy Division.
- Coupland, N. & Jaworski A. (2009). Social worlds through language. In N. Coupland & A. Jaworski, (Eds.). *The New Sociolinguistics Reader*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1-21.
- Department for Education (2018). *Widening Participation in Higher Education*, England, 2016/17 age cohort - Official Statistics, 22 November, 2018, Department for Education Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/widening-participation-in-higher-education>
- Freitas, D. (2018). Plurilingualism in TESL programs? Are We There Yet? In *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Languages, Cultures, Identity in School and Society*, 53-59.
- Geertz, C. (1973/1993). *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected essays*. London: Fontana Press.
- Gumperz, J. (1965). Linguistics Repertoires, Grammars and Second Language Instruction In C. Kreidler, C. (Ed.). *Report on the Sixteenth Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Studies*, 70-81, Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Haque, S. (2011). Truncated Multilingual Repertoire in Indian migrant families in Three Cities of Europe, *esti ja Soome-ugri Keeleteaduse Ajakiri [Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics Journal]*, 2(2), 29-47.
- Harris, R. (2006). *New Ethnicities and Language Use*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hultgren, A., Erling, E. & Chowdhury, Q. (2016). Ethics in language and identity research In Preece, S. (Ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Lazar, (2015). Academic literacy and linguistic diversity: An account from the chalk face. *Seminar 2: Seminar: Widening participation and bi/multilingualism: the cultural and language resources of linguistic minority university students, ESRC seminar series on The Multilingual University: The impact of linguistic diversity in higher education in English-dominant and EMI contexts*, UCL Institute of Education, London. Retrieved from <https://multilingualuniversity.wordpress.com/seminar-2/>

- Lazar, G., Gimenez, J., Pitt, A. & Odeniyi, V. (2016). Widening (linguistic) participation and pedagogy for inclusion: Ways forward. *Seminar 6: Conference: The linguistic landscape in HE in ED and EMI settings: Future Directions UCL Institute of Education, London*. Retrieved from: *Seminar 6: Conference: The linguistic landscape in HE in ED and EMI settings: Future Directions UCL Institute of Education, London Retrieved from: <https://multilingualuniversity.wordpress.com/seminar-6/>*
- Lillis, T. (2008). Ethnography as method, methodology, and "deep theorizing": closing the gap between text and context in academic writing research. *Written Communication*, 25(3), 353-388.
- Ludi, G. & Py, B. (2009). To be or not to be... a plurilingual speaker. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 6(2), 154-167.
- Marshall, S. (2009). Re-becoming ESL: multilingual university students and a deficit identity, *Language and Education*, 24(1), 41-56.
- Marshall, S., Hayashi, H, & Yeung, P. (2012). Negotiating the "Multi" in Multilingualism and Multiliteracies: Undergraduate Students in Vancouver, Canada. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 68, (1).
- Marshall, S. & Moore, D. (2018). Plurilingualism amid the panoply of lingualisms: addressing critiques and misconceptions in education. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 15, 19-34.
- Mazrui, A. (1997). The World Bank, the language question and the future of African education. *Race and Class*. 38(3), 35-38.
- Meissner, F. & Vertovec, S. (2015). Comparing super-diversity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38: 541-555.
- Miles, B., Huberman, A. & Saldana, J. (2013). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed.), Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Moyer, M. (2012). Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Language and Multilingualism in Institutions. In Gardner, S. & Marin-Jones, M. (Eds.). *Multilingualism, discourse, and ethnography*, 34-47. New York, N.Y.: London: Routledge.
- Mufwene, S. (2010) Series editor's forward In Blommaert, J. (2010). *The Sociolinguistics of Globalisation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Odeniyi, V. (2015). *An exploration of students from the African diaspora negotiating academic literacies*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Canterbury Christ Church University: Kent, UK.
- Pennycook, A. (2001). *Critical Applied Linguistics: A critical introduction*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum.
- Pennycook, A. (2017). *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*.

London: Routledge.

Piccardo, E. (2013). Plurilingualism and Curriculum Design: Toward a Synergic Vision. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(3), 600-614.

Preece, S. (2009). *Posh Talk: Language and Identity in Higher Education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Preece, S. (2011). Universities in the Anglophone Centre: Sites of Multilingualism. In Li Wei (Ed.). *Applied Linguistics Review*, 2 (pp. 121-145), Berlin/New York: De Gruyter Mouton.

Preece, S., Griffin, A., Yu, H. & Utemuratova, G. (2018). Examining linguistic diversity as a resource for higher education in the anglophone world. In V.C.H. Tong, A. Standen, M. Storiou (Eds.). *Shaping higher education with students: ways to connect research and teaching*, 288-293. London: UCL Press.

Preece, S. & Martin, P. (2009) Imagining higher education as a multilingual space. *Language and Education*, 24:1, 3-8.

Rampton, B. (2005). *Crossing: Language and ethnicity among adolescents*. London/New York: Longman.

Read, J. (2015). Issues in post-entry language assessment in English-medium universities. *Language Teaching*, 48(2), 217-234.

Simons, G., F. and Fennig, C., D. (eds.). 2018. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Twenty-first edition*. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version. Retrieved from <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

Simpson, J. & Cooke, M. (2009). Movement and loss: progression in tertiary education for migrant students. *Language and Education*, 24(1), 57-73.

Starfield, S. (2015). Ethnographic Research. In B. Paltridge, & A. Phakiti (Eds.) *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: A practical resource*, 137 – 152. London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tuck, J. (2015). “Doing Something That’s Really Important“: Meaningful engagement as a resource for teachers’ transformative work with student writers in the disciplines. In Lillis, T. Harrington, K. Lea, M. & Mitchell, S. (Eds.). *Working with academic literacies: case studies towards transformative practice*, WAC Clearing House.

Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024-1054.

Wessendorf, S. (2019). Pioneer migrants and their social relations in super-diverse London. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(1), 17-34.

Wingate, U. (2015). *Academic Literacy and Student Diversity: The Case for Inclusive Practice*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

For Peer Review