BOOK REVIEW

Multilingualism, (Im)mobilities and Spaces of Belonging, Horner, Kristine and Dailey-O’Cain, Jennifer (Eds.), Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters. 2019. v–xiii + 246 pp. Hb (9781788925044) £119.95, Ebook (9781788925068) £30.00

‘Sota el pont […];
Apa tots passem-hi!
El nostre pont té dos pilars,
Pasem sense tocar-los.
Tu passes […],
Tu quedes presoner del pont!’

(‘Under the bridge […];
Let’s all pass through!
Our bridge has two pillars,
Let’s cross it without touching them.
You pass […],
you remain a prisoner of the bridge!’)

Source: Jove.Cat (2013, p. 40; original in Catalan)

The quote above is a singing game used by Catalan-government educators as a pedagogical resource to develop awareness among primary-school children on the social diversity that characterizes the current classrooms in Catalonia (Jove.Cat, 2013, p. 40–44). As one of the activities aimed at developing interculturality competence, the game ‘challenges’ kids to cross a ‘bridge’ consisting of a row of paired boys and girls facing each other and making a ‘tunnel’ by holding their extended hands (the ‘pillars’) at the eyesight level (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. ‘Sota el pont’ (‘Under the bridge’)

Source: Jove.Cat (2013, p. 41)
The task consists of ‘going through’ the bridge’s tunnel, individually, without touching the ‘walls’ (the peers), moving by bending the body. Those who manage to cross the ‘bridge’ are freed ‘winners’; those who touch it get ‘imprisoned’, becoming ‘losers’. There is not only a space-movement element here – the bridge shall be crossed within a time limit: before the song finishes.

I was singing this song with my daughter while reading Horner and Dailey-O’Cain’s (2019) edited book, which I review here. Three questions came to my mind: Is this an elusive metaphorical way of showing kids particular forms of establishing social borderings? Is it providing them with an example of how we frame space/time mobility as a matter of (non)-legitimate crossings? Is it telling (‘warning’?) them about the ‘dangers’ and ‘benefits’ of (im)mobilities, for (non)-self-managed individuals?

With this food for thought, this book immerses us into the exploration of new ways to conduct research on the interplays between (im)mobilities and spaces of (un)belonging, as these materialize in particular forms of multilingualism(s). To this aim, it includes 13 chapters that, from a critical interpretive sociolinguistics perspective, make a contribution to the (im)mobilities studies which problematize the theoretical underpinnings as well as the methodological and analytical lenses of the still prevailing ‘mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller and Urry, 2016). This paradigm first focused on the circulation of all sorts of peoples (Urry, 2007; Vertovec, 2009), material and symbolic resources (Appadurai, 1996) and transnational imaginations (Faist, 2013); and, later, on their concomitant immobilities (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006). By drawing on previous critiques of ‘the mobilities turn’ (see Blommaert, 2013; Pennycook, 2012), the contributions here further demonstrate that the ‘mobilities paradigm’ is grounded on ‘static’ (unidirectional) notions of spatial-temporal boundary-makings and (dis)emplacements based on the classic ‘nation-state’ mindset. This mindset envisions particular polities (‘countries’) as the ‘natural’ unit of analysis, and, therefore, it operationalizes and reproduces essentialist notions concerning ‘fixed’ territorialities, languages and identities (Glick-Schiller, 2010).

The book calls into question the nation-state mindset by proposing an exploratory framework for a committed research theory and practice on (im)mobilities based upon three rationales. The first rationale is the assumption that mobility regulations have become a gatekeeping tool of citizenship governance for neoliberal nation-states that have devised new surveillance mechanisms and power technologies to hold the monopoly on ‘national sovereignty’ (Martín Rojo and Del Percio, 2019). The
logics behind this first rationale is that top-down (institutional) and bottom-up (grassroots) opportunities for moving and becoming/being a legitimate body in a particular place/time are ‘scarce and unequally distributed commodity’ (p. 2) – a socioeconomically-stratifying mechanism linked to practices of linguistic differentiation and inequality.

The second postulate is the need to base (im)mobilities research on language-centered multidisciplinary and multi-method analyses (see Burawoy, 2009). These involve transdisciplinary work across the sciences of language, education, anthropology, geography, sociology, history and politics, and it demands new multisited fieldwork and network ethnographic techniques. Besides, the book calls for a political economic approach to (im)mobilities which tries to undo the ‘macro’-‘micro’ dichotomy in sociolinguistics-informed research (Del Percio, Flubacher and Duchêne, 2017). That is, it calls for a historicized picture of the political apparatuses and locally situated socioeconomic circumstances that account for the individuals’ opportunities and risks of (accessing) mobility, under the conditions of the new economy.

The third thesis is that citizenship hierarchizations grounded upon mobility ‘regimes’ (p. 236) need to include the participants’ complex and ambivalent orientations towards their past and present ‘movement/stagnation’ experiences and their future prospects. Thus, it puts forwards an informant-participative, socially-engaged perspective on a repertoire-based view of individuals’ (dis/un)placed multilingualisms. The pivotal examples of counterhegemonic subject positionings and empowered self-presentations which speak of (im)mobilities as sites of reinterpretation, resistance and subversion notably contribute to this under-reported research area. What follows are the details of the range of contributions that illustrate different ways in which these three tenets may provide a unique picture of the relational dialectics between language-based borders, heritages, identities and authenticities.

The monograph is divided into three thematic parts which explore the interfaces of ‘contested spaces’, ‘trajectories and heritage’ and ‘mobilities and struggle’ with a diversity of qualitative (and, to a lesser extent, quantitative) approaches. Drawing from research in Africa, Asia, Australasia and Europe, the contributions present a spectrum of ethnographically-informed case studies that complement each other, calling for a research angle which understands linguistic (im)mobilities as sites of (dis)empowerment.
In Part 1 (‘contested spaces’), Hawkey first focuses on the Spanish-French border in Northern Catalonia, where Catalan is minoritized. He proposes the notion of ‘b/ordering’ (p. 21) to claim that individuals’ production of (dis)placement in relation to minority-language affiliations is a dynamic ‘continuum’ (p. 19) discursively played out along multiple pan-cultural (Catalan) center/periphery belongings. He shows that the construction and disruption of territorialized ethnolinguistic boundaries allow for understanding linguistic-minority and border-making both as ‘sites of enclosure’ into a peripheral location within France, Spain and Catalonia and as a locus of ‘flows’ in a strategic transit zone and ‘door’ to Europe.

In the second contribution, Payne analyzes landscaping practices in a Slovak Roma community in Sheffield (UK) to explore the invisibilization of non-standardized forms of Romani, a communicative resource for transnational-life organization and ‘settlement’ in a migrant neighborhood of Slovak Romani, Pakistanis and Yemenis. His contribution provides a methodological approach for unpacking the role of space-making and place-claiming, which he illustrates with the examination of hidden’ (p. 39) ‘translinguistic repertoires’ (Jacquemet, 2010) in globally/locally-informed artefacts such as hand-written notes.

Ribbens-Klein’s third contribution also provides a linguistic landscape ethnography, in this case concerning how place is moralized in narrative discourse, in the postcolonial context of a neighborhood in Cape Town. She draws on the participants’ engagement in the use of colonial heritage languages to investigate the complexities of self-attributed ‘place identity’ (p. 63) and ‘community authenticity’. She shows how emic ‘local’ versus ‘newcomer’ racialized categorizations (the boorlinge versus the inkommers, in Afrikaans; pp. 60–61) speak of bottom-up boundary-making through the ideological spatial ethnicization of ‘intruders’ by neighbors who struggle to ‘belong’ by contesting what counts as legitimate linguistic emplacement.

Baynham’s commentary on Part 1 emphasizes the need for a ‘geography of disciplines’ (p. 84) systematizing team-based interdisciplinarity work on the ‘neglected’ (p. 86) role of language in the studies of space-oriented (un)belongings. Overall, I believe that these four contributions put Barth’s (1969) ‘othering’ practices at the epicenter of research, by showing us new ways to discover them through the lens of current language-based identity work central to unpredictable place-making.
In Part 2 (‘trajectories and heritage’), Rubino firstly engages with (re)deployment practices of home-/host-society (un)belongings through interviews with an Italian couple recently arrived to Australia. She shows that their storytellings reveal the ‘battles’ between two Italian diasporic groups in this ‘host’ place: the first-generation post-World War II group (who were delegitimized ‘dialect’ speakers (not always intelligible for all Italians) seeking socioeconomic stability) and the 1990-generation ‘wave’ with whom informants align (more advantaged, ICT-endowed, schooled, and speakers of accepted standard Italian varieties). Their discursive work unpacks a dichotomous boundary between ‘the Italians from Australia’ (the first ‘wave’, including migrant descendants born in Australia) and ‘the Italians from Italy’ (the second one) (p. 96). This dichotomy speaks of this community’s intra-regulation of whose ‘Italianness’ gets attributed more ‘authenticity’ in terms of command of ‘proper’ Italian and of English as an ‘integration’ resource.

König’s second contribution focuses on 16 language-biographical interviews, employed to explore self-orientations towards ‘accent’, linked to notions of German ‘newspeakerism’ (O’Rourke and Pujolar, 2015). Informants are speakers of South African and Turkish ‘heritage languages’ (p. 138) (Venda, Zulu, Afrikaans and Turkish) for whom German is a second language. She conducts a micro analysis of ‘self-concepts’ (p. 124) to understand how migrant speakers strategically move in and out, in interactional routines, what is perceived of as accented (‘impure’) or non-accented (‘proper’) linguistic incorporation in Germany, where the nation-state language is a ‘barometer’ of ‘integration’ indexing ‘belonging to the German cultural space’ (p. 121). She shows that informants follow this nation-state ideology, where the use of heritage languages is only legitimized in private. However, they simultaneously mobilize ‘heritage-language ideologies’ (p. 137) by constructing ‘accent’ as a sign of alliance with heritage-language identities, envisioning (performative) ‘accent’-use as a continuum between ‘being integrated’ and ‘keeping one’s roots’.

Thirdly, Bradley and Simpson provide a valuable example of a case-study ‘co-ethnography’ (Convey and O’Brien, 2012) in Leeds. They develop the notion of ‘negative translanguaging spaces’ (p. 145), where fluid multilingual repertoires characteristic of interactions among heterogeneous populations are disabled and constrained. They analyze how a Roma-speaking migrant’s unfitting ‘foreigner’ repertoires and non-actualized command of business discourse are reframed and commercially ‘authenticated’ as East/Central European commodities for migrants’
marketplace self-incorporation. They thereby show a way to unpack informants’ self-disciplining strategies to navigate work-related ‘settlement’ regulations so as to succeed in ‘Western’ employability regimes.

Litty and Salmons’ commentary of Part 2 highlights the relevance of space/time ‘contingency’ (p. 166); that is, the particular conditions where the (re)negotiations of linguistic repertoires, identities and (un)belongings unfold. They find this key to broaden understandings of bigger (meta)narratives about (im)mobilities, which they see as hinging upon particular temporalizations (time frames), including traditionalizations and heritage re-inventions. Overall, Part 2 adds to Bourdieu’s work on (non)legitimate ‘social trajectories’ (1991, p. 61) in situated ‘markets’, contributing to the investigation of language (de)skillings in telling-case contact areas.

Part 3 (‘mobilities and struggle’) explores the conditions upon which gendered and racialized populations navigate marginalization. Muller, Schmidt and Weber firstly investigate how the language backgrounds and plurilingual practices of migrant-background children get silenced in two different officially multilingual primary-school educational systems, Luxembourg and Canada (Manitoba). They show how, in Luxembourg, educators struggle to incorporate ‘home’ languages in class, making use of translanguaging pedagogy. However, this is based on the official languages of instruction (Luxembourgish, German and French), and it is regulated through the ‘native’-speaker ‘monolingual habitus’ (p. 177) which delegitimizes translinguistic talk (particularly involving migrant languages such as Portuguese). In Canada, they show how educators try to incorporate stigmatized Indigenous Englishes (mostly, a variety of spoken English called ‘rez’) in class, though they, too, find themselves impeded, as these are not recognized within the Canadian language-in-education policies, showing how ‘cultural deficit’ ideologies are reified in educational contexts.

Secondly, Park foregrounds the gender and class dimensions of language-biographic experiences of confinement by five women from Vietnam and Cambodia who moved to South Korea as marriage ‘newcomers’, by focusing on family authoritarianism (patriarchy) in the ‘space’ of three-generation homes. By approaching informants as active research participants/collaborators, she shows how this ‘site’ allows for the analysis of the constraints of host-society language-learning and other socialization affordances. This exclusion results in these isolated women’s academic and socioeconomic stagnation and into their disposssession of personhood.
Thirdly, Tavares and Juffermans investigate how involuntary immobility shapes and is shaped by the multilingual repertoires of three middle-aged Cape Verdean men. Through a multi-sited ethnography, they focus on the informants’ struggles to move to France and Luxemburg, showing that these are explained in terms of nation-state mobility regimes based on institutional racism.

Deumert’s final commentary highlights the relevance of social-class privilege and (resisted) nation-state power to understand boundary construction/disruption in space/time-belonging studies, foregrounding questions of ethics and social justice. Overall, part 3 illuminates Heller’s (2007) perspective on multilingualism as social action, which helps us to learn more about how to develop sensitive research strategies in order to understand social structurations in our uncertain space-in-time, under the conditions of neoliberalism.

This book will be welcomed by (early-career) researchers as a much-needed exploratory proposal to engage into the critique of ethnocentric approaches towards (im)mobilities, (un)belongings and multilingualisms by thinking of ways to frame these within the political economy of citizenship mobility regimes as exclusionary tools of power.

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REFERENCES


