Language Crossing and the Global Southern Gaze 🔓

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Summary

The notion of language crossing is discussed from the perspective of Southern language practices and epistemologies. The notion of language is expanded to include the voices and metalanguages of subjects who were historically invisibilized and silenced, with a focus on Southern contexts that underwent processes of colonization and liberation, specifically Africa. This also includes speaking across the human/nonhuman dimension. Language crossing not only is a contemporary and Northern practice but also includes a complex set of arrangements, alliances, and negotiations inscribed in the meaning-making process that cannot be reduced to the modern ideas of linguistic, national, or ethnic borders. By drawing on the decolonial sociolinguistic critique of language and linguistics, the concept of crossing is revised and elaborated in light of the insights from certain African sociolinguistic situations. Southern perspectives of language crossing should be able to include the role of objects, animals, nature, and humans in language practices. The following questions are addressed: (a) What does language crossing look like when viewed from the global South/s? (b) What can those who study language crossing learn from the perspective of a global Southern gaze? (c) What can African multilingualisms teach us about the situated dimensions of the notion of language crossing? The conclusion argues that language crossing in Southern contexts is connected to issues of legitimacy, authenticity, and belonging that characterize a sense of community, which is a complex and context-based notion. This means that different peoples, individuals, or groups may have different understandings of what counts as communication and language use. By crossing the disciplinary Northern boundaries toward an approach that dialogues with Southern voices and experiences, the political nature of the notion of boundary is problematized.

Keywords: language crossing, Southern language practices, African multilingualism, decolonial sociolinguistics, Boundary, politics, multilingualism

Subjects: Applied Linguistics, Sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

In this article, the notion of language crossing by focusing on Southern language practices (Makoni, Kaiper–Marquez, et al., 2022; Severo & Makoni, 2020, 2021) and epistemologies (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2018; Hountondji, 2009; Makoni et al., 2021, Makoni, Severo, et al., 2022; Pennycook & Makoni, 2020; Santos & Meneses, 2019) is explored. African multilingual contexts are focused on because they help show "[s]peaking 'across' what are seen as linguistic or ethnic

boundaries is not entirely new in Africa" (Banda, 2019, p. 386) and should be expanded to speaking across the human/non-human dimension, which also includes the role that drums and music play in important rituals in Africa such as naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals.

Indeed, language crossing not only is a contemporary and Northern practice but also includes a complex set of arrangements, alliances, and negotiations inscribed in the meaning-making process that cannot be reduced to the modern idea of linguistic, national, or ethnic borders. Rather, it should also include the role of human and non-human communication that subverts the anthropocentric concept of language (Severo & Makoni, 2021), which is centered on an "esoteric version of language, one that only humans could possess and that was separated from bodies, gestures, senses, and social worlds" (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020, p. 72). Southern perspectives of language crossing should be able to include the role of objects, animals, nature, and humans in language practices, which can only be grasped if we seriously consider laypeople's experience (Pablé & Hutton, 2013).

Through Southern perspectives, the ontologies of language and communication can be expanded by including the voices and metalanguages of subjects who were historically invisibilized and silenced, due mainly to colonial processes of objectification and exploitation (Fanon, 1966; Mbembe, 2017). This means avoiding extractivist approaches to language practices that consider languages and people as objects, things, and raw materials to be explored, analyzed, and classified. It follows that "'crossing' should change the dominant Western macro-narratives to envision new and dynamic epistemological and ontological dispensations and radically alter relations between epistemology, ontology and reality" (Masters & Makoni, 2019, p. 299). In this discussion, extraverted orientations to language that do not seriously engage with what is going on locally and historically are problematized, as articulated by the African scholar Hountondji (2009, p. 8):

> The majority of our country people are de facto excluded from any kind of discussion about our research outcome, given that they don't even understand the languages used. The small minority who understands knows, however, that they are not the first addressees but only, if anything, occasional witnesses of a scientific discourse meant primarily for others. To put it bluntly, each African scholar has been participating so far in a vertical discussion with his/her counterparts from the North rather than developing horizontal discussions with other African scholars.

We focus on Southern contexts that underwent processes of colonization and liberation, specifically Africa. By engaging with a Southern perspective, this discussion seeks to problematize how "patterns of language use in non-Western communities have been used as testing grounds for Western usage rules and their assumed motivations" (Ameka & Terkourafi, 2019, p. 72). Such perspective engages with the role of positionality in research, challenging the Eurocentrism and White, male, heteronormative foundations that dominate the field of language studies (Makoni, 2021). For doing so, a decolonial sociolinguistic critique of language and linguistics is adopted to examine how the concept of crossing can be revised and elaborated in light of the insights from certain African sociolinguistic situations, by focusing on (a) languages

and metalanguages as inventions, (b) languages as products of historical practices, (c) languages as social and situated practices, and (d) human and nonhuman communication. We are interested in how Southern language practices may contribute to expanding or problematizing the notion of language crossing.

By crossing the disciplinary Northern boundaries toward an approach that dialogues with Southern voices and experiences, the political nature of the notion of boundary is problematized. The following questions are addressed:

1. What does language crossing look like when viewed from or in dialogue with the global South or Souths?

2. What can those who study language crossing learn from the perspective of a global Southern gaze?

3. What can African multilingualisms teach us about the situated dimensions of the notion of language crossing?

4. What are the implications of the notion of language crossing if we seriously take into account that communication and language use take place across the human/non-human divide and that drums and music are forms of communication that are utilized to articulate meanings across space?

First, the notions of language crossing are explored. The focus is deliberately on Ben Rampton's (1995, 2019) work, particularly his orientation on crossing because it provides a clearer target to discuss the potential contributions of Southern scholarship. The objective of the article is not to summarize the body of scholarship on language crossing but to explore the role of Southern epistemologies on clearly defined Northern scholarship, that is, language crossing as animated by Ben Rampton. Even though decolonial views of Africa are developed, we are analytically aware that the South–North relationship is not static and is constantly evolving. Rather, it is a dialectal and dialogical one since "the making of the colonial world was a reciprocal process, a dialectal relationship that made 'Europe' in a relationship with its others, i.e., with the non-European world, known these days as the Global South" (Camaroff, 2022, p. 73).

2. Crossing in Conditions of Late Modernity

Rampton (1995, 1999) used the term *crossing* to refer to a specific form of plurilingual practice characteristic of late modern conditions, whereby the traditional image of sociolinguistic orders associated with what Pratt (1987) termed the "linguistics of community" is no longer sustainable. Crossing is a special form of code-switching in which the switch from one variety to another is indexically marked in the moment-to-moment development of interaction (for a discussion of the related types of plurilingual practice, see Rampton & Charalambous, 2010). Crossing gains significance where ethnic differences are ideologically recognized in socio-symbolically differentiated societies. These historical processes of "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2000) disturb the local discursive economies and traditional systems of identity categorization, which were once relatively stabilized and regulated by monoglot (Silverstein, 1996) ideologies of

language. In a detailed review of the literature on crossing, Rampton and Charalambous (2010) summed up the effects of these socio-cultural globalization processes on local regimes of language:

> Crossing is very much a linguistic anthropological/ethnographic topic, and it provides a window on major social and cultural changes that starts very close to lived experience and practical activity. Both in social science and public institutions, there is growing recognition that traditional social and ethnic classification can no longer account for the splits and alignments emerging in contemporary urban environments, and the significance of informal processes, local "conviviality" and low-key "civility" is increasingly stressed. (p. 11)

Because crossing focuses on the nature and historical trajectories of linguistic practices "across" ethnic boundaries, it is conceptualized as a poststructuralist critique of the established standard ideologies associated with "imagined" (Anderson, 1983) modern nation-states and is viewed as socially and linguistically homogeneous communities that reside within self-contained and sovereign territories (Pratt, 1987). For crossing, the issue of linguistic ownership is pivotal to the process of crossing to become sociolinguistically significant. Auer (2006) noted that, in crossing,

> one of the languages or varieties used in the bilingual encounter does not belong to the speaker, i.e., its use implies a transgression, an act of trespassing into the linguistic territory of another group of speakers who have privileged or sole access to it, by a speaker who is not an accepted member of that group. Such cases of code-switching will be called sociolinguistic crossing in the present article. (p. 490)

Rampton (1995, 2019) is concerned mainly with the social indexicalities of crossing and the ways in which they are linguistically materialized. Auer (2006) identified two key indexical types of crossing: antagonistic and accommodating. The former is intended to maintain or enforce power relations through reproducing ethnic boundaries, while the latter aims to establish social solidarity by neutralizing or problematizing these socially constructed borders of identification. Rampton was correct to contend that the precise socio-communicative value of a linguistic expression cannot be determined a priori; it has to be empirically investigated through ethnographic and micro-interactive analysis with the aim to capture what Silverstein (1985) called "the total linguistic fact." Thus, the analysis starts group-up from the close inspection of concrete linguistic articulations through the detection of discursive genres, registers, and frames of participation to the engagement with a broader layer of the historical junctures (Rampton, 1995; Rampton & Charalambous, 2010).

Traditional sociolinguistics cannot handle this form of translinguistic or transgressive practices (abnormal improvization), as it was originally designed to address imagined homogeneities and structural regularity, rather than social heterogeneities and linguistic complexities, characteristic not just of face-to-face interaction but also of virtual communicative exchange associated with digital culture and media. It is in this sense that Rampton's (1995, 2019) thesis of crossing is intended to rescue linguistics from the modernist epistemologies of assumed or imagined

communities to ground it in the material world of interaction and lived experience. Rampton's project can be subsumed within the sociolinguistic studies of globalization (Blommaert, 2010) or what Pratt (1987) called "the linguistics of contact," which is an ethnographic negation of the underlying assumptions of "the linguistics of community." Empirical studies of crossing can provide a critical appraisal of the theoretical foundations and egalitarian assumptions that underpin bilingualism/multilingualism and code-switching research, which is based on models of monolingualism.

3.   Problematizing the Notion of Language Crossing

We avoid a structural and abstract concept of language crossing that is based on a mixture of pieces of language (code-switching) as well as the ideological position of defining which language belongs to whom, as indicated by the following definition: "Language crossing involves code alternation by people who are not accepted members of the group associated with the second language that they are using (code switching into varieties that are not generally thought to belong to them)" (Rampton, 1995, p. 485). An expanded discussion concerning how linguistic signs index social meaning includes the notion of enregisterment, which involves "the capacity of speech and accompanying behaviors to acquire stereotypic indexical values, and thus to be treated as semiotic registers differentiable from each other" (Agha, 2015, p. 27). In certain ways, the paradigm of language crossing may reproduce in its analyses the idea that languages as parts of language (phonology, morphology, words, syntax) exist "out there," waiting to be functionally mastered and consciously manipulated or that there are named languages as bounded units that can be described, even when mixed with other bounded units.

Rampton's work is mentioned because, along with Hewitt (1986), they are considered to have "innovatively laid down the foundations for research in this phenomenon" (Awadelkarim, 2019, p. 101). Whereas Hewitt (1986) explores the use of Black Creole by White adolescents in South London, Rampton (1995) analyzes the use of language by local adolescent networks. Rampton et al. (2018) expanded the concept of language crossing beyond the analysis of vernacular sites to include "the relevance of crossing to learning and teaching another language at school, focusing on young people in the Greek-Cypriot education system learning Turkish, the language of the (former) enemy" (p. 630). Here, the indexical values associated with Turkish are suspended by focusing on the internal structural organization of the language, following the teacher's concept of language as structures (for a detailed review of the literature on crossing, see Rampton et al., 2018). Education plays an important role in applied linguistics and in the way languages have been institutionally framed as bounded systems. Southern perspectives should also be able to question the role played by education in different contexts as well as in relation to the formal schooling system and the social and economic gaps faced by the education policy. It is worth asking, "What is language and what roles can it play in the fast-changing educational domains of the Global South?" (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020, p. 11), and should the notion of language be restricted to humans? Should crossing not be used to describe the nature of the communication and language practices with other species on the planet, trees, water, and the like? In African contexts, the notion of crossing could be expanded to describe the widespread communication

between humans and their ancestors: a form of communication that is absent from Rampton's work because his notion of communication is human- and earth-bound. Such an anthropocentric concept of language is in line with how philosophy has been shaped by a human-oriented concept of language: "The history of philosophy and of science is crisscrossed with lines drawn between Human and Animal on the basis of what counts as language" (Haraway, 2008, p. 234).

The challenges sociolinguists may face in global South institutional contexts regard their capacity to make sense of the tensions between cultural-oriented patterns of interaction and institutional rules. Southern gaze should be sensitive to local language experiences, religious beliefs, and negotiation of meaning with other humans and the ancestors and gods that regulate interactions in such intercultural contexts. Southern perspectives on interactional theories should be able to expand our capacity to make sense of how people engage with each other and other living non-human species on our planet. One example is how the Yoruba concept of *Omoluwabi* "transcends language, moral, philosophical, religious and social boundaries to produce principles and ethics of communication" (Traore et al., 2016, p. 6). In this context, language and culture are deeply connected insofar as the ethical principle orients communicative and interactional patterns involved in the processes of socialization, virtuous action, and civility among Yoruba people, such as the ability to express respect and negotiate meaning (Ayodele, 2016). Another example includes the principle of *Omoluwabi* applied to research and fieldwork, as an ethical dimension inscribed in knowledge production. Such an ethical framework "moves beyond researcher-centred reflexivity to incorporate participants' moral virtues within a broader research ethics framework" (Oyinloye, 2021, p. 1). This shows how the positionality of the researcher matters if we intend to engage with Southern perspectives.

In colonial contexts, the idea of an "accepted member of the group" should be problematized, which means that any "linguistic handling" made to adapt oneself to the privileged group cannot be described as a mere linguistic performance but, rather, as a product of struggles for the right to voice. The perspective adopted in this article contributes to Mbembe's (2017) project regarding the very meaning of Black reason:

> To understand the category of Blackness, one must understand the history of the modern world, its forms of conquest and exploitation, the manifold responses to its systems of oppression, the forms of resistance and voicing, the totality and its fragments. (p. ix)

By expanding the notion of language crossing in colonial and postcolonial African contexts, we explore how colonial and postcolonial processes of voicing contributed to shaping what we understand as African multilingualisms, taken as an example of what we understand as language crossing in Southern contexts. Our interest lies in the politics of language ontology rather than in an engagement with a previous methodological and descriptive model. In colonial and postcolonial contexts, it is worth questioning the following: "In discussions around the limits of humanism and the blurring of the lines that separate epistemology from ontology, who decides what is or isn't a knowledge-producing subject and one that is capable of communication and expression?" (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020, p. viii).

Decolonial processes include struggles for liberation, practices of resistance, reconstruction of memories, and identities outside conditions of coloniality. This means that language practices concern political and ethical processes of negotiating meaning and linguistically building a sense of "us" that could subvert the colonizer's gaze and reference. Under colonial domination, the voices of the colonized found creative and potent ways to be expressed through a set of signs that cannot be reduced to the idea of language as a set of structural pieces. We argue that, by connecting ourselves to this historical mountain of signs, we are able to grasp a Southern notion of language. It follows that "only through dance and trance, via the music of healing, in the midst of cries, gestures, movements—by way of voice, breath, and a new idea of man—can the mountain be penetrated" (Mbembe, 2017, p. 50). How far can we go in recognizing the role played by songs, dances, rituals, gestures, and non-human communication in our epistemologies of what counts as language and, thus, as language crossing? Examples include the role of drums in the Afro-Brazilian religious practices, such as *Candomblé*, where drums play an important role in the communication between the mediums and the spirits or *orixás*. The language of the drum includes different types of rhythm used to call the saint. In this context, "the idea of communication is expanded to include a connection with non-embodied entities" (Severo et al., 2022, p. 207). Drums were also used as a form of secret communication between slaves in colonial era in South America (Traore et al., 2016). The language of the drums was analyzed by Simas (2019), who proposed a polyphonic grammar of the drums, where the borders between voices, verbal language, and sounds are dissolved. Another example includes the conception of *entomusic*, concerning how music can be made by, with, or for insects, such as the project carried out by the Brazilian musician Pedro Filho Amorim (2021), who created a concert for the insects by both recording and codifying the insect sounds in specific soundscapes and converting human music phonograms into sounds appreciable by insects. This, we argue, is an example of artificially constructed language crossing. Such concert for the insects problematizes the borders between human listening and insects' listening, suggesting that human experimentation can enable us to cross into the universes of other living species. There is also the discussion concerning how plants and forests communicate through a complex web of relations, stimulus, and connections: "Trees need to communicate, and electrical impulses are just one of their many means of communication. Trees also use the senses of smell and taste for communication" (Flannery, 2016, p. 6).

The very idea of language crossing is based on the assumption that borders are being crossed: "This kind of switching involves a distinct sense of movement across social or ethnic boundaries and it raises issues of legitimacy which, in one way or another, participants need to negotiate in the course of their encounter" (Rampton, 1995, p. 485). The notion of language crossing is strongly connected to the idea of boundaries (linguistic, ethnic, racial, and so on) and thus boundary transgression:

> Crossing entails a stronger sense of social or ethnic boundary transgression. When hearers encounter the transgressive disjuncture between a speaker's voice and background that crossing involves, the questions with which they make sense of it go beyond "why that now?" to "by what right?" or "with what license?"
>
> (Rampton & Charalambous, 2019, p. 629)

The approach to language crossing also contains the concept of ethnicity, as can be seen as follows: "A great many studies have described crossing as a local practice embedded within widespread ideological contestation about changing ethnic boundaries" (Rampton et al., 2018, p. 648). We argue that the notion of ethnicity deserves to be problematized in light of African postcolonial analysis insofar as ethnic, as well as linguistic, categories are a product of colonial epistemologies. As stated by Amselle (2020):

> [i]ndeed, the palette of the world's cultures, as we know it today, or rather as it appears on the ethnic maps of Africa in particular, does not reflect a definite state of affairs, but rather a socio-historical construction, the projection of a knowledge/power onto what is actually a continuous network of cultures and societies. (pp. 14–15)

This means that, by manipulating categories such as ethnicity and language in the description of the language-crossing phenomena, there is a risk of reproducing colonial categories instead of problematizing them. This point can be further clarified using the notion of "linguistic indigeneity," which is an ideological instrument exploited by colonial regimes to convert culturally dynamic ethnicities into tribal enclosures (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005, 2007; Mamdani, 2020). Furthermore, because linguistic indigeneity is a historical construction, it is through zones of interaction and relations that it is enacted and performed. Decolonial crossing requires a critical engagement with the concept of linguistic indigeneity as it emerged within colonial sociolinguistic economies, as it was the basis for not only the concept of linguistic ownership but also the very notion of citizenship.

Although we recognize the potentialities of the discussion concerning the emergence of new ethnicities of the periphery, as proposed by Hall and quoted by Rampton (1995), how the borders have been historically built by colonial processes and deconstructed or reshaped by postcolonial processes should be able to be problematized. Even the notion of new ethnicities should be contextualized into a historical movement of resistance and oppression. Regarding the complexities involving the discussion on the black subject, for example, it is also worth mentioning the importance of intersectionality in shaping how people perform and experience their identities: "the question of the black subject cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity" (Hall, 1989, p. 442). The challenges such a critical framework poses to language crossing concern our commitment to match critical theoretical approach with analysis, avoiding a patchwork of pieces of language as an index of pieces of identities. The lacuna here is that most of the empirical studies on crossing are conducted either in global Northern contexts. Thus, the literature is generally silent on the role of Western colonialism in the global South as a significant historical layer within which language boundaries are invented and naturalized. Most important, the colonial processes through which these boundaries are colonially constructed are rarely mentioned, if at all. Also, the notion of ethnicity is not static; it also evolves according to the changes in the politics of representation (Hall, 1989), which requires attention to how such politics historically and socially functions.

Rampton (2019) noted that his thesis of crossing can provide empirical support for Pratt's (1987) critique of what she called the "linguistics of community." Pratt founded her groundbreaking critique of "utopian linguistics" on Anderson's (1983) notion of the modern nation-state as an "imagined community" that is built on the monoglot ideology of one homogeneous, named language that corresponds to one homogeneous, bounded "nation." Western modern linguistics is informed by this methodological nationalism (Makoni, Severo, et al., 2022), along with its constituent linguistic ideology, including the concept of the sovereign individual and political citizenship. Again, Pratt has taken Anderson's imagined community for granted, as if it were universally of the same order.

We argue that, in Africa, the ideological-semiotic reference upon which the modern nation-state is imagined is not methodological nationalism but, rather, largely methodological tribalism. In other words, it is the "imagined tribe" that is the basis of monoglot (Silverstein, 1996) ideologies of language. The effect of colonial monoglot ideologies is not monolingualism but, instead, a Western version of tribally regulated multilingualism. This is how the African nation-state as an imagined community is tribalized and how the notion of citizenship is colonially ideologized. In the context of the Sudanese revolution of December 2018, protesters discursively cross ethnic boundaries, not just as an act of establishing solidarity but also, most important, to dismantle the colonially invented racializing system (see Abdelhay et al., 2021).

It is remarkable that hip-hop and rap are deployed in these contexts by the revolutionary signers not to identify with or differentiate themselves from Afro-American identity but, rather, to do serious political work of political resistance against state terrorism and despotic regimes within the ongoing decolonizing struggles to establish a democratic state outside conditions of coloniality. Two examples are the widely circulated musical performances of the Palestinian British rapper Shadia Mansour (nicknamed "the First Lady of Arabic Hip Hop"), who performs bilingually in Arabic and English, and the American Sudanese rapper Aymen Mao. Diab (2018), who reviewed some of the protesting musical works in the context of the Sudanese revolution commented,

> In solidarity with protesters in Sudan, Sudanese music artists, based across the world from Sudan to Qatar to the US, have used their musical talents and creativity to express the revolt of protesters against President Al Bashir and his regime. Their lyrics are revolting. (para. 3)

This "decolonial crossing" requires considering Southern historiographies of imagined communities. The point here is that, if decolonial African thinking problematizes the notion of boundaries, we should be able to question the limits of the notion of language crossing to address postcolonial multilingual contexts, including African ones.

Notably, without the notion of a "language border," the whole epistemological project of crossing would immediately collapse. The following example from Rampton (1995) shows how complicated it can be to define which pieces belong to which language: "In this afterburn, Asif uses some Black English/Creole. Admittedly, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish Creole from

the local multiracial vernacular" (p. 497). In terms of colonial metalanguages, Creole languages were named and classified by Creole studies "during an era when speakers of the language were considered less than human" (Makoni et al., 2003, p. 9). Furthermore, creoles and pidgins are not neutral concepts but, rather, racialized languages—"Black languages"—that may mean different things to different people.

> The names of the languages which fall under the broad rubric of Black languages may at times be different from the names used by speakers of these languages. . . . It may come as a surprise to many that some speakers of Black languages do not have a specific name or label for their form of speech.
>
> (Makoni et al., 2003, p. 3)

This means that even the sociolinguistic work of defining and describing a language has political implications for how such languages are racially framed.

The notion of language as an invention can be engaged with in the sense that the way that how one came to know about language is a product of colonial epistemologies and metalanguages: "Alongside the invention of languages, an ideology of languages as separate and enumerable categories was also created, an ideology founded on a nominal view of language" (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005, p. 138). Such a process is not neutral, and it affected people's lives in areas such as governmental language policies and educational policies.

4. African Multilingualisms as a Framework for Language Crossing

The notions of African multilingualism as an ontological and political framework for language crossing are presented in this section. Rather than searching for boundaries, we recognize that such multilingual experience characterizes African lingua franca (Fardon & Furniss, 1994), which means that we are not concerned about the boundaries but, instead, about the meaning-making process. African contexts, as well as the African diaspora, are a symbol of how the idea of language crosses national, ethnic, and linguistic borders to include a complex network of moving meanings and experiences:

> The specificity of the modern political and cultural formation I want to call the Black Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through [a] desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity.
>
> (Gilroy, 1995, p. 19)

African multilingualism includes, for example, the role of music lyrics as multilingual data in the African context. Banda (2019) explores the notion of language as a social practice along with a poststructuralist performative concept of identity to explain the fluid nature of African multilingual contexts. By focusing on songs as language practices, Banda expands the notion of language to include other semiotic resources. In addition, Banda does not limit his analysis to the

identification of ethical elements indexed into pieces of language but also adopts a fluid, interconnected, and dynamic notion of multilingualism, cultural transformation, and mobility as applied to transnational and translocal contexts in favor of a politics of recognition:

> I show the strategies local social actors in this case musicians use to achieve multilocal and transnational affiliations and thus mitigate the possible hegemonic and unequal power relations between for example American Hip Hop music and Zambian style popular music.
>
> (Banda, 2019, p. 375)

This interpretative framework problematizes the binary model of interaction and communication (self and the other) and moves toward a concept of multivocality and multiple identity performance, which can be also noticed in Northern works, such as Rampton's. The critical approach to multivocality we adopt means that we should be able take into account the different ways people interact in a multitude of cultures, avoiding reproducing Northern or universalizing patterns of interaction and face-to-face communication, thereby demonstrating that understanding how culture deeply affects the way people interact and produce meaning is essential. It follows that

> there is no shortage of literature showing that different cultures have different communicative styles and ways of being with one another in the same place. In particular, it has been shown that in many cultures people do not position themselves face-to-face nor do they look each other in the eye.
>
> (Ameka & Terkourafi, 2019, p. 78)

The framework of African multilingualism also avoids reproducing the idea of identity as fixed categories by transcending "linguistic, ethnic, regional and national boundaries" (Banda, 2019, p. 378) to move toward the construction of global identities rather than the reinforcement of single identities. The analysis also avoids individualizing linguistic units as pieces of named languages; rather, it considers that "[t]he linguistic and cultural features of these languages are fused in such a way that it is not possible to separate them, as the meanings do not derive from individual parts but as components of the whole discourse" (Banda, 2019, p. 382). Instead of languages as seen as a patchwork quilt, the notion of language focuses on a complex of several semiotic and multivocal practices. We should also consider that the meaning-making process that is being negotiated involves historical and situated knowledge as well as the individual's experience that we as researchers are not always able to grasp.

In the African multilingual scenario, language competence is not necessarily a requirement for claiming ethnic identities. Identity, in this sense, is fundamentally a matter of discursive practice. One example is how Black African immigrants (BAIs) in Johannesburg perform ethnic identities by "wearing clothes they perceive to be [an] 'ethnic' style marker" (Makoni, 2019, p. 1). By doing so, they avoid being othered as immigrants, an identity that would render them socially excluded. Makoni works with the notion of self-styling as a non-verbal strategy that expands the notion of

language inscribed in the concept of styling the other, in which "people use language and dialect in discursive practice to appropriate, explore, reproduce or challenge influential images and stereotypes of groups that they don't themselves (straightforwardly) belong to" (Rampton, 1999, p. 421). Instead of out-group solidarity, BAIs seek self-affirmation and recognition by identifying themselves with local ethnic groups who have similarities to the ones in their homeland, without necessarily having proficiency in the language spoken by them. The following shows this discursive practice used as a strategy of protection:

> For instance, Venda-speaking Zimbabweans will very often affiliate with the South African Venda group even if their proficiency in South African Venda is limited or non-existent. The affiliation with the South African Venda is not an expression of solidarity per se, but rather a strategy for concealment of the immigrant outsider status and its associated meanings.
>
> (Makoni, 2019, pp. 2–3)

Such an example shows how non-verbal practices are used as a discursive strategy that aims at self-styling an ethnic identity for the purpose of protection rather than identification. It also reveals how complicated and dangerous it is to define the limits of ethnic identities in African multilingual and multicultural contexts and how different discursive strategies are used to subvert power relations.

5. Conclusion

As language crossing phenomena have been described from an interactional sociolinguistic perspective of language (Rampton, 2019), in Southern contexts, the very notion of interaction and communication deserves to be expanded to encompass the total ecological complexity, including our relationship with lands, seas, objects, animals, and so forth.

Language crossing in Southern contexts is connected to issues of legitimacy, authenticity, and belonging that characterize a sense of community, which is a complex and context-based notion. This means that different peoples, individuals, or groups may have different understandings of what counts as communication and language use. One example is how Afro-Brazilian religions, as (post)colonial practices, reconceptualize the notions of legitimacy and belonging in religious rituals by galvanizing the ideas of linguistic authenticity, elderness, tradition, and human–non-human communication (Severo et al., 2022). In such a context, to master a language does not mean to be able to manipulate pieces of language but, instead, to be able to engage with the role "played by the drums, rituals, and non-human actors in the process of meaning making, language transmission, and modes of worship" (Severo et al., 2022, p. 202). This also includes being able to communicate with non-embodied entities through a set of semiotic resources and practices, which includes clothing, oral performance, musical instruments, smell, food, and the landscape. This shows how the process of meaning-making and meaning negotiation cannot be reduced to a mixture of pieces of language but, rather, should include a complex semiotic repertoire. We finally propose a Southern notion of language crossing that is committed to practices of resistance and voicing as constitutive of liberation processes.

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