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Review

Multilingual Families in a Digital Age: Mediational Repertoires and Transnational Practices

Kristin Vold Lexander and Jannis Androutsopoulos (2023)

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We are living in an age in which technology has facilitated mobility and connectivity. The new media have particularly transformed the way transnational and mobile families communicate and stay connected. Digital media allow family members in these families to use a multitude of media channels, deploy a variety of linguistic and semiotic resources, and stay connected with family members and friends across different locations. These features make digital media a significant aspect of the language use and management in transnational families. But this area remains under researched and the theoretical underpinnings and methodological aspects of researching digital media are quite underdeveloped.

It is against this backdrop that Lexander and Androutsopoulos have embarked on developing theory and methodology to study language practices of families in digital media and its implications for their multilingualism. The theoretical and methodological perspectives have been applied in the ethnographic study with four Senegalese families in Norway and the implication from the field has in turn contributed to the evolution of the method. The recent publications from the research project and the current book, organized in nine chapters, try to discuss theoretical grounds and contributions, methodological tools developed and used, and the fieldwork of the project.

On a theoretical level, the authors elaborate on mediational repertoire, which they put forward in previous publications drawing on the concepts of mediational

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means and linguistic repertoire. Mediational repertoire aims to capture the multiple media channels or the polymedia on the one hand and complex linguistic repertoires that individuals develop through living and using different languages on the other. On the methodological and practical level, the authors elaborate on the creative visualization method they devised to depict the mediational repertoire, or the totality of the individual's language and media use and choices. The visualization method, termed as mediagrams, was introduced by Lexander and Androutsopoulous to show both the multitude of media channels, languages, and modalities used to communicate. The books also elaborate on the fieldwork of the project which was conducted with four families from Senegalese origin and provides and discusses excerpts of data from the mediagrams and online language use of these families.

Chapter 1 and 2 introduce the field of online multilingualism and significance of digitally mediated communication in family interactions, drawing on the current theoretical developments in sociolinguistics, family language policy (FLP), and the concept of mediated repertoires. In Chapters 6, 7, and 8, the authors draw on the findings of the study to conceptualize digital multilingualism of families in relation to family solidarity and affection, polycentricity, and digital diaspora, and heritage language ideologies and repertoires in family. Chapter 3 and parts of Chapter 4 review the fieldwork of the project, including the profile of the participating families and the data collection procedure. Chapter 4 elaborates on the visualization method of mediagrams, the collaborative process of developing them and other issues related to mediagrams such as the ethical considerations. Chapter 5 takes on the analysis of mediagrams and the patterns that emerge through the analysis of the media, language, and modality choices of the family members, with an example from the three fathers. Chapters 6 to 8 further expand on the findings and discuss their theoretical implications. Finally, the book concludes with remarks on the methodology applied to study mediational repertoires, connectivity, and digital togetherness in transnational family and heritage language repertoire in digital media. In the following sections, I will engage with the major theoretical grounds and methodological contributions of the book to the research fields of FLP and digital multilingualism.

In Chapters 1 and 2, the authors present the grounds of the study and its theoretical conception. The main theoretical contribution of the book and the research project is the conceptualization of mediational repertoire. Lexander and Androutsopoulos (2021) 'pull together the notions of linguistic repertoire (Blommaert and Backus, 2013; Androutsopoulos and Juffermans, 2014; Busch, 2017) and mediational means (Scollon, 2002) to coin the notion of a 'mediational repertoire' (p. 2). Mediational repertoire can be viewed as a socially and

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individually structured configuration of semiotic/linguistic and technological resources. This notion helps in understanding the complex relationship between linguistic resources used in digital media and the multitude of media channels and modalities as one whole or repertoire, which the family members draw on in their interactions to maintain family bonds and relations. This conceptualization brings together two strands of substantial theorization. On the one hand, it relies on the studies in the field of sociolinguistics and multilingualism putting forward the notion of linguistic repertoire. On the other hand, it draws on the literature of media studies, anthropology, and sociology, addressing family life and digital media in transnational contexts, as well as the current FLP literature calling for the integration of digitally mediated communication in FLP studies. In what follows, I review the theoretical standpoints the authors build upon to conceptualize mediational repertoires.

First, the authors draw on the current conception of family as a constructed space rather than a domain (Lanza, 2020) and language socialization studies addressing the discursive construction of togetherness, solidarity, and power in families. The common thread in both conceptualizations is the negotiation of family around multilingual and discursive practices. In this sense, family is not what a group of people are but what they do. The routinized and repeated practices and the intertextuality and shared histories connect people in the form of families constructs family as a space. The authors also build on the FLP literature showing interest in the digital media in FLP research or a 'digital turn' (p. 37). The authors refer to recent scholarship in the field, including Palviainen and Kedra (2021) who argued for the integration of digital media practices as an indispensable aspect of FLP (p. 19). Digital media has been recognized as a major tool for transnational families' heritage language development and the management of media and language at home seem intertwined. The authors make an interesting link between these current theoretical standpoints to conceptualize digitally mediated communication in transnational families. Transnational family can be viewed as a space constructed and negotiated through face-to-face and digital practices. The authors expand this view in Chapter 6 by discussing 'doing family' online (p. 106).

The affordances of digital media facilitate 'doing a family' and construction of the family space from far away. A major phenomenon in transnational families is virtual presence despite geographical distance which is provided through different means such as frequent video calls, browsing through social media and other means. This has been conceptualized in anthropology and media studies through terms such as 'virtual co-presence' (p. 51). The authors give reference to works such as Medianou (2016), Nedelcu and Wyss (2016) and Licoppe (2004)

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that conceptualize and distinguish between various types of online co-presence and togetherness (Nedelcu and Wyss, 2016). Another important issue in digitally mediated communication (in families and elsewhere) is the multitude of media channels that offer various affordances, modalities, and templates for communication. A wide range of messaging and social media platforms and apps are used by different family members. The literature on CMC (computer mediated communication) has aimed to account for communication through different platforms and modalities, though the multiplicity of media channels is nicely captured in the polymedia theory by Medianou and Miller (2012, as cited by the authors). Polymedia refers to 'digital ecology with multiple, even competing alternatives for mediated interaction' (p. 49), and it is a useful concept for capturing the range of media platforms. It is also the building block of the notion of mediational repertoire.

Viewing the entirety of media platforms and channels in one repertoire provides a better understanding of the digital media practices in families. Besides media and modalities, this repertoire also includes the totality of languages used for digital practices by integrating linguistic repertoire. The notion of linguistic repertoire (Blommaert and Backus, 2013) emphasizes the organization of the entire linguistic resources in one repertoire that changes and evolves based on the lived experiences or lingistic biographies of the individuals concerned (Busch, 2017). This notion aims to capture the complex trajectories and language resources that individuals and families gain through navigating in different spaces and life histories. The notion has been reconceptualized from the total linguistic varieties in a community (Gumperz, 1972, as cited in Blommaert and Backus, 2011) to the individual level and has received a great deal of attention in recent years since it captures the view of an integrated language ability as opposed to separate competences. Blommaert and Backus (2011) emphasize that linguistic repertoires are organized and developed unevenly because of the life situations and 'record of movement that is both physical and digital' (p. 24). Though they attest that communicative ability is unbounded rather than separated in named languages, they admit that we often refer to named languages to talk about linguistic varieties and use this to analyze the first author's own repertoire. This notion is used as the base for the concept of *Spracherleben* and the method of language portraits (Busch, 2017) which also contributes to the mediagrams method.

The notion of linguistic repertoire has been a central point of discussion in sociolinguistics and education as it is also central to translanguaging (Kusters, 2021). Based on translanguaging perspective, the communicative ability is holistic and continuous rather than being bound by named languages, which are

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ideological constructs, and individuals draw on their entire repertoire to communicate. While the term 'linguistic repertoire' is frequently used in early conceptualizations of translanguaging, recent conceptualizations integrate the entire communicative and cognitive capacity and semiotic resources into the form of semiotic repertoire (Wei, 2018). As Kusters puts it, semiotic repertoires enable a holistic focus (addressing ideologies, histories, potential, and constraints) on action that is both multilingual and multimodal (Kusters, 2017: 11). This difference could also be important in digitally mediated communication practices where various multimodal resources are used and assembled with linguistic resources. Pennycook (2017) introduces semiotic assemblages to expand semiotic repertoires in translanguaging and situate it 'in the dynamic relations among objects, places, and linguistic resources, an emergent property deriving from the interactions between people, artefacts, and space (Pennycook, 2017: 11–12). From this perspective, repertoires are not (only) internal and 'owned' by people but are also located in different spaces.

The authors also try not to lose sight of the current theoretical developments is sociolinguistics and education and trending notions such as translanguaging. Though named languages and code-switching is the basis for mediational repertoire and mediagrams, the authors discuss the theoretical developments in sociolinguitics in 2010's dubbed as 'the trans-super-poly-metro movement' (p. 10) and notions such as heteroglossia that advocate continuity and fluidity in language practices. The authors align the theoretical perspective of the book with interactional conversational code-switching in which the speakers draw on and shift between language verities shared by the interlocuters. They also argue for the practical usefulness of retaining the terms such as multilingualism, both in the critical sense and as it is used by public, including the participants of the study. Lexander and Androutsopoulos (2021) also discuss using named languages as a practical choice and clarify that this does not necessarily reflect the theoretical standpoints of the authors. In the book, they draw on Auer (2022) to argue that neglecting named language separations altogether and critiquing code-switching might 'overshoot the target'. The authors seem to argue for a balance between fluidity and fixity to justify the use of interactional code-switching. Using code-switching and named languages can reduce the diversity in the language practices of the families and digital media practices such as using features of different languages and scripts and creative assemblage of multimodal and linguistic features, as well as traversing the power relations and ideologies seem to be explained better through a translanguaging perspective. The authors rely on ethnographic data from interactions to capture the nuances in actual practices of the participants.

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The book offers a solid and substantiated theoretical ground for mediational repertoire. The notion links research and conceptualization from different disciplines and bring them together to present a conceptualization of the entirety of media, modality, and language resources used by transnational families as a space. The book provides an interdisciplinary contribution to research on FLP, media studies, and anthropology on transnational families. Regarding the fluidity and fixity in using language resources, the fluid practices going beyond boundaries, and the categorical language ideologies that separate and stratify named languages seem to coexist in the semiotic repertoire. further empirical research, and theorization seems necessary to shed more light on the debate.

Another interesting theoretical contribution of the study is conceptualizing polycentricity in digital media, offered in Chapter 7 of the book. Beside the transnational family, the diasporic community is also viewed as a space, which is co-constructed through practices and governed by different linguistic norms and hierarchies in different 'centres' (p. 140). For instance, in a diasporic community, the linguistic repertoires are stratified, and different norms may be present in different contexts and circles. In a similar vein, in digital diasporic communities such as different group chats or interactions, different rules and expectation may apply. In the case of the Senegalese participating families, the authors identified five centers for digital media practices beyond family including the spaces of diasporic socializing: the public sphere of Senegal, religion, the sphere of Norway and the global pop culture. The authors show how different features of the repertoires are drawn upon for communication in each space. This view of polycentricity is an important contribution since it goes beyond the digital practices of family to the wider realm of digital practices in transnational diaspora and show how different language hierarchies are activated in various digital centers. It could be interesting to further investigate individual practices and agency in tailoring the semiotic resources in different centers and the extent to which the digital media adhere to separating languages and following the hierarchies. It could also contribute to the previously mentioned debate on fixity and fluidity.

Visualization through mediagrams is the creative method the book and research project present. Mediagrams are the graphic representations of the mediational repertoire and build on the previous methods used to visualize repertoires such as language portraits put forward by Busch (2015, as cited by the authors) and representations of media choices (Brandehof, 2014; Nemcova, 2016, as cited by the authors) as well as sociograms (Sharma, 2017). In Chapter 4, the process of constructing mediagrams is elaborated. According to the authors, the aim of using this visualization technique was to collect both subjective and objective

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data from the participants' accounts about their language use and actual practices (p. 85). Visualization of mediated repertoires is an iterative process that starts with interviews and drawing language portraits and continues with constructing media maps that are free and unstructured drawings of the media choices of the participant. Media maps are used to elicit more data from online interactions, which in turn help in compiling first mediagrams. This mediagram is modified, based on the data from the subsequent interviews, to capture the medational repertoire of the participants more accurately (p. 99).

The final constructed mediagrams show the participants' online interactions, the addressees with whom one interacts, the languages and modalities, and the platforms used for the interaction. The participant is shown at the center with a circle and colored lines connect them to the family members or friends with whom they interact. The line color represents languages, and the type of line shows the modality. The logo of the platform is placed next to each of the contact points to show the media channels. The mediagrams can be compared to show the patterns and singularities in the mediational repertoires of the family members. It can also show the changes in language and media choices that take place over time and across generations. Patterns of connectivity and availability for transnational communication through digital media can also be viewed and compared between the participants or for the same participant over time. Management and navigation of family ties across polymedia is discussed in detail in Chapter 5, with examples from three cases and their respective mediagrams. Overall, mediagrams can be a very useful tool for making the digital media practices and choices visible and accessible for research.

Despite its usefulness, working with mediagrams also includes some challenges. The ethical issues discussed at the end of Chapter 4 are significant considerations. Data protection and anonymity and issues of consent, particularly when working with children, are important issues that need to be addressed before using the method. In a previous publication (Lexander and Androutsopoulos, 2021) the authors also discuss potential limitations of the method. The directionality of the interactions, fluid language practices (such as translanguaging and trans-scripting) and frequency of contact are some of the details that may be lost. This is to some extent inevitable while using this method. Another potential limitation is focusing on interactions, though part of mediational repertoire might include watching and listening through browsing feeds in social media for instance. The authors' reliance on multisited ethnography and the qualitative data collected through multiple sources can partly make up for these nuances and details. However, the graphics can also be adapted for different contexts and purposes.

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The fieldwork of project and the procedure of data collection and analysis is also elaborated in the book. Participants of the study were four Senegalese-Norwegian families. Details on their language repertoires as well as the sociolinguistic background of Norway and Senegal are also discussed. The study uses various online/offline data collection methods that are deemed necessary by the authors for such a study. The data collection started 'offline first' (p. 92), with observations of family interactions and focus group interviews. According to the authors, it is necessary before compiling the mediagrams and collecting data on digital media practices. It is a significant point, and it should be noted that mediagrams may not be as useful when used in isolation and without an ethnographic offline component. Other sources of data include media diaries, text and voice messages from online interactions, interviews, and non-participating observation.

Chapters 5 and 6 present some of the main themes emerging from the findings. Power and solidarity in the family, translocal connections, and expressions of affection are major themes discussed in Chapter 6. Power and solidarity relations are negotiated through references to shared histories and repertoires as well as morality references. About translocality, distance can range from being in different rooms in the same home to transnational connection with relatives across long distances. Affection and endearment among the family members also range from the interactions between parents, parent-child, and sibling interactions to interactions with the extended family and beyond. This chapter also includes interesting excerpts from the data, which show the use of various linguistic resources, and features from different languages in the online interactions. The data and analysis show the pervasiveness and integration of digital media in the daily life of the families.

The book addresses digital multilingualism in transnational families, an important and timely, yet under-researched and under-theorized area. With the technology boom in recent years and particularly in the post-pandemic period, digital media is now so integrated in family life that its role in the construction of family relationships and interactions is not negligible. While previous generations were raised in front of the TV, electronic gadgets and apps seem to have the central role for the current generation. In such a climate, theoretical and methodological tools to facilitate understanding and further explore the role played by the digital media in transnational families and children's multilingual practices is greatly needed. The book, and the research project, take a big step in filling this void by providing a well-grounded and interdisciplinary conceptualization and a creative and appealing visualization method. Though it might seem difficult in an age of hyper-connectivity to capture the entirety of media

channels, modalities and languages used in the family, the notion of mediational repertoires and the visualization method of mediagrams can facilitate this process. The book mixes the theoretical and methodological discussions with the fieldwork findings from the interesting study in Norway. Further research in other contexts on mediational repertoires of transnational families adopting and adapting mediagrams can pave the way for further theoretical and methodological advances in the field.

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