Language, Asylum, and the National Order

by Jan Blommaert

This paper discusses modernist reactions to postmodern realities. Asylum seekers in Western Europe—people typically inserted into postmodern processes of globalization—are routinely subjected to identification analyses that emphasize the national order. The paper documents the case of a Rwandan refugee in the United Kingdom whose nationality was disputed by the Home Office because of his "abnormal" linguistic repertoire. An analysis of that repertoire, however, supports the applicant's credibility. The theoretical problematic opposes two versions of sociolinguistics: a sociolinguistics of languages, used by the Home Office, and a sociolinguistics of speech and repertoires, used in this paper. The realities of modern reactions to postmodern phenomena must be taken into account as part of the postmodern phenomenology of language in society.

In *The Age of Capital*, Eric Hobsbawm (1975) described the paradox of the late nineteenth century, whereby the classic nation-states of Europe were formed at a time when capital became effectively globalized. While the state became less and less of a relevant scale economically, it became the central political scale, and the expansion and solidification of a transnational economic infrastructure went hand in hand with the expansion and solidification of a national infrastructure: new political systems, education systems, communication systems, and military systems. High modernism set in. The development of "standard," national languages was, of course, an important part of this nation-building process, and when the discourse of trade and industry started conquering the globe, it did so in newly codified and glorified national languages.

Processes of globalization acquired that name about a century later, and while globalization contributes little new substance to the processes of worldwide economic expansion, it adds intensity, depth, and velocity to them, and it expands the range of objects involved in them to include people. The phenomenon of refugees and asylum seekers is a key ingredient of the present stage of globalization, and this paper addresses the ways in which such phenomena appear to trigger an emphasis on the national order of things. In the context of asylum application procedures, the imagination of language, notably, is dominated by frames that refer to static and timeless (i.e., uniform and national) orders of things. So while asylum seekers belong to a truly global scale of events and processes, the treatment of their applications is brought down to a rigidly national scale, a very modernist response to postmodern realities. This creates many problems—problems of justice, to name just one category. It also lays bare some of the threads of the fabric of globalization—the paradox between transnational processes and national frames for addressing them, for instance.

I seek, in this paper, to document these problems, to draw attention to some of the underlying theoretical issues in decoding them, and to suggest more appropriate ways of addressing them. In doing so, I discuss at length one particular asylum application in the United Kingdom, that of a young man I call Joseph Mutingira, a refugee from Rwanda, whose application was refused largely on grounds of the particular sociolinguistic profile he displayed. This profile, the Home Office argued, disqualified his claim to be "from Rwanda." Joseph appealed against this ruling and provided a very long written testimony documenting his life, the incidents in which he was involved, and his escape and rebutting the arguments that supported the ruling. This document is the main data I use; in addition, I also have the written records of Joseph's two interviews with Home Office immigration interviewers (in November 2001 and June 2004), as well as a copy of the official decision of his case by the Home Office in November 2005.[1] I argue that Joseph's life history provides many clues

Jan Blommaert is Professor of Linguistic Anthropology and Director of the Babylon Center at the University of Jyväskylä and Tilburg University (Jozef Balstraat 11, B-2600 Berchem, Belgium [j.blommaert@uvt.nl]). This paper was submitted 7 IV 08 and accepted 11 X 08.

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1. In the United Kingdom, the interview record is handwritten by the interviewer and is called a "verbatim account." There is no audiorecording of the interview, and the immigration interviewer is the one who makes the record. Regardless of the actual language of the interview, however, the record is in English (and thus reflects the institutional voice). It contains both the questions and the answers. In the record of the "screening interview" in November 2001, Joseph initialed all the answers written down by the interviewer as a token of agreement, although he later argued that the interviewer had presented the initialing routine as just a matter of proving that the interview had effectively taken place. The first interview was conducted partly in Kinyarwanda and partly in

about his belonging and life trajectory that together construct a new sociolinguistic profile, one that does not fit the traditional national imagination of Rwanda but does fit the realities of Rwanda during and after the 1994 genocide.[2] The main point is that the sociolinguistic repertoire displayed by Joseph is indicative of *time*, not just of *space*: it connects to the *history* of a region in the past two decades, not just to the region. Sociolinguistic repertoires thus index full histories of people and of places, not just institutionally genred "origins."

The case I build here is analytical and theoretical, yet it is practical as well. I intend to demonstrate that a particular kind of sociolinguistic analysis can contribute to addressing and critically questioning "applied" issues—issues of life and death for many people. Facts like the ones reported here should (re)open our eyes to the critical relevance of social-scientific research in our world. I begin by providing a précis of Joseph's life history, as reported in his written testimony. For reasons that will soon become clear, I focus on the information on languages and language use in the text.

Joseph's Life History

Joseph's long affidavit reads like a horror story, and it grimly testifies to the profound distortion of the social fabric in Rwanda that led to the genocide of 1994. This is a very elementary point: we must read his life history against the backdrop of what we know of that dramatic period in that region of Africa.[3] We must try to imagine his life history as set in a real context and as a possible trajectory followed by people in that region at that time. If we do not, his life history makes no sense; it was a fundamental disbelief in the realism of such descriptions that underlay the rejection of Joseph's asylum application. I suggest the assumption that, in thoroughly distorted conditions of life, thoroughly distorted life stories can be realistic. This, of course, does not mean that we must take for granted that Joseph's account is "truthful." Obviously, many stories told in asylum procedures are *not* truthful, and immigration authorities all over the world assume, as a default position, that the stories told to them are lies. As discussed below, this default position is problematic because it is grounded in commonsense presumptions of how countries are constituted and how they offer a habitat to people. These assumptions—and not the "truth"—are on trial here.

Joseph claims to have been born in Kigali, Rwanda, in November 1986. This, as mentioned above, was disputed by the U.K. authorities, and we return to the issue of Joseph's age below. He claims to be a Hutu, even though his mother was Tutsi. His father was a politician and his mother a businesswoman whose activities were mainly in Kenya. She took young Joseph with her to Kenya, where he attended an English-medium nursery school and, between visits home, often stayed with a friend of his mother's in Nairobi, with whom he spoke English. He picked up a few words of Swahili from classmates. His parents insisted that the children speak English at home in Kigali, too. The family lived in a compound surrounded by walls, and the father forbade them from going out and socializing with other children. The family had a servant who spoke Kinyarwanda; Joseph learned some Kinyarwanda from him. Visiting friends spoke English, Kinyarwanda, and French.

In 1992, at the age of five, Joseph returned to Rwanda with his mother. Shortly after their return, his mother was murdered in circumstances unknown to Joseph. She was buried in their garden, and shortly afterward the servant left the house. About six months later, the house was attacked at night. Hearing shouting and the noise of people breaking things, Joseph jumped out of the window and ran away. His father and the other children in the house were killed during the raid. Joseph ended up in a group of other people trying to escape from the area where they lived. He told them that he had an uncle living in Gisenyi, a town on the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D. R. Congo). They took him on board a truck and, after several hours, dropped him off in Gisenyi, where he found the way to his uncle's house. In that house, French and Kinyarwanda were spoken most often, but Joseph's uncle consistently spoke English with him. His uncle told him that his father was a politician, that his father killed his mother because she was a Tutsi, and that Tutsis murdered all members of his family out of revenge. In his uncle's house, Joseph slept in the basement and hardly communicated with anyone (remember, he was a small child). But he saw many people visiting his uncle and heard them speaking "Kinyankole" (Runyankole), a language similar to Kinyarwanda. (The issue of Kinyankole/Runyankole is crucial to the case, and I return to it in great detail in "Runyankole or Kinyankole?") Joseph picked up a bit of Runyankole and started speaking it with his uncle. Given his uncle's proficiency in English, French, Kinyarwanda, and Runyankole, Joseph suspected that his uncle had lived in another country, and given the proximity of Gisenyi to the Congolese town of Goma, he believed that it must have been the D. R. Congo. (Runyankole is, in fact, spoken mainly in Uganda and the border areas of Uganda, Rwanda, and Congo, but, as we shall see, it is also a diasporic language among Rwandan migrants and refugees.) After some time (when Joseph was 6 years old), his uncle started sending Joseph on errands. He had to carry a bag to a certain place, where someone would tap on his shoulder and take the bag from him. Joseph later came to

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Runyankole (in the presence of an interpreter); the second was conducted completely in English. In the second ("substantive") interview, as well as in the official verdict letter, Joseph's nationality and his date of birth are qualified as "disputed" or "doubted."

2. I am deeply grateful to the man I call Joseph Mutingira, as well as to his legal counsel Anna, for allowing me to publish elements from his case. I came across these materials in the spring of 2006, when I was asked to provide an expert report, for the appeal case, on the treatment of language in Joseph's application.

3. A very good source is Colette Braeckman's (1996) book *Terreur Africaine*.

believe that his uncle was involved with "people from another country," with whom he was plotting something. Gisenyi is adjacent to Goma, which was the gateway to the Interahamwe rebel–dominated Maniema and Kivu regions in Congo, so this scenario (in 1992–1993) is not unthinkable (e.g., Vlassenroot 2000; Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers 2004).

Joseph did this "for several years" until "one day in 1996 (I think)" he was stopped by Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) government soldiers. They challenged him in Kinyarwanda, but since his Kinyarwanda was still very basic, he answered them in Runyankole. The bag was confiscated and proved to be full of weapons and ammunition. One of the soldiers then interrogated him in Runyankole, and they suspected that Joseph had come from the other side of the border and was a child soldier of the Interahamwe. They arrested him and took him to his uncle's house. They called his uncle out, exchanged some words, and then summarily executed him in front of the (now 9- or 10-year-old) boy. Joseph was brought to a detention camp, where he was beaten every day and interrogated about his involvement in rebel activities, other members of his group, and so on. The interrogations were held in Runyankole, and the fact that Joseph did not have a fluent proficiency in Kinyarwanda was held against him as grounds for suspicion of being a foreign "infiltrant." After some weeks, he was brought to a prison, presumably in Kigali. He found himself in a cell with another, older, boy named Emmanuel. The latter had been an Interahamwe member, and he spoke Runyankole as well as Kinyarwanda. Like the prison guards, Emmanuel first thought that Joseph came from another country, given his proficiency in Runyankole. Joseph was routinely and very brutally tortured; in addition, he was repeatedly raped by Emmanuel. "After some years," Joseph was put on a forced labor regime; given that the guards' orders were in Kinyarwanda, he learned the language to some degree, and he also learned the Kinyarwanda and Swahili songs they would have to sing during work.

After four years in prison, in 2001, he received a visitor: a woman he vaguely remembered. A short while later, during work, a guard told him to go into the bush, and there he met the same woman. She urged him to follow her, together with another boy in prison uniform. They got into a bus; after a while the other boy got off. The woman and Joseph continued their journey to a coach station, where they caught a bus that took them "to another country." There people "were speaking languages I couldn't understand." They got to an airport, and the woman produced travel documents for Joseph. Together they boarded a flight that took them to the United Kingdom, where the same travel documents enabled Joseph to enter the country. During the whole journey, the woman discouraged Joseph from speaking or asking questions, and in order to gain and reaffirm his trust she repeatedly mentioned the name of Joseph's mother (Joseph afterward thought she was the Kenyan woman who took care of him in Kenya during his early infancy). They took a bus, got off at some place (pre-sumably central London), and the woman vanished.[4] After several hours of waiting for her, Joseph started walking around, asking people for help. One man took him to the Immigration Service. Joseph was now about 14 years old. When he stated his age to the official ("an Asian lady who spoke Kinyarwanda"), she called in a medical officer who, after the briefest and most summary of inspections, declared that Joseph was over 18 and should, consequently, be treated as an adult. Here lies the origin of Joseph's "disputed" age: the age he claimed differed from the one attributed to him by the medical officer.[5] One week later, a first "screening" interview was conducted, and Joseph describes the event as intimidating: the officials insisted on short and direct answers, did not make notes of some of his statements (especially on his linguistic repertoire), and threatened to throw him in prison, something which, given his background, was to be avoided at all costs. When the interviewer asked him about his "mother tongue," Joseph understood this as his "mother's tongue" and answered "Kinyarwanda." A Kinyarwanda interpreter was called in, and despite Joseph's insistence that he would be more comfortable in English and his explanations for his lack of proficiency in Kinyarwanda (not recorded in the verbatim account of the interview), the interview started in Kinyarwanda. Joseph's restricted competence was quickly spotted, and after he declared that he also spoke Runyankole, an interpreter fluent in Kinyarwanda and Runyankole was called in, and the interview was continued in Runyankole. Interestingly (and an implicit acknowledgment of Joseph's linguistic repertoire), supplementary questions were asked and answered in English and noted in the verbatim account. Joseph's case was dismissed as fraudulent, and both his age and his nationality were disputed.

In November 2003, Joseph's case was reopened by the Home Office, and a second interview took place in June 2004. This interview yielded the usual set of "contradictions" in comparison with the first, notably with respect to Joseph's language repertoire. In addition, Joseph was not able to give details about Rwanda and Kigali (he could not, for instance, describe the nearest bank to his house in Kigali). He was also asked to provide the numbers from 1 to 10 in Kinyarwanda; since no interpreter was around, he was asked to write these words "phonetically." He produced a written list that was half Kinyarwanda and half Runyankole. The result was easy to

4. Joseph's account of the woman's involvement is vague and evasive. It is not unthinkable that he deliberately tried to shield her from the probing eyes of the Home Office. It is a common problem for asylum applicants that they have to narrate the details of their escape, because giving such details may endanger persons who assisted them in their escape and/or expose valuable networks of migration support. At the same time, vagueness and contradictions in this part of their story work heavily against them in the asylum procedure (see Maryns 2006 for examples and a detailed discussion of this problem).

5. If Joseph had been accepted as a minor, the application procedure and the legal framework in which he would have found himself would have been significantly different and far more lenient. The way in which Joseph was declared an adult was a gross violation of his rights, of course.

predict: his application was rejected again. Joseph was ascribed Ugandan nationality and was to be deported to Uganda.

From a Strange Life to No Life

Toward the end of his affidavit, Joseph writes, "I may have an unusual history, but this does not make me a citizen of a country I have never been to." Certainly, what emerges from the summary above is that his life was dominated by a kind of shibboleth predicament, in which his linguistic repertoire continuously played against him. When he was arrested, his proficiency in Runyankole suggested to the soldiers that he was an agent of the Interahamwe from neighboring Congo; to Emmanuel, that proficiency suggested the same affiliation; and in the United Kingdom his knowledge of English and Runyankole were taken as strong evidence that he was from Uganda, not from Rwanda (where proficiency in Kinyarwanda and French would be expected). So his linguistic repertoire—both positively through what was there and negatively through what was absent from it—perpetually gave him away, categorized him, and created confusion and suspicion about the veracity of his story. In technical jargon, Joseph's language repertoire was continuously seen as *indexical* of certain political and historical positions, defined from within the synchronic universe of meanings, social categories, and attributive patterns in which his interlocutors operated. His proficiency in the particular languages and language varieties he knew continuously "gave off" information about him; it allowed his interlocutors to make quick interpretive jumps from speech to society, to provide contextually loaded readings of his words, and to build an image of Joseph on the basis of how he communicated.[6]

Life on an Exit Strategy

The key to Joseph's "unusual history" lies in his early childhood. Sociolinguistically, as well as in more general ways, Joseph's life was "unusual" from the very beginning. We assume, as stated above, that Joseph does not lie about the main lines of his story. And if we follow that story, what becomes very clear is that his family was somewhat aberrant. His father was "a politician but I have no knowledge of what he did"; in terms of the essentialized categories of ethnic politics in Rwanda, he was identified as a Hutu as well. The father shielded his family from the outside world by prohibiting the children from playing outside their compound and by insisting on an English-only policy at home. According to Joseph's statement, their father was very strict on the use of English at home and actively forbade the use of other languages for his children; his father "thought that speaking English set us apart from other people and showed that we

were more civilized." In his affidavit, Joseph makes the following suggestion:

> Looking back, I wonder whether my parents had lived abroad when they were younger and that is why they spoke English.

Given the troubled history of that region and given his father's prominence and visibility in public life, this may very well have been true. It is not unlikely that his parents had lived abroad as exiles or refugees for a while during one of the many periods of crisis in Rwanda since independence. The fact that Joseph's mother appears to have had business interests and networks in Kenya could be further circumstantial evidence for that. Mamdani (2000, 307–312) shows that large numbers of so-called Banyarwanda (Rwandans, both Hutu and Tutsi) had been present as labor migrants in Uganda since the 1920s. Many of them were employed in the cattle-herding Ankole region, where Runyankole is spoken. Refugees of the 1959 and 1964 conflicts also found their way to the same region. A number of these refugees got UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) scholarships for schools in, among other places, Nairobi, which became a center for Rwandan exiles (the exiled king of Rwanda resided in Nairobi). Given the envy this generated among the local population in Uganda, refugees often had to "pretend to be what they were not: Banyankole, Baganda, Banyoro" (Mamdani 2000, 312). So-called Banyarwanda were also prominent in Yoweri Museveni's rebel army (and, before that, in Idi Amin's secret police): up to a quarter of the Museveni rebels who marched into Kampala in early 1986 were Banyarwanda (Mamdani 2000, 321). The point is that the history and politics of Rwanda have since long been entangled with those of Uganda, Kenya, and other neighboring countries. That Joseph's family had some involvement in neighboring countries and that Runyankole may have entered the family repertoire (e.g., his uncle's) should not be seen as something exceptional. In fact, many Rwandans (Hutu as well as Tutsi) who have a diaspora background are fluent in Runyankole, including the current Rwandan president, Paul Kagame, who grew up in the Ankole region.[7]

It is thus also not unlikely that the family lived on an exit strategy. The father, a politician, must have been aware of the volatility of the political climate in Rwanda and (given Joseph's uncle's involvement in the Interahamwe) may have been active in particularly sensitive and dangerous (radical Hutu) politics, the kind that could have warranted a permanent readiness to escape from Rwanda and settle elsewhere, for example, in Kenya, where English is widely spoken. Remember that the time frame described by Joseph (from 1986, the year of his birth, until his arrest in 1996) covers the victory

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6. A very good concise introduction to the notion of indexicality is Silverstein (2006). See also Blommaert (2005).

7. I am grateful to Dr. Pamela Mbabazi of Mbarara University in Uganda, who, in a personal communication (Cape Town, March 18, 2008), provided me with invaluable insights into the spread of Runyankole as a diaspora language among Banyarwanda.

of Museveni in Uganda (1986), the RPF invasion of Rwanda (1990), and the genocide of 1994, an extremely tumultuous period in the region. The fact that Joseph was put in a nursery school in Kenya adds weight to that suggestion. The fact that, as Joseph later learned, his Tutsi mother was killed with at least the passive involvement of his Hutu father also bespeaks deep and active involvement in Hutu radicalism. The Tutsi raid on Joseph's house, during which the whole of his family was murdered and the house was set alight, also fits this picture; we see a foreshadowing of the genocide of 1994 here, and radical Hutu are already pitted against radical Tutsi groups in murderous incidents. If we believe Joseph's story, we see that it starts making sense.

When Joseph escaped to his uncle's place, the pattern of political involvement became clearer, of course. His uncle kept Joseph out of sight and continued the English-only policy with him, but he also received many visitors who spoke French, Kinyarwanda, and Runyankole. We know that both Hutu (Interahamwe) and Tutsi (RPF) rebels had their bases in the neighboring countries Uganda and Congo (Mamdani 2000; Vlassenroot 2000). Runyankole, as we know, is spoken in Uganda (and is part of the "Runyakitara" cluster, along with Kinyarwanda, Runyoro, and other languages), and with the perpetual movement of groups of migrant, exiled, or refugee Rwandans, its spread to particular pockets in Rwanda and Congo is a given. It explains why Joseph met so many people in Rwanda who spoke Runyankole. Apart from the people in his uncle's house, some of the RPF soldiers and prison guards also spoke the language; so did Emmanuel (an Interahamwe militant), as well the second interpreter in Joseph's application interview, who was fluent (like the Rwandan soldiers and guards) in Kinyarwanda and Runyankole. The "foreignness" of Runyankole, therefore, is not a matter of spatial distribution of the language. Joseph's proficiency in Runyankole was interpreted, quite systematically and by all the people he describes in his narrative, as a sign of being from another country *as well as* a sign of membership in a radical Hutu movement. The language was understood, by those who in interaction with Joseph projected synchronic indexical meanings onto it (the soldiers, Emmanuel, the interrogators, the prison guards), as a sign of Hutu rebel involvement imported from neighboring countries. The geography of the language is a *political* geography, something that does not come as a surprise now that we know something about the history of migration and rebellion in the region. We come back to this below.

Joseph's childhood is likely to have been spent in a family living on an exit strategy and acutely aware of the danger of their times. Let us not forget that most of the critical period described by Joseph was indeed his childhood and that this childhood was spent in a deep political crisis in Rwanda. As a toddler, he was raised in Kenya; at the age of five (too young to enter school, where French and Kinyarwanda would have been the dominant languages), he returned to Rwanda. Shortly afterward, and after an interval in which he had in-

formally learned some Kinyarwanda from the family's servant, his mother was murdered, the rest of his family was killed, and he fled to his uncle in Gisenyi, where he lived in hiding and thus did not enter school at the normal age of six. For all practical purposes, he was dead, and his uncle probably banked on this when he started sending him on errands to provide arms and ammunition to rebel groups from Goma. His communicative network was extremely narrow. He still did not socialize with other children, and he met only his uncle's fellow rebels, with whom he interacted in Runyankole. His uncle gave him some books to read, mostly in English but some in Kinyarwanda (this provides evidence of reading skills, not of writing skills). Language learning, however, proceeded exclusively through informal channels. The bit of Kinyarwanda he already knew allowed him to start picking up some Runyankole, and the English he spoke was deployed solely with his uncle. The reading of books provided some backup to these learning trajectories, but overall they were informal; that is, they developed outside the collective, regimented, and literacy-based pedagogies of the classroom. The latter may be part of the explanation for why he failed the number-writing test (and thus had to revert to "phonetic" writing) during his second interview; in all likelihood, Joseph never acquired full literacy in either of the languages he speaks, and during the interview he was asked to write a language that had had very limited functions in his experience and was quite close to the language that had had more extended functions, Runyankole.

Joseph was arrested at the age of 9–10, and at that age he had not had any formal schooling. His multilingual repertoire was constructed through informal learning processes and was highly "truncated," that is, organized in small, functionally specialized chunks (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005; also Dyers 2008). We return to this topic below. For the moment, it suffices to note that Joseph has indeed had "an unusual story" but that such a story may not have been all that unusual in the Rwanda of the early 1990s. This was not how the Home Office saw it.

The Grounds for Rejection

The Home Office, in its rejection announcement letter of November 2005, saw Rwanda in a very different light: as a relatively stable and uniform nation-state characterized by "national" features such as a relatively stable regime of language (Kroskrity 2000). The letter begins by describing the linguistic operations governing the interview procedures (in giving these examples, I am not concerned with the grammatical or rhetorical consistency of the text):

> (1) It is noted that you claim you were born in . . . Kigali and that your principal language is English. However, you say you also speak Kinyarkole and a little Kinyarwanda. It is noted that when you were substantively interviewed, it was conducted in English [a reference to the 2004 interview]

and when you were interviewed by an Immigration Officer [a reference to the 2001 interview], you started the interview speaking in Kinyarwanda then after ten minutes, the interview was continued in the Kinyarkole language. . . .

This description is followed by an authoritative statement about language in Rwanda:

(2) Although English (and Swahili) are spoken in Rwanda, English is spoken by the Tutsi elite who returned from exile in Uganda post-1994. The BBC World Service, however, advises that a genuine Rwandan national from any of the ethnic groups will normally be able to speak Kinyarwanda and/or French. Kinyarwanda, the national language, is the medium of instruction in schools at primary level while French is used at secondary level. Kinyarwanda is also spoken in the neighboring countries of DRC [Congo], Tanzania and Uganda. (Rwanda country report April 2004). Whereas, Runyankole, is a dialect mainly spoken in the West and South of Uganda (Uganda country profile April 2005). . . . Based on the information above, it is considered that the language called Kinyarkole used at your screening interview is more widely known as Runyankole, therefore, Runyankole will be referred in the rest of this letter.

Observe (a) the reference to formal and institutional language regimes, such as the dominant languages in the education system (which, as we know, was unknown to Joseph); (b) the way in which languages are seen as distributed over *countries*; (c) the sources of evidence used here: the BBC World Service and two unidentified country reports; and (d) the fact that the Home Office states that the language (or "dialect") "Kinyarkole" is more widely known as "Runyankole." Several of these points are addressed more fully in the next section. As to Joseph's own performance as a subject set in this tight and stable nation-state institutional language regime, this is what the Home Office observes:

(3) Reasons to doubt your nationality can be drawn from the fact that you are unable to speak Kinyarwanda and/or French. As already stated. . . , you were screened for the main part in the Ugandan dialect [sic] and then were substantively interviewed in English. It is noted that you were able to answer a few questions asked in Kinyarwanda at the start of your screening interview. However, in your substantive interview you were asked to state the numbers one to ten in Kinyarwanda . . . and also asked for the phrases "Good Morning" and "Goodbye," you wrote your answers down phonetically because you could not write in the language. . . . [I]t has been decided that although written phonetically you did not get all of them correct. . . . Your lack of basic knowledge of the Kinyarwanda language suggests that you are not a genuine national of Rwanda.

Joseph had written some words in Kinyarwanda and others in Runyankole. The Home Office continues hammering away

at Joseph's linguistic repertoire and performance during the interviews:

(4) When asked how you were able to understand Kinyarwanda if you were never taught it and only taught to speak English. . . , you did not answer the question directly, instead you said that you wanted to speak English, but you can also understand Kinyarwanda and Runyankole as well. It is believed that if you were able to pick up and speak fluent Runyankole from your uncle with whom you alleged to have stayed for four years in Gisenyi yet unable to pick up Kinyarwanda, even though you claim to have lived in Rwanda for thirteen years. Your inability to give the correct (phonetic) translations for the general greetings in Kinyarwanda, damages the credibility of your claim. . . . Based on this assessment, it is not accepted that you are a genuine Rwandan national as claimed.

Language is the key element in the argument of the Home Office, but it is not the only one:

(5) It is noted that you were able to describe the old Rwandan flag. . . , however, when you were questioned about the basic geography of your home in . . . Kigali, you were unable to give any information. For instance, you were unable to state any well known landmarks, sites, places, and buildings to your home. . . . You did not know of the nearest bank to your home. . . . You were also unable to name any of the major roads nearest to your home in . . . Kigali. . . . It is not accepted that you have sufficiently demonstrated your knowledge of the basic country and local information regarding your alleged place of birth, as such, it is not accepted that you were born and have lived in Rwanda as claimed.

This, then, leads to the following conclusion:

(6) It is the opinion that a Rwandan national should be expected to know something about their country of origin and place of birth. Moreover, it is believed that you could be a Ugandan national as result of your knowledge and use of the Runyankole language at screening . . . . Or, you could possibly be a national of a different East African country where English is much more widely spoken. Your true nationality, however, cannot be determined at this point in time.

Joseph's "unusual" life has thus been reset in a different country and in a different time frame, because the Home Office doubts his age as well. From someone with a strange life, Joseph has now been redefined as someone with no life at all.

Defying the Monoglot Ideal

In a seminal paper, Michael Silverstein (1996, 285) distinguished between a "speech community" characterized by "sharing a set of norms or regularities for interaction by means of language(s)," and a "linguistic community." The latter is described as

a group of people who, in their implicit sense of the regularities of linguistic usage, are united in adherence to the idea that there exists a functionally differentiated norm for using their language denotationally. . . , the inclusive range of which the best language users are believed to have mastered in the appropriate way.

Consciousness of a standard (the "best" language) would typically be something that falls within the realm of linguistic communities, and while speech communities are characterized by bewildering diversity, linguistic communities as a rule pledge allegiance to a single norm and define subjects as "(ab)normal," depending on their degree of fit with that norm. This pattern of categorization, in which subjects are placed "in" or "outside" normalcy, depending on how "normal" their language repertoire is, belongs to what Silverstein calls a "monoglot ideology." A monoglot ideology makes time and space static, suggests a transcendent phenomenology for things that define the nation-state, and presents them as natural, neutral, acontextual, and nondynamic: as facts of nature. Such a monoglot ideology was applied by the Home Office in categorizing Joseph as a language-using subject, and it was the fact that Joseph defied this monoglot ideal that served as the basis for disqualifying him and his claims. Note that "monoglot" does not mean "monolingual." In fact, a monoglot ideology can (and often does) operate in a multilingual environment. The point is that a monoglot ideology imposes a particular regime on languages: the regime of clarity, transparency, and officialdom outlined above.

In what follows, I try to decode this process, in which two "profiles" are opposed to each other. In order to do that, I must give sociolinguistic-analytic attention to two different phenomena: the language-ideological work of the linguistic community used as a conceptual backdrop by the Home Office and the practical, pragmatic repertoire displayed and narrated by Joseph and the speech communities we can see through that. These two views, as I see it, represent different kinds of sociolinguistics: the first a sociolinguistics of language and the second a sociolinguistics of speech or resources. The first is a sociolinguistics of stable distribution of "languages," the latter a sociolinguistics of mobility, in which actual resources move through time and space (Blommaert 2003). I recapitulate this theoretical distinction in my conclusions.

The National Sociolinguistic Horizon

Let us now return to some of the fragments from the Home Office letter above and observe how strongly they define languages in terms of national circumscription. In fragment 2, for instance, we read,

(7) The BBC World Service, however, advises that a genuine Rwandan national from any of the ethnic groups will normally be able to speak Kinyarwanda and/or French. Kinyarwanda, the national language, is the medium of in-

struction in schools at primary level while French is used at secondary level.

In fragment 3, we encounter

(8) Your lack of basic knowledge of the Kinyarwanda language suggests that you are not a genuine national of Rwanda.

In fragment 4, we see

(9) Your inability to give the correct (phonetic) translations for the general greetings in Kinyarwanda, damages the credibility of your claim. . . . Based on this assessment, it is not accepted that you are a genuine Rwandan national as claimed.

In fragment 6, finally, we read that

(10) it is believed that you could be a Ugandan national as result of your knowledge and use of the Runyankole language at screening. . . . Or, you could possibly be a national of a different East African country where English is much more widely spoken.

The space in which languages are situated is invariably a *national* space, the space defined by states that have names and can be treated as fixed units of knowledge and information (as in the country reports quoted by the Home Office). It is also a unit of power, control, and institutionalization, as testify the frequent references to formal institutional environments (such as the education system) for the proliferation and distribution of the languages mentioned.

We have also seen how language itself is totalized and strongly associated with levels and degrees of proficiency: Joseph did not speak *enough* Kinyarwanda or did not speak it *well enough*; his answers were *not correct*.[8] Even if part of the first interview was done in Kinyarwanda and even if Joseph wrote some words down in Kinyarwanda, his level of proficiency was deemed to fall below the standards of normalcy in terms of national belonging. As (reliably, one assumes) affirmed by the BBC World Service, "a *genuine* Rwandan national from any of the ethnic groups will *normally* be able to speak Kinyarwanda and/or French," and that means *a lot* of *correct* Kinyarwanda and French. Given the assumption that a "normal" Rwandan national would have gone through the national education system (and would thus have had exposure to formal learning trajectories for the national languages), moreover, "speaking" a language equals "speaking and writing." Joseph was asked to *write* numbers in Kinyarwanda as part of an assessment of whether he *spoke* the language. The highly regimented nature of literacy was simply overlooked, regardless of the fact that Joseph had clearly stated that he had not attended any schools in Rwanda, and regardless of

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8. We see a form of governmentality here in which "order" (in this case national order) is policed all the way down to the microscopic (or "capillary") levels of pronunciation and writing. This form of policing, to Foucault (2007), would fit in a system of security.

the fact that his problem with literacy had led the interviewer to ask him to write phonetically. The Home Office should have known that they were facing a young man for whom literacy was a hurdle.

A reverse line of argument was used with respect to Runyankole. Since Joseph knew that language *well enough*, and since that language is "officially" spoken (as a "dialect," according to the Home Office) in Uganda, Joseph could be a Ugandan national. The fact that, in Joseph's account, many other Rwandans are reported to use Runyankole and the fact that the immigration authorities had no problem finding an interpreter fluent in both Kinyarwanda and Runyankole were both overlooked or disregarded. That languages can spill over borders, that such phenomena may be rife in regions with a lot of cross-border traffic, that such cross-border traffic is frequent in regions such as the Great Lakes where there are large numbers of "old" and "new" refugees (Mamdani 2000; also Malkki 1995*a*), and that, consequently, people can have densely mixed, *poly*glot repertoires are elementary sociolinguistic facts that were not taken into account in the Home Office's use of language as an analytic of national belonging. This is why we must shift our focus from language to speech and toward the real, practical resources that Joseph had.

A Polyglot Repertoire

All of the above is reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu's observation in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991, 45):

> To speak of *the* language, without further specification, as linguists do, is tacitly to accept the *official* definition of the *official* language of a political unit. This language is the one which, within the territorial limits of that unit, imposes itself on the whole population as the only legitimate language, especially in situations that are characterized in French as more *officielle*. (italics in original)

He continues, "this state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practices are objectively measured" (p. 45). The political unit that is the target of the Home Office's "objective measurement" is Rwanda, and "the" languages of Rwanda are (normative, standardized, and literate varieties of) Kinyarwanda and French. The Home Office overlooks the fact that when a state is in crisis (as Rwanda was for most of its postcolonial history and certainly was in the period covered in Joseph's story), symbols of the state and its power, such as the national language, can be heavily contested. In fact, speaking the national language may in itself be an expression of political allegiance that, in circumstances of violent conflict, requires dissimulation or denial for one's own safety, and as mentioned above, speaking a "rebel" language such as Runyankole induces a political semiotics.[9]

9. This makes the position of interpreters in asylum applications quite precarious. Cases have been reported in which (government-appointed) interpreters identified applicants' accents as being a "rebel accent." See

Joseph did not have a repertoire that accorded with the expected "official" and "national" one. But what was his repertoire? It was, undoubtedly, a "truncated multilingual" repertoire, composed of functionally specialized "bits" of language(s) that he had picked up in informal learning trajectories during his life. Remember, of course, that given the particular chronology of his life, Joseph did not attend school apart from the nursery school in Kenya. The linguistic repertoire he reports in his affidavit is the repertoire of a child or an adolescent who grew up in extraordinary conditions, outside any form of "normalcy."

In light of the prominence given to language issues by the Home Office, Joseph's affidavit is replete with descriptions of how and why he acquired linguistic resources and how he related to them. Here is a selection of statements on language that follows the biographical line reported in the affidavit.

(11) My first language is English. This is the first language I can remember speaking. Ever since I was a small child, as far back as I can remember, my parents spoke to me in English.

(12) It was very important to my father that we children always spoke English as he thought that speaking English set us apart from other people and showed that we were more civilized.

(13) The servant would speak Kinyarwanda. I remember sometimes when my parents were both out, the servant would tell us little Kinyarwanda poems and sayings, and so I picked some Kinyarwanda up from him. He also understood and spoke a little English, but he was not fluent.

(14) At school in Kenya we were taught in English. All communication was in English and if you spoke to the teachers you had to talk to them in English. . . . Some of the children did speak to each other in Swahili or Kikuyu in the playground.

(15) When I had been to my uncle's house with my parents they had spoken French and Kinyarwanda, but mostly Kinyarwanda. However, my uncle had always spoken English to me and my brothers.

(16) My uncle spoke lots of languages. He was very good in English, French, Kinyarwanda and Kinyankole. . . . When I first got to his house I couldn't understand the languages he was speaking and I thought he spoke a different language with every person that came to his house.

(17) I did not have a lot to do, and so I would listen to my uncle and his friends talking and I began to learn some of the words they were speaking. The language [Runyankole] is quite similar to Kinyarwanda, and so it wasn't difficult to learn more, since I already understood some Kinya-

Maryns (2006) for a general overview of the linguistic aspects of the asylum application in Belgium.

rwanda. . . . Eventually I knew enough to speak a bit of Kinyankole to my uncle. I think he was surprised about this. At that time I didn't know the name of the language that my uncle spoke. I knew he had lived in another country because my parents had told me that he lived in another country. I guessed that this is why he spoke that language. I didn't know where the language come from [sic] as I had never heard the language before. I assumed it was from a nearby country. I thought maybe it was a language from the DRC (Zaire) but I had no reason for this except that I knew it was a country which was next to Rwanda.

(18) After I had been there a while I told him [Joseph's uncle] that I wanted to learn, and so he brought me a few books. Mostly the books were in English. Sometimes they were in Kinyarwanda, and some had both languages in them.

(19) [The soldiers] started questioning me in Kinyarwanda asking me what was in the sack. I understood what they were saying to me, but I couldn't reply. I was very shocked, and I didn't have good enough Kinyarwanda to explain, and they were all talking at once so I just froze. I spoke to them in Kinyankole to reply to their questions because that was the language I was using most commonly at the time. The soldiers called another soldier over. This soldier spoke to me in Kinyankole and asked me questions. . . . I now think that they thought that I was a child who had been brought up abroad, and was part of the Interahamwe who was training to come back to Rwanda and fight. . . . The soldier who spoke Kinyankole would translate for the others and tell them what I said.

(20) I kept telling them [the prison guards] I didn't know, but they said that the fact that I didn't speak good Kinyarwanda was evidence that I was a rebel.

(21) He [Emmanuel] spoke Kinyankole and Kinyarwanda very well. . . . He told me that he had been working for a Hutu rebel group and had been a soldier in a different country. I thought that this was DRC or Uganda. . . . I think that is how he learned Kinyankole.

(22) We would be given orders in Kinyarwanda. My Kinyarwanda was good enough to understand what they said and so I would know what to do. There was no talking to each other so I didn't get to learn any more Kinyarwanda or talk to anyone. . . . The prisoners would sometimes have to sing songs on the way. . . . Usually the songs were in Kinyarwanda, but sometimes they would sing Swahili songs.

(23) I have bad associations with the Kinyankole language. I feel that learning Kinyankole has been a disaster for me. I wish I had never learned that language. . . . I want to keep myself apart from that language. Anyway, I do not speak Kinyankole as well as I speak English. I can communicate at a much more basic level. I can make myself understood, and I can understand what someone else says in Kinyankole, but it is not like speaking in English which I find much

easier, and which allows me to express myself more clearly. . . . My Kinyarwanda is not a good language for me to communicate in either. I do have basic Kinyarwanda, but I cannot speak it fluently. When someone talks to me in Kinyarwanda I can understand what they mean, but not every word that they say. However, I cannot reply easily.

Joseph, to be sure, is generous with information on how he acquired languages (fragments 11, 13, 14, 17, and 18) as well as on the particular, specific, skills he acquired in these languages (fragments 22 and 23). He also gives us rather precise microdescriptions of sociolinguistic environments, in which different people use different languages and use them in different ways, often including reflections on how people acquired the languages they mastered as well as elements of the specific genres in which the languages were deployed (fragments 13–17, 19, 21, and 22). Finally, Joseph also appears to be quite aware of the indexical values of some of these languages: English sets the family apart and suggests a superior level of "civilization" (fragment 12), Runyankole suggests an identity as a foreign Hutu rebel (fragments 19–21), and he himself has very negative attitudes toward that language (fragment 23). Here the political geography of the language appears again: Runyankole, in the crisis-ridden Rwandan context in which his story is set, naturally signaled enemy identities to those whom he encountered.

Observe how specific and precise Joseph is in all of this. He specifies that he can "understand" people but not "reply" to them in Kinyarwanda, that he has a "basic" active knowledge in Runyankole, that Swahili was used in RPF songs sung in prison (but not for commands, which were in Kinyarwanda), and so on. Joseph articulates a fairly well developed ethno-sociolinguistics, in which various highly specific resources—"bits" of languages—are assembled into a truncated repertoire, the "best" language of which is English (which "allows [him] to express [himself] more clearly" than Kinyarwanda or Runyankole). We see how Joseph specifies lines "into" particular languages, genres, and registers. These lines are situational and dependent on the highly specific communicative networks into which he is inserted. He grew up "outside" Kinyarwanda, except for the poems and sayings he picked up from the servant; he acquired English in a schooled and rigorous home context; his Runyankole came into existence by eavesdropping on conversations between his uncle and visitors in the house and was later used in interactions with the soldiers and with Emmanuel. His Kinyarwanda (as well as bits of Swahili) developed when he got into prison. As mentioned above, there were hardly any formal learning trajectories here (except, minimally, for English), and he learned the particular pieces of language in the context of a deeply distorted life. The result is a very distorted repertoire, but a "normal" repertoire can hardly be expected under such conditions. Let me underscore that such a repertoire is tied neither to any form of "national" space nor to a national, stable regime of language. It is tied to an individual's life, and

it follows the peculiar biographical trajectory of the speaker. When the speaker moves from one social space into another, his or her repertoire is affected, and the end result is something that mirrors, almost like an autobiography, the erratic lives of people.

Runyankole or Kinyankole?

We have seen that the Home Office based its arguments for rejecting Joseph's claims on his partial knowledge of Kinya-rwanda and his (unqualified) knowledge of Runyankole. It is the latter language that situates him in Uganda, according to the Home Office (and in spite of evidence that shows that the language is also used by Rwandans, including the Home Office interpreter). In fragment 23, we saw, however, how strongly Joseph qualified his own proficiency in Runyankole: "I do not speak Kinyankole as well as I speak English. I can communicate at a much more basic level." He can "make [himself] understood" and understand what other people say. In addition to the fact that he (rightly) considers that language to be one of the severe problems in his life, he self-qualifies as a nonnative speaker of Runyankole.

This is further evidenced by something that the Home Office failed to notice, in spite of the fact that they themselves mentioned it. We read in fragment 2,

> (24) Based on the information above, it is considered that the language called Kinyarkole used at your screening interview is more widely known as Runyankole, therefore, Runyankole will be referred in the rest of this letter.

The use of the term "Kinyarkole" in the Home Office's letter is strange, and it does not reflect Joseph's own consistent use of "Kinyankole." The point, however, is that the Home Office redefined what is named in the reports as "Kinyankole/Kinyarkole" as "Runyankole," using a different prefix with the stem "nyankole." *Ru*nyankole is the official name of the language, and it is the name used for the language by its native speakers.[10] Using the prefix "Ki" for the language would mimic the use of that prefix in language names such as "Kinyarwanda," "Kirundi," and "Kiswahili" and would rather obviously mark nonnative, diasporic usage and identification of that language. It would be a rather predictable *Rwandan* way of identifying Runyankole. The upshot of this simple observation (but one missed by the Home Office) is that Joseph's consistent use of the name "Kinyankole" places him outside the national sociolinguistic order of Uganda, where the language would be called Runyankole.[11]

10. Languages of that cluster in the Great Lakes region often carry the prefix "Ru," as in "Runyoro," "Ruhaya," "Runyakitara," and so on, or the related "Lu" prefix, as in "Luganda."

11. The Home Office did not display much sensitivity to African language features in general in this case. Thus, the name of the nursery school in Kenya that Joseph mentions is systematically written as "Kinyatta," whereas it would be elementary to know that the school would very likely be called "Kenyatta," after Kenya's first president and independence hero.

It is, in a way, an elephant in the room, but such elementary errors disqualify Joseph as a native speaker of Runyankole and thus (in the logic of the Home Office) would rule out Uganda as his place of origin. The use of "Kinyankole," in addition to Joseph's account of his limited proficiency in the language, would clearly point toward a position as a speaker of a local (Rwandan or cross-border) lingua franca, diaspora variety of the language. It would, in effect, be evidence of a totally different sociolinguistic image of the region, in which languages and speakers do not stay in their "original place" but move around on the rhythm of crises and displacements of populations. That image, needless to say, corresponds very well to the historical realities of the Great Lakes region after independence.

Modernist Responses

We have reached the conclusion of the disturbing story of Joseph's life and his asylum application, and what remains is to observe how in the face of postmodern realities, such as the globalized phenomenon of international refugees from crisis regions to the West, governments appear to formulate very old modernist responses (see also Maryns 2006). We have seen, in particular, how in Joseph's case, the Home Office relied on a national sociolinguistic order of things in assessing his linguistic repertoire.

To begin with, his repertoire was seen as indicative of *origins*, defined within stable and static ("national") spaces, and not of biographical trajectories that develop in actual histories and topographies. The question as to which (particular and single) language Joseph "spoke" was one that led to statements about where he was born, about where his origins lie. The fact is, however, that someone's linguistic repertoire reflects a *life*, not just birth, a life that is lived in a real sociocultural, historical, and political space. If such a life develops in a place torn by violent conflict and dislodged social and political relations, the image of someone being born and bred in one community with one language as his "own" is hardly useful. In fact, using such a pristine image is unjust.[12] If we accept that Joseph led the life he documents in his affidavit, then very little in the way of a "normal" sociolinguistic profile can be expected (sociolinguistically, of course, such forms of normality are questionable in any event). To put it more crudely, if the Home Office had assumed that Joseph *may* have been a genuine refugee, deviance from a "normal" sociolinguistic profile would have been one of the key arguments in his favor. Imposing such sociolinguistic normalcy (with the deeper implications specified by Bourdieu [1991] above) amounts to an a priori refusal to accept the possible truth of his story. In fact, it creates a catch-22 for Joseph. If his sociolinguistic profile were "normal," that would be strong evidence that the

12. A group of linguists to which I belong launched a set of guidelines for the use of language in determining people's identities. See Language and National Origin Group (2004).

life history he told was untrue. If he had a command of schooled and literate varieties of Kinyarwanda and French, this would naturally mean that the account of his troubled childhood was a concoction.

As we know, such imageries of sociolinguistic normalcy belong to the instrumentarium of the modern nation-state. In fact, in the sort of Herderian twist often used in nationalist rhetoric, they are at the core of modern imaginings of the nation-state, and they revolve around a denial or rejection of what Bauman and Briggs (2003) call linguistic hybridity: impurity, nonstandard forms, and mixing and transformation of language resources (see also Zygmunt Bauman's [1991] discussion of the relationship between modernity and ambivalence). They come with the monoglot package described by Silverstein (1996, 1998), in which language testing and emphases on literate "correctness" assume a prominent place; witness the little literacy test administered to Joseph in order to ascertain his (totalized) "knowledge" of Kinyarwanda (see also Collins and Blot 2003). The paradox of this modernist reaction to postmodern realities is sketched above; injustice is almost by necessity its result. Imposing a strictly national order of things on people who are denationalized or transnationalized is not likely to do them justice. In particular, it produces tremendous difficulties with coming to terms with

> the logical intersection between mobile people and mobile texts—an intersection no longer located in a definable territory, but in a deterritorialized world of late modern communication. (Jacquemet 2005, 261)

Not just their cases are harmed, but their subjectivity is as well, because they are deterritorialized people whose existence cannot be squeezed into the modern frame of national units and institutions. It is remarkable to see how powerful the nation-state is for people whose lives defy the salience of national units.

It is far too easy to rave about the ignorance or absurdity displayed by the Home Office in this case. The point to be made is wider and graver than that. It is ultimately about the way in which anomalous frames for interpreting human behavior—the modernist national frames referred to here—are used as instruments of power and control in a world in which more and more people no longer correspond to the categories of such frames. This problem is not restricted to asylum cases; we can also see it in the field of schooled instruction (e.g., Collins and Blot 2003), media regimes and various forms of language policing therein (Blommaert et al. 2009), and many other places and events where institutions have to address the forms of cultural globalization so eloquently described by Appadurai (1996) or Castells (1997). The dominant reflex to increases of hybridity and deterritorialization, unfortunately, too often appears to be a reinforced homogeneity and territorialization.

The theoretical questions this raises are momentous, and we should pause to consider one of them. It is clear that a sociolinguistics of languages does not offer much hope for improvement. It is precisely the totalizing concept of language that is used in such cases to disqualify people, often on the flimsiest of evidence. What is needed is a sociolinguistics of *speech* and *resources*, of the real bits and chunks of language that make up a repertoire, and of real ways of using this repertoire in communication (Hymes 1996). Sociolinguistic life is organized as *mobile speech*, not as static language, and lives can consequently be better investigated on the basis of repertoires set against a real historical and spatial background. It is on the basis of such an analysis of resources that we were able to answer the language-based claims of the Home Office about Joseph's national belonging. Work in this direction is underway (e.g., Agha 2007; Blommaert 2005; Jacquemet 2005; Pennycook 2007; Rampton 2006). In such work, however, we should keep track of the strong definitional monoglot effect of the modern state—of the way in which time and space are made (literally) "static" (i.e., a feature of the state) in relation to language—and part of any postmodern phenomenology of language and culture should be devoted to understanding the very non-postmodern ideologies and practices that shoot through postmodern, globalized realities. It is when we are able to balance the two and understand that a totalized, modern concept of language is very much part of postmodern realities that we can offer analyses that have the practical punch they need.

Acknowledgments

Comments

Mike Baynham
School of Education, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, United Kingdom (m.baynham@education.leeds.ac.uk). 4 IV 09

In this paper, Blommaert convincingly demonstrates the lack of fit between the sociolinguistic repertoire of his case study subject Joseph, as produced in his language history, and the interpretations of it resulting from the national language ideology that informs the Home Office position. While not assuming that the account is in all aspects "truthful," he is able to establish its plausibility, from both a sociolinguistic and a historical political perspective, once a sociolinguistics of the nation state is reinterpreted through the imaginable trajectories in time/space of the child subject living through the horrors and displacements of a deeply troubled period. All narrative is riven with gaps, uncertainties, elisions, and suppressions of memory, as work in oral history and indeed

psychoanalysis demonstrates. Joseph's narrative is full of such gaps and uncertainties, inviting painstaking reconstructions: his own (Was the woman who rescued him from prison his mother's Kenyan friend? Had his parents lived abroad?), the Home Office's (In which national frame can we place this case in order to make our decision?), and Blommaert's (What sociolinguistic trajectories are evidenced here?). The sociolinguistic analysis uncovers a clue, that Joseph's outsider use of "Kinyankole" to describe one of the language varieties he had picked up signals him clearly as a non-Ugandan speaker, refuting forensically the Home Office position. Here, in Coulthard's (2007) telling phrase, the linguist is a detective, sifting through and piecing together the evidence that can be used to establish an "identity" in the detective-story sense. From the Home Office perspective, identity is not something that the subject has but a set of characteristics, a template to which the indeterminate subject can be fitted. What slips through this process, only partially recovered or alluded to in Blommaert's analysis, is what kind of identity Joseph might have assembled for himself and out of what materials: a privileged, enclosed childhood in Nairobi and Kigali, his home compound turned into an English enclave, with Ki-Swahili to be picked up from classmates and Kinyarwanda from servants; a brutal expulsion, due to the murder of his parents, from this privileged, safe world into a shadowy world of insurgency, followed by a brutalized and brutalizing time in prison. Twice cheated out of his childhood, first at his parents' deaths and second when wrongly classified as an adult on his arrival as a 14-year-old in London, his first hurdle is a series of asylum hearings using evidence based on his confused and disconnected memories of childhood and his sociolinguistic repertoire, itself creating what Blommaert terms "a shibboleth predicament": a language variety accidentally acquired indexes him at different points as a rebel and as a non-Rwandan. The sociolinguistic analysis interrogates the shibboleth, pulling it apart and assigning it a different, more nuanced meaning.

So what of the future? Suppose Joseph or others with stolen childhoods like him (e.g., child soldiers, even Emmanuel) had gained asylum. What kind of linguistic and educational futures could be imagined/assembled for him? What do language-learning theories, themselves grounded in the settled linguistics of the nation state (L1 and L2), have to contribute? Even some of the more socially accountable approaches, such as language socialization (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Zuengler and Cole 2005) or indeed sociocultural theory (Lantolf 2000), presuppose a preexisting, stable environment in which socialization takes place. Joseph's case is challenging for the sociolinguistics of the nation state but also deeply challenging for accounts of language development, second-language learning, and education, not to mention the practical interventions of teachers. My preferred metaphor for language learning, after de Certeau (1988), is appropriation. Subjects appropriate and are appropriated by language, in the sense that it is through language that they enter into the symbolic order. This is how I understand the Althusserian notion of interpellation, or hailing (Althusser 1994), with its Lacanian overtones. Into which orders of discourse will Joseph be hailed? This is not just a theoretical conundrum but an urgent one for pedagogical practice in an environment of increasing mobility and flows of asylum seekers and migrants, whose lives have been significantly disrupted. How are they to pick up the threads, to weave the threads into a life? How are we to understand Joseph's linguistic repertoire as "truncated multilingualism," the impact of his "extremely narrow" communicative network in his uncle's house in Kigali? What are the "bits and chunks of language" Blommaert refers to? Sociolinguistic theory after Bernstein and Labov has seemed inoculated against deficit theory. Think of Romaine and Martin-Jones's (1986) response to the notion of semilingualism two decades ago. Are there, however, circumstances that deprive the growing child of the bare necessities for linguistic and cognitive growth, or is there a human resilience that overcomes circumstances, however hostile? These are not questions that sociolinguistics tends to ask itself. One might say that it is constructed as a discipline to avoid asking such questions. The trouble is that if sociolinguists or those with a sociolinguistic orientation to language development and pedagogy do not ask them, they will be asked and answered from other, more reductionist theoretical perspectives.

Anna De Fina
Italian Department, Georgetown University, ICC 307-J, 37th and O Street NW, Washington, DC 20015, U.S.A. (definaa@georgetown.edu). 14 IV 09

Taking as a starting point the case of the asylum-seeking ordeal of a young Rwandan, Jan Blommaert proposes to his readers some reflections on a number of very important issues. These have to do with both the postmodern world in which we live and the kind of sociolinguistics that we should be doing.

Blommaert notes how processes of globalization have contributed to a blurring of traditional boundaries between peoples, places, and languages that allows for and/or provokes unprecedented (physical, social, and intellectual) movement among different locations. These processes have been, and largely still are, ignored by institutions (but also people) that see the world and approach the solution of concrete problems through the lens of traditional language ideologies. This leads to the issue of what kind of sociolinguistics professionals should be practicing in response to this state of affairs.

Given the limited space allowed for this commentary, I can only briefly touch on these issues. The fact that globalization has affected the traditional distribution and use of linguistic resources is indisputable, and I concur with Blommaert that the response to these phenomena in the real world of power relations has been the hardening of a monoglot norm and a refusal to come to grips with new, postmodern realities. The case that he discusses—the application of national and fundamentally literate linguistic standards in the evaluation of

the language competence of an individual who has a complex linguistic repertoire and life trajectory—is a clear illustration of this. We can find equally significant examples when we consider the impact of language ideologies on the institutional handling of many social issues. I am thinking, for example, of how the imposition of an ethnic category that presupposes linguistic homogeneity, such as the label "Hispanic," on all Latin Americans in the United States has had the concrete consequence of promoting a generalized disregard not only of the ethnic but also of the linguistic diversity of people coming from that part of the world. These processes have, in turn, affected the way many Latin Americans are treated in the country (see, e.g., Haviland [2003, 767] on how U.S. courts disregard the existence of indigenous languages and "reluctantly" make allowance only for Spanish in translation services).

Blommaert's paper leads to another question: how prepared are we as sociolinguists to address issues of this kind? His answer is that in order to respond to postmodern realities with a postmodern linguistics, we must abandon our own monoglot ideologies and think in terms of speech repertoires and resources rather than in terms of well-defined and unified language codes. It is true, as Linell (2001, 120) has argued, that there is a tendency in linguistics (and sociolinguistics is no exception) toward "grand and comprehensive" theories that privilege system over diversity and stability over dynamics. However, the past 20 years have seen the growth of a significant body of sociolinguistic research that has gone in the opposite direction. Such research has questioned the notion of homogeneous codes and speech communities and has focused attention on the social and spatial discontinuities between languages, places, and groups. It would be impossible to do justice to the depth and breadth of this kind of work in such a small space, but a few mentions will give an idea of what I am referring to. Besides Blommaert's own work on sociolinguistic scales (Blommaert 2007), I am thinking of research on code switching, which has firmly put hybridism and mixing as a constitutive property of speech on the linguistic map (see contributions in Auer 1998); I am also referring to work on language crossing (Rampton 1995), on language and ethnicity (Bailey 2000 and Cutler 1999, among others), and on the linguistic implications of physical and social dislocation (Baynham and De Fina 2005). These studies have all contributed to destabilizing associations between languages, communities, and spaces. Finally, I am also thinking of work on practices of entextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990), which has focused our attention on ways in which texts are never the same but travel and change across social and linguistic contexts. These and other trends potentially constitute the basis for a new kind of sociolinguistics that not only pays attention to fragmentation, multiplicity, and hybridity as central to linguistic practices and identities but also raises awareness of the application of this knowledge to the solution of concrete problems. This is possibly the area in which we (as sociolinguists) most need to make progress. Indeed, how much of the knowledge that we have accumulated within this "so-ciolinguistics of speech" leaves our offices and journals? To what extent do we worry about potential applications of our understanding about the unequal distribution of language resources to the solution of real world conflicts? I think that although we have come a long way in theoretical terms, we still have a lot to do in terms of offering this knowledge to resolve everyday issues of power and justice. Blommaert invites us to move in this direction, and we should listen.

Diana Eades
School of Behavioural, Cognitive and Social Sciences, University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales 2351, Australia (diana.eades@une.edu.au). 24 III 09

Blommaert's article tells a shocking story of two of the worst injustices that an individual can experience. The Rwandan asylum seeker Joseph suffered prolonged abuse and torture in his own country as a child, only to be refused in the United Kingdom the protection from persecution that is supposed to be provided according to international human rights law. Blommaert gives us much more than a shocking story; his analysis of "modernist reactions to postmodern realities" is both strikingly simple and powerfully rich and reaches far wider than this individual's story. As Blommaert says, it would be "far too easy to rave about the ignorance or absurdity" displayed by the British government in their assessment of Joseph's story. What Blommaert provides is an understanding of problematic language ideologies that facilitate such denials of human rights, with his analysis of how "anomalous frames for interpreting human behavior . . . are used as instruments of power and control in a world in which more and more people no longer correspond to the categories of such frames."

The United Kingdom is among a large group of industrialized nations who take this modernist approach, using asylum seekers' speech as some kind of diagnostic for assessing the truth of their claims of origin. In the linguistics literature, this approach is called LADO, for language analysis in the determination of origin. LADO is currently being practiced by some linguists, as well as many "native speakers" without linguistic training. And it is being described, critiqued, debated, and defended within linguistic circles, particularly at conferences and workshops of the International Association of Forensic Linguists and the International Association of Forensic Phonetics and Acoustics and in several linguistics publications. There have been attempts to introduce into the discussion some fundamental sociolinguistic ways of understanding language use, such as variation within a particular language variety, code switching between varieties, lexical diffusion, and the inherent problems in prescriptive views about how language "should" be spoken (e.g., Corcoran 2004; Eades 2005, 2009; Eades and Arends 2004*b*; Maryns 2004, 2005, 2006; Singler 2004). As Blommaert mentions, an international group of linguists (including Blommaert and this commentator) has published a set of guidelines for the use of LADO

(Language and National Origin Group 2004). However, within linguistic circles there is debate over the extent to which sociolinguistic issues are even relevant, with some phoneticians seeing it as a narrowly restricted matter of accent analysis.

Blommaert's article takes the discussion to another level, bringing an insightful theoretical contribution from linguistic anthropology within the context of a confronting personal story. He problematizes a sociolinguistics of language that incorporates a monoglot ideology and the stable distribution of discrete languages within "stable and static ('national') spaces." In its place, Blommaert makes a compelling argument for a "sociolinguistics of speech and resources," in which these language resources are characterized by mobility through both space and time. Joseph's case shows us that linguistic repertoires are about much more than origins; they are produced in and indicative of "biographical trajectories that develop in actual histories and topographies."

I have noticed that among immigration officials, as well as tribunal members who make decisions about appeals from rejected asylum seekers, there appears to be a common view that many (or most) asylum seekers are liars. Some of these officials also seem to have a view that academics have the opposite default position, namely, that asylum seekers generally tell the truth. This issue of whether asylum seekers are telling the truth is central to the determination of their claims. Leaving aside problems with the modernist conception of decontextualized truth, it is impossible to make a confident diagnosis of the complexities of lies, exaggerations, and omissions on the basis of what a person says about their experiences. Blommaert's case study illuminates just how complex this central issue can be; as he points out, Joseph has a "very distorted [speech] repertoire," but one that is consistent both with his complicated life story and with the political situation in Rwanda in the past two decades.

In this paper, Blommaert makes a clear and compelling contribution to the scholarly investigation of language and inequality in the assessment of the claims of asylum seekers. It is a matter of some urgency that this work reach an audience beyond academe, to include refugee advocates, immigration officials, political representatives, and legislators. Blommaert's powerful analysis of Joseph's shocking story would translate well into nonacademic language as a journalistic piece for newspaper, radio, television, or film.

Marco Jacquemet
Communication Studies, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, California 94117, U.S.A. (mjacquemet@usfca.edu). 23 III 09

Refugee determination is one of the most complex adjudication procedures in the contemporary world. Every year, thousands of displaced people seek the protection of various nation-states (mostly Western) by filing asylum claims, which are examined by national boards. Yet although asylum has generated unparalleled levels of public and political concern over the past decade, until recently the two anthropological subfields most capable of studying this phenomenon (legal/political and linguistic anthropology) have produced little substantial field research on the topic. In fact, asylum still may be the least ethnographically examined area of refugee studies; until Anthony Good (2007) published his monograph on asylum courts in Great Britain and Bohmer and Shuman (2008) followed with their comparative analysis of U.K. and U.S. asylum procedures, most of our ethnographic data on the asylum process came from short articles, doctoral dissertations, and episodic memoirs (for an excellent one, albeit "fictionalized," see Showler 2006).

This is a pity, because as Jan Blommaert shows, the asylum process is a crucial nexus for understanding late-modern technologies of power. It constitutes a site where questions of identity and the traumatized body; law, credibility, and the production of evidence; language ideology; national and transnational belonging; and intercultural communication come to the fore in a context defined by asymmetrical power relations. Moreover, an in-depth anthropological inquiry into this process would provide the arguments and facts necessary for nation-states, UN agencies, and humanitarian organizations to develop better ways of handling asylum claims.

It is in this institutional context, full of real-life consequences for its participants, that Blommaert focuses on the lack of fit between national policies and postnational phenomena. He elects to investigate, in his words, "modernist reactions to postmodern realities." One of these "postmodern realities" is the unregulated flow of deterritorialized people, such as migrants and refugees. Faced with the influx of foreigners seeking refuge and a better life, nation-states have responded by setting up institutional boards charged with handling these deterritorialized speakers, their multifaceted and complex (in many cases postnational) identities, and their multiple languages. To accommodate the various needs of asylum seekers, these boards provide them with interpreters, access to Web sites containing information useful to their cases, and the services of lawyers, social workers, and cultural mediators.

Despite such efforts, asylum boards are structurally at a disadvantage in addressing the communicative practices of the hearings, which I have labeled "transidiomatic," that is, characterized by asymmetrical power, multiple communicative channels, multilingual and hybridized talk, and creolized forms of interaction (Jacquemet 2005). In these hearings, transidiomatic practices come into conflict with national language ideologies. Faced with the intrinsic alterity of the asylum seekers' performances, state bureaucrats rely on commonsensical, at times quite inappropriate, national norms and forms to construct, process, and eventually determine the validity of a claim.

As Blommaert clearly shows, late-modern communication as experienced in these hearings is embedded not in a single dominant language but in the multiple transidiomatic prac-

tices that arise with global cultural flows and their power matrices. Participants in such encounters must consider that a successful outcome is increasingly determined by their ability to attend to the transidiomatic nature of the interaction. They must realize the differential power and linguistic skills of all participants, the ideological play among languages, and the asymmetrically distributed ability to tiptoe through the different frames of the transidioma.

In this logic, one of the most problematic issues in the interview process is the determination of the asylum seeker's credibility. In making this determination, state officials rely on their own indigenous understanding of the factors that establish credibility, an understanding that asylum seekers do not necessarily share. As a result, the performances of asylum seekers are routinely framed by officials as "difficult" and "problematic" and are routinely handled with suspicion. Out of what I would label a "culture of suspicion," in which the production of probative evidence squarely rests with asylum seekers and the adjudicators have to be convinced of asylum seekers' claims, the deck is stacked against the weakest players. In this intercultural context (unlike many others, such as international business meetings), the burden of potential misunderstanding has dramatic consequences for only one party, the asylum seekers. They are the ones who have to adjust their conversational style or face the consequences of their inability to do so. On the other side, examiners and adjudicators are using the communicative power of their technopolitical devices (questioning, procedural objections, metapragmatic requests, and so on) to ensure that the hearings reflect the wishes of the state.

At the same time, we should avoid a deterministic understanding of power relations in which people with power are opposed to those without it. Any interactions, including the asylum hearings, still have to be accomplished through the turn-by-turn organization of the performance. Even participants in a weaker structural position may use their superior communicative skills to snatch a favorable outcome. These interactions are shaped by performances carrying within them the seeds of ideological struggle and thus social change. It is our duty as anthropologists to research and highlight them.

Alexandra Jaffe
Departments of Linguistics and Anthropology, California State University, Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, California 90840, U.S.A. (ajaffe@csulb.edu). 8 IV 09

In this paper, Blommaert uses the case study of an asylum seeker to explore transnational, postmodern life trajectories and sociolinguistic profiles as they collide—with unjust consequences—with national, modernist frames for interpretation used by powerful gatekeepers. He calls for a sociolinguistics of speech and resources that takes into account the hybridity, movement, and deterritorialization of linguistic practices and competencies in the postmodern, global context and also for a continued attention to the way that a territorialized "monoglot standard" continues to hold sway. The story of Joseph is a powerful illustration of these issues because his "truncated" multilingual repertoire, born out of movement across time and space, is repeatedly misrecognized. At the hands of the Home Office, Joseph's complex story is reduced to one of linguistic "origins." Here it is crucial to point out the homology between discourses of national and personal origins/identity: both are represented as having an "essential," primordial quality. Here we see that not only is "the language" made over to reflect the ideal (bounded, homogenous) nation, but also the individual speaking person is made over in the image of imputed national origins.

Joseph also suffers at the definitional hands of the Home Office for having "too much" Runyankole and "too little" Kinyarwanda. Both are measured against normative (and institutionalized) frameworks of competence; both are taken as direct indices of bounded national territories and identities.

We understand that Joseph cannot win in the discursive field controlled by the Home Office. This is in part, of course, because the Home Office has the power to impose a modernist discourse and is not obliged to "hear" Joseph's story on his own terms. However, there is another dimension of gatekeeping discourses that is not touched on in Blommaert's analysis. That is, gatekeepers maintain and shift between different models of the relationship between language and identity to suit their purposes. One model characterizes people as "stuck" to their language "of origin": its imprint is acquired unconsciously, naturally, through experience. The other model, however, emphasizes the separability of person and language: languages are acquired consciously and voluntarily and thus can be read as indices of personal commitments/desires to belong. Both of these models can be deployed to positive or negative effect, as the readings of Joseph's history shows.

Power comes not just from asserting a particular kind of connection between language and identity but also from maintaining the right to pick and choose when to characterize that connection as "essential" or "separable." The same can be said for issues of hybridity and territorialization. That is, the dominant response to increases of hybridity and deterritorialization as they relate to *others* (people like Joseph) may be to reinforce homogeneity and territorialization. But dominant speakers and institutions reserve the right to assert hybrid and deterritorialized identities or to make claims (e.g., of elite, multinational identities) on the basis of patchwork sociolinguistic histories.

Thus, the best defense for Joseph would be a complex narrative in which both "essential" and contingent or separable relations with particular codes would bolster his claim to be a legitimate asylum seeker. He has, however, no discursive agency and thus becomes the victim of *other people's* essentializing characterizations. The point I wish to make here is that defending the potential veracity of Joseph's story involves a delicate balance between insisting on the contingent

nature of the linguistic competencies and registers acquired in specific political contexts and life trajectories and granting legitimacy to claims of essential language loyalties/identities.

What are the implications for Blommaert's expressed hope that sociolinguists can find a voice that has both theoretical sophistication and a "practical punch"? This is a crucial issue in an engaged sociolinguistics, but I am struck by the magnitude of the obstacles. One of them, as Blommaert suggests in several places, is that nonessentializing discourses about linguistic practices and repertoires in movement across time and space conflict with foundational ideologies of national belonging that gatekeepers, such as Joseph's evaluators in the British Home Office, are bound to defend. As Blommaert points out, recognizing Joseph's story as possibly true would cause the Home Office to acknowledge "a totally different sociolinguistic image of the region, in which languages and speakers do not stay in their 'original place' but move around on the rhythm of crises and displacements of populations." For the Home Office, however, this movement of bodies across porous national boundaries is the political pathology they are paid to defend against. In a very concrete way, they are policing their own national boundaries by regulating access to residency and citizenship. In a more abstract sense, they are policing the notion of the nation. Acknowledging the indeterminate relationships among language, nation, territory "*elsewhere*" subtly undermines those connections "*here*." This is what makes Joseph's story untellable: to tell it is to introduce the possibility that it is not just *his* story, and that would be unacceptable.

Katrijn Maryns
Linguistics Department, Ghent University, G. Van Gervenstraat 23, B-9120 Beveren, Belgium (katrijn.maryns@ugent.be). 10 IV 09

In this insightful paper, Blommaert identifies a range of key issues pertaining to the institutional management of linguistic diversity in transnational contexts. Drawing on a comprehensive and well-documented case of a Rwandan asylum applicant in the United Kingdom, Blommaert sharply criticizes the uses and abuses of language in the determination of national origin. As a way of countering the fact that immigration authorities all over the world are mainly concerned with the credibility of asylum accounts, Blommaert argues that what acutely requires critical inspection here are the outdated and "placed" language-ideological assumptions and the unquestioned patterns of commonsense reasoning that underpin these credibility assessments.

Procedural language ideologies, notwithstanding the fact that they apply to essentially multiethnic and multilingual contexts, entail highly culture-specific interpretations of the relationship between language and identity. The belief that there exists something like a functionally differentiated norm—preferably a national standard—that indexes normality, neutrality, and veracity is a very dangerous ideological construct that disempowers multilingual speakers in legal-institutional settings. For it has been convincingly argued in the literature on multilingualism that multilingual speakers draw on a broad range of intrinsically mixed and functionally organized communicative resources to position themselves and others in the social activity they are engaged in (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). Their communicative behavior reflects speaker identity indeed: their fused repertoire indexes their language socialization in a community where linguistic multiplicity is the norm rather than the exception. Moreover, as Blommaert notes, far from being an indicator of unreliability, their struggle to perform "adequately" in the locally defined regimes of language reflects the specific conditions of their displacement in time and space. The truncated performance of these applicants is essential to their polycentric identity and functions as the most natural and necessary resource for them to manage the complex translocal situation they have to operate in. The question, then, is, given the intricate relations between speech and identity trajectories in the deterritorialized contexts that are so accurately explored in this paper, in what ways, if any, language can be deployed as a valid means to determine citizenship, for that is what the government officials are using it for.

Whereas the practical, data-based reflections offered in this paper have already been pioneered and elaborately discussed in forensic linguistics (Eades and Arends 2004*a*) and interpretive studies (Inghilleri 2005; Pöllabauer 2004), the strength of Blommaert's study lies in how it consistently balances micro and macro sociolinguistic dynamics and concerns. Blommaert offers some useful reflexive and analytical insights here: his plea for a sociolinguistics of mobility and the way he frames the observed injustices in terms of a collision between modernist and postmodern realities contribute greatly to our understanding of the barriers asylum seekers face as their mobile performances are measured against the static language ideologies that underpin the bureaucratic procedures they must go through. Significantly, the theoretical issues raised in this paper are not merely relevant in asylum contexts—the asymmetries between local and translocal competences being particularly pertinent here—but also apply in other institutional settings where increased linguistic minority participation amounts to a higher visibility of linguistic inequalities. In addition, in these contexts, the imposition of a "monoglot ideal" on the dynamic linguistic identities of multilingual participants not only touches on the attribution of identity but also inherently disadvantages multilingual speakers in the institutional space, because it prevents them from mobilizing the full range of their communicative potential.

We agree that in translocal contexts of legal decision making, where complex social realities have to be captured in bureaucratically processable accounts, uniformity is not the best answer to justice. While some argue that the observed practices stem from mere naivete about sociolinguistic issues, a situation that could probably be rectified by specific training programs, others suggest that language is consciously pressed

into service to discriminate people. As long as gatekeeping institutions construct multilingualism as a problem rather than as a resource, the question remains: how far do we, as academics, have to go in trying to intervene in the practices we criticize?

Tim McNamara
School of Languages and Linguistics, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria 3010, Australia (tfmcna@unimelb.edu.au). 7 IV 09

The clash between postmodern realities and modernist notions of the nation that forms Blommaert's argument in this compelling paper has a parallel in the rapidly spreading contemporary practice of demanding "satisfactory" performance on language tests as a condition for gaining citizenship. In times of transnational flows, questions of national identity inevitably become more complex, and a frequent political response is to assert the hegemony of the majority or traditional community in the form of a test of competence in the language that is the primary vehicle of national identity (Shohamy and McNamara 2009). Wherever immigration becomes a central issue in the politics of the majority, language tests for citizenship typically become more stringent. Studies in the United Kingdom (Blackledge 2009), Luxembourg (Horner 2009), and Australia (McNamara 2009) have shown that, despite the argument that a requirement of language knowledge is justified as being in the best interests of immigrants, the real target of the tests is public opinion in the majority community, not the supposed "welfare" of the immigrants. This is confirmed by the fact that governments in Europe and elsewhere set the standard required for entry, residency, or citizenship in terms of a single international yardstick, the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001), a six-point proficiency scale ranging from a low of A1 (beginner) to a high of C2 (virtual native speaker). The range of standards required for citizenship varies from A2 to C1, the level chosen in any particular country acting as a barometer of the intensity of the debates over immigration there.

National identity is privileged in the case of asylum seekers for a rather different reason. Refugee law is itself based on nationality. If a person is a national of a country where persecution is known to be taking place, the (national) signatories of the refugee conventions are obliged to give that person asylum. If the person is not from a country where persecution is taking place, the recipient country has no such obligation. Given that refugees typically arrive without identity documents such as passports, the question of rights is therefore a question of national origin. A reform of the system would require a complete overhaul of refugee law, a much more difficult issue than the reform of procedures, requiring, for example, that the analytic procedures be informed by a sociolinguistics of speech rather than one of language. Blommaert's argument appears to be against the inadequacies of current practices rather than against the system itself. Linguists working for asylum seekers in appeals cases are constrained to appeal on the same grounds as the immigration authorities who have previously considered the cases in question.

As Blommaert points out, the kind of language analysis to which Joseph was subjected conforms to an ancient practice of using language knowledge and behavior to determine identity in contested social and political contexts. In the book of Judges, a linguistic password was used to determine the identity of refugees after a battle between two ethnic groups: those who could produce the password in an acceptable form were seen as kin; those who could not were seen as foe and were killed. The password in this case was the word "shibboleth" (שיבולת); the initial consonant ש can be pronounced /ʃ/ ("sh") or /s/ ("s"). Those who pronounced the word with /ʃ/ were recognized as kin. In an essay on the conflicted relationship to German of the German Jewish poet of the Holocaust Paul Celan, Jacques Derrida (2005 [1986], 27) speaks of

> the terrifying ambiguity of the shibboleth, sign of belonging and threat of discrimination, indiscernible discernment between alliance and war.

What is a guarantee of security for one is the threat of exclusion for the other; a difference of pronunciation that is undetectable to the unsensitized ear is the basis for a distinction between friend and foe, with the painful, even violent consequences that follow.

The shibboleth, for Derrida, is not a procedure in need of reform; it is an *undecidable*, echoing the insights of the *trace* and the *pharmakon*. Even when linguists working for governments that exercise their responsibilities appropriately under refugee law (Eades 2009) and linguists preparing appeals for those who are rejected are enjoined to follow the same procedures, in accord with the recommendations of the professional associations that Blommaert mentions (Language and National Origin Group 2004), the problem of justice, according to Derrida, has not necessarily been resolved; no modernist solution, however enlightened, solves the postmodern dilemma. In offering the promise of protection to those whom it distinguishes as worthy of rescue and the threat of exclusion to those whom it does not, the shibboleth necessarily retains its ambiguity. An awareness of the terrifying implications of this realization is the relevant insight of postmodern philosophy.

Robert Moore
Department of Anthropology, National University of Ireland–Maynooth, Maynooth, County Kildare, Ireland (rem10us@yahoo.com). 20 IV 09

Blommaert's demonstration of what a sociolinguistics of speech and repertoires might look like opens up two very important avenues for research: to illuminate the sociolin-

guistic milieu in which one could plausibly acquire such an internally heterogeneous speech repertoire as Joseph's (as Blommaert convincingly does here) and to investigate the speech genres and discursive practices in which the different elements of such repertoires find their functional raison d'être. In this brief comment, I want to explore this second set of possibilities, treating the texts produced in Joseph's asylum process as artifacts of state ritual.

Globalization, Blommaert suggests, has brought about a seemingly paradoxical state of affairs: faced with the "post-modern realities" created by globalization, the "modernist" response of states is to bring everything "down to a rigidly national scale." This is an important insight, the more so as it applies so well to the current global economic crisis, in which formerly "fluid" capital retreats and congeals in (mostly national) enclaves of security, but there is even more to it than this. Terms like "refugee" and "asylum seeker"—compare "(labor) migrant," "resident alien," and "newcomer"—are already imbued with indexical values: each denotes a different category of person, keyed to particular kinds of institutional contexts, domains, and activities. Rooted in and licensed by certain familiar (and now "globalized") post-Enlightenment discourses—the notion that "human rights" inhere in biographical individuals, for example—terms like "refugee" and "asylum seeker" carve out categories of person defined in terms of individual participation in state-sanctioned *rites de passage*.

Joseph's life, writes Blommaert, "was dominated by a kind of shibboleth predicament": his linguistic repertoire, whether viewed "positively through what was there" or "negatively through what was absent from it, perpetually gave him away." As he moved through zones of conflict and across state boundaries, Joseph was continually subjected to linguistic "tests," both formal and informal. The biblical passage from which we get the term "shibboleth" is instructive here (Judges 12:5–6).

Indeed, all the characters in Joseph's autobiographical narrative seem to be actively engaged in detecting one another's identities on the basis of evidence from language, to the point that the narrated world of Joseph's childhood comes to resemble in this respect the world of narration, in which the Home Office scrutinizes various textual "samples" taken from Joseph like so many milliliters of blood, examining the content of his story for its plausibility and the patterns of his linguistic knowledge (and nonknowledge) for their authenticity. The officials in the Home Office get it wrong, of course, but that is their raison d'être.

There are, in fact, several chronotopes and several "images of Joseph" in the material here, laminated on one another. First, there is Joseph's own life, as represented in the auto-biographical account he produced to the specifications of the Home Office. Here, Joseph becomes subject to the state's techniques of "normalization": this story must be an account of a single individual's life; it must, in being narrated (and inscribed), produce that life as a series of steps leading from the place and time of Joseph's birth (1986) to the "here/now" of London and the Home Office.

Second, there is a character-focused narrative of a life as experienced, told from the point of view of a young adult narrator (Joseph the asylum applicant in 2001–2004), who incorporates and comments on a story told from the point of view of a child narrator: a bildungsroman whose distortions register the distorted facts of the lives of Joseph and people like him. The child narrator is himself trying to piece together a plausible strategy of survival in the face of almost unimaginable real threats coming from several directions and emanating from sociopolitical groups in formation and dissolution/destruction all around him.

Like the child narrator of Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, Joseph the child as narrator has "many more perceptions" than he has "terms to translate them" (James 2002 [1897]). Like James's readers, Joseph the asylum applicant participates vicariously in the child Joseph's world, supplying a commentary that "constantly attends and amplifies" the child's highly skewed perception of his experiences. One example—using italics for the voice of Joseph the asylum applicant, and a plain font for the voice of Joseph the child—will have to suffice; questioned in Kinyarwanda by a group of soldiers

> I just froze. I spoke to them in Kinyankole to reply to their questions because that was the language I was using most commonly at the time. The soldiers called another soldier over. This soldier spoke to me in Kinyankole and asked me questions. . . . *I now think that they thought that I was a child who had been brought up abroad, and was part of the Interahamwe who was training to come back to Rwanda and fight. . . .* The soldier who spoke Kinyankole would translate for the others and tell them what I said. (from Blommaert's example 19; ellipses in original.)

The story Blommaert tells is gripping and Kafkaesque ("Joseph K" would have been too obvious a pseudonym). Embroiled in the state ritual of the asylum seeker in 2001–2004, Joseph was actively struggling, in a way that is literally visible on the page, to achieve an account that struck *him* as plausible.

Salikoko S. Mufwene
Department of Linguistics, University of Chicago, 1010 East 59th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637, U.S.A. (s-mufwene@uchicago.edu). 27 IV 09

Blommaert's article highlights some of the conflicting aspects of globalization, interpreted as the particular way in which the world is now interconnected thanks to more reliable, faster, and more affordable networks of communication and means of transportation of both goods and people. It also highlights power asymmetries in attempts to control this traffic, in terms of both its volume and its direction. Since Western Europe is one of the centers exercising this control, it is hard to resist the claim that today's globalization is but an extension of yes-

teryear's colonization of the "Third World" by the West, except that multinational corporations play a more important role than governments do in the current process.

It appears that Western governments are not as emasculated by multinational corporations as has been claimed in some of the literature; at least they have not been sidelined. They perpetuate the asymmetrical power relations of the colonial period, gatekeeping the flow of immigration into their territories, although the volume has undeniably increased over the past few decades. The asymmetry is also evident in, for instance, the connotations associated with the term "migrant," as in "migrant worker," a term that is used exclusively for people from less affluent countries, notably the "Third World," who come to do manual labor in more affluent countries and that conjures up not only their low socioeconomic class but also the opinion that they are not (so) welcome. This asymmetrical practice has apparently been exacerbated by the recent waves of long-distance "refugeeism" caused not only by political conflicts but also by the economic collapse of the countries of origin.

Thus, from the start, Joseph has all the cards stacked against him in England. We need not be shocked by the fact that the British Home Office insisted on interviewing him in Kinyarwanda or Runyankole, despite his claim to be more fluent in English. Ordinarily, immigration officers are happy to interview immigrants in the host country's language, because such a practice saves money and time in not having to resort to an interpreter. The interviewers can thus also determine right away the extent to which individual interviewees are capable of functioning linguistically in the host country. It is debatable whether refusing to speak English with Joseph is some insidious courtesy or an a priori underrating of his competence in the host language. After all, he receives the ruling in English. One may also argue that this linguistic treatment is a reminder to Joseph of his inferior status as a nuisance and undesired person, owing to his place of origin.

In a world increasingly marked by mobility, one would expect the British Home Office to accept the nationality declared by Joseph instead of imposing one on him. The treatment Joseph received reflects the asymmetrical relations articulated above. The British Home Office appears to be little interested in learning about the actual nature of societal multilingualism in the Great Lakes region and even less interested in determining how population structure and mobility influence an individual speaker's repertoire.

Joseph's experience substantiates in geographical terms the position, also defended by Vigouroux (2008), that one's linguistic repertoire and variable competence in the language varieties he/she claims to speak are defined by his/her migration trajectory. For immigrants, this trajectory reflects interactional histories that often reshuffle the ethnographic statuses of the varieties, sometimes subjecting mother tongues to erosion while promoting the host country's language to the status of vernacular. Immigrants who are marginalized and communicate mostly among themselves remain fluent in their heritage languages but may acquire only minimal competence in the host language. However, thanks to more affordable means of long-distance communication, some immigrants not only become more competent in the host country's language but also maintain competence in their heritage language. The variable picture is more complex for immigrants who have relocated several times across national borders. Joseph's linguistic predicament stems from the fact that while he has learned many languages, he does not fully command either Kinyarwanda or Runyankole, although his geographical trajectory situates his place of origin in the Great Lakes area. The British Home Office cannot accept this incongruity with their expectation that every person must be able to speak the vernacular of his/her birth place.

More generally, *every* speaker's repertoire is determined by his/her interactional trajectory, the difference from Joseph's case lying especially in whether the trajectory is local and includes no multilingual experience. There are, of course, always specificities that account for why the outputs of the general equation vary from one speaker to another. Joseph's trajectory stands out especially because it crossed several national, and hence geographical and ethnolinguistic, spaces, although some of the latter overlap in ways that Joseph rightfully interprets to be "a disaster" for him. Whether or not this "truncated[?] repertoire" calls for a "sociolinguistics of speech" rather than one "of language" is debatable, a question that I hope is addressed by another commentator.

Tope Omoniyi
School of Arts, Roehampton University, Roehampton Lane, London SW15 5PH, United Kingdom (t.omoniyi@roehampton.ac.uk). 17 IV 09

I start by noting that Blommaert achieves the ultimate desire of most sociolinguistic practitioners by producing a practical intervention in a bureaucratic problem of considerable magnitude, managing human displacement. In this commentary, however, I take issue with a couple of arguments. The first is a minor yet significant observation on definition, considering Blommaert's juridical stance. The UNHCR has formal definitions for "refugees" and "asylum seekers," and although many use the two terms loosely interchangeably, a judicially invested intervention ought to make clear the distinction. Refugee, unlike asylum, status is negotiated from outside the borders of the chosen country of resettlement, thus facilitating the contact of two national orders, with all its sociolinguistic implications.

Joseph Mutingira, Blommaert's subject, was subject to "the law of the country of his residence," according to provisions of the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (chap. II, art. 12),[13] but he was excluded by a flawed

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13. Published by the UNHCR, http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_c_ref.htm.

deployment of sociolinguistic scales (Blommaert 2006) on arguably nonexpert advice by the BBC World Service. His trajectory traversed multilingual and multidialectal spaces that did not demand equal competence of him. Lack of communicative competence in one's claimed mother tongue confirms the native-speaker myth but does not nullify self-ascribed identity. In neocolonial contexts, a generation of African elites accrued social capital by pursuing a straight-for-English microlanguage policy in the home at the expense of mother tongues.

The next issue arises out of Blommaert's claim that asylum seekers are "people typically *inserted* into postmodern processes of globalization" in the West (my emphasis). This is a localizing act that runs against the grain of Malkki's (1995*b*, 503) remark that "if we accept that poverty, political oppression, and the mass displacement of people are all global or world-systemic phenomena. . . , then it becomes difficult to localize them." Refugee status or asylum seeking must be framed as intersystemic. The intersystem takes on board the fact that before Joseph Mutingira became the subject of investigation under U.K. laws, he had already had the subjectivity of one failed national order as a Rwandan. His language and speech repertoires located him in a linguistic nation (Uganda) of colonial creation reproduced by the BBC World Service but other than the one he claimed in interviews. There are two problems here. First, the evaluation by the Home Office was conducted by *one* national bureaucracy, whereas there was obvious need for input by a transnational institution (the UNHCR or a nongovernmental organization) whose operational framework had the apparatus to handle such postmodern experience. Second, the colonial boundary between Rwanda and Uganda bisects the Banyarwanda and Bujumbira ethnic groups (Asiwaju 1985, 258) and thus sets up polycentricity. In "national order," the inflection on order will orient itself differently to different ethnic and political states and historical trajectories. The intraregional flow of refugees and asylum seekers often overlooked in discussions of globalization feeds the polyglot repertoires to which Blommaert refers. Thus, refugee movements may be critical enough to require a revision of scales.

We must invoke history to appropriately construct Joseph Mutingira's sociolinguistic profile. Ethnic nationalities were arbitrarily partitioned at the Berlin Conference of 1884. The people, especially in the borderlands, reject the subjectivity of colonial divisions in conducting their daily lives. They insist that the boundaries separate the colonizers, not the colonized. The case of Beninois parents in Igolo (Benin) who send their children to English-medium schools across the border in Idiroko (Nigeria) illustrates this (Omoniyi 2000, 2004).

In addition, Foucault remarks that government has to do with "men in their relation to those still other things that might be accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death, and so on" (Foucault 2000, 208–209). In order to fulfill this purpose, government assessment of the circumstances that produce people like Joseph Mutingira must include an understanding of the limitations of national orders in responding to postmodernity's regime variation, multiple centers, and inevitably multiple sociolinguistic scales.

I conclude as I began, by considering Blommaert's interventionist agenda. Effective interventionism also warrants a recommendation. In this instance, national-order institutions such as the Home Office will benefit from embedded intersystem agents in advisory roles, say UNHCR representatives, who help to avoid miscarriages like Joseph Mutingira's and misjudgments like this:

> Sent back by Britain. Executed in Darfur. Failed asylum-seeker followed home from airport and shot by Sudan security officials. (headline in *The Independent*, March 17, 2009)

Christopher Stroud

Department of Linguistics, University of the Western Cape, Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, South Africa (cstroud@uwc.ac.za). 21 IV 09

Jan Blommaert's incisive and stimulating paper on the complex and contradictory dynamics of new-order transnationalism, starkly illustrated with the sad case of Joseph M, brings beautifully to the fore the penetrating consequences of linguistic ideologies on ordinary lives. Blommaert paints a complex human face on prevailing critiques of "linguistic distinctness," a perspective on language that "takes the world to be a neat patchwork of separate monolingual geographical areas almost exclusively populated by monolingual speakers" (De Schutter 2007, 3), or what Heller (2007, 11) calls the structural-functional view of languages as bounded and delimitable systems that occupy equally bounded and delimitable spaces and functions. He illustrates how contemporary speech communities increasingly comprise translocal, complex, multilayered, polycentric, and socioeconomically stratified semiotic spaces, so that it makes ethical sense to speak not of distinct languages and separate speech communities but of overlapping networks of activity and of messages traveling across linked continua of forms. Many postcolonial polities, having emerged into what Aronin and Singleton (2008, 2) suggestively call "the new multilingual dispensation," are struggling to find ways of coming to terms politically with their citizens' inherited multiple language resources. Often, the only recourse available is to use models of language that emphasize a linguistics of community, a linguistics of standardization and officialization that cannot do justice to the complex and blended identities of their speakers. These very models also tend to deny epistemological authority and participation to citizens whose voice is carried in nonstandard, hybrid, or local forms of language or is expressed through alternative rhetorical forms that are deemed *non*legitimate in the formal, public sphere (Stroud 2009). More generally, much contemporary sociolinguistics relies on a notion of

community organized in terms of public and private spaces and formal and informal domains, with implications for how social roles and identities, such as gender, age, and social class, are seen to be structured and linguistically mediated. Moreover, educational language planning has yet to come to terms with the fact that students' linguistic needs might best be managed through repertoires of codes that will enable them to shuttle *between* communities rather than locking them into any particular *locale* (Canagarajah 2006).

Extant constructs of language are discursive products, performatively constituted and legitimated as particular types of object in specific sociohistorical contexts. The modernist notions of language that Blommaert critically highlights emanate from a liberal political conception of citizenship as (historically gendered and racialized) practices exercised within a uniform, shared public space and within the boundaries of a territorially defined nation-state, where language is conceptualized as an identifiable and relatively stable property of a group and community, in order that it may be "institutionally accommodated in such a manner as to respect the norms of liberalism" (Wee, forthcoming). An alternative political philosophy is thus needed that repositions language within discourses of postliberal/postnational citizenship. Such a framing would emphasize the role of multilingualism as a political resource in complex, transnational, and scaled societies, seeing linguistic diversity and difference as a prime *means* (rather than a problem) for the material realization of democracy in its recognition of the multitude of voices and linguistic practices. Such an idea of "linguistic citizenship" could take its cue from emerging understandings of citizenship as cosmopolitan (Held 2006) and of democracy as deliberative (e.g., Benhabib 2004). Central to the linguistic specification of such an approach would be an idea of language conceived in terms of a sociolinguistics of multilingual mobility rather than linguistic localization, where issues of how multiple encodings of a discourse are transfigured across contexts and languages take center stage, that is, a focus on the "inevitably transformative dynamics of socially situated meaning-making processes" (Iedema 2001, p. 30). An understanding of the semiotics of citizenship would also benefit from emphasizing notions such as linguistic "fracturedness," "hybridity," "partiality," and "perspective," rather than the idea of a "language" per se. A stance such as this could point the way toward a more inclusive position on voice and a more comprehensive mode of talking about and linguistically managing social transformation in late modernity generally. Blommaert's emphasis on postmodern complexity thus provides an invigoratingly fresh take on how multilingual biographies are (re)produced and consolidated. This will ultimately inform an understanding of minority-language speakers in nonessentialist terms, one that takes into consideration the multiple identities and social locations of speakers (cf. Gouws 2005).

Cécile B. Vigouroux
Department of French, Simon Fraser University, 2630 West Mall Complex, Diamond Building, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, British Columbia V5A 1S6, Canada (cvigouro@ sfu.ca). 26 IV 09

Blommaert's article points out two important related aspects of globalization: (1) people are increasingly mobile, although statistics show that the weakest are the most sedentary; and (2) because of economic inequities, people are not equally mobile. Political technologies have developed within particular institutions to "order" and "discipline," in Foucault's words, human circulation, constructing mobility as a threat, a disorder in the system, and therefore a thing to control. The way the British Home Office handles Joseph Mutingira's case epitomizes what Malkki (1992) calls the "sedentarist metaphysics" that has pervaded thinking about mobile people since the twentieth century in both our modern institutions and scientific fields. Uncritical use of terms such "second-" and "third-generation migrant," in reference to children of immigrants, falls within this paradigm. Being a migrant is implicitly framed as a flaw passed from generation to generation with people tied, by their genealogy, to a space where they might never have set foot and denied the present in which they live. As suggested by Blommaert, there is an urgent need to rethink our tools of analysis and the theoretical premises that have shaped our disciplines, whether sociolinguistics or linguistic anthropology, in order to account for "postmodern" speakers such as Joseph.

In sum, we need to move from a sociolinguistics of fixity to a sociolinguistics of mobility. The question is how. Blommaert does not articulate how to answer it. His call for a "sociolinguistics of speech" rather than "of language" seems to disregard theoretical challenges arising from the proposal. While I generally agree with his plea for a dynamic approach to "language repertoire" that is constantly reshaped by the communicative acts of the speaker in different settings, I find no particular gains from the proposed terminological change. The significance of the proposed change may be only notional (rather than empirical), especially if speech is still assumed to instantiate knowledge of (a) particular language(s), depending on one's repertoire, and is correlated with identifiable "resources." Whether one takes a language to be a well-defined phenomenon, whether a speaker must always know what language he/she is speaking, and whether one can claim a language as mother tongue only if one speaks it fluently are unresolved questions that are independent of whether or not Joseph's predicament is better analyzed in sociolinguistics, whatever paradigm we subscribe to. It is not obvious to me that a "sociolinguistics of language" must be conceived of as ahistorical and one "of speech" as historical, although speech is necessarily dynamic. What really matters is that linguistic competence is the outcome of a learning process determined by an interactional history that is unique for each speaker

(Mufwene 2008). In addition, the assessment of this competence is always local, that is, contextually based, as argued by Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck (2005).

A sociolinguistics of mobility prompts us to put social encounters at the heart of our analysis of speakers' language repertoires. Joseph's story illustrates that we do not necessarily belong to where we come from but that we are the outcome of multiple experiences, encounters, and absences. Being Rwandan or British can only be a starting point, as Edward Said would argue, never the full story. From a methodological and theoretical point of view, this implies that we move away from a simplistic view that explains human migration only by the (ultimate) places of origin and arrival. Indeed, mobility cannot be reduced to spatial trajectories; it should be linked to a world of practices and ideologies. Any move should be understood in relation to the historical dynamics that produce specific forms not only of geographic but sometimes also of social movements. Blommaert's embedding of Joseph's sociolinguistic history within the broader history of his part of the world is definitely a promising route to follow but is not enough. Also worth investigating is the way each agent constructs his/her mobility. This prompts me to reframe the notion of "trajectory" (never really problematized by Blommaert) as discursively constructed. Note that the very idea of trajectory can exist only retrospectively: Joseph makes sense of his life and, to a certain extent, of his language resources in telling his story. Through his narrative, a lived experience of heres and nows becomes a trajectory marked by landmarks associated with specific social encounters (a primary caregiver, a father, a cellmate, an uncle, etc.) at specific times and in specific geographic spaces. This is an additional aspect that should be brought into the already complex picture framed by Blommaert in order to better articulate the different scales involved in shaping a speaker's sociolinguistic history.

Reply

I thank the commentators for their thoughtful and constructive responses to my paper. Many have spotted the conceptual effort in the paper: to turn from a sociolinguistics of language to a sociolinguistics of speech, in the sense of Hymes (1996), in such a way that the complexities of late-modern sociolinguistic life can be better captured. I am particularly gratified by the fact that some productive reformulations were offered by commentators joining me in that effort. Concepts such as transidiomaticity (Jacquemet) and linguistic citizenship (Stroud), as well as the reflections offered by Mufwene and Vigouroux on the notion of trajectory and by McNamara on the scope and depth of the shibboleth phenomenon in late modernity or postmodernity, are very valuable contributions that strengthen the conceptual tissue I tried to weave around my analysis of Joseph's case. They bring analytical clarity to

areas where I was obscure or tentative, and they hold the promise of new and positive inroads into the subject matter that was central to my concern: how to make sense, sociolinguistically, of the tremendous complexities of identity and subjectivity that arise from cases such as Joseph's, complexities both of individual (subjective) articulation and of institutional uptake or failure thereof.

It is also gratifying to see that other commentators added layers of context to the single case I developed. De Fina correctly noted that the phenomena discussed in Joseph's case also occur in other, germane fields (and could be said to define the late-modern state response to increasing diversity in general); Maryns, Eades, and McNamara all pointed toward the increasing importance of language (notably language testing) in the field of immigration and citizenship; Jaffe noted that gatekeepers shift between different models of language and identity to suit their purposes; Moore framed this same feature in terms of late-modern state rituals in which a variety of chronotopes are being played out; and Omoniyi pointed toward the intrinsic shortcomings of treating asylum cases with the instruments of a single state system when transnational (or "intersystem") organizations such as the UNHCR could offer a more delicate and negotiable framework, an optimism I do not entirely share because I do not see much in the way of genuinely "intersystem" features in organizations such as the UNHCR. All of these comments, too, I see as valuable additions and corrections to things I left unsaid or undeveloped. The comments to my paper are, in that sense, genuinely cumulative: they add important material to the paper itself, and I am very happy to see them appear along with my paper: the *Current Anthropology* commentary system works.

What is most gratifying, however, is that most of the commentators joined me in questioning what sort of sociolinguistics would be useful and valuable for exercises such as these. I say "such as these" because, manifestly, Joseph's is not a freak case; it is not even exceptional as an asylum case if we read Maryns's (2006) exquisite but depressing study *The Asylum Speaker*. Linguistic border control is very much part and parcel of late-modern responses to superdiversity, and widely accepted (but fundamentally phony) linguistic measuring instruments, such as the CEFR (mentioned by McNamara), now belong to the toolkit of more and more national governments facing the "threat" of increased social, cultural, and linguistic diversity. The fact that the CEFR came into existence at a time when Europe counts many thousands of subjects such as Joseph, whose backgrounds are fragmented and transnational and who cannot possibly be pigeonholed into most existing administrative or social-scientific categories, is itself telling. The CEFR is hailed as the final, objective measuring tool for language, the technical and discursive frame that will make language into an objective fact of belonging, being, and becoming: it is a thing that tells us objectively—because uniformly—"how well" you "speak" a "language" and how this can index who you are (a newcomer, someone who is already "integrated," someone who is almost "like us," etc.). The language-ideological aspect of the

CEFR should be obvious: this is the orderly, organized, static, and artifactual concept of language that we associate with high modernity, the birth of modern linguistics, and most standard theories of language learning until the 1960s. I reject a sociolinguistics based on that concept of language, and most of the commentators join me in that. The question, very aptly formulated by Baynham, remains: what is next? What should come in the place of this obsolete notion of language, keeping in mind that things such as the CEFR and cases such as Joseph's illustrate how very much alive that concept is? Since I had to restrict myself to general statements on that topic in the paper, I will reflect on it in most of the remainder of this reply.

The answer, as I see it, lies in a fully ethnographic sociolinguistics, a sociolinguistics that returns to its roots in ethnography as an epistemology and methodology: that is, a return to an inductive case method that strives toward a comprehensive and multifaceted analysis of what is there in relation to the conditions of production and circulation of these phenomena (such conditions also explain why certain things are *not* there, e.g., why Joseph did not have a fully developed repertoire in Kinyarwanda). In such an approach, we look at what people effectively do (and can or cannot do) with things we usually call "language," but in doing so we clearly look not at language in the sense described earlier but at communication, at the practices with which people deploy these linguistic materials. We thus look at people's *speech*, not at their *language*, and speech stands here as shorthand for the actual set of communicative resources people have at their disposal and the things they effectively do with them. We are now in a pragmatic world of communication, no longer in a linguistic world of static and abstract language. It is from this pragmatic perspective that we can engage with things such as language ideologies and the wider complex of conditions on speech: social, cultural, and historical conditions (the things that were in a traditional vocabulary grouped under "ethnology"). It is this ethnographic foundation that allows us to address the main challenge in our field nowadays: how to come to grips with these phenomena we call globalization, of which asylum seekers are the prototypical examples. Asylum seekers confront us with the inescapability of *mobility* as the key to understanding human subjectivities in late modernity and so largely destroy the self-evident character of so many assumptions we usually take on board. One such assumption is that language and speech must be understood within the boundaries of a particular circumscription: a neighborhood, a region, or a state, that is, the traditional focus on locality in sociolinguistics. To replace that assumption, we must now see things in terms of translocality and mobility, the trajectories that Mufwene and Vigouroux both identified as crucial to the enterprise. Slightly overstating, we could say that this is a move away from a Newtonian sociolinguistic universe toward one that is more akin to quantum mechanics. In that move, we will have to shed some of our traditional vocabulary and develop a new one with terms that capture the instability and the intense movement of our objects (see Blommaert 2007, 2009 for suggestions in this direction).

Some commentators observed that there is already a sizeable body of literature that points in that direction. This is true. The past couple of decades saw the development of a new analytical vocabulary and theoretical apparatus in linguistic anthropology (all of it built on the ethnographic foundations I mentioned above), in which linguistic notions of language have been replaced by ethnographic ones. The work of Michael Silverstein, Asif Agha, Charles Briggs, and others (including some of my commentators) has been influential in this development. It is from this corner of the field that we got fully developed notions of language ideology and indexicality, new insights into the social and cultural foundations of language and speech, and a fundamental questioning of the modernist concept of language (see, e.g., Agha 2007; Bauman and Briggs 2003; Silverstein 2004). The work of Ben Rampton (1995, 2006) brought a similar innovative angle, also deeply influenced by a fully developed ethnographic stance, to the study of small-scale interactions in late-modern contexts and demonstrated how bits of language (the "resources" I alluded to above) can be taken in very unexpected directions. Linguistic resources are, to some extent, unpredictably mobile, and a sociolinguistics that assumes the stable distribution of linguistic resources across a given (and equally stable) community misses the point.

All of this work is there; it has been around for a while, but it is still very much an avant garde. We are, in sociolinguistics, still very much prisoners of what Immanuel Wallerstein described as the legacy of the nineteenth century: an institutional division of labor among the social sciences in which one looks at language and another at society and people who look at both are seen as dilettantes or trespassers. The problem we are facing is, however, compelling: our study of language is usually good linguistics but very poor sociology, and the reason is that our theoretical and methodological instruments are designed to address language, not society. The work I have identified above manages to produce an approach in which concepts for describing and analyzing linguistic issues are also directly relevant as concepts that describe and analyze society. This, of course, was the ultimate ambition of sociolinguistics, an ambition that it failed to achieve for a very long time and that, clearly, can be achieved only from within an ethnographic paradigm. Those who believe that I am passing an unfair judgment on mainstream sociolinguistics should be aware that sociolinguistics courses are commonly offered from within linguistics departments, not from within anthropology or sociology departments. Sociolinguistics is seen as work on language and thus as belonging firmly in the realm of linguistics.

It is, in my case as well, the confrontation with issues that are obviously beyond language that prompts reflections on where we stand and what we need. My rejection of a sociolinguistics that addresses only the modernist concept of language is prompted by work such as that on Joseph's case,

cases in which I could not escape phenomena of institutionalized language regimes, power, and inequality and in which (as testified in the conclusion of Ominiyi's comment) people's lives are sometimes at stake. The paper on Joseph had its genesis in an expert report I wrote for Joseph's lawyer, who was appealing against the Home Office. The Home Office had reduced the whole of Joseph's case to language (in its modernist sense). I believed that, in my reply to their ruling, I should avoid making exactly the same mistake; that is, I believed that I could not do a traditional or mainstream linguistic or sociolinguistic analysis. If I had done that, I would have brought Joseph's subjectivity down to what was linguistically readable about it, and I would have been compelled to come up with clear statements about belonging, being, and becoming, like those in the CEFR. That is how simple it was: I had to reject a traditional sociolinguistic approach to these materials, because accepting it would have been tantamount to inserting myself into the power regime of which Joseph was a victim. A different sociolinguistics for different times is, seen from that angle, as much a political issue as it is an academic one. I called it simple, but no one should be fooled into believing that it is actually so simple. Nothing in the politics of science is ever simple; it can be straightforward, but never simple. The political option I chose in my work, to investigate cases such as Joseph's, took me to the paradigmatic foundations of sociolinguistics and compelled me to make fundamental theoretical and methodological decisions.

Ethnography is an antihegemonic paradigm, a paradigm in which very few things are taken for granted or have an a priori importance. Social facts are very much emergent and contingent, and the particular outcome of ethnographic inquiries more often than not displays serious differences with input assumptions and hypotheses. It is a paradigm in which the researcher's ignorance and, consequently, the factor of surprise in research are default features (Fabian 2001). It is an epistemological position that allows, even invites, the unexpected and the deviant in research. Pending future developments, it remains our best tool for capturing rapid and confusing social change and its correlates: phenomena that do not fit clear-cut patterns or categories but represent moments of change, conflict, and movement in social systems. If we wish to build a mature sociolinguistics of globalization, it will have to have both feet firmly planted in the ethnographic paradigm. It will, consequently, have to be a sociolinguistics in which the tension between predictability and unpredictability in the mobility of communicative resources is a central question. This, I believe, is the road toward becoming a counterhegemonic, critical, practical, and applied discipline, a thing that is much needed, given the fact that the CEFR is now seen as applied linguistics' most prominent and most practical achievement.

Most of my commentators already work from within such an ethnographic perspective, and perhaps this could explain the remarkable similarities between some of the comments. Clearly, the people who joined me in this discussion do not need to be convinced of the value of the inductive case method; most of them have, in their research, come across complex and confusing cases similar to the one I discussed here, and so most of them have encountered the problems of description and interpretation of conflicting, paradoxical, "abnormal," and deviant phenomena as features of sociolinguistic globalization. They have, consequently, been facing the political and theoretical choices that I was faced with; we share that experience. It is wonderful to see this emergent community come together around this paper in a productive and constructive dialog.

—Jan Blommaert

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