

INTRODUCTION

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Increased mobility and migration in a globalized world have led to the rise of multilingualism in the Global North, especially in urban areas. This increase of languages has led to a range of new studies of and perspectives on (urban) multilingualism. One example of this new interest in urban linguistic settings in the North is illustrated by the project [Multilingual Manchester](#).

In the Global South, on the contrary, multilingualism has been part of the linguistic reality of people in the majority of societies for ages. In many parts of the South it is nothing new. Yet the linguistic environments and the social practices involving languages and policies are very diverse. And, of course, the picture gets more complicated as the Global South also exists in the Global North and vice versa.

What does it mean to speak more than one language and to live in a multilingual society? How do people cope with and use linguistic diversity? How do societies deal with multilingualism on institutional levels?

Answers to these questions are as diverse as the multilingual settings themselves. There are many ways in which people live with and use their linguistic resources and these are influenced by many different factors and the various environments they exist in, which may determine which linguistic resources are used in a particular context. Language policies may determine the way languages are recognized at an institutional level (for instance, while some postcolonial countries practice 'exoglossic' language policies, i.e. promoting the language of the former colonizer as an official language, South Africa has named eleven languages as official languages), or used and taught in institutional contexts (e.g. the educational system), while people's biographies and ways of life impact individual multilingualism (which languages and linguistic practices do people encounter during their lives and how?).

Just as there are many different multilingual societies and environments, there are many diverging opinions about multilingualism and languages. Lately, cultural and linguistic diversity are regarded as something positive and enriching, and something to be celebrated, in many public discourses in the North. In this regard, diversity can be measured by 'counting' languages (which, of course, requires a certain definition of 'language', especially in a multilingual setting, as a clearly delimitable entity). The [Ethnologue](#), a major authority in cataloging and indexing the World's languages, currently counts 7,102 languages. Another recent perspective is to look more critically at the concepts of 'language' underlying such approaches to multilingualism. Based on the observation of actual linguistic practices in multilingual societies, it is evident that multilingual speakers use their whole repertoire in a fluid and boundless way, not separating 'languages'. Such insights have led people to rethink 'language' and multilingualism and to consider both sides, language as social and political construct on the one hand and actual linguistic practices (the ways people actually speak) on the other hand.

In this issue of *voices from around the world*, the contributors seek to present a variety of perspectives on multilingualism which illustrate a broad spectrum of ways of thinking about language(s) and multilingualism. The contributions are diverse: while some contributions introduce a perspective from a sociolinguistic point of view, they do so in different ways, either reflecting cutting-edge research perspectives on multilingualism or presenting more traditional accounts. Moreover, looking at multilingualism in society, other contributions include or represent voices of speakers as protagonists of their multilingual performances or reflections. Likewise, the contributions are in various formats: from sociolinguistic accounts to creative individual statements, from the critical to the poetic and from the written to the visual, the contributions animate the reader to rethink ideas about languages and multilingualism, especially with regard to the Global South.

The predominant Northern or Western view on multilingualism, which is informed by

monolingual language ideologies and the idea of languages as distinct, separable entities, is deconstructed by [Friederike Lüpke](#), who mentions various examples of small-scale multilingualism in the Global South. Her observations challenge the notion of languages as structured and delimitable systems. On the other hand, she shows that the construction or identification of separate languages with distinct names or labels is an important social practice and political act, and shapes our ideologies of language.

[David Barasa's](#) contribution reflects on his study of the Iteso people, who live in two multilingual communities in Kenya and Uganda, divided by a colonial border. He discusses the similarities and differences in multilingualism in these two communities, looking at linguistic practices such as borrowing or code-switching, particularly with regard to education and language policy.

The fact that multilingualism is also an important and challenging aspect in the classroom is illustrated by [Eunjeong Lee](#), who looks at the Global South in the Global North's classrooms. Moreover, she brings the written domain to our attention as she looks at oral and written practices and multilingual strategies in an English writing class, exploring the classroom as a dialogic learning space.

The short documentary film by [Miriam Weidl and Andres Carvajal](#) opens up yet another view on multilingualism from the perspective of Maxime, a deaf young man who lives in Casamance, a highly multilingual area in Senegal. The way he interacts with people who exhibit large multilingual repertoires inspires new thoughts on lived multilingual experiences.

Multilingual practices in a range of different domains and contexts are presented by [Nico Nassenstein](#), who specifically looks at the use of Swahili in multilingual Uganda. By taking into account the history and politics of languages and linguistic practices, the author explores the various meanings and social conceptualizations that Swahili embodies for people in Uganda. Swahili's strong associations with the military and with power in Uganda underlie the deliberate and conscious usage of Swahili resources in particular communicative situations. The author looks at everyday conversations, the linguistic landscape, popular culture and digital media

[Anne Storch](#) dives into philosophical debates about language and languages and looks at non-academic perspectives on language practices and ownership in a postcolonial context. Investigating an online blog on language and citing an interview with the Nigerian politician Patrick Obahiagbon, as well as subsequent comments, she illustrates how language (and ways with languages of the other) can be conceptualized differently in the South, and thus offers a critique of Northern concepts and ideologies of languages.

A different and poetic approach to language and multilingualism is presented by [Penelope Allsobrook](#), who creatively processes experiences and encounters with languages. Full of emotional and witty poetry, she interrogates multilingualism by asking questions of representation, of speaking and listening, of silence and muting, of ownership, belonging and understanding.

[Abbie Hantgan](#) discusses the role of accent in "the Crossroads", a highly multilingual area of Casamance, Senegal. She explores the meaning and implications of accents and illustrates the social functions of accent, which play a special role with regard to identity in this multilingual crossroads community: specific sounds, perceivable to people as accents, emblematically relate to particular places and origins and are used by speakers to construct and express identity.

A visual journey to transnational Rastafari communities in Jamaica and Ethiopia is presented by [Andrea Hollington](#), who took photos of linguistic landscapes which illustrate the social semiotics of specific linguistic resources, such as particular expressions or typefaces, in transnational, multi-sited and multilingual settings. Contrasting photos from Jamaica and Ethiopia, the author lets the pictures speak for themselves and presents images of the meaningfulness of specific linguistic practices from a transnational perspective.