

Language and Space

An International Handbook of
Linguistic Variation

Volume 1: Theories and Methods

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Offprint

De Gruyter Mouton

3. Language and political spaces

1. Introduction
2. Language ideologies and spatial representations
3. Standard languages in national space
4. Other models, other maps
5. Locality in places
6. References

1. Introduction

Speaking overcomes distance: We communicate across stretches of space, relying on sound to travel. Linguistic messages go considerably further when they are written or transmitted through ever more sophisticated media. Yet speaking also seems to be anchored in territory, that is, in geographical space as mediated by political practices. Many forms of cultural logic link political claims to language and to territory. The most widespread of these in the contemporary world is that of the nation-state, with its presumed ethnolinguistic unity. In this hegemonic political form, speakers are considered authentic members of nations by virtue of their linguistic competence, and nations are supposed to be distributed over territories that are organized politically into states. Whatever specific political system a state adopts, its linkage to a posited nation is most often established through the medium of a standardized language with a literary tradition, a norm of monolingualism and the assumption of linguistic homogeneity in the polity. This presumed cultural-linguistic connection is a fundamental feature of the state's legitimacy. Nation-states of this type are the political *ideal* in the contemporary world. Rarely do actual states show the full form. There are also many other cultural configurations – either long-standing or newly emergent – that draw on different links between linguistic forms and political space. In describing these less familiar patterns, we find differences in the cultural definitions of 'polity' 'language' and even 'space.' Thus, I argue that the relation of language to political spaces is always mediated by cultural systems – language ideologies – that define the very terms we are discussing.

To make this case, the second section examines the cultural assumptions about language and location embodied in the nation-state, ones that also underlie eighteenth and nineteenth-century linguistic science. The internationally conventional language map is built on the perspective of the contemporary nation-state as a political form. This becomes clear when we consider the linguistic phenomena omitted by such maps. Maps are constitutive of cultural notions of space. When taken to be objective representations, they help to construct the linguistic world they claim merely to reflect. Nation-state maps remain persuasive representations of the ethnolinguistic world even when their elisions are revealed because there are many other practices that buttress or produce the configurations such maps display. Section three discusses some of these practices – standardization, purification, authentication – as institutionally orchestrated semiotic processes. Even the exceptions to nation-state imagery provide evidence of the current international strength of these ideas: When state boundaries and linguistic territories do not match –

as is often the case around the world – the result is political tension, or the threat of political mobilization.

Nevertheless, there are limits to this hegemony. Section four discusses alternative ways of thinking about space and language by presenting cartographies that are motivated by strikingly different political perspectives and cultural values. Finally, section five takes up cases where perspectives clash and definitions of what counts as language are explicitly contested among speakers, analysts and governments. At stake in these conflicts is the perception of “place” or locality. The study of locality highlights the sensuous, experiential aspects of places – rather than abstract spaces – and how their structures of feeling and belonging are constituted by linguistic form.

2. Language ideologies and spatial representations

It is customary to trace the language ideology of ethnonationalism to German philosophy in the late eighteenth century. Johann Gottfried Herder was perhaps the most influential of the many who argued that each language is unique in its poetic expression; each has the capacity to express all the human capacities, including feeling, reason and will. For Herder, the most salient contrasts among linguistic forms are those based on cultural inheritance and that differentiate national languages. They are the means of giving expression to the distinctive spirit of a people, its *Volksgeist*. He assumed uniformity of speech among the Volk when he equated one people, one fatherland, one language. Herder feared that the verbal traditions of Germans were increasingly endangered by the incursions of French among the aristocracy and by the tendency of ordinary peasants and simple city people to forget their past. Traditions must therefore be safe-guarded by a special sort of intellectual, one who shuns foreign models and is specially attuned to the artistry of “his” Volk. Herder’s views invoke the past to authorize current nationalism in which language and folklore become key symbols of identity, unity and persistence (Jankowsky 1973: 20: 53). These ideas about language continue to be characteristic habits of thought in Europe, among elites and the general populace (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998).

Recent historical scholarship has stressed a further point: When Herder’s philosophy is seen within its historical context as a language ideology – a metadiscourse about discourse on language – its emphasis on intertextual links with a known or imagined past stands in direct contrast to the language ideology of John Locke, over a century earlier. For Locke, political unity rested on reason used for public discussion, which was made possible by the inherent properties of language. These included the primacy of referential over emotional meaning, the arbitrariness of signs in the service of philosophical expression and the rigorous precision necessary for rational discourse in politics and science. These properties were corrupted by appeals to history. Thus for Locke, political legitimacy depended on severing intertextual links with the past. To be able to use language in this way required certain forms of character and education.

It is these two opposed positions, one authorizing the nation through links to “tradition” in the linguistic past, the other locating political authority in the timeless-placeless systematicity of language itself, that constitute the tense ideological formation we now call “modernity” (Bauman and Briggs 2003: 190–196). Although Locke’s theory argues that all languages are the same in their semiotic potential, and Herder’s theory stresses

the differences between languages in the spirit and vision they impart, the two theories agree that a viable polity must be based on uniformity of linguistic practices among speakers, and the guidance or mediation of properly inclined and trained intellectuals. In this, both contribute to legitimating the ethnolinguistic perspective characteristic of the modern nation-state. As we will see in section 3, the nation-state is a product of “modernity” in a further sense: it relies for authorization as much on Herderian authenticity as on Lockean universal reason.

2.1. Locational technologies

Herder considered geography to be an influence on national language, but how space as an abstract notion came to seem significant is a more complex story. Though often credited to Herder, the connection between language and nation had been stressed earlier by French, Spanish and English as well as other German philosophers. Most scholars agree that it was well established in European intellectual circles by the early eighteenth century (Aarsleff 1982); others give it a much older, even biblical origin (Olender 1992; Trautmann 1997). Leibniz and then Condillac explicitly noted that language was the repository of a people’s history and character. The famous English contribution came later, during Herder’s lifetime. Speaking from his post in British colonial India, William Jones announced in 1788 the discovery of similarities between Sanskrit, Greek and Latin. From these correspondences he deduced “family” relations among these languages and – presuming the language/nation equation – among the peoples who spoke them. Since the parallels Jones announced had long been known, the intellectual excitement came rather from Jones’s explanation of these similarities. He constructed a single story of kinship and geographical movement for Indo-European peoples that would later be shaped into the *Stammbaum* theory of historical linguistics, providing a model and evidentiary basis for the study of language change more generally.

To do this, Jones relied implicitly on three “technologies of location,” that is, three frames of cultural assumptions guiding a project of mapping, ones that define abstract representational spaces and then show how entities are situated within those spaces (Trautmann 2006: 2–21). First, Jones assumed the mapping of the surface of the earth according to latitude and longitude, a Ptolemaic practice from the second century AD that – though often challenged – has survived the vast changes in geographical knowledge since that time. Indeed, the power of the framework lies in its invisibility. Despite their small size, their flatness, their lack of relief and paucity of other information, we have come to take such maps to be faithful pictures of geographical space itself. Second, like most thinkers of the period, in presenting new ethnological material from the colonies, Jones had recourse to biblical categories. His terminology – Hamites, Jasephites, Semites – invoked the schema of kinship in the first book of the Hebrew Bible that charts the relations among the male descendants of Noah after the flood. The patrilineal logic of these relations predicts a continual segmentation of branches over time, so that new and related tribal units are formed. The dispersion of such patrilineal segments, when projected onto Ptolemaic geographical space, created a concrete image of migration (Trautmann 2000: 6–9). Finally, the early and simple word list, initiated by Leibniz, was a technology for the spatial redefinition of language itself. Drawing on Locke’s notion of complex words built on earlier and simpler ones, it imagined language as

having a center and a periphery. It divided the lexical stock into what was taken to be core elements as opposed to others that, because they were supposedly later developments, could be ignored in comparative research (Aarsleff 1982).

In sum, the scenario of a family of nations with a single source, their different branches increasingly dispersed geographically, each with its own core language, relies on the lamination of these three locational technologies, and ultimately allowed their projection onto contemporary linguistic evidence as well as ancient textual sources. Assumptions about language, kinship and space – each coming from different historico-political contexts – contributed to discussions in philosophy, comparative philology and language history. These intellectual endeavors in turn have been in constant engagement with political projects, and contributed to the idea of nation-states as ethnolinguistic units, as well as of supranational units based on linguistic “kinship” that have authorized political movements such as pan-Slavism and pan-Germanism.

2.2. Language maps and their limits

The culturally apprehended relationship between language and political space was further transformed by another locational technology: the nineteenth-century census. Meanwhile, global maps of latitude and longitude had accommodated new ideas about sovereignty. In contrast to feudal kingship, which was organized around a center, the modern nation’s sovereignty is “fully flat, and evenly operative over each square centimeter of a legally demarcated territory” (Anderson 1991: 19). Maps represented this conception iconically with solid lines marking boundaries and spaces within these lines filled with contrasting colors to show the extent of states and their colonial holdings. The new census created a form of information that could “exist” within those colored spaces. But language has been an enduring problem for this technology.

Early European census categories did not include language at all. Their purpose was tax assessment. They distinguished among categories such as merchant, serf, aristocrat, Jew, German, thereby putting into a single series a set of classifications we would now consider to be on contrasting dimensions (occupation, social status, religion, nationality). By the early eighteenth century there were attempts, such as the famous *Völkertafel* of Styria, to organize a consistent chart of European national types and their characteristics: clothing, favorite activity and mode of religiosity (Stanzel 1999). In contrast to these earlier forms, the great innovation of the nineteenth-century census was to focus not on types but on individuals and to include every individual regardless of tax-status. Each person was made “visible” as the intersection of a set of bounded, non-overlapping classifications representing whatever social dimensions the state recognized. As a result of such a grid, each person could be enumerated as an instance of each exclusive category. Operating as a paper-and-pencil panopticon, the census grid aspired to distinctively locate anything – regions, people, products – in terms defined by the administrative interests of states. When disseminated through print capitalism, this model enumerated populations that stretched from metropolises to their colonies, and were organized for bureaucratic surveillance and control (Anderson 1991: 163–185).

The attempt to include language within such a totalizing grid – and to represent it on maps – produced technical difficulties and political battles for the many state-sponsored statistical bureaus created in nineteenth-century Europe (Hobsbawm 1990). In a world

that assumed language = national spirit = political autonomy, multilingual empires were deeply threatened by evidence of linguistic diversity within their borders. Aspiring movements for independence were reliant on the same evidence, to be placed before sympathetic international audiences. Such information remains crucial today for regional and migrant populations soliciting support from the European Union (Urla 1993).

Closely related, and no less problematic, were the technical difficulties: what would “count” as a language statistic. Dialectologists had amply documented that linguistic forms do not have neat spatial boundaries; even borders between nation-states are crossed by dialect chains, and social strata differ even though located in a single space. Census-takers argued bitterly over whether and how to formulate questions about language. Should speakers register their “mother tongue”, “community language”, “language of the home”, “Verkehrssprache”, “Umgangssprache”, or some other category? Each of these would produce results with different political implications. The concept of standard language got a boost from its compatibility with the census: ideally homogeneous, spoken by everyone in a polity, commensurable with all other standards, bounded, deliberately non-overlapping, one-to-a-person, easy to count.

To see how language maps work, let us consider an excellent, indeed exemplary, minority-friendly and technologically advanced case published by the European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages, the major clearing house for information about minority, regional and immigrant languages in the European Union. The EBLUL map recognizes regional and even some immigrant languages, and marks areas of bilingualism by using stripes of two colors. It does not presume that language areas (“Sprachgebiet” “area linguistique”) are isomorphic with nation-state boundaries. Yet, much of linguistic reality is erased. For example: colors operate like those that represent “evenly operative” sovereignty in modern political maps, giving the impression that languages show no internal differentiation, and that speakers are evenly distributed across territory without variation in language(s) used. Yet we know the density of speakers varies importantly, as does the density and type of bilingualism: do the striped segments represent bilingual speakers or territories inhabited by monolingual speakers of two languages? Also invisible are degrees and modalities of linguistic competence (fluency, literacy, pronunciation), their relative prestige and the situational distribution of the languages. Knowledge of English and French by educated speakers of other languages is not represented; nor is knowledge of Latin, Arabic, Church Slavonic and Hebrew by clerics. The map provides little information about the place of a language in public life, nor speakers’ often varied stances towards the standard languages they encounter or are said to speak.

Like any representation, this map is inevitably partial. Judging by what it omits, and despite efforts to the contrary, it presents more a vision of what ethnolinguistic diversity should look like from the eye-view of a nation-state or through a European supra-state’s standardizing gaze, than a picture of actually existing linguistic practices.

3. Standard languages in national space

Language maps remain remarkably believable despite their elisions because many social institutions support the sociolinguistic picture displayed in such maps. As Bakhtin (1981) argued, heteroglossia — diversity of varieties, a centrifugal proliferation of styles, ac-

cents, registers, languages – is ubiquitous, the ordinary condition of linguistic life. The centripetal, standardizing processes, however, require active construction by state-related institutions. To be sure, print capitalism has been crucial in spreading books and newspapers written in standardized orthography and creating a public to read them (Anderson 1991). But at least as significant has been the work of centralized school systems and curricula, unified labor markets, and legions of language planners, linguists, teachers and poets who have created dictionaries, academies, grammars and literatures. The resulting corpus of standardized texts is indispensable to the process. But even more consequential has been the creation of a set of naturalized beliefs about standard language. Cultural workers have inculcated in speakers the notion of respect for standard forms of “correctness,” and indeed an entire ideology of the standard that has had effects on how speakers use language, what they accept as ideal models of speech, and what the existing differences in pronunciation, grammar, lexicon and prosody come to signal for interactants in face-to-face interaction and in mass mediated talk. Standardization does not happen by itself, nor simply through the magic of a capitalist market.

Nation-states have differed in the timing and rate of standardization. They vary in how strictly their pedagogical systems are centralized, how thoroughly they penetrate the whole country, and how stringently they inculcate and enforce the standard. But the semiotic processes of language ideology that authorize one linguistic variety as the “standard” are more uniform across cases and as important as the institutional histories. In general, semiotic processes consist of sign relations that link linguistic forms to social facts; the signs are interpretable within cultural presuppositions about language, i.e. language ideologies (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994). Such sign relations include indexicality (a pointing to or assumed contiguity between the sign and its object), iconicity (resemblance between sign and object), fractal recursion and erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000; Silverstein 2003). There are several ways in which sign relations create standardization by drawing on political geography and on abstract spatial metaphors.

First, in standardized regimes, linguistic variation is visualized – by ordinary speakers and often by linguists too – as an abstract space in which the standard “covers” other varieties, is superimposed on them, and therefore imagined to be located “above” them. Other forms are not simply different, or typical of different geographical regions and social strata. They are seen to be “lower,” and therefore worse. These judgments are inscribed in the workings of institutions such as schools. Students may fail to learn the forms designated as standard by language planners. But they invariably acquire the disposition to accept that some forms are “better” than others. They are taught that the standard forms have greater intrinsic, linguistic value – e.g., that they are more rational, more precise, more beautiful. But, in a sociological view, these values are cultural endowments, not inherent in linguistic form (Bourdieu 1991). Because linguistic varieties are indexical signs of those who speak them and of the situations in which they are used, devaluing a form means devaluing its speakers. Therefore, those who accept the high value of a standard language that they do not themselves control usually find that they devalue themselves. This is a process Bourdieu has called “linguistic domination.” One aspect of standardization seen in semiotic terms is exactly this switch in perspective: seeing oneself from the viewpoint of judgmental others.

A second kind of spatialization concerns the specific indexical significance of linguistic varieties. Meanings associated with linguistic form are far more elaborate than differential acceptance or prestige. Linguistic varieties also come to index what Bakhtin

(1981) has called “chronotopes”: cultural categories identifying a nexus of space-time and person. “Modernity” is one such chronotope, usually associated with standards, which are among the many insignia of modernity that nation-states are required to display if they are to be acceptable members of the contemporary international community of states. Anthems, flags, national airlines and – in the nineteenth century – even statistical bureaus, were among the many such signs, forced on states as the price of recognition by national ideology and its “coercive isomorphism.” By contrast with the standard language’s modernity, regional and “non-standard” forms are assigned a chronotope of rural distance and historical past, sometimes inflected as authenticity and old-fashioned simplicity, at other times as country bumpkin ignorance. Hence the supposed discovery of “Elizabethan English” in the isolated mountains of Appalachia, or the nostalgic attractiveness for urban Germans of touristic visits to the villages of German-speakers in rural Hungary.

Although chronotopes of tradition/modernity are common, there is a more complex world of meaning, a “culture of standardization,” particular to each standardized speech community (Silverstein 1996). In the United States, for instance, standard English is seen as neither too precise nor too lax, neither emotional nor rational; just right for communicating political truths. It is believed to be a product of skill, achievable through costly training, and – like American commodities in advertisements – sold as the means to improving one’s life chances. The regional and socially marked forms are seen, in contrast, as lacking this balance, and often stigmatized as emotional or lazy, old-fashioned commodities ready to be traded in. On another dimension, American and British English are thought to be welcoming of foreign words and phrases, just as the countries are “open” to migrants (Crowley 1989). The French standard is also seen by its speakers as clear, rational and pure, but to retain its special clarity – so the ideology goes – standard French should not accept foreign words, or only after considerable domestication. This is an attitude that contrasts with the American and, as it turns out, echoes long-standing French immigration policy. In each case, borrowing – that is, the defense and policing of linguistic boundaries – is regimented by ideology, and thereby constrains linguistic structure. In each case, cherished national self-images are iconically projected onto the standard language and its speakers; internal differentiation carries the stigma of negative self-images.

The recursive nature of standardization provides a third way in which it is connected to spatialization. Because standards are tied to nation-states as linguistic emblems, standard ideology creates expectations that standard languages will be evenly distributed over the state’s territory, just as modern sovereignty is. Contrary to this commonsense view, however, standardization creates not linguistic uniformity within a state but even more, and hierarchical, heterogeneity in speech. The creation of a standard necessarily recasts the relation among existing varieties, bringing all forms into a unified field of judgment and surveillance. Every attempt to standardize a regional form – e.g., to create a standard Friulian, Basque, or Corsican – will require picking out and regularizing a newly standard register. That step will bring with it the stigmatization of other forms used among the very speakers whose regional linguistic practices the new standardization was supposed to valorize. To be sure, what is seen as stigma from the perspective of the standard and its institutions can be re-evaluated. Novel regional or class-based forms (anti-languages) are often created and celebrated as resistance to standards. Because standardization is fractally recursive in this way, it brings not homogeneity but more heterogeneity (Gal 2006).

Dialectologists working in countries with standardized regimes (now virtually everywhere), can no longer simply track regional differences in speech, because “regionalism” itself is created as a contrast with standard. How people define and evaluate regional, non-standard, local or indeed any socially-marked linguistic form will depend, in part, on how the standard is viewed. The indexical significance of the standard – like that of any linguistic form – emerges as the product of a cultural project: intellectuals of all kinds, politicians and pedagogues actively label and analyze the significance of linguistic differentiation as supposed clues to the character, intelligence and other qualities of speakers. Given these omnipresent efforts to lend meaning to variation, it is not geographical or social distance between speakers that creates differentiation. On the contrary, differentiation arises from the juxtaposition of contrastively valued linguistic varieties within a single person’s repertoire, or the interaction of neighboring speakers whose different forms signal social position. Even single sounds gain contrastive significance as indexical and iconic signals of identity or social situation. Thus linguistic change is best understood as a consequence of intimate contact among speakers rather than distance (Irvine and Gal 2000).

Standards display a fourth kind of spatialization. Although historical accounts often show that a nation-state’s major administrative center is the source of many linguistic features adopted later as standard, the locus of the “best” and most admired linguistic forms is not necessarily a major urban center. Often it is some particular region of the countryside that is designated as the repository of authentic and “historically national” speech. As with the cultural meaning of linguistic variants, so too in the location of the “best” forms, there are cultural brokers involved in creating and sometimes changing the ideals. The region seen as the source of the best American speech was deliberately re-located in the early years of the twentieth century to the rural Mid-west of the country when elites stigmatized the cities of the East Coast as corrupted by the presence of foreign immigrants (Bonfiglio 2000). Similarly, the recent debates about the polycentric nature of Hungarian are also arguments about what regions should be considered the “center” or norm of Hungarian-speaking, and for what historical-political reasons (Lanstyak 1995).

Finally, the forms of authority granted to standards can be understood as the result of conflicting spatializations. As exemplary modern phenomena, standard languages are simultaneously credited as both “traditional, authentic” and “universal,” even though (or because) these values are both present, though usually opposites, in modernist ideology. The apparent contradiction is resolved by spatially distinct, comparative contexts. When compared to regional or class dialects or minority languages internal to the nation-state, the standard language is understood to be a universal solvent: it is the means of translation among the other forms; it is the variety in which everything can be said clearly and truthfully. By contrast, in the larger comparative context of other national standards, emblems of other nations, the standard language is heard as specially authentic to its nation, providing ways of expressing supposedly untranslatable, culturally specific concepts.

4. Other models, other maps

Standard ideology is now a common phenomenon across the globe. Nevertheless, there are alternate visions of political geography and linguistic practice that rely on different cultural values. As with the other representations we have discussed that claim simply

to describe the world — kinship charts, word lists, latitude/longitude maps, census grids — these too are performative: creative, prospective models for, as well as partial models of, the systems they describe. It is illuminating to consider some of those that are the product of long-standing cultural principles as well as others that are relatively novel schemas in active competition with nation-state maps. Given the acceleration in economic globalization, it should not be surprising if some of these mappings are visions born of migration and displacement.

4.1. Southeast Asian polities

A striking contrast to contemporary European maps is the Southeast Asian “galactic polity” (Tambiah 1985), for which the *mandala* provided the basic schema. According to Indo-Tibetan cosmology, part of Hindu-Buddhist thought, a mandala is composed of two elements, the core (*manda*) and the container or enclosing element (*la*), with satellites of increasingly complexity around a center. Across Southeast Asia up to the twentieth century, this general model organized activity in virtually every cultural domain. Architectural projects and textile decoration were shaped as mandalas; the cosmos was understood in myth as constituted by Mount Meru in the center surrounded by oceans and mountain ranges. At a philosophical and doctrinal level, the relation between consciousness and perception was supposed to be organized like a mandala, as was the heavenly, spiritual order. Mandalas were geometrical, topographical, cosmological, societal blueprints for polities.

In fact, the physical layout of political units, on the ground, often looked astonishingly like mandalas, with the most powerful ruler located in the geographical center, surrounded by his feuding sons or heirs who were themselves surrounded by lesser rulers. The constant conflict among rulers precluded firm boundaries, but produced an oscillation of disintegrating and reconstituting politics, each fractally replicating the central one in organization and activity, and arranged in mandala shapes. In each region, the most powerful court, the “exemplary center” (Geertz 1980), gained and legitimated its power over lesser courts and their hinterlands not by military or administrative means, but through the elaborate display of the key value of “refinement” in pageantry, festivals and theatrical self-presentations. This demonstrated the court’s ever more precise imitation of the delicacy, civilization and perfection of the celestial, supernatural order and thereby justified and demonstrated that court’s worthiness and ability to rule.

Most important for our purposes, the linguistic aspect of exemplary political centers was crucial to legitimate governance. In the cultural system that created power of this kind, refinement, civilization and minute gradations of power were expressed and reproduced primarily through linguistic and other expressive distinctions that required the complex ritualization of everyday interaction. The higher the lord, the more refined, perfect and elaborate was his verbal etiquette, his comportment and sartorial display, all of which then proved his capacity to rule. Although there was usually only one named language involved in any one court, the rulers of Java, Bali and the lesser kingdoms of Southeast Asia created and elaborated linguistic distinctions now called “speech levels” that are characteristic across all the languages of this region. Errington (1988) reports as many as five-to-seven such speech registers in Javanese. Lexicon and morphology distinguished “levels” that precisely marked each utterance for very fine degree of polite-

ness or refinement. These distinctions created – and did not merely reflect – the hierarchical social order. Linguistic delicacy and the complex etiquette of displaying it increased as one moved from the peasantry who spoke simply, to the elaborations of ever higher-placed aristocrats.

4.2. A global constellation

The model of a galactic polity bears only superficial resemblance to a quite different “global language system” proposed some years ago as a theory of linguistic demography by a Dutch political scientist. De Swaan (2001) calls his model “a galaxy of languages” in which constellations or concentric circles represent the relationship between languages in an abstract, relational space. In contrast to the Southeast Asian model, the units charted here are (mostly) standard languages, not ritualized registers; the value at issue is profit, not refinement. If the galactic polity is a form with a long past, the global system is supposed to map and understand a global future. Though presented as a social scientific theory, de Swaan’s model is recognizable as an ideological perspective that views economic globalization and the distribution of languages as parallel phenomena, both growing out of the presumed universal tendency of humans to maximize benefits.

The “language galaxy” model recognizes that there are thousands of rarely-written languages in the world, spoken by only hundreds of people each. These are termed *peripheral languages* and likened to the moons that travel around planets in a solar system. Examples would be Sulawesi, Sumba, Bayak and Javanese in Southeast Asia. More like planets are the *central languages*, those that have writing systems, literatures, many more speakers, official status in states and participate in the workings of international organizations (i. e. standards). In Southeast Asia, Indonesian and Chinese would be such languages. Finally the model proposes that there are *supercentral languages*, with even more speakers, that are like suns in a solar system, around which the planet languages revolve. In this view, Arabic, Russian, English and French (in some parts of the world), Spanish (in other parts), are among the 12 such languages of the world. And finally there is a single center – English – for the 12 solar language systems. English with its huge number of (mostly second language) speakers is the hub of the linguistic galaxy as described by de Swaan.

According to this model, speakers try to learn languages that are further in towards the center orbits than their native tongues, but do not learn languages further out. Bilingual individuals connect the orbits of moons to planets, planets to suns, so there is a key but limited role for multilingualism. Those at the center (i. e. the sun) of each solar system speak to each other in English. Although the model/scheme is hierarchical, as well as demographically and functionally oriented, and “constellation” is largely a metaphor, the system is not entirely abstract. There is a geographical factor, in that different parts of the world can be mapped by specifying which languages fulfill each of the hierarchically organized functions in a region.

This model erases much of what the jigsaw map and the galactic polity highlight. It ignores nation-states and their boundaries, elides the problems of defining language, linguistic difference and the significance of indexical signals. It is uninterested in the ritual modes, genres and values (such as refinement or correctness) by which communities of speakers, within cultural systems, organize and evaluate their practices. In this vision, all languages are merely denotational codes, all speakers are individual decision-

makers, and languages have chiefly instrumental, economic value. Speakers make rational choices in language learning, within what their circumstances allow. This is a social scientific schema, to be sure, but one written from the lofty perspective of transnational corporations and their aspiring executives, whose presumed career goal is always to move closer to headquarters, to the center. The model projects – and celebrates – a neoliberal world in which businesses and their mobile employees make choices in ideal-type free markets.

4.3. Diverse diasporas

Migrant populations are likely to have different visions of space, politics and language than do nation-states, which can imagine mobile people only as problems, unless they assimilate. However, it is not deterritorialization that migrants envision, but rather novel, spatial connections. A case in point is the language and spatial ideology of Hadrami men, who are merchants and traders with origins in the region that is now Yemen. They have been part of a centuries-old migratory pattern around the Indian Ocean (Ho 2006). Since the 13th century and continuing today, Hadrami traders have made their way southwest, down the coast of Africa, spreading Islam and commerce, marrying the daughters of local leaders, establishing families and often becoming local political elites. Others in the same lineages moved to the east, through the southern coast of present-day India and to Malaysia and Indonesia. The merchants retained individual and familial memory of where they and their male kin came from, retaining as well a tradition of ideal return, and a set of practices – including Islam – that tied them to others from Hadramawt.

Other practices that maintained ties among merchant families included circum-Indian Ocean visiting, business relations and the careful ritual tending, in Hadramawt, of the graves of returned migrants. Most informative for our purposes is the custom of keeping genealogies, which were always written in Arabic, the language that has continued to be the sacred if not the everyday usage of these multilingual traders. In the calligraphically elaborate genealogical charts, written in Arabic, each man's name is followed by the name of his place of death (also in Arabic). One genealogical tree reproduced by Ho (2006: xvi) names male relatives over six or seven generations – fathers, sons, brothers, uncles and cousins of a single lineage – who died in places as diverse as India, Say'un, two different parts of Java, the Sawahil (East Africa) and Mocha (Yemen). The values inscribed here are tellingly selective: the vast and diverse territories around the Indian Ocean are represented simply as points of death, unified by a single written language (Arabic), a single lineage and the locational practice of genealogical representation.

For other populations, different visions of language and space create connection in diaspora. The island of Mauritius is a predominantly Mauritian Creole-speaking society, but over two thirds of the population are of Indian origin, mostly Hindu. Although Hindi is officially recognized by the state as the “ancestral language” of Indo-Mauritians, their everyday usage consists mostly of Mauritian Creole. Some, however, speak Bojhpuri, which is a northeastern Indian variety that – although part of the long dialect chain of northern India – is quite different from Standard Hindi, which drew on western dialects and in any case was regularized well after the ancestors of Indo-Mauritians left their homeland. How then do Indo-Mauritians come to recognize Hindi as “their” ancestral language? Politically and religiously motivated efforts to establish diasporic

Hindu identity in Mauritius depend on strengthening culturally imagined ties to mainland India. These rely on a number of spatio-linguistic practices quite different from those of the Hadrami merchants.

Of central importance is the annual pilgrimage to a mountain lake in the southwest of Mauritius on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Shivratri. The event is heavily attended and state-supported. Through the shape and location of the temples around the lake, and the rituals enacted there, Indo-Mauritians spatially and performatively create a sacred geography closely resembling that of Hindu pilgrimage sites on the sacred river Ganges in North India. The continuity with a sacred Hindu landscape in India is emphasized in legends that claim the lake is a tributary of the Ganges itself, the water coming through subterranean sources across the ocean. In 1972 a vessel of water from the Ganges was deposited in the lake, thereby officially consecrating the lake as a part of the Ganges. Equally important is the use of Hindi in the religious events at the pilgrimage site, which are understood as re-enactments of what the ancestors did at the site. But since Hindi is not a part of the daily repertoires of Indo-Mauritians, the use of it during the pilgrimage relies on schooling in the “ancestral language” and on the use of Hindi in associations that organize temple activities at villages around the island (Eisenlohr 2006).

Yet the usage in each of these contexts is not what would be recognized as Hindi by speakers from the subcontinent. Rather, what characterizes these contexts is the use of everyday Bhojpuri that is purified of Creole lexical elements, which are replaced by sanskritized Hindi items. Many grammatical and phonological changes also appear, so that the effect, for speakers of Bhojpuri, is a new and purified register of Bhojpuri, one that is used to signal the start of Hindu genres of moral discourse. This register has the effect of blurring the boundaries between Bhojpuri and Hindi, making persuasive through recurring linguistic usage the connection between Indo-Mauritians and Hindi-speakers. It also makes the ancestral Hindi taught in schools and used in sacred performances more accessible for Indo-Mauritians (Eisenlohr 2006: 66–110).

The Hadrami merchants created a diaspora by picturing their patrilineage as an Arabic-Islamic web connecting disparate spaces. On their genealogies, they reduced the conventional space of longitude-and-latitude to points made significant by family members’ lifespan. By contrast, Hindu Mauritians created a diaspora by replicating a revered model. Indo-Mauritians become diasporic Hindus through representing events in such a way that they bear a close, iconic similarity to events elsewhere. Through the pilgrimage and through a hindiized register of Bhojpuri, experiences of the “homeland” become available on Mauritius, further verifying the constructed fact that Indo-Mauritians are indeed Indians. Spatial and linguistic replications operate as parallel synecdoches: a piece of Mauritian landscape recreates India’s sacred geography, just as India’s linguistic materials are recreated in Mauritian linguistic practice.

5. Locality in places

The discussion so far has foregrounded representational practices in order to highlight that a vision of space is always constructed from some imagined or actual physical point or social perspective. Most human schemas of orientation are ego- and event-centered,

as is suggested by the universal presence of deictic systems in the languages of the world. In English, for instance, “here/there” and “now/then” refer not to any clock time or geographical space but rather to a point of time/space defined in relation to the speech event in which these terms are uttered. Tense is temporally indexical in this way. Like tense, deictics of space can be transposed from the speaker onto objects in the physical and narrative surround. So we can talk not only about our own “front” and “back” but also that of trees, toasters and trucks; “here/there” can be centered inside the story we tell, as well as in the event of telling the story.

Some cultural groups, such as the Guugu Yimithirr of Northern Australia have – in addition to such event-centric forms – what are called ‘absolute systems of coordinates.’ Instead of instructing a child to go to the left of a tree, they will tell him to go south or east of it (Haviland 1993). The invention of absolute space in the European tradition was a disputatious affair, linked to but not identical with the cartography of latitude and longitude discussed earlier. It has been singularly effective. Relying on the scientific tradition since Newton, most educated westerners assume an absolute abstract space which is believed to be “out there” as a constant set of fixed points, and to pre-exist our interactions and our representations. Phenomenologists, sophisticated Whorfians and most social scientists, by contrast, think that absolute space is itself a projection from deictically anchored, “origo-centered”, relative space (Levinson 1996). Terminologically, “space” is most often used – as it has been in this essay – to talk about these relatively abstract notions and their instantiation in semiotically organized cultural objects such as pictures and charts. By contrast, “place” is the term employed for the more immediate apprehension or experience of locality as a structure of feeling, mediated by bodily, ritual and – most ubiquitously – by linguistic practices (de Certeau 1984).

Two questions arise from these distinctions: First, how do people project a deictic “origo” (“here”) of face-to-face interaction onto a more fixed physical location that is then considered their center, the “place,” and thus social home from which they look out on the rest of the world? Although this emplacing is not necessarily political, in the guise of “making community” it has surely functioned as the first step in many political projects. Second, how is a sense of locality sometimes displaced, so that the speakers consider themselves to be not at the center but at the margin or periphery of some social world to which they orient (either positively or negatively)? This second is surely a political-economic effect, the result of domination. By starting with the second question, we can see how linguistic ideologies and linguistic practices are crucial to both.

5.1. Displaced centers

Linguists have long designated as “local” those languages or dialects that are demographically small, seem geographically isolated, culturally remote or exotic. Yet, the fact of “locality” in the contemporary world is not a matter of scale, space or strangeness in itself, but is a relational and contextual issue. No matter how remote, a linguistic form is reproduced by its practitioners with a self-aware sense, perhaps even an explicit theory, of what it is produced “from, against, in spite of, and in relation to.” In short, the local – while fragile and always in need of careful tending to assure its survival – is never separate or alone. It is always created by becoming the object of comparison to some “elsewhere” or center which is itself culturally apprehended. “Locality” emerges as

a social fact in a national or globalized world (Appadurai 1996: 178, 184). We have already seen one example of this process as part of standardization, in which speech varieties are made “regional” or “deviant” once they are subsumed as the chronotopically distant or bottom of a standardized (metaphorical) space of linguistic varieties.

In this same process, geography is always involved, as is political economy, but with surprising results. For many centuries, Europeans have perceived the continent as a cultural territory on which prosperity, progress and civilization are distributed in a gradient: concentrated in the west and decreasing as one moves east. Arguably, the political economic relations between European regions over the last three hundred years created the inequalities reflected in this gradient. The Cold War division of the continent solidified the differences. Currently, the cultural image itself has political and economic consequences. In the realm of language, the imagery helps to explain exceptions to the general rule that minority languages are indexical of local solidarity but less prestigious than the national languages of the states in which the minority is located. Through their code-switching practices in the 1970s, the German-speaking minority in Romania demonstrated that for them Romanian was not a prestige language, although it was the language of state. Viewing themselves and their languages not from Romania, where they lived, but from the perspective of the political-economic-cultural gradient to which German-Romanians were finely attuned, they were persuaded that German trumped Romanian in prestige (Gal 1987).

A more complex case comes from Indonesia. The Weyewa-speaking villagers on the island of Sumba were settled until the 1970s in village clusters. Each such cluster had a geographical center at which the greatest of rituals were performed, the ones at which the voice of ancestors would be heard through men’s performance of a complex genre of ritual speech. Spreading out from these centers like spokes on a wheel were other settlements that were increasingly less efficacious as the location of rituals, and at which only minor genres of ritual speech were performed. In the late nineteenth century, the largest of the rituals fell into disuse when the arrival of Dutch colonialists led to an increase in population, and a consequent dispersal of people away from the large central villages. The people found themselves removed from their own ceremonial centers. The net result has been a decrease in the importance and sheer presence of ritual speech, especially the most important kinds. An orientation to Dutch administration easily followed. The language itself, which was in the past considered “perfect” and “a source” of skill and knowledge, has been devalued because it is now seen as incomplete, lacking in elaborate ritual genres which were understood to be its most powerful and essential characteristics (Kuipers 1998).

5.2. Place-making through linguistic practices

Locality is not simply relationality, however. It is important to analyze as well how people make a physical location or social group into a “place” that – in comparison to an “elsewhere” – is phenomenologically dense with meaning, familiar and legible for its inhabitants. The creation of places in this sense implies the making of subjects with patterns of action, ritual performances, ways of speaking and constructing events that are recognizable for others who are thereby identified as local subjects in the same place. The practices that make places are always in part linguistic, indeed a chronotope, and

often named or ceremonialized. We can see in retrospect that the ethnography of speaking was concerned to document the linguistic details of just those everyday routines that “emplace” their practitioners (Bauman and Sherzer 1974).

It is noteworthy that varied definitions of language are crucial in constituting place. In the example of Weyewa-speakers in Indonesia, ritual speech was defined as the most perfect Weyewa, the form without which the language was incomplete. In Northern California, among Native American Tolowa-speakers, the structural patterns that linguists consider the building blocks of language are of little importance. Recognition of each other as Tolowa-speakers, and the making of a dense and meaningful Tolowa “place,” comes from speakers’ knowing the Tolowa names of geological and geographical features in the landscape. Native speakers, linguists and government agents charged with maintaining this endangered language are in continual conflict because of these diverse definitions. Despite an ostensibly shared aim of maintaining the language, they work at cross-purposes (Collins 1998). Similarly, for the Western Apache, the names of features in the landscape are important as evidence of knowing the language. But even more significant are the specific narratives linked to landmarks, which operate as a communal, unwritten memorial of past activities and personages. It is the knowledge of these stories and the ability to judge when and how to tell them that constitute the knowledge necessary to be a complete person. The notion that “wisdom sits in places” (Basso 1996) is an explicit ethno-theory of the relationship between language and landscape that lends significance to everyday life, makes the social group visible to itself, and stands implicitly against American nation-state imagery. It is an exemplary case of “making place.”

Knowing what to call a place is as an aspect of belonging, one that makes people members of a social group, recognizable as local persons. In the same way, the choice of designation for all those cities and regions in the world that have names in many languages (e.g., Bratislava, Pozsony, Pressburg) immediately signals one way of telling history as opposed to others and thereby a political stance for the speaker in a world of contrasting positions. This occurs in less obvious ways too, through the indexicality of reference that is a fundamental feature of all languages. Two English-speakers exchanging stories of their winter vacations must select lexical items to identify where they have been. The words – which need not be place names or even nouns – must be chosen from among the huge number that can accurately achieve reference. Has the speaker been “in the mountains”, “skiing”, “in Obergurgl”? The selection creates solidarity for interactants, or it can exclude. The first choice presumes the hearer and speaker know together which mountains count; the second conjures a world divided into practitioners of contrasting sports. The final one creates a “place” of connoisseurship which can either invite the other to celebrate a shared expertise or humiliate the hearer as ignorant (Schegloff 1972).

Although place names are not indispensable for place-making, the loss of words for places can index political changes and show how dense, ritualized and embodied senses of place – as distinct from geography – can be erased. After the Second World War, land was collectivized in Hungary as part of the communist era. There were rarely any occasions on which to use the centuries-old proper names – specific to particular villages – for sections of arable land, meadow and woods. The names were remembered in the communist era by the men and women who had participated as youth in rituals of inheritance to which these names were crucial for identifying parcels of land. The

names were also significant as archaic sounds suggesting an ancient rural continuity. Knowledge of the names identified elder generations who were able to evoke, through the casual use of them, their own former selves, values, customs and sense of place. The villages have remained, agriculture has continued and private property in land was restored at the end of communism. Men and women younger than 80 may have heard the archaic terms but cannot use them to refer to the land that has now regained its value. Those names index a profound political shift in the countryside, one that separates the "place" of the elders from that of co-resident, younger generations. The present owners of the land (often the same families) are creating place in novel ways.

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4. Language and transnational spaces

1. Introduction: Media and migration
2. Deterritorialized spaces: Indexicality
3. Reterritorialized spaces: Preservation vs. recombination
4. Digital spaces
5. Transidiomatic practices
6. Conclusions
7. References

1. Introduction: Media and migration

One of the most significant aspects characterizing late modernity has been the high degree of space-time compression caused by the increasing mobility of people, commodities, texts, and knowledge (Giddens 1990; Appadurai 1996). This compression has transformed the geography of social relations and communication, leading many scholars to focus their studies on the transnational nature of late-modern communicative environments. These studies have linked the emergence of transnationalism with the post-industrial wave of migration, a wave characterized by people able to forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations across geographic, cultural, and political borders. Transnational migrants sustain a multiplicity of involvements in both home and host countries, a multiplicity made possible by their networks of interpersonal relationships. In a transnational space, social and symbolic ties reach beyond face-to-face relationships, connecting people who are involved in distant interaction through the same faith, class, ideology, ethnicity, or nationality (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Faist 2000; Fist and Özveren 2004).

As Pries (1999) pointed out, transnational spaces are characterized by triadic relationships involving the host state, the sending state, and the migrants' networks. Structured by social networks, transnational spaces are multidimensional and multiply inhabited