TRANSIDIOMA

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I will sketch the evolution of the concept of transidiomatic practices from my first analysis of the "transidiomatic floater" as an example of these practices (JACQUEMET 2005) to the current all-encompassing concept of the "transidioma" (JACQUEMET forthcoming).
KEYWORDS: Transidiomatic practices. Transidiomatic floater. Transidioma.

RESUMO: Neste texto, pretendo discorrer sobre a evolução do conceito de "práticas transidiomáticas" tendo, por percurso, minhas primeiras análises de "flutuadores transidiomáticos" (JACQUEMET 2005) até o atual conceito abrangente de "transidioma" (JACQUEMET no prelo).
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Práticas transidiomáticas. Flutuadores transidiomáticos. Transidioma.

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> Khalid was loud, fat, twenty-three and fearless. . . . He was a night owl, and so was I, and on many nights I would wander into the *Times'* Baghdad newsroom at one or two in the morning, and I'd find him sitting there, …. He'd be surfing the web and talking on his cell phone and sending a text message and maybe eating a bowl of popcorn with melted butter. The two television sets in the newsroom, which were supposed to be tuned to news channels like Al Arabia or Al Jazeera, would inevitably have been switched to the Movie Channel or MTV. If I asked Khalid to do something for me he'd put his phone down and look at me like I was a burdensome parent. (FILKINS, 2008, p.338-339)

This interaction—multilingual, multitasked, multichannelled—between an American reporter and his Iraqi assistant epitomizes the socio-cultural and linguistic condition of much of humanity at the beginning of the 21st century—a condition that we have come to understand as "global." Humanity is experiencing globalization of an unprecedented scale and scope, mostly because of the high degree of space-time compression achieved by the increasing mobility of people, commodities, texts, and knowledge (HARVEY, 1989; HANNERZ, 1996; TOMLINSON, 2007). These movements do not happen against the background of a neutral space, but rather are shaped by relations of power and inequality conveyed through "global" languages that cross national boundaries and political allegiances (BLOMMAERT 2009; COUPLAND, 2010).

Late modern globalization is best understood as a development *within* globalization, in which mobile, deterritorialized people and digital communication technologies play the central role in organizing social life on a global scale (APPADURAI, 1996). As Appadurai conclusively established two decades ago, transnational migration and digital communication technologies are the two most important diacritics of post-industrial globalization. Where they intersect, we find novel communicative environments shaped by multiple languages transmitted over diverse, simultaneous communicative channels.

Late modern globalization makes a significant impact on language in two ways. First, as people move, they learn new languages, often while maintaining previous ones. The movement of people across borders thus creates multilingual speakers. Second, the movement across borders of resources—both material goods and intangible resources such as knowledge—increases the demand for people with multilingual capabilities. Globalization makes multilingualism more common and more valuable (HELLER, 2003).

In this light, contemporary studies of language and communication must address the progressive globalization of communicative practices and social formations that result from the increasing mobility of people, languages, and texts. Accelerating rates of migration around the world, accompanied by communication technologies that enable people to engage with others over multiple locations and channels, have inspired language scholars to examine linguistic communities that are diffused and overlapping, in which groups of people, no longer territorially defined, think about themselves and communicate using an array of both face-to-face and long-distance media.

Moreover, the contemporary complexity of migration depends on, and is enabled by, devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and Internet-connected computers that make digital media accessible to everyone, producing an epochal transformation in access to knowledge infrastructure (just think of Google) and in long-distance interactions.

Digital communication technologies are much more than enablers of people's interactivity and mobility: they alter the very nature of this interactivity, confronting people with expanded rules and resources for the construction of social identity and transforming their sense of place, cultural belonging, and social relations. The integration of communication technologies into late modern communicative practices has resulted in the emergence of a telemediated cultural field, occupying a space in everyday experience that is distinct from yet integrated with face-to-face interactions of physical proximity. This field is transforming human experience in all its dimensions: from social interactions (now globalized and deterritorialized) to the semiocapitalist marketplace (with its shifting methods of production, delivery, and consumption of virtual sign-commodities, BERARDI, 2009) to the production of new conveniences and excitements as well as new anxieties and pathologies (TOMLINSON, 2007).

Finally, analysis of communication in the intersection of multilingual production and digital media must be attentive to power-saturated settings, placing a spotlight on the ways social hierarchies and power asymmetries are reconfigured in the interaction between global forces and local ideologies (JACQUEMET, 2013; FAIRCLOUGH, 2002; BLOMMAERT, 2009).

In my own work I seek to describe the communicative practices of networks of people exposed to deterritorialized flows and able to interact in different languages and semiotic codes by using, simultaneously, a multiplicity of communicative channels, both near and distant. I use the term *transidiomatic practices* to describe these communicative practices at the intersection of mobile people and mobile texts (JACQUEMET, 2005 and forthcoming). Two brief notes on this term: The root word *idiomatic* in *transidiomatic* must be understood in its most generic meaning, which is close to its Latin root: "the usual way in which the words of a particular language are joined together to express thought" (*OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY*, s.v.). It does not mean "an expression that has a meaning contrary to the usual meaning of the words (such as 'it's raining cats and dogs')" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). On the other hand, the main difference from the related words *translanguaging/translinguistic* lies in my insistence on the importance of digital communication for multilingual practices. I do not claim that all multilingual settings are now transidiomatic; instead, I use the term to flag, for analytical purposes, the increasing number of communicative environments where

we find the commingling of localized, multilingual interactions and technologically mediated, digitalized communication.

In the remaining pages, I will sketch the evolution of the concept of transidiomatic practices from my first analysis of the "transidiomatic floater" as an example of these practices (JACQUEMET, 2005) to the current all-encompassing concept of the "transidioma" (JACQUEMET Forthcoming).

TRANSIDIOMATIC FLOATERS

The first time I focused on communicative mutations in the age of globalization was during my fieldwork in Albania in 2000. For the first time in 50 years, Albania was opening up to the world, its media flows (mostly from Italy), the ever-expanding Internet, and foreign languages—especially Italian and English. Language and computer schools were popping up in the capital, Tirana, every few weeks. Young people in particular would congregate around the foreign staff of international organizations and migrants returning from Italy and other Western European countries, and were constantly scouring the newsstands and the few bookstores for foreign language materials. Foreign media and returning migrants had become the new language pushers for thousands of young people (and their families). Among their peers, these youth displayed newly acquired linguistic skills in a mixed idiom of Albanian, Italian, English, and local slang.

Such multilingualism was not, however, a rare or unique phenomenon. After all, social groups in reciprocal contact have always learned and borrowed from each other's languages, a tendency that accelerated as colonization and international trade gave rise to lingua francas, pidgins, and creoles. What was particularly impressive in Albania was the massively fluid semiotic production of multilingual codes that circulated through a multiplicity of communicative channels, from face-to-face to mass media to digital communications—a phenomenon I decided to call *transidiomatic practices*. Transidiomatic practices in Albania usually involved linguistic innovations of standard Albanian grafted on both English and Italian linguistic forms (although German could also be present in these recombinations) and were liberally used in a variety of channels (including radio, television, email, chatrooms, and cell phones).

In my analysis of Albanian communicative mutations, I initially focused on a particular category of transidiomatic practice: the translinguistic process in which particular referential signs flowed via foreign languages into Albanian, morphed into local signs, and circulated through multiple communication channels. I labeled such signs *transidiomatic floaters* and found evidence of them in my fieldwork and, subsequently, in other scholars' work on linguistic globalization. Two such floaters included the borrowing of "by the way" by Malaysian rappers (PENNYCOOK, 2003) and the circulation of the term "karma" in the discourse of Westernized yoga practitioners and others (ARAVAMUDA, 2004). In my fieldwork, I ran into the widely diffused, excessively-repeated expression "don uorri" (a linguistic mutation of the English "don't worry"), which in few years had created its own linguistic niche next to the still-dominant "ska problèm" (no problem).

I had become aware of the Albanian syntagm "ska problèm" in 1996 through some migrants I met in Italy. They routinely evoked the phrase in conversation as a way to assure each other that some worrisome affair would have a positive outcome. In 1998, during my first stay in Albania, "ska problèm" surrounded me, uttered by drivers who lost their way, restaurateurs dealing with my hungry pleas during a black out, and informants responding to my requests for help. I came to the conclusion that "ska problèm" had spread to interactions

between Albanians and foreigners, and played a major role in the cross-cultural repertoire of Albanian stranger-handlers.

However, by the end of 1999, while "ska problèm" was still quite common in Albanian everyday talk, it had almost disappeared from most intercultural settings, having been replaced by the English expression: "don't worry."

It is worth noting that Albanian stranger-handlers could have opted to hybridize "ska problèm" by simply pronouncing it with the English stress on the first syllable "ska pròblem." This anglicized pronunciation might have evoked the semantics of the English language while maintaining the local vernacular. The switch to a full English form ("don't worry") reflected, in my view, a desire to display familiarity with a foreign language and to index the speaker's social aspirations, at a time when knowledge of foreign languages was perceived as a valuable tool for social mobility.

"Don't worry" was sometimes immediately followed by another expression: "be happy," a clear testimony to the penetrating power of American pop music and the pervasive influence of Bobby McFerrin's rather annoying vocalizations (his song "Don't Worry, Be Happy" and accompanying video were released in 1988, but reached Albania only in the mid 1990s). When I first heard Albanians repeat this popular refrain, I ascribed the linguistic shift to the global penetration of American pop culture and filed it away. However, the situation may have been somewhat more complex.

In 1998, a local television station, TNSQ, started rebroadcasting a *telenovelas* (soap opera) parody produced in 1994 by its Italian home station, Tele Norba. This parody, called *Melensa,* which became quite popular in both Southern Italy and Albania, included among its characters an Anglican priest named Don Uorri, who specialized in solving all sorts of problems for his followers (see figure 1).

The creative talent behind this TV show had borrowed the English expression "don't worry" to produce a hybridized character name in which the negative "don't" had been morphed, via a reduction of the final consonant cluster, to "Don" (a Spanish and Southern Italian honorific title, derived from the Latin *dominus*, or lord). "Uorri," on the other hand, was simply the result of the phonetic representation (in both Italian and Albanian) of the English "worry," in theory not carrying any meaning but in practice tapping the original English meaning to provide semantic depth to the problem-solving priest.

In Tirana, many of my acquaintances and informants who commonly used the expression "don't worry" were also aware of Don Uorri—they would refer to *Melensa* when commenting on the popularity of Tele Norba and TNSQ. This link between the use of an English expression and a character in a soap opera parody was intriguing (and hilarious), but did not scream "linguistic social fact." It was a second appearance of this floater that convinced me that there may have been more to this phenomenon.

In 2000 an Italian website (altavista.it) advertised itself with a testimonial from a fictional character, also named "Don Uorri," who had the typical features of a Mafia Don (see figure 2). His hat, called a *coppola* in Italian, was the classic headgear of Sicilian peasants, from whom came most of the *Mafiosi.* He wore the sunglasses—mirrored Ray Bans—that had been adopted by Mafia members after watching 1960s Hollywood gangster movies as a sign of distinction, cool behavior, and inscrutability (GAMBETTA, 2009). The only visible facial gesture of this Don Uorri, his downturned mouth, was the prototypical Sicilian gesture for expressing denial, making a negative comment, or pretending ignorance. This persona was meant to brand a business that would provide the protection, security, and advice that customers needed to navigate the relatively new, and somewhat threatening, territory of cyberspace. This advertising campaign ran in most national newspapers, including *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*. It also ran in *La Gazzetta*'s sister edition in Albania (*Gazeta Shqiptarë*)—providing Albanians with their second Italian Don Uorri.

More likely than not, the Albanians who used the transidiomatic floater "don't worry/don uorri" had been exposed to its multiple sources—the song, the soap opera parody, and the ad—and applied this new twist to their habitual practice of reassuring stressed-out Westerners. When Albanians used this transidiomatic floater, especially while interacting with Italians (including me), they marked not only their knowledge of foreign languages but also their awareness of Italian TV shows and advertising. In so doing, they displayed their familiarity with, and desire to belong to, a cosmopolitan milieu immersed in global cultural flows.

FROM TRANSIDIOMATIC FLOATERS TO TRANSIDIOMA

My fieldwork in Albania led to numerous publications, in particular the article "Transidiomatic Practice," published in *Language and Communication* (JACQUEMET, 2005). The article was well received but it also draw some sharp criticism. The main critique revolved around my choice of analyzing global cultural flows (including transidiomatic floaters like "don uorri") in a somewhat politically neutral terrain. In particular, scholars working in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) pointed out that the article did not engage with an analysis of power relations resulting from global forces and provided a somewhat overly optimistic picture of the relationship between language, society, and power (a criticism that, many years prior, had also been leveled at my mentor and friend, John Gumperz, see Singh 1998, SARANGI, 1994).

Having been trained in European critical theory (Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and Bourdieu above all), excluding power from my analysis had never been my intention. In my previous work, an ethnography of criminal trials in Southern Italy (JACQUEMET; 1996, 2000), I subscribed to a fluid understanding of power relations, in which power resides not in opposing blocks but in myriad asymmetrical everyday encounters, which are shaped by culture-bound judgments carrying within them the seeds of ideological struggle. In this I had listened to Foucault's insistence that power needs to be explained through a detailed analysis of discourse — one that explores the micro-physics of how power operates, rather than merely demonstrating its existence. In sum, I agreed that the study of communication must render explicit a power-centered perspective. In particular, the linguistic analysis of social encounters must be cross-pollinated with an analysis of power that is applicable in all late modern settings, but especially in institutional ones.

In order to provide an analysis of language and globalization that would more directly address power relations, I decided to locate the most power-saturated setting I could find. By 2006, I had identified asylum proceedings as the ideal site for investigating the link between transidioma and discursive technologies of power. Interactions between state officials and deterritorialized people (such as refugees) had many of the same contextual features as transidiomatic floaters: they were embedded in multilingual environments (such as asylum courts) and constructed by mixing face-to-face and electronically-mediated communication (such as the asylum hearings). Additionally, these interactions were shaped by clear power asymmetries, allowing me to probe the role played by power technologies in an institutional transidiomatic setting.

Transidiomatic communication in the asylum process is less like a cooperative enterprise and more like a battlefield, which interactants (judges, asylum seekers, lawyers, interpreters, etc.) enter equipped with biased cultural and socio-linguistic expectations, asymmetrically distributed language skills, and divergent institutional agendas. It was in power-saturated contexts such as asylum courts that I would be able to complexify my analysis of transidiomatic communication, which I saw as a contested field composed of

opposing discursive strategies that interactants insert in wider and sometimes long-standing power struggles.

One of the consequences of late modern globalization has been the need for national governments and international institutions to address transnational concerns—particularly the regulation of the 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 creating transidiomatic environments, such as agencies capable of handling these deterritorialized speakers and their multiple languages. To process asylum claims, most Western nations have set up examination boards run by bureaucrats trained in asylum jurisprudence. These boards seek to follow due process by using interpreters, counsels, social workers, and cultural mediators; moreover, the board's staff has access to websites containing information useful to prove or dismiss a case.

Despite such efforts, the interview process in an asylum hearing has remained a site where multilingual practices come into conflict with national language ideologies. State bureaucrats impose norms and forms (shaped by national concerns and ethnocentric cultural assumptions) on people barely able to understand the processing agency's local language, let alone the bureaucratic procedures of in-depth interviews, writing reports, and producing the records required in order for institutions to grant refugees access to local resources (MARYNS and BLOMMAERT, 2001, BLOMMAERT, 2009).

Until the late 1970s, agencies in charge of asylum determination placed a disproportionate emphasis on the applicant's account. In the absence of written evidence, applicants were prompted to demonstrate their credibility by means of a detailed narration of their stories. Evidence provided directly by the asylum-seeker was awarded a high value and was generally accepted at its face value (FASSIN and RECHTMAN, 2009). Starting in the 1980s, however, more restrictive policies were introduced in almost all Western nations (the final destination of most asylum seekers) and asylum agencies reduced their reliance on the credibility of the applicant's testimony. As a result, asylum hearings increasingly acquired the flavor of cross-examinations, with asylum officers resorting to discursive power technologies to maintain their dominance and trying to poke holes in an asylum claim. Since the first examination, they systematically and harshly questioned applicants' narratives, casted doubt on claimants' identity, evoked procedural objections, and used metapragmatic statements (i.e. statements about the implicit social meaning conveyed by speech) to ensure that the asylum hearings reflected the wishes of the dominant class.

The study of metapragmatic attacks (a topic I studied in my ethnography of Italian trials against organized crime, JACQUEMET 1996) became again one of the sites where I could study asymmetrical interactions in an institutional setting.

Metapragmatic statements are often triggered by asylum officers' keen sense of how speech forms are used to establish the indexical relationship between interactants: their situational stance vis-à-vis the claimant (one-up/one-down); the social relationships or relative status of the participants; and special attributes of particular individuals (see SILVERSTEIN; 1976, JACQUEMET; 1996). During asylum hearings, officers are acutely aware of how to use signs to create interactional dominance, whether this use involves reference to specific words spoken by claimants or to particular attributes of speech (such as claimants' style of delivery, intonation, or underlying logic). Denotational signs—along with body language and tone of voice—are routinely monitored to gauge claimants' sincerity and credibility. In cases deemed "suspicious," officers overtly call upon the utterance or intonation found wanting, asking for clarification while reasserting their authority.

The dominant position of the officers is at times held in check by the presence of asylum lawyers (at least in the case of claimants lucky or resourceful enough to have secured the help of a counsel). In these cases, the practice of resorting to metapragmatic moves was

more evenly distributed among all participants, assuring a level field where the (translated) voice of the asylum seeker could be heard.

Moreover, these strictly linguistic power technologies are only part of what shapes interactions in the asylum process. Because communication technologies have made digitalized information accessible to everyone using mobile phones, tablets, or wired computers, we are witnessing an epochal transformation in access to asylum's knowledge infrastructure and in managing courtroom interactions. Since the turn of the 21st century, the digitalization of the workspace has allowed the asylum courts to become "smart courtrooms," fully wired spaces offering access to the digital information infrastructure 24/7. In particular, this digitalization expanded the reach of the asylum commission to include speedier and more accurate record keeping, more efficient use of translation services (both human and machine), and immediate checks on the on-going depositions (for example, it is now possible for officials to use both internet search engines and ministerial databases on foreign intelligence to try to verify—or more likely discredit—the applicant's story) .

The contemporary blend of discursive strategies and digital technologies does not necessarily produce a better asylum process. As I have argued elsewhere (JACQUEMET, 2011), transidiomatic communicative breakdowns during asylum depositions have continued to be significant and arise from a host of issues, ranging from the ideology of suspicion surrounding asylum claims, to the power asymmetry of the interaction, to the semantic, syntactic, and prosodic expectations of the speakers. In particular, asylum participants were acutely aware of language use and of the possibility of using this metapragmatic awareness to better their institutional agenda.

Let me illustrate metapragmatics in an institutional transidiomatic environment with an example from my fieldwork in an asylum court in Rome, Italy. The claimant was a Kurdish refugee, who had fled Turkey after military police discovered that he had been helping the Kurdish guerrillas. During his asylum hearing, the asylum officer asked him about the reasons for his fear of persecution (the basis for his asylum claim). The interpreter, a young woman quite fluent in the applicant's first language (Kurmanji) but unfamiliar with the political situation in Turkish Kurdistan, made a mistake in translating the claimant's reply, turning his generic statement about helping "people waging a guerrilla war in the mountains" (which would be translated as "*la gente che fa la guerriglia sulle montagne*") into a reference to a particular guerrilla organization, which she translated in Italian with the proper name *I Guerrigli*. The officer, faced with a proper name she had not encountered before (regardless of the fact that she had been deposing Kurdish asylum seekers for the last few years), expressed her skeptical curiosity and probed the applicant for more information.

Commissione Territoriale Asilo, Roma, May 26, 2009

AS Asylum seeker, young man, Kurmanji/Turkish
I Interpreter, young woman, Kurmanji/Turkish/Italian/English
O Officer, young woman, Italian/French
Law Lawyer, middle aged woman, Italian/English

1	O	allora perche` i militari turchi	O	so, why the Turkish army
2		ce l'avevano con lei?		was after you?
3	I	cima leshkerè tirka tera neyarti dikirin?	I	why the army was after you?
4	AS	min arikari dida kurda	AS	*because I helped the Kurds*
5		u leshkerè kurda		*and the Kurd army*
6	I	aiutava i kurdi e l'armata kurda	I	he helped the Kurds and its army
7	O	come l'aiutavate?	O	how did you help it?
8	I	çawa te wanra arikari dikir?	I	*how did you help them?*
9	AS	min arikari dida wan kesè	AS	*I helped the people waging a*
10		ciyada gerila bun		*guerrilla war in the mountains*

11	I	aiutava i Guerrigli...	I	he helped the Guerrigli ...
12		sono dei soldati kurdi		they are Kurdish soldiers
13	O	I Guerrigli...	O	The Guerrigli? ...
14		questi non li ho mai sentiti...		these ones, I never heard of...
15		e chi sono?		and who are they
16	I	kène ew?	I	*who are they?*
17	AS	ewana kesè arikariyè gelè me kurdara dikin	AS	*they do stuff for the Kurd people*
18		Ewana gelè mera arikariyè dikin		*they help our people*
19	I	sono quelli che fanno qualcosa per i kurdi	I	they are those who do things for the Kurds
20		che aiutano la nostra gente		they help our people
21	O	sono armati?	O	are they armed?
22	I	cekè wan hene?	I	*do they bear arms?*
23	AS	erè, hema mera tishteki nabèjin	AS	*yes, but they don't hurt us*
24	I	si, ma a noi ci fanno niente	I	yes, but they don't hurt us
25	O	e grazie!	O	well, I would hope so!
26		ma allora chi attaccano?		So, whom do they target?
27		popolazione o militari?		the Turkish population or just the Army?
28	I	ser kèda digrin	I	*what are their targets*
29		ser gelè weda yan ser leshkeran?		*the Turkish population or just the Army?*
30	AS	ser leshkeran u ser qereqolada	AS	*army people and barracks*
31	I	militari e caserme	I	military personnel and barracks

[Fourteen minutes omitted]

32	O	e che rapporti ci sono	O	and what kind of relationship is there
33		tra il PKK e questi Guerrigli		between the PKK and these Guerrigli
34		che ho sentito qui per la prima volta		that I heard here for the first time
35		e che il collega non trova su internet?=		and that my colleague cannot find on internet?
36	Law	=guardi che c'è un errore di traduzione,	Law	I believe there's a translation mistake
37		lui ha detto che aiutava la guerriglia,		he said he helped the guerrilla
38		cioè il PKK		that is, the PKK
39	O	ah, voi aiutavate dei guerriglieri del PKK?	O	ok then, you helped the PKK guerrilla?
40		... chiedi un pò?		... [to I] can you ask him?
41	I	we arikari PKK è ra dikir?	I	*did you help the PKK*
42	AS	erè AS		*yes*
43	I	si, aiutava il PKK	I	yes, he helped the PKK
44	O	oh, meno male.	O	well, finally!
45	(...)	(...)		
46	O	e il PKK è anche conosciuto	O	Is the PKK also known
47		con un altro nome?		with a different name?
48	I	pkk bi naveki dinè ra ji tè naskirinè?	I	*the PKK, is it know with another name?*
49	AS	KADEK	AS	KADEK
50	O	vabbene	O	very good.

When asked how he came to be persecuted by the Turkish Army, the applicant replied (in Kurmanji) that he helped the people "waging a guerrilla war in the mountains" (lines 9-10). The active "waging a guerrilla war" was translated by the female interpreter as "*i Guerrigli*" (which in English could be rendered as "The Warriors", line 11). In so doing, she lexicalized and transformed into a proper name the activity of supporting the guerrillas described by the applicant. As soon as the officer heard the proper name "I Guerrigli" she immediately expressed (metapragmatically) her skepticism (line 14: "these ones I never heard of…") and started asking more question about this organization.

During more than fifteen minutes of continued interaction between the asylum seeker and interpreter (not all of which is included in the transcript) that turned increasingly rambling and non-sensical, the officer kept inserting her caustic metapragmatics (for instance, when told that the "Guerrigli" did not attack Kurd people, she replied "well I'd hope so!" [line 25]).

She finally boldly expressed her skepticism about the existence of this guerrilla organization with a classic metapragmatic move, casting doubt on the deposition ("that I heard here from the first time," line 34) and counterpunching by claiming that her colleague, who was busily scouring Internet sites, could not find any reference to the Kurdish revolutionary party I Guerrigli (line 35). (This constant presence of a digital layering of communication over the face-to-face interaction of the deposition makes these asylum proceedings truly transidiomatic).

At this point, the asylum seeker's lawyer felt compelled to intervene and clarify (metapragmatically) that when the claimant mentioned the "*guerrilla warriors,*" he was referring to the PKK**,** the acronym for *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, or Kurdistan Workers' Party (lines 36-38). Once the officer ascertained that the applicant was indeed referring to the PKK when the interpreter translated his words as as "Guerrigli," she quickly moved to establish an internal denotational reference by asking the applicant whether the PKK had previously been known by a different name (lines 46-47). When he provided the correct answer—"KADEK," the acronym for *Kongreya Azadî û Demokrasiya Kurdistanê,* the Freedom and Democracy Congress of Kurdistan)—she was finally satisfied with his accuracy and expresses her satisfaction. Note how in the last turn, once the applicant produced the proper name KADEK, the officer did not wait for the interpreter's translation because she immediately recognized the name.

In this case, the resort to metapragmatics by the officer was matched by the lawyer's intervention, providing some balance in the exchange and assuring that the (translated) voice of the asylum seeker could still be heard.

CONCLUSIONS

The world of communication is entering a new phase, which I would not hesitate to identify as a paradigm shift (à la Kuhn). The impact of digitalization on social life, the increasingly pervasive presence of de- and reterritorialization processes, and the development of digital communications are of tremendous theoretical and methodological relevance. The online-offline nexus is entirely *new*—no online behavior existed in sociocultural, political, and historical phenomenology until the final decades of the 20th century. As such, this nexus offers formidable potential for empirical and theoretical reformulation. I believe there is a marked difference between the intercultural interactions analyzed by the ethnography of speaking in the 1970s and the interactions in my current research on asylum hearings. Late-modern communication as experienced in these hearings is no longer characterized by the tension between a single national language and a single minority one, but by the multiple transidiomatic practices that arise from transcultural communicative flows and their power relations.

By looking at massively fluid multilingual interactions spanning over multiple media, scholars interested in contemporary communication are studying linguistic habits and communicative mutations that are redefining the entire field of language and communication studies. The concept of transidioma challenges researchers to look at linguistic forms (such as "don uorri"), social indexicalities, and power relations in multilingual, mobile, and media-saturated contexts.

In these contexts, my focus is not on language but on *registers*. However, I modify Halliday's definition of register as a "variety of a language used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting" (1976, p.85) to account for registers operating across various languages and communicative platforms. My current emphasis is on transidioma as an assemblage of *registers* across multiple languages rather than within a specific one.

Transidiomatic registers, such as the register of resorting to metapragmatics in the asylum case explored above, may be simultaneously activated over multiple channels, depending on the social desires and linguistic ideologies at play in a particular environment. Adapting Agha's definition of enregisterment (2007) for the transidiomatic world, I see these registers as a combination of transcultural models of actions which link speech varieties to stereotypical linguistic values, performable over multiple media, and recognized by a socio-historical population. In this light, transidiomatic registers figure centrally in the reterritorialization of transcultural processes, the production of locally exchangeable codes, and their circulation in global networks of meaning and signification.

My current research's focus on the power-saturated transidioma of asylum not only looks at the asymmetrical nature of the asylum process, in which one side seeks help and provides personal information and the other listens and adjudicates, but it also places power relations center stage in at least two ways. First, it focuses on the ways examiners and adjudicators are using the communicative power of their techno-political devices (questioning, procedural objections, metapragmatic requests, online searches) to ensure that the asylum hearings reflect the wishes of the ruling class. Second, it points out that the burden of potential intercultural misunderstanding has dramatic consequences only for the asylum seekers. They are the ones who need to adjust their conversational style, or face the consequences of their inability to do so.

At the same time, we should avoid a deterministic understanding of power relations, opposing people with power against those without it. Any interaction, including the institutional routines discussed above, still has 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 reach a favorable outcome. In other words, we must always be very aware of the relationship between performative force and power relations, and recognize that all interactions, including asymmetrical institutional encounters, are shaped by culture-bound performances carrying within them the seeds of ideological struggle, and thus social change.

Participants in power-saturated interactions—and the scholars studying them—need to consider that successful outcomes are increasingly determined by speakers' abilities to attend to the transidiomatic nature of these interactions. In other words, both participants and analysts need to realize the differential power and linguistic skills present in these settings, the ideological play among fractured and mixed languages, and the asymmetrically distributed ability to tiptoe through the different frames of the transidioma.

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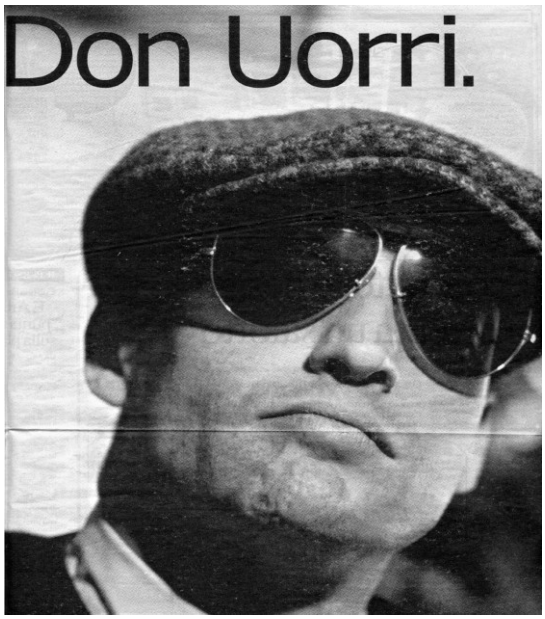
TABLES

Image 1 - Don Uorri (still image from the show *Melensa*, Tele Norba, Fall, 1994)

Image 2 - Don Uorri (scanned image from advert in *Gazeta Shqiptarë,* March 12, 2000)



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