

## Policing for commodification: turning communicative resources into commodities

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Sociolinguistic research has recently turned its attention to an investigation of the role of language as an economic resource. Scholars have taken different settings such as the workplace, marketing, tourism, education as well as art as starting points in order to demonstrate how and with what effects language can be exchanged for various forms of capital gain on specific markets (Cameron 2012; Heller and Duchêne 2016; Tan and Rubdy 2008). Sociolinguistics became increasingly interested in the commodity value of languages, looking at ways to imagine, disentangle, analyze and making sense of the complex relationship between communicative resources and their potential economic value. According to this scholarship, languages as commodities play a double role: Language and multilingualism may serve to imbue a given product, place or person with specific qualities (for instance being authentic, local, exotic, sexy, serious, as well as professional, progressive, or cosmopolitan) that a given language is usually associated with and that are considered as particularly desirable by certain consumers (Bishop et. al. 2005; Blommaert, 2009; Cavanaugh and Shankar 2014; Kelly-Holmes 2005; Piller 2007). Also, language and multilingualism can be regarded as powerful resources serving the conduct of specific work tasks and playing central roles in the management of complex networks and the circulation of knowledge (Cameron 2000; Duchêne 2011; Pavlenko 2015).

Along with this literature, scholars have recently turned to a discussion of the market conditions under which language can be turned into an economic resource (Kelly-Holmes 2016; McGill 2013). Research has also problematized linguists' logocentrism and argued that the commodification of language is part of larger exploitative processes involving the commodification of individuals producing language (Duchêne 2012; Holborow 2015). Finally scholars have pointed to the necessity to resonate with Marxist theory (Block, forthcoming) and language economics (Grin and Vaillancourt 2012) to expand our understanding of the processes that are at play when language is turned into a commodity.

This special issue 'Policing for commodification: turning communicative resources into commodities' is inspired by and anchored within this critical scholarship interested in the intersections between language and political economy. While recent work has primarily focused on actual attempts to exchange language with forms of material compensations as well as on attempts to assess the objective market value of a given language at a given moment in time, the contributions in this special issue analyze the specific rhetoric that within particular circumstances and contexts frames language and multilingualism as commodities (also see Duchêne and Heller 2012 for an analysis of discourses of profit). The contributions of this issue are interested in the effects of these discourses on the ways individuals and institutions police their own linguistic conduct and that of others. They also examine, how the commodity value of specific

communicative resources is discursively constructed and identified by both individuals and institutional actors and show, how languages and speakers are controlled and regulated in order to be turned into commodifiable objects. In foregrounding the interrelation between language, commodity value and practices of policing, it is our aim to expand our understanding of language commodification and incorporate a perspective that highlights the circumstances and processes in which potential commodity values are negotiated, decided upon and made possible.

Thus, this special issue intends to emphasize a perspective on language and commodification that examines processes, policies and decisions within different types of public and private organizations as well as communities and actors. In particular, we are bringing together six case studies documenting attempts to invest in forms of commodification of languages and speakers within six different national contexts (Switzerland, Italy, Ireland, Belgium, Pakistan and Tajikistan) and specific fields (medical tourism, heritage tourism, vocational training, minority language activism, the media, and language learning within transnational communities). All of them represent projects and agendas where investments in language commodification are made, following economic logics, being part of efforts of community building, language revitalization or incentives to create 'good' citizens. Indeed, while we agree that the commodification of language is often anchored in processes of economic development, -restructuring, and market expansion, in this special issue we are also interested in pointing to alternative histories and motivations that prompt individuals, communities and organizations alike to engage in efforts to commodify languages and communicative resources, in turn raising awareness for a broader interpretation of the framing of languages and speakers as commodities that are intrinsically linked to community building, social activism, attempts to create forms of social cohesion as well as to turning individuals into economically self-responsible and -sufficient subjects. In this sense we are interested in generating an understanding of language commodification that incorporates but in the same time goes beyond its economic dimension and that regards these discourses as attempts to regulate and structure society and to produce specific types of speakers and communities for a diverse set of goals.

Investments that follow economic logics and motifs are investigated by Del Percio, Muth, and Schedel, and describe efforts to commodify languages, speakers and communicative conduct from diverse perspectives. In his ethnographic account of counseling practices in a state-run professional guidance center for newly arrived migrants to Italy, Del Percio highlights strategies to commodify a 'bundle of skills' that are mobilized to engineer commodifiable migrant workers for the Italian labor market. By describing how migrants' communicational conduct is policed and how their socialization into desirable professional selves is promoted, the paper sees efforts to commodify communicative resources both as expressions of a neoliberal logic of activation and professionalization, but in the same time also that of a civic engagement of counsellors that aims to emancipate migrants and turn them into self-responsible citizens. Yet ideas on

what constitutes commodifiable communicative resources and desired speakers are not necessarily clear-cut, an aspect discussed in Muth's paper on the commodification of language as a means to provide services for patients in the Swiss healthcare industry. Within this context the paper examines the management of multilingualism and the negotiation of the oftentimes fluctuating and unstable value of linguistic resources within two hospitals engaged in the care for affluent Russian- and Arabic-speaking medical tourists and asks, which specific linguistic proficiencies are deemed valuable, how this commodity value is constructed and how institutional policies react to changes in market conditions, imagining ideal medical workers with commodifiable communicative resources. Remaining within an economic logic of investing into speakers whose communicative resources represent an added value, Schedel examines the efforts to revive tourism in a small town situated on the language border between French- and German-speaking Switzerland. By analyzing the development and implementation of a bilingual guided theatrical tour within a community that only recently underwent structural economic change, the paper highlights how this tour is marketed as an expression of local bilingualism, how this bilingualism is enacted and how it is turned into an experience sold to tourists.

Investments into language commodification as part of efforts of community building and the creation of social cohesion are described in contributions by Bolander, Brennan and Van Hoof. In her paper on transnationalism and the effects of an 'English as second language' policy on two Ismaili communities in Eastern Tajikistan and Northern Pakistan, Bolander demonstrates how English is discursively constructed as an economic and symbolic resource with language policy measures by the Aga Khan Education Services being used to underscore community-internal sameness and index Ismaili progress. Similar efforts of community building but within the context of language revitalization efforts are described by Brennan in her paper on the promotion of Irish in the Republic of Ireland. This contribution particularly demonstrates how discourses of commodification are used to promote the use of Irish among small-scale business owners to contribute to the revitalization of Irish and the imagined community that this language is said to stand for. In the Belgian context, Van Hoof shows how attempts to turn speech styles of Dutch into a commercial resource by a public television broadcaster intersects with the organizations political concerns with educating and civilizing the Belgian nation.

Investments into the creation of 'good' subjects and citizens are addressed in a number of contributions in this special issue. In her paper, Bolander describes how the mobilization of the idea of English as a valuable communicative resource is utilized to construct Ismaili community members as open to progress and globalization, while Del Percio highlights instances when language facilitates the commodification of labor power, with individuals being subjected to specific moral regimes aimed to turn them into 'good' citizens. Equally, Muth refers to the idea that certain languages attract patients, as a consequence subjecting medical workers to normative orders that are not necessarily economically motivated. Ultimate-

ly this results in policies aiming to create appropriately skilled speakers who can be commodified on the global health market, in turn cumulating in the reproduction of stereotypical images of languages and speakers. From a broader perspective, Van Hoof's paper points towards efforts to apply ideas on the appropriate use of standard and nonstandard language use to a wider societal context.

All contributions underscore attempts to reframe language as a commodity and describe transversal mechanisms in the policing of languages and speakers. In particular this includes top-down impositions of specific language regimes, regulations through incentives and advocacy for languages, as well as ways that connect to entrepreneurial-like tactics and the governmentality of the self (Foucault 2000). This also resonates through the papers of Bolander, Muth, and Van Hoof that describe top-down policing efforts aimed at producing marketable communicative resources via incentives for language learning, the discursive construction of competitive and potentially commodifiable language users, or the strategic utilization of language varieties in media broadcasts. These policing efforts are realized through the imposition of linguistic norms as part of spiritual guidance to the community (Bolander), the imposition of linguistic regimes within hospitals (Muth), or the imposition of specific normative modes of speaking by a public Belgian broadcaster (Van Hoof), in the latter case addressing both television producers and audiences being supposed to learn what 'good' and appropriate language is. In contrast to that, Brennan and Schedel describe more subtle attempts of policing and refer to incentives that promise benefits in exchange of specific morally marked modes of speech. For Brennan this relates to the imagination that language advocacy and limited revitalization efforts can prove to be profitable for small-town entrepreneurs, while in Schedel's case a carefully staged and policed imagination of a bilingual community may result both in a greater number of visitors as well as in capital gain for those engaged in the local tourism industry. In Del Percio's research, policing is exercised through demands to asylum seekers to work on themselves in order for them being able to profit from the Italian labor market. Fundamentally, all policing of languages and speakers described in this special issue manifest a recurring trope in the field as they observe authorities exercising power and control over individuals and their communicative resources. At the same time though, we are also observing neoliberal modes in the regulation of speakers, calling for own initiatives to improve communicative conducts.

The effects of these regulatory discourses for languages and speakers come at a certain cost. Firstly, they put languages and speakers into specific hierarchies and effectively structure speakers depending on their communicative resources and –conduct while secondly, they determine which languages are particularly suitable for communication and which aren't. These effects are illustrated by Bolander with regard to English that is constructed as a highly valuable resource vis-à-vis regional (Russian and Urdu) as well as local languages (Burushaski and Tajik). Similar hierarchizations and commentaries on use value become apparent in Del Percio's work. While proficiency in Italian is regarded as essential for a sustaina-

ble future within Italian society, all other languages of migrants are portrayed as being of little importance in the local economy; furthermore, hierarchies emerge that determine which personal properties count as favorable and desirable professional personas. In similar vein, Muth describes how changing market demands result in shifting values of linguistic repertoires, processes that in this instance are highlighted in a sudden devaluation of Arabic speakers and the emergence of a segmentation of speakers of Russian based on their linguistic and ethnic identities. In Brennan's and Schedel's research, idealized and authenticated visions of speakers and particular constellations of bilingual repertoires are brought forward, either in the form of English and Irish bilingualism or in that of a certain type of bilingual speaker mastering Swiss German and French. A hierarchization of standard and nonstandard Dutch is described by Van Hoof. Although an increased use of nonstandard forms of talk within television broadcasts led to an increasing overall use of nonstandard speech in the media, this nevertheless did not result in a wide societal shift in the perceptions of both standard and non-standard speech within the Dutch-speaking community in Belgium.

However, exclusion and the production and reproduction of social inequality are not the only effects of regulatory discourses on languages and speakers. While language commodification is frequently associated with processes of both objectification and alienation (Cameron 2000; Duchêne 2011), the papers within this special issue also show that the reframing of language as a commodity may also be a way to imagine alternative futures and promote societal change. In Del Percio's paper it helps individuals to find employment within a strained economy, whereas in Van Hoof's contribution, alternative forms of speech are popularized and made socially more acceptable. The image of an alternative future is also reflected in Brennan's work on Irish as it highlights efforts to challenge the predominance of English and give – albeit limited – visibility to Irish in the public sphere. Further, even Bolander's account draws the attention towards efforts that promote English as a language understood by all Ismaili and that may help to ensure the continuing existence of the community and its recognition within national and transnational contexts.

Thus, we understand discourses of commodification as both the result of the extension of neoliberal market logic to all domains of social life including language and in the same time as a means to challenge seemingly exclusive and inevitable dynamics of neoliberal capitalism. In that respect, this special issue is not only meant as a continuation of the debate on language commodification, but also as a way to highlight where language policy and -commodification intersect and to bring attention to the rhetoric that describes the reframing of languages and speakers as commodities. By examining how commodity values are discursively constructed and how languages and speakers are policed and regulated in order to become commodities, we also hope that this special issue will raise awareness for the dependence of processes of

valorization on language policy and on the conditions and consequences of efforts to police languages and speakers for symbolic- or capital gain.

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