

## **Metrolingual practices and distributed identities: people, places, things and languages**

Alastair Pennycook and Emi Otsuji

### **1. Introduction: The 500 Söm Note**

A trio of young men are strolling through a Bangladeshi-owned shop in Isuramu Yokochō (Islamic Alley), Shinjuku, Tokyo. As they pause at one of the freezers near the counter, the attention of the youngest of the three, who is trailing the other two, is drawn to something on the counter. Pointing to whatever he has seen, he urges the others to look. Following the pointing finger, the three of them gather around. On the counter, beneath a vinyl sheet positioned under the till – on which sit a scotch tape dispenser, a basket with sachets of saffron and a dented donation can with the words (either side of the slot for inserting money) ‘Donation Please / MASJID (Mosque) in Bangladesh / Donation Box’ – are a collection of banknotes of different currencies (Image 1). The young man points to an Uzbek 500 sōm (about 0.04 Euros) banknote (Image 2). At the sight of three customers assembling around the counter, a shop assistant approaches from the shop floor and swiftly goes behind it, patting the shoulder of the youngest man as he passes: ‘Hello brother. What do you want? Please tell me.’

Such use of English is not particularly marked but nor is it necessarily the obvious choice. A large signboard displayed outside the shop states at the top in English ‘100% Halal food’ above the Japanese ‘香辛料専門店’ (spice speciality shop). Pictures of Nepalese, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Indian, Pakistani, Ghanaian and Nigerian flags, as well as images of various foods (fish and meat), spices and phone cards are scattered round the sign, alongside the name of the shop written in Roman, Bangla, Hindi, and Burmese scripts. In response to a question about languages commonly used, the shop manager listed Bangla, Urdu, English, Hindi and Nepalese. This linguistic repertoire was further extended by a shop assistant – ‘Arabī mo chotto’ (a bit of Arabic too) – using the Bangla word for Arabic and speaking in Japanese (a language missing from the inventory above). Through the images, flags and scripts on the sign, the shop identifies itself as dealing in spices and other goods, being South Asian Muslim (halal) but oriented more broadly to South Asia and West Africa.

The three young men, however, are not sure who runs this shop, having asked amongst themselves (in Uzbek) 'Bu qorachalar kim? Hintlar ekanu' (Who are these darker people? Seem like Indians). The multilingualism of this shop is therefore, best understood in relational terms: Our interest is neither in individual multilingualism (plurilingualism) nor societal multilingualism but in the multilingual resources in this store. The use of English by the shopkeeper to the young men, or of Uzbek amongst themselves, is part of the multilingual repertoire of the shop.

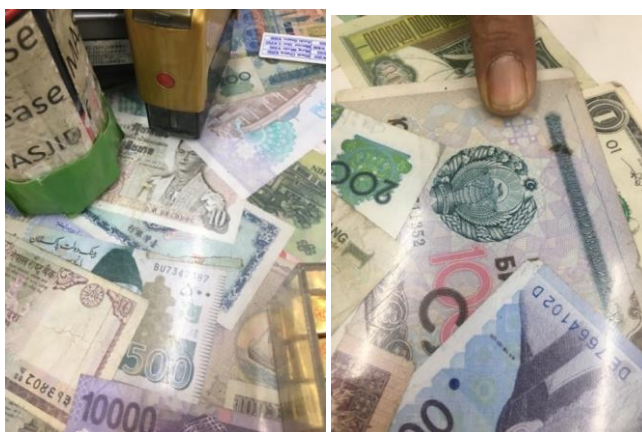


Image 1: Bank notes on the counter    Image 2: Pointing to Uzbek note

Rather than replying to the shop assistant's greeting in English, the oldest of the three men points at the Uzbek note and says (in Japanese) 'これ私達の (this is ours)' which is met with 'ウズベキスタンでしょ (Uzbekistan, right?)' from the shop assistant. They nod and start strolling around the shop, looking at the different goods on display until they return to the counter with 2 frozen chicken 15 minutes later. They pause again as they leave to look at the banknotes on the counter, recognizing and commenting amongst themselves about a Vietnamese note. These three men of Uzbek background are newcomers to the shop, and as we saw above, unsure about what kind of shop it is, or who runs it. Indeed the assistant tells us later that they must be fairly recent newcomers to Japan: He and his colleagues are very attuned to migration trends in Japan from observing customers. With Japan's working-

age population decreasing yearly (currently about 60% of the total population), Japan enacted a new Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act to take effect in 2019, changing its immigration policies to encourage overseas workers, who now make up more than 2% of the population. In 2019 new laws were passed to promote Japanese language learning and social integration among these new migrants (Yamawaki, 2019).

The new visas are either for specialised skilled workers or for workers who can fill gaps in care-giving, food service, construction, cleaning, and food and beverage industries. While this 2% figure is relatively small compared to many other countries, it is growing, and is leading to a wider variety of workers than had been common (Ebuchi, 2019). Chinese, South Koreans, and Vietnamese have been at the forefront of this growing migration to Japan, but others are now coming from further afield across Asia. The money displayed on the counter reflects these trends, expanding in step with the growth of the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the shop's clientele, and the patterns of migration into Japan. During our 6 years of observation of this Bangladeshi corner shop (see Pennycook and Otsuji, 2017; 2019), we have observed people not only from South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, but also from other Asian countries such as Myanmar, Nepal, and Thailand, as well as West African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. One of our long-term interests in this shop has been the ways it draws together people of a range of different backgrounds through its selection of food and other goods and services.

## **2. Pointing, Identity and Distribution**

Of particular interest for this chapter is not only the diversity of customers in the shop, or the ways recent migratory patterns correspond to the money displayed at the counter, but the implications for understanding identity as a distributed effect across people, objects and place. Our concern, therefore, is the relationship among the people (the three young Uzbek men), what has been pointed at (the 500 sōm note), the kinds of identification this implies, the way this is framed linguistically – ‘これ私達の (this is ours)’ – and the way this is taken up by the shop assistant – ‘ウズベキスタンでしょ(Uzbekistan, right?)’. When the oldest of the three Uzbek men points at the money (or when the youngest points out the note to his

fellow Uzbeks), several issues converge. Discourse about money, as Agha (2017:352) explains, is key to a wide diversity of social interaction. To talk about money is to engage with 'a class of social indexicals whose values are variably specified in different times and places.' Pointing at this banknote invokes both the register of money (Agha, 2017) and tokens of *banal nationalism* – everyday forms of national identification through flags, songs, bank notes and other symbols – that Billig (1995) suggests are the everyday experience of national identity.

This moment is therefore already one of layered indexicalities, or as we argue in this chapter, of various inter-relational effects of distributed identity. As a recognizable everyday object appears in front of them, the intricate relations among the pointer, the indicated object, its surrounds, and the kinds of identification invoked, become significant. As Kusters et al. (2017: 220) remind us, people 'speak, point, gesture, sign, write, draw, handle objects and move their bodies, in a variety of combinations or aggregates, within diverse social and material contexts.' Pointing itself is a compound and much-discussed aspect of human (and possibly non-human) behaviour (Goodwin, 2003; McNeil 2005). As a generally deictic signalling device, pointing is always located (we point to things around us) and of communicative importance and may or may not be accompanied by language. As Jaworski and Thurlow (2014) argue, we can also understand pointing not only in terms of its deictic work but also as an everyday enactment of discourses, styles and genres. This mundane act of pointing to a banal object is part of a process of identification that is realised in part verbally – 'これ私達の (this is ours)' 'ウズベキスタンでしょ (Uzbekistan, right?)' – but is enabled by the presence of the 500 sōm note that plays an important role as a distributed component of their assembled identities.

Such examples we view in terms of *distributed identity*, where this moment of identification is made possible by the interactions among people, objects, language and place. Just as we have argued elsewhere that repertoires do not reside exclusively in the individual, but rather are distributed in space in and through iterative everyday engagements (i.e. *spatial repertoires*; Pennycook and Otsuji 2014 a, b; 2015), we also understand identity in distributive terms. Our starting point, therefore, is with this moment of Uzbek identification

that is not merely the use of an indexical sign (this bank note indicates our nationality) but rather suggests that items such as this banknote form part of an assemblage through which identity is distributed across everyday objects, places and interactions. Our interest in this chapter is to unleash from the individual and distribute among objects the ways identities may be marked.

Drawing on various distributive frameworks – distributed cognition, distributed agency, distributed language – this chapter makes a case for understanding identity along similar lines. While poststructuralist approaches to identity usefully undermined monological cognitive approaches (where identity is a characteristic of the individual) – emphasizing instead the discursive construction of subjectivity as multiple, conflictual and flexible – many failed by and large (at least in the ways poststructuralism was taken up within applied linguistics) to escape the constrictions of methodological individualism (the focus might have shifted to discourse but still the interest remained on identity and the individual), or to account adequately for material and non-discursive factors (discourse was seen in primarily linguistic terms distanced from material origins and consequences). Distributive frameworks, by contrast, seek to break down the barriers between inside and outside, between humans and their surrounds, between language and context. Some approaches to distributed language, agency and cognition focus largely on their social realization: thinking is socially mediated and cooperatively achieved (Pontier and Gort, 2016) and although ‘agency is intuitively thought of as located in the individual person, it is in fact radically distributed: one person may work toward another person’s ends; two people’s goals may be shared; one person may be held accountable for another person’s behavior; and so on’ (Enfield, 2017: 9).

We share with these approaches an interest in escaping methodological individualism, whereby language, cognition, agency and identity are all seen as personal properties. We likewise are interested in moving towards an understanding of relational or interactional processes: cognition, agency and identity are only realised collaboratively. Yet we find it important to see this not only in term of human-human interaction but also in terms of interactions between humans and the non-human world: language, cognition, agency and identity depend not only on interpersonal interaction but also on interaction between

people, things and places. They are deeply intertwined with the material world. From this point of view, language, cognition and agency are not associated solely with individuals but rather operate through larger entanglements and assemblages of distributed elements. In this paper we draw on recent data from our ten-year metrolingualism project (Pennycook and Otsuji, 2015) to explore ways in which identity may be understood as extending through semiotic assemblages, or the totality of distributed elements that come together at a particular moment.

Part of a broader critical sociolinguistics of diversity, this metrolingual research describes relations between language and the city, focusing particularly on everyday, multilingual language use in urban workplaces (Pennycook and Otsuji, 2015). There are three principal aims in this current work: to understand ways in which diversities (multilingual, multicultural, ethnic, racial and so on) are enacted and perceived as everyday social practices; to reconsider language in terms of semiotic assemblages, and thus to see linguistic resources as part of wider constellations of things, people and places; and to seek alternative frameworks of material relations that can redress issues of structure, agency, intentionality, cognition and language through new ways of thinking about distribution and redistribution (to which we return later in the chapter). Multilingual identity from this perspective includes much more than an individual's identification in and through different languages, dialogical construction through interactive language use, or discursive production through discourse. It is, rather, a relational quality of an assemblage of people, places, things and linguistic resources.

### **3. Distributive Orientations**

Studies of language and identity moved forward considerably with the development of poststructuralist understandings of identity. As McNamara (2019: 2) explains, a key aspect of much work on identity has been the assumed 'autonomy of the individual, the idea that the individual has agency or choice over action, thought and being.' From this point of view, the focus is on 'individual cognitive and emotional aspects of social self-awareness.' Various challenges to this idea of individual identity sought to bring in more social dimensions and to see identity as always depending on forms of social interaction. Poststructuralist

approaches to identity, or the preferred term *subjectivity*, stressed the ways in which subjectivity was produced in discourse, both subject to and a subject of discursive constraints. This shifts the terrain considerably since agency or identity are seen as products of the circular effects of discourse: We take up and are taken up by positions within discourses. What we and others understand ourselves to be is understood as a changing, diverse and conflictual construct subject to varying discourses. Norton's (Peirce 1995; 2013) work from this perspective was most influential in second language education, suggesting that identity was multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change across time and place.

While this view helped us greatly in seeing identity as social, variable, and subject to social and ideological forces, there were also a number of limitations, particularly in the tendency to see subjectivity only in linguistic-discursive terms and at times to maintain a level of agentive action that saw people choosing between discourses. The key idea of 'investment' that became central to this version of identity has been constrained by its economic resonances and the implications of an agentive subject choosing between pre-given ways of being (Price, 1996). Rather than a position whereby subject positions pre-exist the discursive engagement of the subject, discourse is better understood 'as a practice in which both discourse and subject are performatively realized' (Price, 1999: 582). This brings Butler's (1993; 1997) key understanding of the performative realization of subjectivity into the picture, as well as her insight that bodies are both discursive and material (discourse should not be contrasted with materiality) (Pennycook, 2004).

Busch (2015) has extended these ways of thinking by bringing together interactional, poststructuralist, and phenomenological approaches, enabling a focus on *Spracherleben* (the lived experience of language), the physical, embodied, biographical and emotional aspects of language use that were potentially missing from poststructuralist accounts. *Spracherleben*, bringing together a wider range of temporal, physical and affective elements into identity construction (as well as different epistemological means for getting at them), enables us to extend this discussion not so much through the phenomenological demand to understand lived experience (the interiority of being) but through the new materialist and post-qualitative (St Pierre, 2019) demand to grasp the relations between people and their material entanglements (the exteriority of being). In the same way that we consider

repertoires to be spatially distributed – ‘the available and sedimented resources that derive from the repeated language practices of the people involved in the sets of activities related to particular places’ (Pennycook and Otsuji, 2014a: 166) – rather than defined by individuals or communities, we see identity as an emergent process deriving from assemblages of people, place and artefacts.

This is a notion of identity as distributed (not just spread out or shared) in the same way that *distributed language* can be understood as emergent from internal and external interactions. The idea of distributed language challenges a conceptualization of languages as internalised systems or individual competence. From this perspective none of these terms – internal, system, individual, competence – is very useful for grasping what is at stake when language is concerned. Viewing language as embodied, embedded and enacted (it is far more than representational activity in the mind) and on the other hand extended, distributed and situated (it involves the world outside the head) (Steffensen, 2012), a distributive perspective brings together, in Cowley’s (2012) account, distributed cognition (Hutchins, 2014) and integrational linguistics (Harris, 1998). Encompassing the insights of *extended mind*, which locates ‘the neural contribution as just one (important) element in a complex causal web spanning brains, bodies and world’ (Clark, 2008: 10), distributed cognition operates not only on a spatial scale larger than the individual, but expands such insights beyond the cognitive affordances in immediate time and space towards broader cognitive ecosystems. ‘Distributed cognition begins with the assumption that all instances of cognition can be seen as emerging from distributed processes’ (Hutchins, 2014: 36). Thinking from this point of view becomes spatial and artefactual: there is no longer a world ‘out there’ separate from humans and represented in language but rather a dynamic interrelationship between different materialities (Pennycook, 2018b: 449).

Material surrounds are not mere contexts in which we interact but rather part of an interactive whole that includes people, objects and space, a focus on ‘how the composite ecology of human and nonhuman interactions in public space works on sociality and political orientation’ (Amin, 2015: 239). This suggests a strong focus on both *practices* – those repeated social and material acts that have gained sufficient stability over time to reproduce themselves – and on ‘the vast spillage of *things*’ which are given equal weight to



other actors and become 'part of hybrid assemblages: concretions, settings and flows' (Thrift, 2007: 9). Central to this way of thinking is the idea of *assemblages*, drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Assemblages are dynamic combinations of people, objects and places and concern 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle' (Bennett, 2010: 6).

Assemblages can be understood as 'ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts,' (Bennett, 2010: 23) and as 'temporary arrangements' of things in an endless, nonhierarchical array of shifting associations of varying degrees of durability' (Appadurai, 2015: 221). Assemblages are not centrally governed by one material or event: their effects are 'emergent properties' in that their ability to make something happen 'is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone' (Bennett, 2010: 24). Our focus on semiotic assemblages (Pennycook, 2017; Pennycook and Otsuji, 2017) suggests 'the simultaneous co-presence and co-reliance of language and other semiotic resources in meaning-making, affording each equal weight' (Hawkins 2018: 64). How, Hawkins asks, can 'relationships between things and people constitute meaning', and what therefore is 'the role of human intent and agency, and individual consciousness, in multimodal design and assemblage?' (2018: 61).

The dynamic interactions of assemblages also suggest the need to think in terms of 'distributive agency' (Bennett, 2010: 21). While poststructuralist accounts sought to undermine voluntarist models of agency – suggesting that agency was part of the mutual constitution of subject and discourse – they nevertheless tended to maintain a humanist focus on language and discourse. Thus 'while the concept of agency is much contested, it is done so within the theoretical margins of a narrow anthropocentric perspective,' suggesting that 'agency, in the real sense of the word, is a property of the human individual' (Knappett and Malafouris, 2008: x). Neither agency, nor language, nor cognition, nor identity, however, is best understood as a property of the individual, as something located in the human mind or tied to personal action; rather it is a distributed effect of a range of interacting objects, people and places. From this perspective 'the human is not approached as an autonomous agent, but is located within an extensive system of relations' (Ferrando, 2013: 32). Thrift (2007: 8) talks of a '*material schematism* in which the world is made up of

all kinds of things brought into relation with one another by many and various spaces though a continuous and largely involuntary process of encounter.’ Agency makes sense ‘only from the perspective of dynamic spatio-temporal relations’ (Malafouris, 2008: 33). It is not something we ‘have’ or ‘use’ but a property of socio-material and spatio-temporal relations.

Such a proposition may not be easy to grasp if we continue to think of agency as the human capacity to act. A notion of distributed agency, by contrast, shifts the meaning of the term as part of an interactive whole. The point is not that objects have agency in the same way that human agency has been understood – as a conscious and deliberate will towards action – but that such propositions require a rethinking of what agency means. It is no longer a solely human and conscious will to action but rather a property of an interrelated network. Likewise when we consider cognition, it is not that objects think along human lines but rather that they become material anchors in our distributed processes of cognition. Similarly identity can be understood not as something individually determined or produced only in human interaction, but rather an outcome of a larger assemblage. There is therefore a constant dynamic between distribution and assemblage, the one seeking to account for ways in which language, agency cognition and identity operate beyond the human, the other drawing attention to the ways in which particular configurations of people, places, things and linguistic resources are drawn together.

We are interested therefore in the ways the Uzbek 500 sōm note plays a role in ‘making people happen,’ as Kell (2015: 442) puts it, how ‘objects, in and of themselves, have consequences.’ The banknote on the counter, alongside other notes and objects, in this shop, at this time, within the interactions that occur, does some of their identity work for them; it produces them as Uzbek customers; it becomes part of the assembling of a distributed Uzbek identity. The ‘simultaneous co-presence and co-reliance of language and other semiotic resources’ change and re-shape their meaning in and through ‘the specific assemblage, and within trajectories of time and space’ (Hawkins, 2018: 64). To explore further how identities are distributed across entangled relationships between things and people, we explore in the next section some further data from our ten-year (2010–2020) metrolingualism project.

#### 4. Metrolingual Identifications: Distributed Identities and Assemblages

In this section, we return to the same Bangladeshi owned corner shop in Tokyo, to consider identity not so much in terms of who comes to the shop, from what background, using what languages – which would be common sociolinguistic markers of identity – but also in terms of the objects (merchandise) and spatial arrangements that come together and bring about particular interactions as part of larger everyday practices involving both humans and non-humans. As in the interaction between between the young Uzbek men, the banknote, and the shop assistant, where people, language, objects, gesture and space combine in a semiotic assemblage, our interest is in how things, people and language together produce a particular relational identity,

From our observations, because people travel from other suburbs (unlike a quick errand to buy a carton of eggs from the nearest supermarket), it is not uncommon for customers to bring a long list to work through. Customers of South and Central Asian, Middle Eastern and North and West African backgrounds come looking for familiar (or similar) ingredients for their ‘home’ cooking. Japanese customers browsing through the shop carrying a shopping list of unfamiliar ingredients (to them) such as tamarind, turmeric and spices, have also become more frequent. While the Uzbek trio are gathered around the freezer, a young Japanese woman (JF) enters the shop. Being new to the shop and products, she uses various senses – touching, smelling, checking colours and shapes – to identify products and check against her list, before putting them in her shopping basket (Image 3). After about 20 minutes, looking unassured, she makes her way to the cash register located at one end of the long counter. At the other end of the counter an extended discussion (in Bangla) is continuing between the shop owner and a customer, who is unimpressed by the offer of a one-week guarantee for a mobile phone battery: ‘guarantee only ek hafta....(only one week guarantee).’



Image 3

Spotting the same shop assistant as the one who attended to the Uzbek trio, she asks him to come and have a look at her list: ‘すみません このタマリンド (Excuse me this tamarind)’ as she points to the word tamarindo. ‘あります,’ the assistant responds, ‘うちはないことは ほとんどない’ (We have it. We hardly ever don’t.). After showing her the shelf where the tamarind is kept, he explains how to keep the product once it is opened, before packing a basket of produce into a plastic bag: ‘開けたら [inaudible] 冷蔵庫に保存すれば、冷蔵庫というか、外においても、外においても全然平気。(After you open [inaudible] if you keep it in the fridge, or not in the fridge, even if you leave it out, even if you leave it out, it’s totally fine). Here, then, we see a rather different set of interactions from those with the three Uzbek men: While both involve predominantly Japanese as well as pointing (to the banknote in one case, to the food item on the list in the other), they differ particularly along lines of the familiar and unfamiliar.

In the first instance, the 500 sōm note became part of a distributed identity that was pulled together in that moment. In this second instance, the relation with the item on the list, the product itself, the spatial arrangements of the shop and other aspects of this momentary assemblage afford various possible lines of identification. Rejecting, for very obvious reasons, simple connections between food items, culinary traditions and identities, we neither assign an agentive role of identity formation exclusively to JF for her newly embodied and internalised experiences and knowledge around tamarind, nor do we suggest

Commented [A1]: In romaji? Or katakana?

disregarding her (human) interventions in the process of identification and meaning making. Instead, we view identities as integrated social practices of distributed effects where acts, things and spatiotemporal elements come together. The identities are social practices that emerge from interactions between distribution and assemblages, between humans and humans (JF and SA), humans and nonhumans (JF and tamarind), and non-humans and non-humans (a shopping list and tamarind) that are mediated by social actions (shopping, pointing, asking, browsing and cooking).

In the next set of data, we will look more closely at the complex ways in which these relations may happen. One afternoon in June, 2019, when the shop is relatively busy, two (middle-aged) female customers of Japanese background are looking over a shopping list scribbled on a used envelope and constantly checking items on the shelves and chatting in Japanese (Image 4). Next to them, a male and female couple of Maghrebi background are both holding shopping lists while they chat in Moroccan Arabic (Excerpt 1). More assured about what they have come to buy here, they are working through one of the lists (Image 5). Beneath the general French term 'Achat' (to buy/purchase) are items such as 'Viande' (meat), 'Poulet' (chicken), 'Lentilles' (lentils), 'Pois chiches' (chick peas). Following this general list of items is 'Barkouk' (a Moroccan dish cooked in a tajine with lamb and dried plums). The woman holding this list (Image 5), pointing to items with her thumb, is taking items from the shelves, and crossing them out as she puts them in her basket (Image 6). 'Pois chiches' (chick peas) and 'Lentilles' (lentils) on the shopping list are already ticked off, and the baskets are quite full (Pic 6) (they are stocking up). On the back of the list (pic 7), there is another mixture of menus and specific items, such as 'Pastilla' (Moroccan sweet and savory meat pie which requires powdered sugar: see excerpt 1), 'Viande + Barkouk,' 'Boulette' (small meat balls) replacing the crossed-out 'Viande + Kafta'. This is followed by 'Kafta Tomate' (meat balls with tomatoes) and further down are 'couscous,' 'Zaalouk' (Moroccan cooked eggplant, chickpeas, and tomato salad) and 'Taktouka' (Moroccan cooked bell peppers and tomato salad).



Image\_4

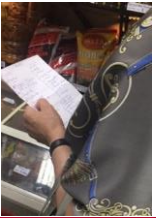


Image5



Image 6



Image 7



Image 8

Using a thumb to point to an item such as “Lentilles” on the shopping list that in turn points to an actual product on the shelf is a slightly different act of pointing to the one discussed in the first example of Uzbek data, and yet it is also an enactment of discourses around identity involving the interactions among people, language, activities and things. We therefore have to pay attention to the more elaborate relations between the pointer (a thumb) and the things pointed to (an item on the list, a menu and a product on the shelf) since this is the site where meaning changes between different artefacts within semiotic assemblages. On one level we can observe fairly straightforward relations between words on the list – ‘Lentilles,’ ‘Pois chiches’ – and products on the shelves, but at another level we can see how this assemblage of everyday artefacts and meanings has much wider implications when we consider the wider spatial and temporal implications of shopping lists and cooked meals (a Moroccan dish such as ‘Zaalouk’). Identity is here distributed across wider practices.

Identity is also distributed in the local practices of shopping. As the customer points to the words ‘Pois chiches’, picks up bags of ‘chickpeas’ from the shelf labeled ‘Kabuli Chana’ (Khabul chickpeas, an Afghan variety), places them in the basket, before eventually using them in a dish such as zaalouk, the chickpeas take on different meanings. They become Moroccan at this moment. Various spatiotemporal, historical and cultural factors are entangled as part of these changes of identification: of the humans (the couple reaffirming and refashioning their Moroccan-ness through this social practice of shopping in a Bangladeshi-owned shop in Tokyo) as well as the non-humans (Afghan chickpeas become ‘Moroccan’ as they are configured in this particular assemblage).

Excerpt 1

1. MF: شتو تاخذ؟  
*šnū tāxʷəd?*  
What are you going to get?
2. MM: السكر ديال أتاي  
*s-səkkʷār dyāl ātāy.*  
Sugar for tea.
3. MF: بلا دير بإيدك هداك  
*yāllā, dīr b-īd-ək hādāk.*  
Go ahead, put this in your hand.  
  
... عندك السكر ... السانيدة هادي، ولا خصك الاخر، ال... السكر...  
*əandək s-səkkʷār... s-sānīda hādi, wallā xəšš-ək lə-xxʷər, l... s-səkkʷār...*  
You have sugar... that's granulated sugar, or do you need the other one? The...
4. MM: المكرر  
*lā-mkərər?*  
The cubed one?
5. MF: ام  
*əmm...*  
Umm...
6. MM: المكرر  
*lā-mkərər?*  
The cubed one? [repeating]
7. MF: لا السكر للبسطيلة، السكر...  
*lā, s-səkkʷār lə-l-bəšṭīla, s-səkkʷār...*  
No, sugar for pastilla, sugar...
8. MM: كَلاصي  
*glāšī (glacé).*  
Icing.
9. MF: كَلاصي  
*glāšī (glacé).*  
Icing
10. MM: كاين تّي هو  
*kāyən ttā hūwa*  
There's that too.

After picking up the lentils and chickpeas, the couple moves on to the next item on the list. Standing in front of the shelf where various types of sugar are piled up, they are discussing what type to buy (Excerpt 1). At first it appears MF is in favour of MM's response that he wants to buy sugar for tea ('*yāllā, dīr b- īd-ək hādāk'*. Go ahead, put this in your hand. [meaning take it]) until she sees a basket with sugar on the floor (Image 8). She points out that he has granulated sugar already (the sugar in the basket is actually a Japanese product called 上白糖, *Jōhakutō*, which is more moist than granulated sugar, and closer to caster sugar) and asks if he needs another kind. To this, MM lightly suggests cubed sugar (*lā-mkārṛar?*) twice (Line 4 & 6) but these attempts are not favourably received by MF, who suggests instead they should buy sugar for making *pastilla*, one of the menu items written on the back of the list (Image 7). Knowing the type of sugar required for the dish, MM confirms '*glāṣī (glacé)*' (cf French *sucre glace* – icing sugar). MF affirms the choice and the packet is placed on top of the chickpeas (Image 6).

What interest us in this mundane practice of working one's way through a shopping list are the ways identity is taking place across texts (language), actions and artefacts. The "lentilles" (lentils) "pois chiches" (chick peas) and *pastilla* on the list – taken from recipes, discussions, cooking practices, or whatever processes contributed to the making of the lists – point to the actual items on the shelves, which then generate the conversations between the couple in Moroccan Arabic (with its French influences), and the action of taking the items and putting them in the basket. While this example differs from the overt process of inter-identification we saw between the young Uzbek men, the banknote, and the shop assistant, these examples show how distributed identity may work across time and space – from the making of the shopping lists with future meals in mind – and yet also happens in the concrete here and now between lists, items and shopping practices.

What we are able to observe here, then, is one part of a longer chain of identity processes of being Moroccan (or Maghrebi, or French) within a Bangladeshi corner shop in Shinjuku, Tokyo (with its larger patterns and politics of migration and religion), involving a shopping list, lentils, chickpeas, sugar, a Japanese female customer, a Maghrebi couple, a basket, spoken and written language. All of this comes together, becoming part of a temporary



assemblage that suggests particular processes of identification. It is useful to view this in terms of distributed identity because of the roles played by the shopping lists and products, as well as the various spatiotemporal plains on which this shopping trip occurs (planning meals, making lists, shopping, cooking). We see this as multilingual not so much because of the use of a Moroccan variety of Arabic, with its embedded French terms – this is common enough in both North Africa and France – but because of the relational use of resources within this Bangladeshi store.

When we talk of semiotic assemblages (Pennycook, 2017; Pennycook and Otsuji, 2017), we view language as part of a broader set of semiotic possibilities, as it enters into new and momentary sets of relationships when different trajectories of people, semiotic resources and objects at particular moments and places. This perspective opens up alternative ways of considering metrolingual identities since our central focus is less on language-to-language or language-to-people relations than on language-to-material relations (space, objects). From a metrolinguistic point of view, identity is produced through the identifications that occur within assemblages, with the Uzbek men and their bank note, the young woman in search of tamarind, or the Maghrebi couple and their shopping, where particular assemblages of customers, conversations, shopping lists, purchases come together into particular forms of identification.

## **5. Conclusion: A Redistributive Politics**

In a number of ways, the central point that we are making in this chapter – that space and objects play an important role in identity formation – is a very obvious and mundane observation. From the clothes we wear or the food we eat, to fondly-retained objects we keep for many years, it is clear that our identities are bound up with the material world. We have tried in this chapter to take this commonplace reflection further, however, by suggesting not merely that we have affective relationships with artefacts, but that this ‘we’ – this agentive individual who interacts with the world – is better understood as part of that world, as extending out in thought and words and deeds and artefacts into a material world. As popular sayings suggest, we are the clothes we wear, we are the food we eat, we are the objects we keep. Our reading of such sayings does more than suggest that our attire,

culinary practices and souvenirs partly define the way we may be perceived; it suggests rather a dynamic relational quality to among people, things and languages.

This understanding of distributed identity within a critical metrolinguistics of diversity rests on three key conceptual domains: practice theory, semiotic assemblages and new forms of materialism. These have a number of implications for understanding multilingualism and for the relation between multilingualism and a broader politics. Assemblages describe the way things are brought together and function in new ways, and provide a way of thinking about how agency, cognition, language and identity can all be understood as distributed beyond any supposed human centre. Identities, therefore, are not merely assembled in the way that poststructuralist approaches insist on their discursive production – identities could be seen as temporal and contingent assemblages of discursive elements – but rather as part of sociomaterial assemblages that bring language, people, places and things together. Identities are distributed across people, places and things and then assembled in temporary entanglements of linguistic resources, spatial relations and objects.

As Toohey (2019: 953) suggests, ideas born of new forms of materialism, such as *assemblages* or *entanglements* have major implications for applied linguistic pedagogy and research, encouraging us 'to ask new questions, and be alert to innovate, experiment, and learn new ways of teaching, researching, and being.' Building on poststructuralist insights into subjectivity, and sociological insights into intersectionality, we are able from this perspective to explore the ways in which multilingual identities are always part of a wider set of both human and non-human relations. We have argued in this chapter that identity in relation to multilingualism is usefully considered in terms beyond the individual (something that people have), social interaction (something that people jointly construct) or discursive production (something that produces subjectivity). Once we think in terms of semiotic assemblages, we shift both the meaning of multilingualism – which is no longer limited to a collection of named languages – and the locus of identity. Multilingual identity becomes a relational quality that emerges from the dynamic interactions of an assemblage that includes people, linguistic resources, artefacts, and place.

This perspective also allows us to rethink questions of materialism and redistribution. 'Rather than reductively privileging one genre of materiality,' as Kruks (2010: 260) puts it, a more comprehensive project seeks 'to explicate the interconstituent quality of diverse "materialities" that shape human practices, selves and social formations.' It is not enough to describe *intersectionality* as if we can merely pluralize modes of human oppression. Block (2016) argues that identities are constructed at the intersection of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, generations and occupations. While this focus on intersectionality of identities has been significant for understanding the interlocking factors that are part of any identification, it stops short at viewing the intersections among human and non-human worlds. From the perspective we have been developing here, the issue is not merely one of individual identity, nor of intersectional complexity but rather of 'something that encompasses and attunes to surrounding resources (not only to others but also to the wider ecological environment)' (Otsuji, 2016: 28; translation by author).

This conception of identities is about 'affording possibilities' or 'emergent prospects' that exist at the intersection of people, space, and objects, or put another way, as distributed and assembled. In order to 'adequately capture the complexities of human life and account for the phenomena of social oppression with which feminist and other radical social practices are concerned' Kruks (2010, p. 260), it is important to understand a diversity of materialities. Rather than viewing human-world interactions in terms of a world 'out there' symbolically represented by a world 'in here', this is better understood in terms of a dynamic interrelationship between different materialities (Pennycook, 2018a,b). Distributed agency, language, cognition and identity can point to ways in which our being is deeply tied up with the material world and its ideological formations (Ratner, 2019).

By showing how language, identity, cognition and agency are themselves distributed, new materialism, while maintaining a strong focus on fundamental material inequalities (Bennett, 2010), provides an alternative space for thinking what redistribution can mean. For Fraser (1995) justice hinges on two central concerns: distributive justice refers to the equitable distribution of resources, while recognition justice refers to the equitable recognition of different groups. There are two corresponding forms of injustice: maldistribution and misrecognition. Fraser (2000) warns that the rise of recognition politics

– struggles to recognise difference and identity along lines of class, gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity and so on – have started to *displace* struggles for redistributive justice (the redistribution of economic goods) and to *reify* identities. Some have read this as a call for a wholesale reemphasis on redistribution (Block, 2018) but Fraser’s argument is better understood as a call to rethink recognition ‘as a matter of status’ and thus to examine ‘institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors’ (2000: 113)

Alongside Fraser’s political challenge to ‘overcome status subordination by changing the values that regulate interaction, entrenching new value patterns that will promote parity of participation in social life’ (2000: 116), we also want to suggest a rethinking of redistribution. Just as Fraser is cautious not to undermine the importance of recognition but to reinvigorate it with a new politics, so we are interested in rethinking redistribution without undermining its central concerns with material inequalities. As Block (2018) notes, arguments about the transformative nature of translanguaging or multilingualism commonly focus on processes of recognition rather than redistribution, on cultural arguments (recognizing identities) rather than political economic arguments (changing society). An alternative way forward, however, is to understand a greater set of materialities and the micropolitics with which they are engaged. This enables us to rethink both recognition and redistribution, a project that needs to be part of any critical sociolinguistic or applied linguistic project.

### **Acknowledgments**

We benefited greatly from feedback on this paper at the MEITS conference workshop in Cambridge, and particularly from David Block, John Joseph, Daniel McAuley and Janice Carruthers. Thanks to the anonymous reviewers and to Wendy Ayres-Bennett and Linda Fisher for the invitation to participate in this project and for further feedback on frat chapters. We are also very grateful to Ilkhom Khalimzoda for assistance with the Uzbek data and to Mike Turner from the university of North Carolina Wilmington and Malainine Ebnou for assistance with the Moroccan Arabic data.

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