Transient multilingual communities as a field of investigation: challenges and opportunities

A key assumption in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics has traditionally been that interaction within communities tends to proceed on the basis of some degree of shared understanding of social and linguistic norms. However, in transient multilingual communities, defined here as social configurations where people from diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds come together (physically or otherwise) for a limited period of time around a shared activity, such shared assumptions cannot be assumed to be in place *a priori*. By examining the social and linguistic processes that characterize transient communities, researchers are invited to analyze and theorize meaning-making in ways that hold the potential to enrich current work at the interface between sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. The article aims to take a first step in this direction by offering a definition and a discussion of the notion of transient multilingual communities, exemplified by data from an international student community in Denmark, and by discussing some of the general methodological challenges and opportunities involved in research that focuses on transient multilingual communities. The article is concluded by a brief discussion of how the notion of transient communities may be utilized in a research agenda concerned with sociolinguistic change.

[Transience; Speech Community; Indexicality; Sociolinguistic Change]

Introduction

A key assumption in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics and related fields has traditionally been that interaction within communities tends to proceed on the basis of some degree of shared understanding of social and linguistic norms. As language socialization research has emphasized, these norms cannot be taken as fixed, as they are continuously reproduced and potentially transformed through interaction over time (Moore 2009: 67). Transient multilingual communities, defined as "social configurations where people from diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds come together (physically or otherwise) for a limited period of time around a shared activity" (Mortensen and Hazel 2017: 256) constitute contexts in which it is particularly problematic to assume any *a priori* existence of shared norms and assumptions. While the field of intercultural communication has investigated in great detail the challenges that come about when individuals from one particular cultural background interact with individuals from another, a focus on transient communities emphasizes processes of *mutual* socialization in which members negotiate sociolinguistic norms not just to get along and accomplish goals but also as a way of enacting membership in social configurations that are emergent and temporally bounded. How to enact membership and collaborate successfully across sociocultural and linguistic boundaries in settings characterized by transience arguably constitutes a central challenge for many individuals in late modernity, as currently evidenced by the considerable problems arising in the wake of the massive migration flows to and within Europe. Of course, the problems related to migration arising in Europe at the time of writing (2015) cannot – and should not – be reduced to matters of linguacultural difference alone, but the use of language undeniably plays a central role in all processes involved in the large-scale migration that currently unfolds, from the day-

to-day interaction "on the ground" to high-stakes negotiations taking place at the upper echelons of political power. In all these contexts, people from diverse backgrounds regularly find themselves in situations where they have to negotiate solutions to shared problems without being able to rely on extensive shared linguistic experience or sociocultural habit. Navigating and interacting in such settings is obviously not an impossible task, but it is certainly not straightforward either. For that reason, social configurations characterized by transience call for the attention of linguistic anthropologists, sociolinguists and scholars from complementary fields in order to help build a better understanding of how such communities are formed, developed and destabilized, what their main challenges and potentials are, and how we can help members facilitate processes within such communities that are seen as beneficial by the members themselves.

Apart from the practical problems that members of transient multilingual communities may face, the empirical phenomenon of transient communities also presents a theoretical challenge for sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists – or perhaps rather a welcome opportunity to (re)consider how we account for sociolinguistic processes in contexts where norms of language use and social interaction are under negotiation in quite fundamental ways. This challenge has been one of the focuses of recent sociolinguistic research devoted to conditions of "superdiversity," linked both to speaker mobility and to the multiplication of channels and media of communication (see Budach and de Saint Georges 2017). Studying transient communities represents one way of approaching this broad area of investigation. By turning the analytical gaze towards transient social configurations, we are sensitized to the fact that indexical links between ways of speaking and social meaning, which are often seen as core components of meaning-making in well-established social configurations, are not always fully "sedimented" (Agha 2003; 2007). Similarly, as we acknowledge that we cannot

assume individuals in transient social configurations to be oriented towards persisting identities or relationships, we are invited to look for alternative, supplementary or modified ways of theorizing meaning-making in interaction in such contexts.

The aim of this article is to outline the challenges and opportunities involved in the study of transient multilingual communities. I do this by offering a discussion of the notion of transient multilingual communities itself, exemplified by data taken from three studies of higher education in Denmark. While the sort of orderly transnational mobility which is increasingly becoming a characteristic feature of higher education in Denmark is obviously a far cry from the issue of massive migration I alluded to above, I will argue that the socio- and linguacultural processes involved in forming transient communities in the two contexts are nevertheless comparable. My observations concerning the case of higher education in Denmark are therefore offered on the assumption that they are in fact applicable to a wider set of settings, and that they may be useful to discuss as part of a first humble attempt at outlining a research agenda that takes transient communities as its primary object.

The article is organized as follows. I start by offering a brief discussion of familiar notions of community in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, pointing to some of the well-known problems associated with the concept, and then move on to give a definition of transient multilingual communities. illustrated by examples taken from studies I have conducted alone or in collaboration with colleagues. The article concludes with a discussion of how the notion of transient communities may be utilized in a research agenda of sociolinguistic change that aims to describe and theorize social change and linguistic change in an integrative manner.

Notions of community

The concept of the speech community has been treated multiple times in the literature on sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (e.g. Patrick 2002; Rampton 2010; Morgan 2005; 2014; Muehlmann 2014) which attests to its central status in both disciplines. Despite salient differences, foundational definitions of the concept all include *sharedness* of linguistic and/or social norms as an essential feature. Gumperz states that "the speech varieties employed within a speech community form a system because they are related to *a shared set of social norms*" (1968:381); Hymes defines the speech community as a "community *sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech*" (1972:54) while Labov holds that the speech community is marked "by participation in a set of *shared norms*" (1972:120–121).

One of the persisting critiques of the concept has been the emphasis on *consensus* as the organizing principle of community (Bucholtz 1999). The problem of emphasizing consensus is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the study of transient communities occasioned by increased transnational mobility. In such social configurations – which we find across multiple societal domains, including education, business and politics and which could be exemplified by anything from a group of students at an international university program to a group of refugees living together in a refugee camp – sharedness of linguistic and social norms cannot be taken for granted. In transient communities, norms have to be developed *in situ* in an on-going negotiation between the participants based on their individual linguistic resources and sociocultural experience, standing in continual dialectic relationship to the particular context of interaction, including aspects of the specific institutional and wider cultural context (as illustrated by Moore, this issue).

In more recent work within sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (e.g. Bucholtz 1999; Eckert 2000), the concept of *community of practice* (Lave and Wenger 1991) has been taken on board as a supplement to, or replacement of, the notion of the speech community. In the definition of Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992:464) a community of practice is "an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor." Thus, communities of practice typically exhibit three characteristics: i) mutual engagement of participants ii) in a jointly negotiated enterprise, on the basis of iii) a shared repertoire of resources, including linguistic resources. Though the community-of-practice notion is in many ways quite close to the notion of transient community proposed here, the third characteristic assumes a degree of sharedness which cannot be assumed to be in place in transient multilingual communities where "participants do not share the same trajectories of socialization" (Goebel 2010a:223; cf. Wortham 2005).

Transient multilingual communities

Transient communities may be said to have three prototypical properties. They are *emergent* – in the process of becoming – which is the reason why shared semiotic resources, sociocultural practices and norms cannot be assumed to be in place. Of course, norms and practices do not emerge from nowhere, and no social situation can ever be completely norm free. But in transient communities the practices and norms of the community, linguistic and otherwise, are in the process of being formed in more fundamental ways than in more established communities where processes are often naturalized or "sedimented" (Agha 2003; 2007). Transient communities are therefore relatively more *heterogeneous* in terms of what Hymes (1972) would call verbal repertoire--norms of speaking and norms of interpretation-- than

more established communities. This is particularly true for multilingual transient communities where participants speak different first languages, but in principle also holds for monolingual transient communities where participants do not necessarily share ways of speaking (again in a Hymesian sense) despite the fact that they speak "the same language." Finally, transient communities *involve work on some form of shared activity* which will often be the reason why the social configuration was formed in the first place. Some transient communities will be project-based with participants coming together to solve a particular task, for instance setting up a new play at a theater, while others will be organized around more loosely defined shared activities, for instance taking part in the same university program which involves collaboration with fellow students in a number of different ways. In the latter type, it is not uncommon for smaller social units, embedded within the larger institutional configuration, to be formed around specific and time-delimited projects, for instance conducting a study project. This will be exemplified below.

Communities of practice may be transient communities and vice versa, but the two types of community are not mutually constitutive. In traditional conceptions, the community of practice approach involves an assumption that there is an established community of experts that novices are initiated into. Due to their emergent nature, this does not hold for transient communities since all members are in principle novices in their understanding of the social and linguistic norms of the emerging community, although in practice there will obviously be differences between the members in terms of knowledge, status, and authority. Nevertheless, as Lønsmann (this issue) discusses traditional notions of language socialization (see e.g. Ochs and Schieffelin 2011) are not always immediately applicable to transient communities since the socialization processes we find here are characterized by being mutual, dynamic and often "multi-directional." Under certain circumstances, the pre-established norms and cultural

habits of some participants are likely to become the dominant norm in a transient community. This might be the case if an international team of researchers come together around a joint research project and end up doing things more or less the way they tend to be done in the setting where the experiments are carried out and where the majority of the researchers on the team are based. In this event, we have a situation that resembles a community-of-practice scenario in many ways, which indicates that the difference between the two types of community is in some cases a matter of degree. It is nevertheless possible to make a distinction between transient communities and communities of practice by considering the orientation that members bring to the endeavor. In a transient multilingual community, unlike a community of practice, the norm center will not be given; it will be a matter to be explored, not a matter of course.

There is a danger that the term "community" can be seen as a concept with distinctly positive connotations, perhaps denoting a particularly harmonious social unit. This is not the intended meaning when I speak of transient multilingual communities. Community is simply used as shorthand for "social configuration" and there is no expectation that these configurations will be particularly harmonious. In other words, the absence of power differences and strife is not a defining characteristic of a transient multilingual community. However, as has been illustrated by the discussion above, transient communities take many different forms, and for that reason they are best defined through the specification of prototypical properties. In an attempt to map different types of transient communities further we can take our starting point in two continua.

First, we may conceptualize communities as organized on a *scale of transience* ranging from one-off encounters, as exemplified by encounters in Victorian railway carriages studied by De Sapio (2013) or fleeting tourist encounters discussed inter alios by Jaworski

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and Thurlow (2010), to more stable, historically entrenched communities which form the staple of classic variationist sociolinguistics (e.g. Labov 1966). Of course, communities are never truly stable, and no sociolinguist or linguistic anthropologist would probably ever claim that they are. Yet, some communities have certainly been treated as if they *were* stable, and some communities are probably also, at least relatively speaking, more amenable to this sort of characterization than others. For that reason, it makes sense to have "stable" communities at one extreme of the scale of transience, though we have to recognize that it invariably constitutes an analytical simplification. In between these two extremes, one-off encounters and stable communities, we find a range of intermediate stages of transience, for instance the recurring women's neighborhood meetings in a transient urban setting in Indonesia discussed by Goebel (2010a) or the New Zealand sexuality education classroom discussed by King (2014) (see also Kecskés 2011, and several examples from the literature discussed in Haberland 2007). Unlike one-off encounters, these intermediate cases exhibit a degree of sustained engagement, typically involving multiple occasions of interaction and longer time spans.

Secondly, we can introduce a *scale of semiotic sedimentation* along which we can discern differences in the degree to which participants in a given encounter or community share semiotic resources, including linguistic ones. In some cases, participants will, to all intents and purposes, share the same semiotic space; in other cases, there will only be partial or very minimal overlap. Sharing semiotic space does not merely concern physical access to the same signs, whether verbal or not, but also access to a shared understanding of the typical meaning of these signs, including indexical meaning associated with different ways of speaking and being. Gumperz' (1982) early work on contextualization cues famously illustrates how diverging understandings of the meaning potential of communicative practices

such as hesitation and rising intonation may lead to problematic communication, even in cases where interactants are using "the same" language. Conversely, Pharao et al. (2014) use experiments to show how "the same" linguistic feature, alveolar versus fronted /s/ in Danish, carries distinct indexical meanings depending on the style within which it occurs for listeners who are sensitized to these styles (cf. Campbell-Kibler's work on ING in American English 2007; 2008). Examples like these illustrate the remarkably refined way in which the differential meaning of verbal signs can be shared within a social group when members have overlapping and historically sedimented sociocultural experiences and references to draw on. In such contexts, speakers do not merely share understanding of the referential meanings of words, they have also developed sophisticated and (partially) overlapping understandings of multiple layers, or multiple *orders*, cf. Silverstein (2003), of indexical meaning associated with different ways of speaking. Particular ways of speaking may come to be heard as indexing gender (Ochs 1992), the velar and apical variants of the (ING) variable in English have come to carry social meanings of "educated vs. uneducated" and "effortful" vs. "easygoing/lazy" and so on (cf. Eckert 2008 drawing on the work of Campell-Kibler, e.g. 2007) in a process that is automated to such an extent that the relationship between verbal sign and social meaning is often perceived as iconic (Coupland 2007). At the other extreme of the scale we would find situations where participants do not have any linguistic resources in common, making even referential meaning opaque.

Graphically, the two continua that I have outlined here can be displayed as in Figure 1, where the x-axis represents degrees of transience (ranging from one-off encounters to "stable" communities) while the y-axis represents the continuum of semiotic sedimentation (ranging from cases where there are no shared resources at all, to situations where higher order indexical meanings are shared, for instance the association between the velar variant of (ING)

and the social meaning value "educated"). The two axes may be compared to two of the prototypical features of transient communities discussed above, viz. "emergent" and "heterogeneous," in that the x-axis can be said to concern degrees of emergence while the y-axis concerns degrees of heterogeneity. Yet, since the property "emergent" is also meant to concern the emergence of shared semiotic norms, and 'heterogeneous' refers not only to heterogeneity in terms of semiotic resources but also sociocultural experience more generally, I do not mean to imply that there is a 1:1 relationship between the two scales and the prototypical characteristics "emergent" and "heterogeneous." Similarly, the figure does not capture the different intensities and laminations that may be evidenced in the way members of a transient community engage in shared activities.

[PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Although the two axes in Figure 1 are not necessarily all that is needed in order to capture the complexity of transient communities, the grid nevertheless gives us a starting point for mapping and eventually comparing different types of communities and the processes that unfold within them. The grid can also be used to visualize how the study of transient (multilingual) communities may represent a break with more mainstream approaches. A large proportion of the work that has been conducted within sociolinguistics has been concerned with social configurations in the top right corner of Figure 1, essentially looking at relatively "stable" or well-established communities with a high degree of semiotic sedimentation. The focus on transient communities that I am advocating in this article constitutes an invitation to develop more systematic ways of exploring other areas of the field outlined in Figure 1.

Studying transient multilingual communities – three examples

To illustrate what may be understood by the notion of transient multilingual community, it is useful to look at specific examples and relate them to the grid outlined in Figure 1. In the following I do this by drawing on three studies I have conducted within the last five years (2010-2015), either alone or in collaboration with colleagues, under the auspices of the CALPIU Research Centre at Roskilde University, Denmark. CALPIU was funded, first as an international research network and later as an interdisciplinary research center by The Danish Council for Independent Research | Humanities, with the aim of studying how increased internationalization of higher education in Denmark affects and helps develop new cultural and linguistic practices at Danish universities, both inside and outside lecture halls. Research at CALPIU was based on extensive video and audio recordings of naturally occurring interaction and interviews, stored in a common database referred to as the CALPIU storehouse. The notion of "transient multilingual communities" was developed within the framework of CALPIU as part of our efforts to theorize what we saw in our data as we focused on areas of university life where transnationally mobile students or members of staff were involved. As an institution, the university constitutes an established community with relatively stable norms for language use and social interaction, but these norms are historically contingent, shaped by the people who inhabit the space of the university. This becomes particularly obvious when we study social configurations within the university setting where participants have different (socio)cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and therefore have to invest considerable effort in establishing a common vocabulary for their activities and a shared set of norms for their interaction more generally. The transient communities we find in the data can thus be seen as the progeny of transnational mobility that

exist like small pockets of emergent social organization embedded within more entrenched social structures.

The studies introduced below all concern communities where English is used as a lingua franca (ELF). This is not meant to suggest that the study of transient multilingual communities should be restricted to or equated with the study of what I have called ELF "scenarios" (Mortensen 2013). But ELF encounters are, by virtue of being based on lingua franca scenarios, obvious places to look for transient communities, simply because the need for participants to use a lingua franca is typically a clear marker of a transient community.

Example 1: Developing basic shared semiotic resources in service encounters

The first example, discussed in more detail in Mortensen and Hazel (2017), is located at the left end of the x-axis on Figure 1. In Extract 1, we see a conversation between Adam, a student study counsellor with a German background, and Zara, a student from North America who has come to seek advice about taking a year off from her studies. The interaction takes place at a Danish university, and as illustrated by the extract the participants predominantly use English as their lingua franca for the conversation.

Extract 1: do you say ex-matriculated (Mortensen and Hazel 2017)

```
83 Adam    I mean what happens is (.)
84         [you will] you will officially be (0.2) um
85 Zara    [??perso-??]
86         (1.3)
87 Adam    do you say ex-matriculated
88         (1.4)
89 Zara    ↑yeah↘
90 Adam    yeah e[heheh] ·hhh
91 Zara          [heheh]
92 Adam    you know so um
```

In addition to English, Zara and Adam both speak Danish, which could have functioned as an alternative lingua franca in the situation. As such, they clearly have a considerable amount of

shared semiotic resources at their disposal. Still, as illustrated by the extract, they may at times need to engage in metadiscursive talk in order to establish mutual agreement in the understanding of particular words, or, as in this case, establish mutual agreement about the proper linguistic label for a "real-world" phenomenon. The adopted term, "ex-matriculation," which denotes a particular institutional procedure, appears to be a calque on the Danish expression "eksmatrikulering" (or its German cognate), and is as such quite clearly tied to the local Danish context, while also bearing testimony to the multilingual base of the conversation. The meeting may be described as a fleeting encounter, in some ways similar to a tourist encounter, and does not in itself give rise to anything like "a community." This is the reason why the encounter, in terms of transience, is situated at the left end of the continuum on the x-axis in Figure 1. Yet, in the wider context, the encounter is only one out of myriads of similar encounters involving transnational students at the university in question, and in this perspective, we may think of it as a single event that fits into a larger pattern in which transnational students take part in the establishment of transient communities at the university, which gradually develop their own sociolinguistic norms, in an interplay with the surrounding environment.

Example 2: Language choice in student project groups

Mortensen (2014) reports on a small-scale study of interaction in three student project groups at "HIB," an international BA program offered by the same Danish university as the data in Example 1 is taken from. In this program, students work in groups of three to eight members on a joint project for a semester at a time, and the groups thus constitute small-scale transient communities. The majority of the students at the program is Danish, but groups will often have one or more members who do not have a Danish background and may only speak

Danish to a limited extent, if at all. Based on video recordings of meetings in the three groups
I investigated the language practices of the students, particularly in relation to language
choice. While the groups exhibit certain clear similarities in terms of language choice, the
analysis suggests that the three groups have also to some extent developed different patterns
(Mortensen 2014: 429f.): English is the dominant medium in all groups, but all groups also, to
varying degrees, use Danish and/or Danish and English in conjunction as what Gafaranga and
Torras (2001) call a "bilingual medium." In my interpretation, these patterns of language
choice represent the preliminary result of an on-going process where the group members
negotiate appropriate norms for the use of their shared linguistic resources, within the space
of the individual group. In short, moving from left to right on the axis of transience, the
groups have developed their own, very local, practice-based "language policies" where
language alternation is imbued with different kinds of indexical meaning, achieving a higher
degree of semiotic sedimentation.

Extract 2 shows a piece of interaction from one of the groups. We enter the meeting at
a point where the students have been having a small break, with most group members in the
group room discussing non-project related matters, particularly opportunities for study abroad
in later semesters. As it appears from the extract, this stretch of interaction has been taking
place in Danish (indicated by italics; English glosses available line-by-line on the right).

Extract 2: *nå skal vi øh* (0.3) continue with the structure (Mortensen 2014)

```
 1 Rune     det jeg fatter slet ikke noget              I don't get any
 2          af det [der]                                 of that
 3 Mette          [nej] det fatter jeg heller ikke       no me neither
 4          og jeg prøvede på at [fatte det]             and I tried to get it
 5 Julie                        [hvilket]               what
 6 Rune     bachelorstudienævn                           bachelor studyboard
 7 Mette    ahem
 8          (1.0)
 9 Julie    pu[ha]                                       phew
10 Rune       [nå] skal vi [øh] (0.3) continue with the structure  well should we er
11                         [ja]                          yeah
12          (0.2)
13 Torben   yes (0.9) structure yes
```

The language alternation produced by Rune in line 10 functions as a contextualization cue, taking the interaction away from "off-topic talk" onto "on-topic" business, *viz*. a discussion of the structure of the group's joint report. The context switches mid-utterance from break to business, and the switch is, in part at least, facilitated by language alternation from Danish to English. Following Gafaranga and Torras (2001, cf. Goebel 2010b: 58-75), this interactional behavior may be described as *habitual* since the participants treat it as trivial or at least non-remarkable: there is no "medium repair," no displayed orientation to language alternation as interactionally remarkable. The lack of repair sequences in situations like these imply that there is an emergent set of norms active in this group according to which "alternation" is seen as an unmarked use of the group's shared semiotic resources, as part of a bilingual medium.

What is also relevant to note is that the communicative effect that Rune achieves in line 10 could not by achieved by the same means outside the context of the group. It is a contingent function, tied quite specifically to the local context of the group, and the norms of interaction that they have developed over the course of the semester. Other students in the same study program may be sensitized to similar norms related to language choice and language alternation, but it is not a type of contextualization cue that is shared by the wider surrounding "speech community" in Denmark (though similar patterns have been found in comparable internationalized multilingual contexts, cf. Lønsmann 2011).

Furthermore, the language alternation in Extract 1 arguably does more than index a new context for the interaction. In Mortensen (2014) I suggest that Rune's use of English – and the use of English by other students under similar conditions – may be seen as acts of identity (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985) that allow Danish students to assert their status as international students despite the fact that they studying at a Danish university (cf. Hazel and Mortensen 2013). This adds a further layer to the indexical meaning of "language choice"

that is particular to this setting, developed through a process of mutual socialization. The meaning attached to language alternation is highly localized, and may not extend beyond this particular context. What we see is that the groups have developed local practices for the appropriate use of the available linguistic resources, and created a context where particular linguistic choices are imbued with significant social meaning. On the basis of what we might assume to be less than fully shared semiotic resources, the group has developed rather refined shared interactional and interpretive procedures that facilitate their joint activity of writing a semester project.

Example 3: Language and identity: Repeating old patterns or forging new norms?

Following the work of Silverstein (1976; 2003), Ochs (1992) and others, indexicality has become a household term in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, where it is used as a powerful theoretical metaphor to describe processes of meaning-making. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that "in identity formation, indexicality relies heavily on ideological structures, for associations between language and identity are rooted in cultural beliefs and values – that is, ideologies – about the sorts of speakers who (can or should) produce particular sorts of language" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 594). In other words, the construction and decoding of identity in and through discourse requires presupposed, shared cultural beliefs and values about the use of language and different ways of speaking, tied together by indexical links. As Pharao et al. (2014:5) point out, the indexical field of a particular linguistic feature or particular ways of speaking constitutes "an ideological field, and it is bound to be unstable, constantly changing, and dynamic." So, to some extent indexical fields will be undergoing change and take somewhat different forms from one speaker to another, also in "stable"

communities, depending on sociocultural experience and stance. Nevertheless, as Pharao et al. also point out, "basically" indexical fields are "collectively shared, not individual constructs" (2014:5). How does this work out in transient multilingual communities where cultural beliefs and values relating to different ways of speaking cannot necessarily be assumed to be shared *a priori*? To offer a preliminary answer to this question I will refer to a small-scale interview study I conducted with a colleague (Mortensen and Fabricius 2014).

In the study in question, we investigated the attitudes of four students towards different ways of speaking English in the context of their university program (the same as discussed above in relation to Extract 2). The four students were not part of the same study groups (of the type discussed above), so the community we propose that they are part of is essentially an "imagined" one (cf. Anderson's 1983 notion of imagined communities). We were particularly interested in gauging the extent to which the students' attitudes and the underlying language ideologies they implied could be said to draw on wider, more general language ideologies. Our findings revealed considerable complexity in the attitudes held by the students. On the one hand, our analysis of the interviews suggested that the students saw "competence" and "effectiveness" in English as important features when it came to evaluating and ascribing social value to different ways of speaking English. In the view of the interviewees, the particular accent a speaker has (Danish-sounding, English-sounding or otherwise) matters less as long as the speaker is able to "get the job done" and participate successfully in the groups' activities. This is the position taken by the interviewee in Extract 3 (referred to simply as Informant 1, INF1), as she responds to the interviewer's question (not included in the transcript) of whether accent matters at HIB. This student was Danish, and the interview was conducted in Danish, following her cue.

Extract 3: it's maybe not so much about accent at HIB (Mortensen and Fabricius 2014)

```
90   INF1   øhm (0.2) men også på engelsk synes jeg [øh]
91   INT                                            [mm]
92          (1.1)
93   INF1   hvis især men men øh-
94          det er måske ikke så meget med accent (.) på HIB
95          der er det mere med
96          hvordan hvor god du er til det
97          (0.3)
98   INT    o[kay]
99   INF1    [hvis du ikke] er så god
100         (0.8)
101  INF1   øh til at formulere dig og sådan så så kan du hurtigt sådan s-
102         (0.2) s- så mister jeg i hvert fald fokus
103  INT    ja
104  INF1   synes jeg så er det ikke så interessant (0.4)
105         hvorimod hvis det er nogen der formulerer sig rigtig skarpt og
106         (0.9) og øh siger så synes jeg bare det er mere interessant så
107         [så bliver] det de siger bare mere interessant
108  INT    [ja]
109         (0.3)
110  INT    ja
111  INF1   og så er jeg måske også selv med at re- med til at reproducere det
112         samme hierarki men
113  INT    mm
114  INF1   sådan er det bare lidt
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Extract 3 – English paraphrase (Mortensen and Fabricius 2014)

```
90   INF1   er (0.2) but also in English I think [er]
91   INT                                         [mm]
92          (1.1)
93   INF1   if especially but but er-
94          it's maybe not so much about accent (.) at HIB
95          there it's more about
96          how how good you are at it
97          (0.3)
98   INT    o[kay]
99   INF1    [if are not] that good
100         (0.8)
101  INF1   er to express yourself and like then- then you can quickly like li-
102         (0.2) then I at least lose focus
103  INT    yeah
104  INF1   I think then it's not so interesting (0.4)
105         whereas if it's someone who express themselves very clearly and
106         (0.9) and er say- then I just think it is more interesting then
107         [then] what they say just becomes more interesting
108  INT    [yeah]
109         (0.3)
110  INT    yeah
111  INF1   and then I'm perhaps also myself part of re- part of reproducing
112         the same hierarchy but (.)
113  INT    mm
114  INF1   that's just kind of how it is
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The position that INT1 expresses here, which is shared by the other interviewees, entails that

perceived "native" varieties (in scare quotes to indicate a critical stance towards the status of

this ideological construct) of English may be evaluated negatively. One interviewee says that

understanding German and French accents does not represent a problem to her, but "when it comes the (.) real English from mean the States or the um (.) unite- um or the um (0.3) Great Britain then it's like whuu (0.2) then I have problems" (Mortensen and Fabricius 2014:211). Taken at face value, the implication is that we see a local norm developing where particular ways of speaking English are being evaluated positively because of their communicative effectiveness, while others are not. The positive value assigned to "non-native" accents and the concomitant downgrading of "native speaker" varieties ("the real English") that we see here runs counter to well-established standard language ideologies.

However, the situation is more complicated than what transpires at first sight. The interviewees also subscribe to what appears to be quite familiar language ideologies that favor "native" varieties/ways of speaking over other kinds of English. This is implicitly acknowledged in the way the interviewee just above positions German accent etc. in opposition to "the real English" as an ideological construct. Similarly, INF1 who claims that accent does not matter at HIB seems to have a troubled relationship with her own accent, relating to the tension between speaking perceived "real" English or a localized version. In another part of the interview she explains how she has tried to "turn her language down" in order not to intimidate members of her project group who are less proficient in English than her, but this has had problematic effects for her. As a consequence of this deliberate moderation of her speech, she describes how her accent became "strange," "ridiculous," and "horrible" – and above all "*Danglish*" (a common derogative term for English spoken in a recognizable and perhaps exaggerated Danish manner). So, although she clearly values communicative efficiency and effectiveness, it is troubling for her self-image if this is to be achieved by speaking English with a strong Danish local flavor.

What is evidenced by these interviews is a situation in which attitudes towards different ways of speaking English are in part grounded in the sociocultural reality of the transient community that the students are part of here-and-now, and in part related to language ideological positions in circulation beyond the immediate context (similar to Millar's study of the corporate context, this issue). In this way, the example illustrates how transient communities are invariably nested within larger social configurations, and how normative expectations and established ways of thinking in these wider contexts will be fused in various ways with the norms that are developing locally within the context of the transient community. As argued in Mortensen and Fabricius (2014:220) transient multilingual communities "… represent dynamic language scenarios where indexicality is constantly in-the-making, and historical community memories are necessarily short." This means that the indexical processes that are fundamental to recent sociolinguistic theories of identity (e.g. Bucholtz and Hall 2005) are perhaps not as "automatic" as they may be in other, more stable contexts. There is (even) more room for the negotiation of social meaning. Yet, the negotiation of social meaning inevitably *also* takes place against the backdrop of pre-established sociocultural patterns of knowledge and ways of knowing, and this dialectic is one of the issues which the study of transient communities invites us to come to grips with, both in theory and practice.

Transient multilingual communities – proposals for a research agenda

As illustrated by the discussion above, the study of transient multilingual communities invites us to reflect on certain aspects of established theory. Directing the analytical gaze towards transient social configurations can be seen as a purposive methodological act. By focusing on

transient communities, researchers are likely to encounter practices in which processual aspects of human sociality are foregrounded in ways that they may not be in more "stable" settings. I do not mean to suggest that transient social configurations are *sui generis*, but they are likely to represent contexts in which the social and linguistic processes that are at the core of sociolinguistic theorizing are likely to "stand out" more clearly than in contexts where social interaction unfolds on the basis of relatively well-established norms. In the following I outline two areas that I believe may be particularly relevant to interrogate from this analytical vantage point, using this as a preamble to a brief concluding section in which I sketch how the study of transient multilingual communities may contribute to a wider research agenda concerned with sociolinguistic change in late modernity.

Discursive practices and identity: Professional transient communities as a case

As illustrated by the third example above, transient communities invite us to reconsider – though not necessarily overthrow – the way the language–identity nexus has been theorized within sociolinguistics. Theories that rely on notions of indexicality have proven very powerful in suggesting how the social identity of speakers is simultaneously reflected in and constituted by the (variable and varying) use of language. Yet, these theories are not necessarily immediately and fully applicable in contexts where constructs of indexical fields are not shared. In such contexts, we are invited – to an even greater extent than in the study of stable communities – to look at indexicality as an unfolding *process*, and take a particular interest in how participants navigate in situations where the boundaries of indexical fields are unclear.

As Jaffe (2016) has argued (cf. Coupland 2007 and Eckert 2008), indexical fields are never stable: When we use "indexicality" as a noun, we are essentially reifying what is in fact an on-going process of *indexicalization*. So, as Jaffe rightly points out (2016: 109-110), in talking about "indexical fields" and "fields of indexicalities" we should really be talking "about the process of 'fielding' of indexes into supposed coherent complexes" of social meaning. Much recent work within sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology has taken an interest in such processes, emphasizing how indexes – and the linguistic processes they are part of – are not only context-sensitive but also context-creating (Kiesling 2009: 177, cf. Jaffe 2016: 86). So, taking an interest in indexicality as a process, emphasizing its active role in emergent meaning making, is not a novel idea (though it is certainly not mainstream in all corners of sociolinguistic theorizing either), but by taking transient social configurations as the object of research, rather than relatively more "fixed" social settings, we are likely to see more clearly how indexicalization unfolds in "real time," for instance through repeated stance-taking and by means of metalinguistic discourse (see Lønsmann, this issue).

If no relevant shared understanding is in place for the social meaning of particular ways of speaking – or other types of social behavior – then that understanding must be created, little by little, *in situ* by the participants. This process does not happen in a vacuum. Participants obviously draw on the semiotic resources and the types of sociocultural knowledge that are available to them, but in the event where these resources cannot be assumed to be shared, they have to be established "anew" for the purposes of the local context (as shown by Hazel, this issue). Turning to the study of processes like these as they unfold in transient social configurations gives the analyst a particular vantage point from which to interrogate and theorize indexicalization.

In the situated practice of professionals, looking at indexicality as a process will need to include more than the study of linguistic practices (cf. Bucholtz 1999). Professions are in part established through and reflected in discursive practices that imbue actions and objects with particular meaning for practitioners (Goodwin 1994). Depending on the particular profession, such discursive practices are typically multimodal, involving a range of semiotic means and modes, including language (Dyer and Keller-Cohen 2000), bodily conduct (Schegloff 1998), the manipulation of objects (Hazel 2014) and written and spoken communication, whether online or offline. Mastering the discursive practices of a profession is an essential part of becoming a ratified member of it. A focus on transient settings invites us to address how this works out in settings where there is potentially no pre-established *shared* framework for what constitutes appropriate professional conduct. How are particular norms for "how things are done around here" (linguistic and otherwise) formed? And (how) does the relative lack of shared resources, linguistic and otherwise, affect this process? Research in settings of this type becomes increasingly important as more and more professions become transnational, and as the need to solve transnational problems increases.

Language ideology and social structures

Turning to research questions focusing on the relationship between language, power and social structure, the area of language ideologies presents itself as another area in which the study of transient (multilingual) communities may bring a new perspective to established research endeavors (as illustrated by Millar, this issue). Linguistic anthropologists have shown how language ideologies, conceptualized as "mediating link[s] between social structures and forms of talk" (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:55), have the power to valorize

certain social groups and their language practices over others (Gal 1998) and thus hold the potential to (re)produce linguistic hierarchies and power relations (Kraft and Lønsmann fc). However, in much the same way as we may develop a refined understanding of the process of indexicality-in-the-making by studying transient social configurations, it seems that the study of transient multilingual communities would allow us – and urge us – to study the *emergence* of language ideologies and their associated power relations, in a potentially more fundamental way than what is possible when studying more "established" social constellations. How are mutually constitutive links between language use and social order actually created *in situ* in contexts where participants may be drawing on radically different sociocultural experiences? How do particular languages come to be considered more valuable than others in such contexts? How are norms of language alternation developed in transient multilingual communities, and how do they interact with language ideology and social structures?

There is a rich literature investigating the emergence and on-going renegotiation of language ideologies and language hierarchies (see e.g. Jaffe 1999), in minority/indigenous language contexts, at various level of societal/institutional organization (Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity 1998), and through multiple modes and means, including mediatized humour and satire (see e.g. Woolard, with Bencomo and Soler-Carbonel 2013, Coupland 2017 and Spilioti 2017). Transient communities constitute another site for the investigation of the processes by which language ideologies and hierarchies are developed – and potentially contested – over time through social interaction. Looking at transient social configurations offers a perspective that aligns with recent critical research within the area of language and migration (see e.g. the contributions in Duchêne, Moyer and Roberts 2013), critical work on multilingualism in education (see e.g. contributions in Martín Rojo 2010) and related areas of investigation. However, by adopting the notion of transient communities as a framing-device

– conceptualised as a particular type of analytical lens on these seemingly disparate social activities – we may develop a valuable comparative perspective that allows us to see similarities across cases. Is there a different dynamic at work in the formation and contestation of language ideologies in transient social configurations – and if so, what are its salient characteristics compared to the processes that we see unfolding in contexts characterised by relatively more well-established social structures?

In the case of the student project groups investigated in Mortensen (2014), cf. example 2 above, I suggest that more research is needed in order to understand the processes behind the language ideological orientations that are being developed in the process of on-going collaboration, and how these processes draw on highly local group-internal dynamics as well as wider discourses, for instance concerning the role of English in a globalizing world *vis-à-vis* the status of Danish as the national language of Denmark. Unravelling the social dynamics at work in a local-yet-global language ideological process of this sort constitutes an interesting challenge in itself, but the investigation becomes all the more interesting, I believe, if we conceptualize this particular process as one instantiation among many of the same type, regularly unfolding in the context of a transient communities. Doing so makes it immediately relevant to combine the sociolinguistic study of university internationalization in Denmark – a fairly provincial concern, some may say – with the much more widespread issue of migration in Europe I briefly mentioned in the introduction. How are language ideologies being formed – in the context of transient social configurations – as large groups of migrants, along with their established ways of speaking, are being uprooted, and placed in new settings? How are language ideologies part of shaping the social processes that migrants take part in, for instance when negotiating the right to asylum in a European country or when entering the job market and being met with demand to learn the language of the receiving community in order

to become a ratified member? These are all questions which are of concern to sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropologists alike, and in order to tackle them, I argue, we need to develop a better understanding of the sociolinguistic processes that characterize transient multilingual communities.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that taking an interest in indexicalization, language ideologies and social meaning-making more generally in the context of transient social configuration does not merely have a theoretical purview. This research endeavor should also involve an interest in turning analytical observations and subsequent theorizing into more tangible "tools" that may be of use to individuals who find themselves in contexts characterized by transience and relative semiotic uncertainty. The lack of pre-defined "grooves" of social meaning-making is often perceived as a challenge not only by analysts but also by individuals in transient social configurations, who often find themselves in difficult and high-stakes settings. The better sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological theory is able to account for the typical social and linguistic processes that unfold in the context of transient social configurations, the more likely it is that we will able to offer reflexive tools and general frameworks which participants may find useful to work with, both as individuals and groups.

Concluding remarks: Transient multilingual communities and sociolinguistic change

Coupland (2014:70) argues that sociolinguistic research needs to look beyond language change and take a broader interest in sociolinguistic change "where the interest is less in discovering structural change in language systems and more in discovering changing relationships between language and society and their instantiation at the level of practice."

While clearly formulated within the disciplinary boundaries of sociolinguistics, a research agenda concerning sociolinguistic change (as opposed to language change) also seems to be of relevance to linguistic anthropology, particularly if research on transient multilingual communities is seen as an integral part of the endeavor. The argument I would like to make is that transient communities are ideal sites in which to pursue the study of sociolinguistic change in late modernity. Premised on changing sociocultural conditions and in turn part of shaping these new conditions, transient multilingual communities are characteristic of late modernity, which is understood to be particularly flexible (Sennett 1998), network-based (Castells 2010) and diverse (Vertovec 2007). Moreover, by virtue of their dynamic nature, the study of transient multilingual communities allows us to track sociolinguistic change in progress as it unfolds in an interplay between new social dynamics and historical chains of continuity. Research on transient multilingual communities also clearly speaks to research agendas concerning the notion of "superdiversity" (cf. e.g. Vertovec 2007; Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Goebel 2015), while explicitly aiming to counterbalance what some see as potentially problematic theoretical claims about the reality of the "super-new-big." As Reyes (2014:368) asks, "who, in fact, perceives the world as superdiverse? Who experiences it as superdiverse? If it is superdiverse now, how was it diverse to some "regular" degree before?" By adopting a members' perspective and using extensive empirical data to inform and harness theory-building, empirical studies of transient multilingual communities should be able to provide new insights into how sociolinguistic life in late modernity is experienced by "real people" (Preston 1998) – which may or may not correspond to the way it is conceptualized in current sociolinguistic theory (cf. Silverstein 2015). Such research would be able to deliver the empirical grounds necessary to refine and possibly extend existing theory on how sociocultural norms are formed through a combination of what individual participants bring to

the table and "new impulses brought about by the new setting" (Mortensen and Fabricius 2014: 220).

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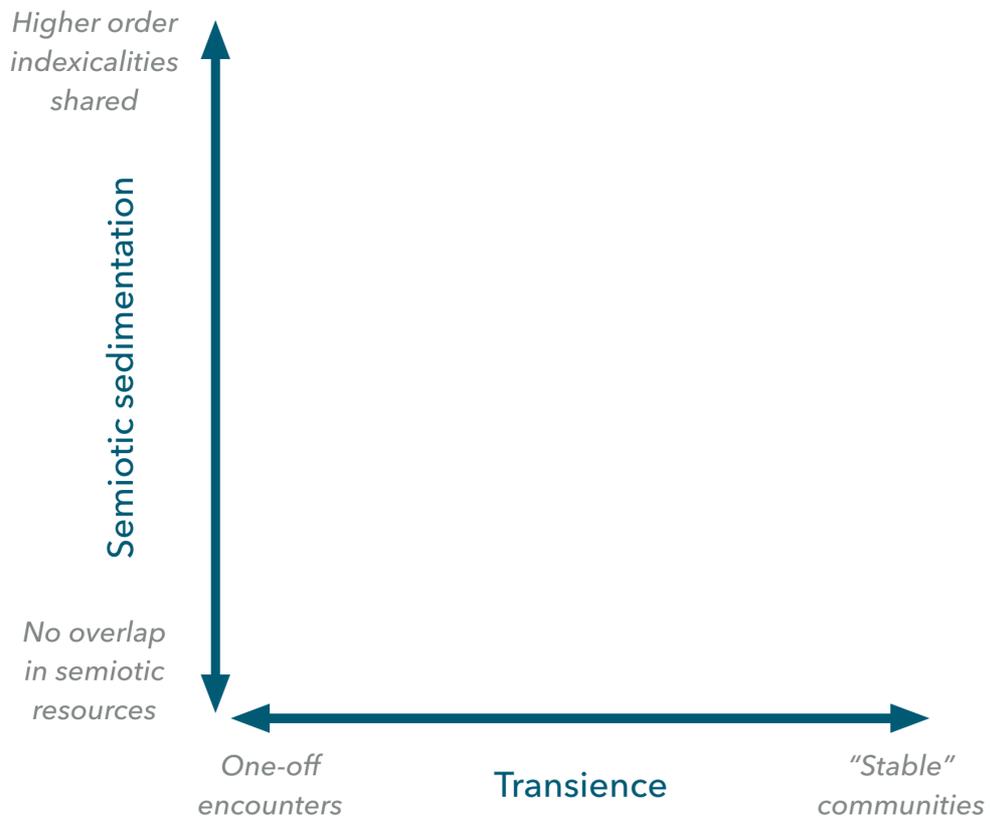2005. Socialization beyond the Speech Event. Journal of Linguistic Anthropology 15(1):95–112.

Figure 1: Mapping transient communities along the scales of transience and semiotic sedimentation