Studies on language and migration: Towards 'migration linguistics'

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The early expansion of archaic humans in and out of Africa dates back to million years ago, yet human migration remains a contemporary and relevant issue in the globalizing society today. Indeed, the present movement of peoples plays a very important role in redefining the make up of the world and, truly, migration is an integral part of human progress in the present times that cannot be overemphasized. While the percentage of international migrants in the world population in 2019 remains a very small portion of the whole at 3.5% (or 272 million), this percentage has gone beyond the predictions for 2050 (International Organization for Migration, 2019). People migrate for various social, economic, political, and educational reasons. Whatever the reason is, language has remained a most crucial factor in the integration of migrants in their destination countries. The ability to communicate to people in the receiving society is vital in the success of the move from their origin countries to their destination countries. The International Organization Migration (2019) says it well: "Language is considered *one of the most central aspects for migrants' inclusion* by both the receiving society and migrants themselves" (p. 192).

That communication through language has been very important to the lives of migrants has not escaped the notice of scholars. And while language is primarily the affairs of linguists, scholars of various persuasions themselves have contributed to the growing body of knowledge on migration linguistics. Proofs of this are the anthology (Piller, 2016) and handbook

(Canagarajah, 2017). As migration continues   to be more prevalent in the world today, the fact that the momentum of studies on migration generally and migration vis-a-vis language particularly has increased alongside the prevalence of international migration could not be denied. Of course, linguists and non-linguists alike would be interested in any prevailing and pressing social phenomenon. It can be observed that these various disciplines mentioned have each contributed to the investigation of the nexus of migration and language using their own disciplinary frameworks and perspectives. Yet, this extant corpus of studies on migration and language remains unconsolidated. In applied linguistics in particular, Canagarajah (2017) bemoans, "[A]pplied linguists in diverse parts of the world studying this nexus [of migration and language] don't necessarily enjoy *a shared scholarly identity or disciplinary space*" (p.1).

It is at this juncture that a new sub-discipline of linguistics is being alluded to here — which could be called 'migration linguistics'. ***Migration linguistics will be involved in the scientific study of language in the context of migration*** and, while it is a primarily linguistics sub-discipline, it borrows significantly from a number of other disciplines, sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, political science, education, and other related disciplines. That said, the nomenclatural transition from 'language and migration' to 'migration linguistics' should signal development and maturity of the research area and, consequently, the emergence of the new sub-discipline. Of course, 'migration linguistics' clearly embeds the research area under the broad discipline of linguistics, again, rather understandably, because the point of focus is language. Yet at the same time, 'migration linguistics' also directs attention to a very clear and neat consolidation of these multidisciplinary efforts — though occasionally distant from one another — towards a more coherent academic endeavor.

It is important to point out here what migration linguistics hopes to be. First, it should theorize on language as it is used, acquired, and learned in the context of the migration process. Second, it must describe the various factors and patterns relating to language within the migration process. Third, it ought to investigate language within the context of migration using interdisciplinary perspectives and methodologies. Fourth, it has to provide practical solutions to the issues and problems related to language confronting

migrants. And lastly, it should engage various stakeholders of language and migration. Indeed, the nexus of migration and language is a very important concern not only for the community of scholars (interdisciplinary) but also for the community of nations (international), too.

There are various dimensions of migration and language which migration linguistics must be able to shed light on. The following are just a few of the factors which must necessarily be investigated:

Table 1: *Factors relating to language during migration*

	Pre-Migration	**During Migration**	**Post-Migration**
Migrant	1. Motivation 2. Group and cultural attitudes 3. Government policies 4. Abilities and skills 5. Resources 6. Networks	1. Identities 2. Group and cultural attitudes 3. Social integration 4. Government policies 5. Other institutions 6. Resources 7. Abilities and skills 8. Social networks	1. Identities 2. Reintegration
Language	1. Mother tongue 2. Language proficiencies 3. Language attitudes 4. Language training 5. Motivations for language learning	1. Acquisition and learning of new languages 2. Influence of previously acquired/learned languages on the newly acquired/learned languages 3. Restructuring of languages in the destination country 4. Influence of destination country languages on proficiencies in origin country languages 5. Language attitudes 6. Language training	1. New language proficiencies and competencies 2. Influences of destination country languages on proficiencies in origin country languages 3. Language attitudes

		7. Motivations for language learning	
Society	1. Social situation	1. Demographic loss for the home country 2. Demographic gain for the destination country 3. Accommodation 4. Change	1. Population recovery 2. Accommodation

The table above is meant to capture the various aspects of language in the context of migration and so it attempts to cover different types of migrants, i.e., workers, families and children born into these families, and students. Needless to say, because of its attempt to broadly capture the entire experience of human mobility, some factors and even phases may not apply to all, e.g., not all migrants return to their origin countries and so post-migration may not apply to them.

Having listed the factors which must be investigated in relation to migration and language, it is clear that, as was mentioned earlier, the nexus of migration and language is not only a concern for linguistics but for many disciplines as well. While language is the central concern, several various factors come into play in the migration process and these factors are best studied using the multidisciplinary lens. Here, it is possible to mention a few methodologies and corresponding studies which made use of them in investigating on language in the context of migration:

1. **Narratives**: Vilog (2015) uses narratives to see the formation and modification of ethnolinguistic boundaries, accompanied by the fragmentation of identities, during the experience of migration of Filipino Nikkeijins. He notices that 'ethnolinguistic bordering' becomes more salient especially in a location or workplace where there are political and socio-economic contestations among migrants.

2. **Ethnography**: Dlugaj and Fürstenau (2019) investigate the use of migrant languages in German primary schools.

Ethnographic classroom observations pointed out that the inclusion of migrant children's languages in lesson protocols meant valuing and acknowledgement of these children's multilingualism while, at the same time, it also signified its being part of the comprehensive language teaching and learning design.

3. **Survey**: The Subject Vitality Questionnaire (SVQ) study of Gibbons and Ashcroft (1995) among Italians in Sydney have shown differences in perceptions of Greek and Italian vitality.

4. **Policy analysis**: Hoang and Hamid (2017) look into language-in-migration policy of Australia by studying two cases of migrant applications, one successful and one unsuccessful on the basis of their language proficiency tests.

5. **Modeling**: Adserà and Pytliková (2015) did modeling using data set covering linguistic proximity, widely spoken languages, linguistic enclaves and language based immigration policy requirements. They highlight the fact that there is an increase in migration rates with linguistic proximity and with English language use at destination countries.

6. **Language documentation and description**: Ansaldo and Lim (2014) document the shift, loss, and revival of the ancestral language of the Malay diaspora of Sri Lanka.

7. **Experiments**: Leung's (2012) study is a perception study, focusing on whether or not the presence of FDWs (Filipino domestic workers) affects the ability to listen to English. He involved subjects exposed to Filipino domestic workers and another group not exposed to Filipino domestic workers. No detrimental effect was found and, in fact, those who were cared for by Filipino domestic workers demonstrated much better ability to perceive Philippine English than those who were not under their care.

This brief survey of studies with differing disciplinary and methodological traditions and approaches only goes to show that there is an excellent tradition of studies on migration and language, and that their consolidation as a new sub-discipline is quite compelling. To this list, it could be added that Ariane Borlongan and his multidisciplinary team at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (Japan) is developing what they call 'Migrant Linguistic Index' (MLI). An instrument will be designed and it will be used to determine a migrant's propensity for acquiring, learning, and using language(s) in his/her destination country. The same instrument will also be used to build baseline data regarding migration and language. The instrument for the Migrant Linguistic Index will be implemented in various metropolitan areas around the world where migrants congregate to build baseline data on migration and language.

Prospects for the new sub-discipline being proposed here seems bright given the place of migration in the globalizing society today as well as its ongoing interest among scholars of various academic backgrounds and interests. It is hoped that migration linguistics will be well-received by academics and non-academics alike. Most importantly, the new sub-discipline must be able to respond to the current issues being faced by migrants around the world, most especially those relating to language and communication. A brief survey of its aims, concepts, and methodologies have been outlined here, and scholars, practitioners, and even migrants themselves are invited to see the potential and viability of this line of inquiry not only as an academic endeavor but also, most especially, as a response to the current challenges the globalizing world is experiencing.

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