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## Metrolingualism: fixity, fluidity and language in flux

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By extending the notion of metroethnicity, this paper proposes the notion of metrolingualism, creative linguistic practices across borders of culture, history and politics. Metrolingualism gives us a way to move beyond current terms such as ‘multilingualism’ and ‘multiculturalism’. It is a product of modern and often urban interaction, describing the ways in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through language. The focus is not so much on language systems as on languages as emergent from contexts of interaction. Looking at data from workplaces where metrolingual language use is common, we show how the use of both fixed and fluid linguistic and cultural identities is part of the process of language use. The notion of metrolingualism gives us ways of moving beyond common frameworks of language, providing insights into contemporary, urban language practices, and accommodating both fixity and fluidity in its approach to language use.

**Keywords:** metrolingualism; multilingualism; language contact; code-mixing; fixity; fluidity

### Introduction: ‘Honto’?

- (1) J ふふ～ ワインを16本。(Ha ha...16 bottles of wine)
- (2) H Yeah
- (3) Ad なんて、どこからもらったの？(Why? Where did you get them from?)
- (4) J Ah, I bought them off the internet. There is like a sale, special cellar masters at the moment
- (5) H う～ん。(Right)
- (6) J Offering a 16 bottle dozen,
- (7) H Uuu
- (8) J For a hundred twenty nine dollars. From all over the country
- (9) H Oh, wow
- (10) J Some Margaret river stuff, Coonawarra
- (11) H Oh, 言ってよ。(You should have told me!)
- (12) J まだあるよ。(They still have some)

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- (13) H 本当? (*Really?*)<sup>1</sup> (English translation is provided in brackets and the italics indicate Japanese used in the original)

At first glance, there is nothing very remarkable about this conversational fragment between J (James), Ad (Adam) and H (Heather). Code-switching, we know, is common and widely attested in contexts where two languages are used in daily interaction (Myers-Scotton, 2006; Wei, 2005). In this workplace in Sydney, in a company where Japanese and English are frequently used for both business and social purposes, it is common to find dialogues such as this where participants switch and mix between English and Japanese. What might give us pause, however, is that none of the participants in the conversation, J, Ad and H is ‘Japanese’ (though as we shall see, all such identity categorisations will need careful consideration). At the very least, then, we can note that such instances of English/Japanese mixed code use derive not so much from the use of different first and second languages but rather as the result of a mixed Japanese/English code becoming the lingua franca of the workplace.

We intend to take such observations further, however, as part of an exploration of language use in contemporary urban environments that seeks to move away from ascriptions of language and identity along conventional statist correlations among nation, language and ethnicity. Following a range of recent work that has come to question the connections assumed between language and forms of belonging (Auer, 2005, 2007; Auer & Wei, 2007; Bailey, 2007; Heller, 2007a, 2007b; Jørgensen, 2008; Otsuji, 2008; Quist & Jørgensen, 2007), we are interested in exploring how Adam’s, Heather’s and James’ language use can be understood differently. As Heller (2007b, p. 343) puts it, ‘languages turn out to be floating around in unexpected places’. Examples such as this have led us to question not only a one-to-one association among language, ethnicity, nation and territory, but also the authenticity and ownership of language which is based on conventional language ideology.

A recent movement in bi and multilingual studies has been to shift away from a focus on how distinct codes are switched or mixed, in favour of an interest in how boundaries and distinctions are the results of particular language ideologies and how language users manipulate the multilingual resources they have available to them. This is in line with Makoni and Pennycook’s (2007) argument that language is a social, political and historical construct, and their proposal for the need for disinvention and reconstitution of language drawing on the *local knowledge* of what it means to people in the local context. An obvious starting point, then, is to look at how participants use their multilingual resources and how they themselves understand language use. The following two excerpts from the same workplace show the staff using their *multilingual* resources. In Excerpts 2 and 3, Heather is jokingly reporting the same telephone conversation with a Japanese client to different participants, first with James in Excerpt 2, and then with Asami, her Japanese colleague, in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 2 (H: Heather, J: James)

- (1) H James, Chiba san said to me もしもし、9日にシドニーに行って、そのままニュージーランドに行ったほうがいいですか? 私に聞くなよ。 [laugh] 何考えているのよ。「あ、それは千葉さんのご都合で」 [laugh]

(“Hello, Is it better to go to Sydney on the 9th and go straight to NZ?”  
Don’t ask me.[laugh] What is he thinking? “Well, It’s up to your schedule,  
Mr. Chiba” [laugh])

- (2) J ニューージーランドに9日だったら。(If NZ is on the 9th.)  
 (3) H then he said 「で1日ゴルフで1日ニューージーランドって無理でしようかね」。  
 (“Is it possible to play golf one day and go to NZ for one day?”)  
 (4) J だって9日だったらもう僕らいないんだよ。もどってきているんだよ。  
 (If it’s 9th, we are not there anymore. We are already back here)  
 (5) H なに言ってるの？ ばかだな:: (What is he saying? He is ma::d)

Here again, though both James and Heather are non-Japanese (in the usual sense) and the conversation was held exclusively between the two, Japanese and English were mixed not only to quote the actual dialogue in the conversation (which might, of course, be an obvious trigger for Japanese use) but also in James’ comments about the conversation in lines 2 and 4. Ten minutes later, Heather reports the same telephone call to Asami.

Excerpt 3 (H: Heather, J: James, As: Asami)

- (1) H What is he thinking?  
 (2) J 吸いすぎじゃないの? (Maybe he is smoking too much?)  
 (3) As [laugh] what did he say?  
 (4) H He asked me should he go to New Zealand instead of playing golf?  
 Should he go to N.Z to the 口ケ地? (location?) どうして私の判断を...  
 (Why my decision...)  
 (5) J ゴルフね。(Golf, huh?)  
 (6) As He is not coming till Monday. What did you say?  
 (7) J She said  
 (8) H I said it is up to you 千葉さんのご都合で。(Its up to Chiba-san)

In this excerpt, Heather is reporting to Asami the same conversation about the Japanese crew asking her to decide their schedule. This time, as opposed to Excerpt 2 where she quoted the actual conversation in Japanese (line 1, Excerpt 2), she rephrases the quote in English (line 4, Excerpt 3). It is interesting to note that while in Excerpt 2, Heather reported to an ‘English’ dominant speaker in ‘Japanese’, she uses ‘English’ with Asami, a ‘Japanese’ dominant speaker. Now, while any number of explanations can be given to account for this reporting of the same content in different languages – direct quotation, location of the company, type of company, personal relations and contrary language affiliations (using languages contrary to obvious ethnic or linguistic identifications) – we find it more useful to think in terms of *metrolingualism* than to try to explain this in terms of switching between languages.

The above staff, moreover, reported little awareness of using one language or the other: *In Japaria I don’t consciously speak in English or in Japanese. I choose the one I feel comfortable with at the time.* Another reported that *I don’t have any awareness that I am choosing language or when I recall a particular conversation, it is often the case that I can’t remember in which language it was spoken.* While they thus reported little conscious language choice, they were nevertheless aware of the mixture they used as a result: *what we are doing here is bastardising English and Japanese or in a casual conversation, language is chaotic.* In this light, we will look at how language is

invented, disinvented and re-constituted by examining everyday conversation and what it means to people as a local practice.

### From multilingualism to metrolingualism

Rather than describing such language phenomena in terms of monolingualism, bilingualism, code-mixing or code-switching, we shall look at this in terms of what we have called *metrolingualism*. Current cultural, social, geopolitical and linguistic thinking is predominated by a celebration of multiplicity, hybridity and diversity. Within this trend, terminology such as *multiculturalism*, *multilingualism* and *cosmopolitanism* are taken as a focus and a desirable norm in various fields including academia, policy-making and education. While they are generally seen as the driving force for new possibilities, an appreciation of multiple cultural/linguistic beings and practices also leaves us with at least two major concerns. First, one of the underlying ideologies of multilingualism and multiculturalism is that people and associated practices are composed of multiple discrete languages and cultural practices. Notwithstanding the fact that there is an increase in the number of studies that shift away from conceiving *language* as an adequate base category towards a focus on features, styles or resources in order to explicate late modern bi/multilingualism (Bailey, 2007; Coupland, 2007; Jørgensen, 2008; Rampton, 2009), the difficulty still lies in fully escaping and dissociating from old statist language ideologies.

Auer rightly critiques the ‘rash equation of “hybrid” language use with “hybrid” social identity; such an equation may be as essentialist as that of nation and language which underlies traditional European language ideologies’ (Auer, 2005, p. 403). That is to say, in celebrating multiplicity, models of diversity tend to pluralise languages and cultures rather than complexify them. One aim of this paper is to question multilingual or multicultural ideologies, to challenge too easy a move towards multiplicity with its particular strategies of pluralisation. Another, following Auer, is to be suspicious of claims to hybridity and to relations between hybrid language use and hybrid identities. If nothing else, a more complex vision of language use leads us to an inevitable questioning of such claims.

And yet, at the same time, we also want to pick up on a second contradictory strand in common thinking about multiplicity: on the one hand, the celebration of *multiple* allows for difference and dynamism providing new possibilities to society and people. On the other hand, its antagonistic view towards pre-given fixed ascriptions of cultural identities – chastised for being *essentialist* – often fails to acknowledge the contribution that such pre-given identities have in becoming different. That is, one of the driving forces to be different and multiple and dynamic is the interaction between fixed and fluid cultural identities. The underlying assumption of the previous interview statements *what we are doing here is bastardising English and Japanese* as well as *in a casual conversation, language is chaotic* is that even though they do not have a sense of treating languages separately in their use, they have a set of ideal and orderly linguistic practices that are reflected in such terms as *bastardising* and *chaotic*. Our argument is that we need to account for this within our understanding of *metrolingualism*, especially if, as suggested above, it is incumbent on us to include the local perspectives of language users who appear to incorporate within their own hybrid practices both fluidity and fixity. What often seems to be overlooked in discussions of local, global and hybrid relations is the way in which the local may involve not only the take up of

the global, or a localised form of cosmopolitanism, but also may equally be about the take up of local forms of static and monolithic identity and culture.

We cannot therefore leap into an examination (or celebration) of hybridity as if fixed ascriptions of identity and their common mobilisation in daily interaction have ceased to exist. The celebration of *happy hybridity*, as an unproblematic category of cultural diversity that somehow provides solutions to sociocultural relations and conflicts, has been widely critiqued (Allatson, 2001; Perera, 1994). When we constantly focus on hybridity, ‘the notion of the “hybrid” can become as fixed a category as its essentialist nemesis’ (Zuberi, 2001, pp. 239–240). While we may wish to focus on a multiple, hybrid and complex world, we need both to avoid turning hybridity into a fixed category of pluralisation, and to find ways to acknowledge that fixed categories are also mobilised as an aspect of hybridity. In their search for more dynamic terms than global and local, which ‘reify the status of geometric space over the dynamic conditions under which space is actively constructed and consumed by companies, institutions of governance and by individuals’, Connell and Gibson (2003, p. 17) propose *fixity and fluidity* which ‘reflect more dynamic ways of describing and understanding processes that move across, while becoming embedded in, the materiality of localities and social relations’ (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 17). From this point of view, it is important not to construe fixity and fluidity as dichotomous, or even as opposite ends of a spectrum, but rather to view them as symbiotically (re)constituting each other. In talking of metrolingualism, therefore, we also intend to address the ways in which any struggle around new language, culture and identity inevitably confronts the fixed traditions of place and being.

For Heller (2007b, p. 342), bilingualism is a ‘kind of fault line, a space particularly sensitive to and revealing of social change’ since both bilingual practices and the ways we perceive them raise questions about how we view language boundaries. This remark, however, is intriguing in another sense in that it shows how social change and new boundaries are also supported by this *fault line*. Similarly, Jørgensen’s study of polylingualism, while it attempts to challenge the notion of discrete language by using linguistic features, rather than languages, as the base of analysis, claims that ‘competent polylingual language users tend to be competent when they choose to follow a monolingualism norm’ (Jørgensen, 2008, p.174). This again shows how fixed boundaries/practices and those which are fluid cannot be simplistically treated as discrete phenomena. As we shall see, our hybrid and multilingual office workers can ascribe to themselves and others a mixture of open-ended and closed identities. The notion of multiplicity can thus contain complex and apparently contradictory processes.

Put another way, the celebrated spaces of hybridity, third space and transcultural interaction may also include monolithic ascriptions of culture and identity. While one aim of this paper, therefore, is to demythologise notions of language mixing along the fault line of bilingualism, another is to demythologise hybridity as if cultural and linguistic fixity also were not part of its apparatus. We need to reframe what it means to be ‘Japanese’, what it means to speak ‘in Japanese’/‘in English’/‘in French’ and so on, and what it means to transgress and reconstitute cultural and linguistic borders. By extending the notion of *metroethnicity*, this paper proposes the notion of *metrolingualism*, which refers to creative linguistic conditions across space and borders of culture, history and politics, as a way to move beyond current terms such as *multilingualism* and *multiculturalism*. The notion of metrolingualism provides

useful insights into processes of social change that are involved in different contemporary ways of being.

### From metroethnicity to metrolingualism

The changing cultural and linguistic worlds in which many language users live pose challenges for how we conceive of culture, ethnicity and language. As Maher describes it in the context of Japan, young people of various backgrounds are rejecting fixed ascriptions of cultural identity and instead playing with notions of metroethnicity: ‘Cultural essentialism and ethnic orthodoxy are out. In Japan, Metroethnicity is in. Cool rules’ (Maher, 2005, p. 83). Metroethnicity, he explains, is ‘a reconstruction of ethnicity: a hybridised “street” ethnicity deployed by a cross-section of people with ethnic or mainstream backgrounds who are oriented towards cultural hybridity, cultural/ethnic tolerance and a multicultural lifestyle in friendships, music, the arts, eating and dress’ (Maher, 2005, p. 83). People of different backgrounds now ‘play with ethnicity (not necessarily their own) for aesthetic effect. Metroethnicity is skeptical of heroic ethnicity and bored with sentimentalism about ethnic language’ (Maher, 2005, p. 83).

Metrolingualism, therefore, drawing on Maher’s (2005) metroethnicity, is a product typically of modern, urban interaction. The notion of metrolingualism also invokes the metrosexual, that term for the *new man* (metrosexuality most often seems to be a gender-specific term, soccer player David Beckham, or swimmer Ian Thorpe, often being cited as the archetypes) who takes pride in his appearance, enjoys clothes, shopping, skin products, jewellery and good food, and engages in practices that distinguish him from the *retrosexual* (the old-fashioned male) (Coad, 2008). While conscious irony, affluent consumerism or a focus on fashion are not ideals we would wish to associate closely with metrolingualism, there are nevertheless affiliations here with metrosexual connections to the city, the centrality of style (Coupland, 2007) and the undoing of gendered orthodoxies, which resonates with the metrolingual undermining of ortholinguistic practices. Just as the metrosexual challenges hetero/homosexual and masculine/feminine dichotomies, so the metrolingual undermines retrolingual mono/multilingual dichotomies.

This focus on the urban ties to Coulmas’ observation that sociolinguistics ‘is the study of language in urbanized settings, its proper object being the multidimensional distribution of languages and varieties in the city, as opposed to the regional distribution of varieties of language investigated in traditional dialectology’ (Coulmas, 2009, p. 14). We do not, however, want to limit the notion of metrolingualism only to the urban. Just as Williams (1973) warned against the juxtaposition of an idyllic, rural, unchanging countryside with the grimy and polluted industrial city (ignoring, amongst other things, the organisation and conditions of rural labour), so, in different times and within different orientations to cosmopolitan, hybrid cityscapes, we want to avoid an idealisation of urban metrolingual landscapes set against the assumed narrowness of rural living. This has two corollaries: on the one hand, metrolingualism as a practice is not confined to the city; and on the other, it is intended as a broad, descriptive category for data analysis rather than a term of cosmopolitan idealism.

While characterised by the kinds of language use commonly found in the contemporary city, in other contexts of movement, migration and mixing – such as can be seen in different regions of Africa (Blommaert, 2008; Higgins, 2009; Makoni

and Makoni, 2010; Stroud, 2007) – metrolingualism may be rural, mobile, local and fragile. If, furthermore, we take on board Canagarajah's (2007a, p. 238) insistence that in order to understand contemporary multilingualism, we need 'to know how communication worked in contexts of rampant multilingualism and inveterate hybridity in traditional communities, before European modernity suppressed this knowledge in order to develop systems of commonality based on categorization, classification and codification', we might be tempted to broaden the notion of metrolingualism as an analytic category across both rural and precolonial linguistic landscapes. While this may be stretching the term too far, it does draw attention to the fact that the kind of mixed language use we are trying to describe in urban landscapes has many earlier precedents.

Metrolingualism describes the ways in which people of different and mixed backgrounds use, play with and negotiate identities through language; it does not assume connections between language, culture, ethnicity, nationality or geography, but rather seeks to explore how such relations are produced, resisted, defied or rearranged; its focus is not on language systems but on languages as emergent from contexts of interaction. As a result, while part of the focus here is on hybridity and play, there are several caveats. As with many studies of language play – from Rampton's (1995, 2006) studies of *crossing* and the language of late modernity in school classrooms, or Lin's (2000) and Luk's (2005) studies of language play in Hong Kong, to studies of multilingual creativity in hip-hop (Lin, 2009; Omoniyi, 2009) – the focus here is not on elite game playing but the ludic possibilities in the everyday. While the focus of metrolingualism, therefore, may include forms of chic, privileged playfulness in elite bilingualism – acquired bilingual capacity for the upwardly mobile in a global world (De Meija, 2002) – it includes a much broader view of contexts of translingual activity.

It is worth noting in this context that while Coupland (2007) and Rampton (2009) read Maher's metroethnicity as a shallow form of ethnic identification in terms only of being *cool*, Maher (2005, p. 84) conceives metroethnicity as 'an exercise in emancipatory politics. It is an individual's self-assertion on his own terms and that will inevitably challenge the orthodoxy of "language loyalty"'. If Maher's notion perhaps draws too ready a connection between emancipatory politics and individualistic assertions, we can nevertheless make more of this than only shallow identification. While metrosexuality may sometimes be playful and cool, there is also serious business at work here in terms of identity politics, of the queering of gender and sexuality (Nelson, 2009). Metrolingualism, accordingly, allows the reconstitution of language and an alternative way of being in and through ludic and other possibilities of the everyday, a queering of linguistic practices.

There is an emancipatory politics in the challenge to 'the orthodoxy of language loyalty' that may enable people to disassociate legitimised links between language, ethnicity and nation state, which in turn renovates the discursive content of what it means to be 'Japanese' or to 'speak in Japanese'. In this sense, though there surely is an emancipatory politics to Maher's metroethnicity or metrolanguages, our notion of *metrolingualism* differs in that it by no means exclusively refers to the *lite* aesthetic *options* that are *portable* based on practices of *here* and *now* (Maher, 2010). We are interested in the queering of ortholinguistic practices across time and space that may include urban and rural contexts, elite or minority communities, local or global implications. In the same way that Butler (1993) strongly rejects the idea that performativity is akin to the pulling on or taking off of identities, we



would reject assumptions that languages may be worn and discarded *litley*, as metrosexual accoutrements. We locate metrolingualism instead as another practice of undoing, as both a rejection of ortholinguistic practices and a production of new possibilities.

The *metro* as we understand it, then, is the productive space provided by, though not limited to, the contemporary city to produce new language identities. Such an interpretation is intended to avoid the pluralisation of languages and cultures, and to accommodate the complex ways in which fluid and fixed, as well as global and local, practices reconstitute language and identities. Jørgensen (2008) and Møller (2008) propose the notion of *polylingualism* in place of multilingualism in light of the idea that 'speakers use features and not languages' (Jørgensen, 2008, p. 166). As Møller explains polylingualism:

What if the participants do not orient to the juxtaposition of languages in terms of switching? What if they instead orient to a linguistic norm where all available linguistic resources can be used to reach the goals of the speaker? Then it is not adequate to categorise this conversation as bilingual or multilingual, or even as language mixing, because all these terms depend on the separability of linguistic categories. I therefore suggest the term polylingual instead. (Møller, 2008, p. 218)

By focusing on linguistic features rather than languages, their studies are more inclusive than many multilingual studies that attempt to account for late modern, urban language use, including the use of linguistic features at the word level by people who do not necessarily have sufficient knowledge or *competence* in the particular *language*. Nevertheless, while this notion of polylingualism shares much with the approach we are taking here, it still, like plurilingualism and multilingualism, tends towards a pluralisation of singular entities (languages). It is in part to move away from such pluralisations that we have opted for the more open *metrolingualism*, where the notion of language in time and space (*metro*) rather than countability, becomes the language modifier. Metrolingualism, while following in a number of ways the same trajectory as Maher's (2010) recent discussion of *metrolanguages*, provides us with more flexibility to move away from the enumerative strategy of counting languages (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007).

At the same time, however, just as we have warned against the celebration of happy hybridity, so we need to be cautious lest we adopt an uncritical analysis of metrolingualism as a locus of ludic diversity. Just as elements of linguistic and cultural fixity may be mobilised as part of metrolingualism, so metrolingual language use may have to confront its static nemesis, the fixed identity regulations of institutional modernity: when judgements in law courts, educational systems, asylum tribunals, job interviews or hospital waiting rooms are brought to bear on metrolingual language use, the full discriminatory apparatus of the state all too often works against such fluidity. As becomes clear in the example below with Osman, metrolingualism is not exclusively about fluid possibilities but is also about the fragile processes of identity reconstitution, about struggles in the face of local ortholinguistic practices.

Metrolingualism, therefore, is centrally concerned with language ideologies, practices, resources and repertoires: a focus on language ideologies (Blommaert, 1999; Seargeant, 2009) provides an understanding of the ways in which languages need to be understood in terms of the local perspectives of the users, and the different struggles to represent language in one way or another; an understanding of language

as a practice (Heller, 2007a; Pennycook, 2010) allows for a view that language is not an entity used in different contexts but rather is an emergent property of various social practices: bilingualism is ‘a sociopolitical semiotic nexus of praxis cum ideology’ (Tsitsipis, 2007, p. 277); an appreciation of language practices as drawing on semiotic resources and repertoires suggests that language knowledge should be defined ‘not in terms of abstract system components but as communicative repertoires – conventionalized constellations of semiotic resources for taking action – that are shaped by the particular practices in which individuals engage’ (Hall, Cheng, & Carlson, 2006, p. 232). Metrolingualism is not, therefore, playful language use devoid of social context so much as a way of describing diverse grounded local practices.

### Metrolingualism, fixity and cultural change

At the same time that metrolingualism presents possibilities of borderless language crossing and flexible identifications, it nevertheless always rubs up against the fixed identity markers of modernity. For the participants in these metrolingual conversations, these may mean that while they are conducting fluid conversations in a mixture of English and Japanese, they may also mobilise ascriptions of identity along static lines. One of the workers at Japaria, Atsuko, for example, said in an interview *In Japan, people are different depending on the person. I stop thinking it is different because she is Japanese and I don't consciously think that I am a Japanese. I stop being aware of noticing people as Japanese or Australian.* And yet, in other conversations, she nevertheless showed herself to be capable of ascribing quite monolithic characteristics to French speakers.

Excerpt 4 (A: Atsuko, Ad: Adam)

- (1) A フランス語? フランス語しゃべる人ってかわいし 格好良いと思う。  
(*French? I think people who speak French are cute and cool*)
- (2) Ad [laugh] みんな? 国全体がかわいくて格好良いと思う? (*Everyone? You think everyone in the country is cute and cool?*)
- (3) A おとこ おとこの人がフランス語話すとセクシーだし 女の子が話すとかわいい  
と思う フランス人はみんな。(Men. If men speak French, they are sexy and  
if girls speak French, they are cute. All French people)

Such generalisations, however, are immediately challenged by Adam, and though she continues to assert her desire to generalise here, she soon sides with Robert in critiquing the essentialist direction the conversation takes when other participants started to provide extreme comments about French people.

Excerpt 5 (A: Atsuko, R: Robert)

- (1) A みんなすごい。(All of you are extreme)
- (2) R すごい差別だよ。(Extreme prejudice) [everyone laughs]

Likewise, Asami, another participant in the essentialising moves in this conversation, commented negatively during the interview about over-generalised views about Japan: *there are many people who think 'Japanese people are like this', or 'Japanese people always eat fish' and I do not like that.* In a later discussion, she told us *After*

*I started to live in Dubbo [a rural town in Australia], I noticed that a small town is a closed society. It is not a bad thing. It can't be helped. It must be the same in the countryside in Japan.* Here she struggles between a generalising move about small town mentalities and a relativising move across locations. This is the push and pull between fixity and fluidity, the capacity to both mobilise and critique essentialised identity ascriptions. This is akin to the point Blackledge and Creese make in the context of heritage languages in the UK. 'If languages are invented, and languages and identities are socially constructed', they point out, 'we nevertheless need to account for the fact that at least some language users, at least some of the time, hold passionate beliefs about the importance and significance of a particular language to their sense of "identity"' (Blackledge & Creese, 2008, p. 535).

None of these staff members, moreover, are easily categorised along common lines of ascribed identity. Atsuko moved to Australia from Japan with her family at the age of 11 due to her father's business assignment, and has been living in Australia since then. She is an Australian citizen, having given up her Japanese nationality. Adam was born in the northern part of Japan to New Zealander missionary parents, and lived in Japan until the age of 13. In the interviews, they challenged, attested, compromised and sometimes ignored the issues of linguistic and cultural borders. Under these circumstances, what it means to be 'Japanese' or to speak 'Japanese' shifted back and forth from fixed to fluid understandings, which leads us to ask how we can reconcile a certain level of borderlessness with a certain level of fixed cultural views and language use.

Another of our research participants presents us with a slightly different way of approaching these questions. Osman, who works for a working holiday maker's advisory office in Australia, was in his late 20s, an Australian national born in Australia to a mother of Turkish descent and a father of Anglo-Saxon background. He speaks English and Japanese and can understand Turkish but not speak it.<sup>2</sup> During the interview, Osman demonstrated a distance from both Australian and Turkish communities, reflected in remarks such as *I could not fit into either Turkish or Australian culture and I was always unconsciously searching for a place where I belonged, I always thought that I was not a typical Aussie and I like the Japanese way of thinking and I have a feeling that I could live in Japan for the rest of my life.*<sup>3</sup> While expressing an intriguing fluidity on the one hand in his rejection of Turkish/Australian identities and his adoption of Japanese, he also operates at another level with quite fixed interpretations of these cultural and linguistic entities.

Osman began to study Japanese when searching for where he *belonged*. When he was in his teens, he was the target of physical abuse in his neighbourhood, leading at times to considerable anger and depression. He started reading Asian philosophy and literature at 15, in his search for a place to belong. According to Osman, he felt more comfortable with Japanese ways of thinking than with Australian ways: *I cannot get along with typical Australians. I find more commonalities with Japanese.* Osman's discomfort in Australian and Turkish-Australian societies, and the fact that he felt more comfortable within Japanese society, can be associated with an attempt to claim a new membership and identity by persistently speaking in Japanese. In contrast to the conversation amongst the staff at Japaria where a mixed code was common, Osman was determined to speak exclusively in Japanese in every context at work.

Excerpt 6 (O: Osman, R: Rie)

- (1) O どう りえちゃんこの曲?(*What do you think, Rie chan?*)
- (2) R ん? あんたきのうも聞かなかった?(*Huh? Didn't you ask that yesterday as well?*)
- (3) え?(*What?*)
- (4) R 昨日も聞いたでしょ?(*You asked that also yesterday, didn't you?*)
- (5) 昨日ちがう曲じゃん。(Yesterday was different music)
- (6) R うそ。(liar)
- (7) ん記憶良くないね 君。(Huh, you do not have a good memory, you) [silence]
- (8) りえちゃんは 君って呼んだらすごくおこるからさ。(I know that Rie chan gets very angry when I call you KIMI)

By using Japanese, his endeavour can also be interpreted as an attempt to break the connection between one language and attached ethnicity and cultural background in order to create a new tie between another ethnic/cultural background and language. It is interesting, however, to note that his creative attempt to break borders is, in fact, supported by his understanding of a fixed relationship between language and culture/ethnicity. Osman's example is a good case in point where someone operates on one level with a fairly borderless identity – a Turkish–Australian immersing himself in Japanese language and culture as a preferred identity – and yet at another, by insisting on Japanese and trying to claim Japaneseness, he also operates simultaneously at a level of linguistic and cultural fixity.

Excerpt 6 is intriguing in another sense. The conversation was held between Rie and Osman during office hours. Notwithstanding the fact that Rie is his manager, Osman's language directed to Rie is very informal and indicates the close relationship between the two. First of all, Osman addressed Rie, his manager, as *Rie chan* (*chan* is used to show an intimate relationship). Superiors are normally addressed by their family names and positional terms, such as *Suzuki Bucho* (Suzuki manager), when addressed by subordinates. Although it is also true that the use of language is in a state of flux, and a more creative use of Japanese language by younger generations has been studied by various researchers (Inoue, 2006; Kubozono, 2006), it is still not common for a superior or person in a high position to be addressed by their first name with *chan* by subordinates in a Japanese work context. He also used plain form (informal verb form) with colloquial language じゃん in line 5 which is informal slang from the Tokyo and Nagoya areas, normally used by young people.

Moreover, in lines 7–9, Osman is challenging Rie with an address term <sup>Kimi</sup>君 which is normally used by a superior to a subordinate (Kunihiro, 1991). He did so knowing that Rie would not like the choice of term, suggesting that aside from the particular relation between the two, he was also interested in pushing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in Japanese. He was also, one might argue, taking advantage of the *outsider* privilege to play with Japanese norms. Here, then, we see a complex mixture of a fixed and fluid practices. On the one hand, Osman had a strong desire to associate himself with 'Japanese' culture and language, to leave his own ascribed identities behind in search of alternatives, but on the other, he was also able to mobilise his outsider identity to challenge standard practices by his deliberate language choices within less hierarchical relationships.

### Fixity and fluidity in metrolingual language use

Assumptions about multilingualism are so deeply embedded in predominant paradigms of language studies that they are rarely questioned. A central argument in many contemporary accounts of multilingualism is that language research has tended to work with monolingualism as a norm, and that such a construct is inappropriate because a majority of people in the world are multilingual. While we share many of the concerns over the monolingual bias at the heart of much research on language, we are also concerned that the preferred focus on multilingualism all too often takes us little further than a pluralised monolingualism (Heller, 2007a). As Makoni and Pennycook (2007) argue, current approaches to diversity and multilingualism frequently start with the enumerative strategy of counting languages and romanticising a plurality based on these putative language counts, a presupposition that 'clear borders exist between languages, that they can be counted, catalogued with certainty and that, above all, their vitality can be promoted and their disappearance prevented' (Duchêne 2008, p. 8). By rendering diversity a quantitative question of language enumeration, such approaches overlook the qualitative question of where diversity lies while continuing to support those very language ideologies that we need to supersede (Canagarajah, 2007a, 2007b; Heller & Duchêne, 2007).

There are a number of parallels between the argument we have made here for understanding metrolingualism and the current shift towards a notion of lingua franca English (LFE) as described by Canagarajah (2007b). While the move towards the description of world Englishes (Kachru, 2005) was a reaction against the normative claims of centrist models of English, or English as an international language, this orientation needs to be seen as a hybridity-oriented pluralising strategy to understanding language diversity (Pennycook, 2003, 2007). Like multiculturalism and multilingualism, a world Englishes focus reacted against the homogenising tendencies of scholars, textbooks, industries and language policies that sought to belittle the diversity of English, and produced a model based on pluralisation: where there had been one (or a few) Englishes, now there would be many. The more recent emergence of studies of English as a lingua franca have accordingly been met with cries that this is a return to a focus on homogeneity, to centre norms, to English as an international language (Kachru & Nelson, 2006). Yet clearly, as with emerging critiques of multilingualism, there need to be alternative ways of understanding diversity other than pluralisation (making English into Englishes and monolingualism into multilingualism).

Canagarajah distinguishes between English as a lingua franca and LFE on the grounds that the former tends towards an understanding of a pre-given language that is then used by different speakers, while the latter suggests that LFE emerges from its contexts of use: 'LFE does not exist as a system out there. It is constantly brought into being in each context of communication' (Canagarajah, 2007b, p. 91). From this point of view, 'there is no meaning for form, grammar or language ability outside the realm of practice. LFE is not a product located in the mind of the speaker; it is a social process constantly reconstructed in sensitivity to environmental factors' (Canagarajah, 2007b, p. 94). This is consistent with the arguments we have been making in this paper for the need to escape the predefinition of a language user by geographical location, ethnicity or other ascribed identities, and to move instead towards an understanding of local language practices (Pennycook, 2010).

Just as it is the temporal, spatial and mobile possibilities in the term *lingua franca* that brings diversity to English here, rather than a pluralisation of Englishes, so the modifier that makes the language of metrolingualism diverse is not the pluralising multi (or poly or pluri) but the temporal, spatial and mobile possibilities of the metro. Put another way, our strategy here has been to focus on the singularity of metrolingualism while exploring its heteroglossic possibilities. Heteroglossia, as Bailey (2007, p. 258) reminds us, ‘encompasses both mono and multilingual forms’ allowing ‘a level of theorising about the social nature of language that is not possible within the confines of a focus on code-switching’.

The idea of metrolingualism sheds light on processes of social change and the kinds of linguistic, cultural and social issues that are involved in creating different kinds of language and identities. Both data from Japaria and the case of Osman indicate the complexity and flux of cultural and linguistic understanding, as people move between fixed and fluid views. They attest to the point that hybridity and fluidity by themselves cannot on their own disassemble relations between language, culture and nation. Similarly, they show how fixity, within a metrolingual frame, becomes meaningful only through the interaction with fluidity. Metrolingualism, therefore, can be conceived as the paradoxical practice and space where fixity, discreteness, fluidity, hybridity, locality and globality coexist and co-constitute each other. This is different from multilingualism, which is either based on a pluralisation of fixed linguistic categories, or hybridisation, which cannot accord any legitimacy to the mobilisation of fixity. Metrolingualism, by contrast, can assign an alternative meaning to essentialism as part of a process of social change. What therefore sets metrolingualism apart is its productive power to overcome common ways of framing language, its capacity to deal with contemporary language practices, and its ability to accommodate both fixity and fluidity in its approach to mobile language use.

### Notes

1. Data in this paper are drawn from a large study of casual conversation in bilingual workplaces, based on over 120 hours of recorded data, as well as 19 interviews at five different worksites in Sydney. Names of people and companies and places are pseudonyms.
2. As we have suggested, these linguistic labels need to be questioned but we have stayed here with the ways in which participants talked about their language use.
3. Osman was about to move to Japan to join his Japanese girlfriend at the time of the interview.

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