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(Dis)fluency

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Abstract

Sociolinguists are deeply politically committed to (dis)fluency. They have generally seen it as their task to revise popular wisdom on the presumed disfluency of nonstandard, accented, or multilingual speakers and to demonstrate regularity and competence where deficit is presumed. I argue that this revision has its merits but is not immune to reconsideration for its naturalization of cultural ideas that value fluency and its promise of modernization through sociolinguistic knowledge. After addressing the limitations of this literature, I review works that explore alternative conceptualizations of (dis)fluency. I build on these to argue that rather than being an inherent characteristic of particular linguistic forms, (dis)fluency depends on relationships between these forms and their evaluation by speakers with competing perspectives and different positions in the social arrangements they so help to reproduce.

INTRODUCTION

Fluency is something of a woolly concept, like native speaker, accent, or language. It is often used in a nontechnical sense as a concept that parallels speakers' proficiency or, in a more restricted sense, to refer to an absence of speech phenomena such as fillers, anacolutha, false starts, and truncations. Fillmore's account [2000 (1979)] is notably comprehensive. It distinguishes temporal fluency (the automaticity of the speech flow) from semantic fluency (the ability to produce coherent meaning), sociopragmatic fluency (the ability to link content appropriately to context), and creative fluency (a speaker's imaginativeness) and suggests "the maximally gifted wielder of language [. . .] has all of these abilities" (p. 52; cf. Koponen & Riggenbach 2000). This account includes a narrow, technical sense of fluency as well as its broader, everyday use to characterize speakers' linguistic abilities, and it hints at social evaluation processes (perceiving appropriateness or creativity). I take this liberal view too, which implies that fluency below does not refer only to the automaticity of speech regardless of specific varieties or styles. It also includes a range of verbal acts, such as speaking a (non)standard variety, having an accent, learning and mixing languages, or failing to make sense, that are often taken as signs of speakers' (in)articulateness, (in)competence, or (un)intelligibility, depending on the perspective and social position of the evaluators. Contra Fillmore's account, this means I apply (dis)fluency also to so-called nonnative speakers. I equally argue that a focus on linguistic form or individual (in)ability fails to uncover much about (dis)fluency as a social arrangement through which some speakers come to be distinguished from others. Rather than the (in)ability of specific language wielders or the technical quality of particular kinds of speech, (dis)fluency will, in this review, be taken as something that can be defined only by considering relations between evaluations of language and actual language use or, in Agha's (2015) terms, interactions between metadiscourses and object-discourses observable among those who find themselves differently positioned in the same social formation (Hymes 1972, McDermott 1988, Rampton 2013). In this sense, there exists no single definition of what (dis)fluency is; rather, a range of competing definitions circulate within the field and outside it, although some are more ratified than others.

This is not, of course, how (dis)fluency has been approached thus far. In logocentric civilizations, such as the one from which this review emanates, all language use, as McDermott (1988) argues, falls between two ends of a continuum of mastery and disappointment: At the latter end, speakers are found to fumble and mutter, whereas at the former, "words flow, new things are said, and the world is temporarily altered"; between these two ends, "there is the level of mundane talk, at which a person can fill up time with words, but only in service of a status quo" (pp. 42–43). Thus we celebrate those who talk and write in ways that surpass our own abilities. We have a passion for fluency. We build democracies on the deployment of verbal expertise. We commemorate great political speakers, comedians, and poets, and we develop language education policies designed to give all a fair chance at verbal mastery. Such passions also have a dark side, however, because they lead to disappointment, at best, for those speaking without flair, inexpertly, awkwardly, or just differently. Our dedication to equality and individual emancipation consequently makes those identifiable as disfluent available as targets for compassion, problematization, and improvement.

Research within the broad domain of linguistics has not been exempt from this passion and its consequences. Broadly, it has approached disfluency either as an individual incapacity to perform in ways that are considered normal or as a social judgment flowing from a collective inability to appreciate hidden fluencies that linguists are specially equipped to reveal. Thus in clinical linguistics, fluency marks a developmental end point of behavior, the acquisition of phonolexical and morphosyntactic skills that generative linguists claim all children acquire spontaneously, barring developmental syndromes, traumatic experience, genetic difference, or brain damage.

This conception of fluency has invited research on phenomena as diverse as stuttering, aphasia, dyslexia, and difficult reading, next to pragmatic disorders related to autism, dementia, and Down syndrome (Cummings 2008, Kuhn & Stahl 2003). Applied linguists explore comparable language disorders in multilingual populations (Goral & Conner 2013). Psycholinguists focus on repetitions, fillers, false starts, slips of the tongue, and hesitations that discontinue or decelerate speech (Corley & Stewart 2008). Psychiatrists and psychotherapists identify taciturnity as a hindrance to recovery and investigate alexithymia—not having words for feelings—as the cause of emotional illiteracy (see Carr 2006 and Cameron 2000 for critical discussion). Disfluency is also a major concern in foreign language acquisition research, which strives to make learners attain a conventional speech rate, longer lengths of turn, and the use of complex, idiomatic vocabulary in the target language (Brumfit 1984, Riggenbach 2000)—ideals that have been institutionalized in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Sociolinguists,[1] in contrast, are committed to demonstrating fluency. Rather than describing what speakers fail to do and trying to cure it, their instinct is to reveal what speakers can do that others think they cannot. This inclination is driven by sociolinguists' apprehensiveness about the distribution of (dis)fluency across social groups (Alim & Smitherman 2012) and by their concern over the fate of these groups in modern institutions, especially schools. So when educational sociologists and psychologists in the 1960s sought to explain soaring school failure rates among black and working-class children as a consequence of the "absent" language skills and "nonlogical modes of expressive behavior" in these children (Bereiter et al. 1966), as well as their "restricted code" (Bernstein 1961) or "verbal deprivation" (Deutsch et al. 1968) which evidences their "inferior genes" (Jensen 1969), sociolinguists justified their raison d'être through exposing these hypotheses as unscientific prejudice. Using their specialized technical knowledge, they documented the systematicity, eloquence, and accuracy of these communities' everyday linguistic practices, if interpreted along culture-specific criteria (Cazden et al. 1972, Heath 1983, Labov 1972, Stubbs 1976, Trudgill 1975). Instead of being labeled as deficient, it was argued, domestic and other minority communities needed to be treated as different but equally capable of verbal, cognitive, and cultural complexity. We are all fluent, was the baseline, and sociolinguistics can prevent us from seeing otherwise.

Naturally, if conventional wisdom lacks insight that causes harm to others, disproving its validity is "an important job for us to undertake" (Labov 1972, p. 240), and many have responded to this call. The knowledge produced under this flag has informed school books and teacher training programs (Rampton 2006, p. 271), and linguistic diversity today is more positively received than before (Coupland 2010). There are signs, however, that sociolinguists' countervalorization of problematized ways of speaking competes with (more) popular adjudications: Various authors draw attention to a revival of deficit discourses in popular opinion and policy (Avineri et al. 2015, Cameron 2000, Evans & Hornberger 2005, Grainger & Jones 2013); others highlight continued negative stereotyping of nonstandard and mixed language use (Bennett 2012; Lippi-Green 1997, Milani 2010, Ronkin & Karn 1999, Stroud 2004) or describe public outrage over scientific attention to such language use (Heller 1999, Jaspers 2014a, Wiese 2015).

Although popular stereotyping is often taken to justify continued intervention, this review argues that, however laudable, such efforts naturalize a cultural scheme that valorizes particular linguistic performances over others; they also promise modernization through sociolinguistic knowledge. This has complicated our understanding of how fluency and its opposite come to be

[1]I use "sociolinguists" in a broad sense here, which includes linguistic anthropologists, variationist and interactional sociolinguists, applied linguists, and discourse and conversation analysts.

imbued with meaning and how these notions organize relations between groups. I argue instead that the production of (dis)fluency is an inherent aspect of social arrangements and offers a "display board" (McDermott & Varenne 1995, p. 341) that is of interest to sociolinguists seeking to understand the organization of the discursive zones that people create for each other.

THERE IS NO PROBLEM HERE: PROBLEMATIZING DISFLUENCY

Sociolinguists' insistence on the regularity and community-specific validity of stigmatized speech practices has deep roots in nineteenth-century anthropology and in Franz Boas's work in particular (Bauman & Briggs 2003). Boas worked in a climate where Herder's view of languages as organic entities had been further scientized by Jacob Grimm in the study of the evolution of these languages' inner complexity over time. Convinced that humans distinguish themselves from other living beings through their capacity for abstract thought, primarily through language, Grimm interpreted linguistic complexity as indicative of (a) people's intellectual development, before identifying modern European languages as most advanced, complex, and developmentally complete. Consequently, "[b]y constructing bounded and distinct languages, each of which possessed an 'inner unity' that could be identified and compared only by a linguistic scientist, a new global cartography could be proposed" in which "each 'nation' could be specified in terms of the qualities of abstraction and rationality possessed by its language" (Bauman & Briggs 2003, p. 202).

Boas dismantled this view by demonstrating that when it came to subtlety and sophistication, many supposed primitive languages were so complex that allegedly advanced or classic icons of linguistic refinement like Latin ought to blush deeply. This work inspired him to emphasize the universal human capacity to develop different but equally complex languages—languages which were "immune to inadequacy" (Hymes 1967, p. 635)—although, in making this point, Boas retained from Grimm the idea of separate languages but placed them into individual heads that shared this internalized variety with others belonging to the same cultural unit (Bauman & Briggs 2003, pp. 259–67).

When scientific attention in the twentieth century turned to intranational issues following the end of explicit colonization, sociolinguists recycled Boas's rhetorical strategy to proclaim linguistic grammaticality as a defense against popular perceptions of disfluency. If the speech of domestic nonelite groups showed orderliness and complexity, then at least on linguistic grounds these groups needed to be talked about with precision and respect. In making this claim, Pratt (1987, p. 56) argues, sociolinguists "in effect suggested 'there is no problem here' or if there is a problem here, it has nothing to do with language." Educational anthropologists argued that what seemed chaotic at first, upon closer consideration needed to be described as intricately organized and orderly oppositional behavior (Erickson 1982, McDermott 1974, Mehan 1979). Ethnographic psychologists demonstrated the complexity of minority groups' cognitive processes in the local contexts where it was meaningful (Cole & Scribner 1974). In a similar vein, Gumperz (1982) and others (Scollon & Scollon 1979) drew attention to different culturally determined communication strategies and claimed that those perceived as inarticulate or rude in their interactions with Westerners were, in fact, following sophisticated, albeit non-Western, discursive strategies (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1982).

Virulent criticism befell those who observed a problem nonetheless. Notable is the reception of the "half-baked" premises of applied linguists proposing that some pupils are appropriately called "semilinguals" because of their difficulties with, and incomplete acquisition of, the school register (Martin-Jones & Romaine 1986). And because schools were seen as sites where one continued to turn pupils' nonstandard language into a problem, they were fiercely attacked as arenas of white middle-class prejudice. A direct link was drawn between teachers' lack of knowledge or respect for

pupils' language use on the one hand, and feelings of alienation or inadequacy among minority and working-class pupils, and subsequent school failure on the other hand (Heath 1983, Piestrup 1973). Ample pleas followed that teachers needed to adapt their attitudes, and they were advised to synchronize their linguistic styles with those of their pupils, with mixed results (Au & Mason 1981, Erickson 1987). Others argued for a bilingual approach, teaching pupils in their home variety first before transitioning to the standard variety (Simpkins & Simpkins 1981), a position that inspired the Ebonics controversy (Perry & Delpit 1998, Rickford 1999) and which continues to be honored in demands that pupils' home language be introduced—in parallel to or mixed with the school language—to facilitate acquisition of that language as well as the learning of other subject matter (Cummins 2000, García & Li Wei 2014).

Proclaiming fluency, however, was bought at a price. In advocating the rehabilitation of marginalized groups "by attributing system and coherence to their conduct, system and coherence being rational properties that modernity rated much more highly than, say, sanctity or splendour" (Rampton 2010, p. 281), sociolinguists reinforced the discursive regime within which dominant and marginalized groups identified each other's value on the basis of particular linguistic forms. And because they viewed linguistic structure as stemming from shared communicative norms of which speakers were largely unconscious but into which they were homogeneously socialized in their respective communities (Bucholtz 2003, Pratt 1987, Williams 1992), rehabilitating speakers crucially depended on representing linguistic practices as new, systematic varieties whose speakers were now to be treated respectfully (Snell 2013 on Labov 1972 and Trudgill 1975; Wiese 2012 offers a recent example). This strategy is not different in principle, however, from Herder's earlier objection to the subjugation of all languages as "provincial" compared with a supposedly cosmopolitan French, and it tallies with his legitimation of these languages as authentic and equally modern on the condition they are standardized. Hence Pratt (1987) typifies this cocktail of assumptions as a "linguistics of community," an essentially romantic linguistics that "posits a unified and homogeneous social world in which language exists as a shared patrimony" (p. 50) and which, upon finding heterogeneous linguistic communities, typically seeks to establish unified social and linguistic worlds at a lower level, attributing to subcommunities the properties of the former higher-level community.

A linguistics of community arguably served scholars well in their contestation of popular wisdom and can be seen as "strategically essentialist" (Bucholtz 2003, p. 401). Yet because the existence of complex languages that sociolinguists were technically capable of revealing was conditional on-the latter's authorization of other people's dignity, a whole range of speakers—those producing mixed, irregular, or unconventional types of language as a result of language contact, shift, or attrition—were sidelined as irrelevant if not as accidents that said nothing about the intrinsic quality of the language (Hymes 1967). Scholarly attention to such speakers was accordingly problematized, as Hymes (1996) deplored: "There is difference in command of verbal resources, and in access to them, and it is not the case that inequality would be overcome by ending prejudice and discrimination against all forms of speech. Some discrimination among verbal abilities and products is not prejudice, but accurate judgment" (pp. 46, 213).

Theoretically the linguistics of community ran into difficulty because it failed to "think relationally"; that is, it concentrated on preconstructed problem groups rather than "tak[ing] as one's object the social work of construction of the preconstructed object" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 228). Sociolinguists, in other words, contested predominant judgments of particular ways of speaking with their own, authorizing them through linguistic technology. But they disputed only the targets for negative identification rather than the ideology in which it made sense to do so. The problems that ex-disfluent, rehabilitated groups continued to experience in various institutions, however, provided opportunities for appreciating that these groups were problematic

after all. Such opportunity is already provided by Labov (1972): Among the "verbal skills which children from ghetto areas must learn [. . .] some [. . .] are indeed characteristic of middle class behavior" (p. 213), he points out, although he distinguishes undesirable middle-class verbosity from useful middle-class habits such as precision and explicitness; the latter qualities are subsequently identified as "the main advantages of standard English at its best" (p. 229), a variety that "has an advantage over BEV [Black English Vernacular] in explicit analysis" (pp. 217–18), and the reason why "BEV children need help [. . .] in being more explicit (p. 230).

The construction of respectable varieties has been doubtful on strategic grounds too. Because it "invites only an account of how [a variety] works well" (McDermott & Varenne 1995, p. 336), it creates the very conditions for identifying impure or mixed speakers as now disfluent in their own sanctioned variety (see Labov 1972 on a black middle-class speaker; see Gal 2006 and Jaffe 1999 for similar effects after minority language standardization). In addition, sociolinguists' adoption of the "salvation through education" mantra from the deprivationists they denounced reproduced the consensus that educational change will redress social inequality and exaggerated the possibilities of linguistic reform. After all, progress can be made in changing teacher prejudice toward pupils' language. The promise of social change that this different mindset is usually seen to entail looks overstated, however, in light of the stable finding that "[e]ducation can be significantly reformed and educational inequalities even significantly reduced without this having any appreciable impact upon social opportunities and inequalities" (Moore 1996, p. 153; Marsh 2011; Reay 2010). The positive effect that an attitude change may generate, moreover, relocates school failure elsewhere, with other pupils or later in pupils' school career, and so legitimates a schooling system that requires failure to identify those eligible for salvation (Varenne & McDermott 1999). Other research calls attention to pupils' success or well-being in spite of prejudice or indifference toward their languages and backgrounds (D'Amato 1993, Erickson 1987, Gibson 1987, Ogbu 1978), suggesting that the relation between attitudes and learning outcomes may be weaker than usually assumed.

Sociolinguists' (com)passion for (dis)fluency has been considerably productive then, and it has helped reveal the unsuspected fluency of stigmatized minority groups. But it has been consonant with predominant cultural ideas that naturalize the value of systematic, coherent, and pure language use, and so paved the way for identifying new disfluencies. In a classic modernist move too, sociolinguists presented their technical knowledge over language as crucial to societal perfectibility and discredited common-sense views of (dis)fluency as irrational. Insofar as this approach worked to break down popular preconceptions, it ratified a particular educational culture and depoliticized common-sense metapragmatic judgments as errors of fact. Standing united against popular attributions of disfluency thus obfuscated the role of all judgments on the attractiveness of language, whether technical or not, as criterial in the production of a sociopolitical order. This stance also contributed to obscuring the possibility of a different social evaluation of (in)correct, (un)systematic, and (un)hesitant language use. To illuminate this possibility, it will be useful now to attend to sociolinguistic work of a different kind.

ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF (DIS)FLUENCY

"[I]f you really get down to the disaster," Irish playwright Samuel Beckett wrote following the end of World War II, "the slightest eloquence becomes unbearable." To distinguish himself from compatriot writers much-lauded for their articulateness, he starting writing "without style" and even switched to his second language, French, to make his characters speak as plainly and concisely as possible around moments of awkward silence (Knowlson 1996). Such examples draw attention to the predominant appreciation of particular ways of speaking seen as eloquent; to Beckett's devaluation of these as unfit for capturing the meaninglessness he felt needed underlining; and to

his promotion of lesser-valued linguistic practices as more appropriate to that end. Sociolinguists have not so much been interested in playwrights' revaluation of linguistic practices as they have in how ordinary people deploy conventionally disfluent language phenomena in daily conversation, in how they value a lack of fluency in societies preoccupied with articulateness, and in how (dis)fluency can be differently appreciated in relation to particular communicative needs.

Thus, sociolinguists have explained the occurrence of silence, hesitation, and vocalized pauses, such as "uh(m)", not just as a mere absence of talk or failure to speak, but as accountable actions the practical, local significance of which must be explained through "the structural expectations engendered by the surrounding talk" that "map 'meaning' onto silence" (Levinson 1983, p. 329; Jaworski 1993; Kurzon 1997; Macbeth 1991; Schegloff 2010; Tannen & Saville-Troike 1985). Speakers thus analyze these pauses for their sequential relevance to the conversation at hand, subsequently understanding them as a turn-taking issue, a particular response, a trouble indicator, a word-finding problem, or any other strategy in the overall organization of talk (Schegloff 2010). Silence and hesitation are therefore actively pursued, such as for producing "predelicates" (Schegloff 1980) that signal incipient difficulty and for flagging a tentative stance or instead an assuredly uncooperative one in the construction of gender identities (Gal 1989, Lakoff 1975). The power of silence moreover emerges in talk-dependent institutional settings where speakers refuse to take up turns or exercise their right to silence (Cotterill 2005, McDermott 1988). Focusing on a specific type of hesitation, some research (Alim & Baugh 2007, Rickford & Rickford 2000) demonstrates the value of stuttering for preachers seeking to index sincerity and an in-the-moment verbalization of a divine truth against a background that associates smooth language with intellectualism, lack of spontaneity, and contrived verbal artistry.

Other scholars have described the alignment of silence, verbal reticence, and a subdued type of speaking with spiritual salvation, respect, autonomy, or nonwhiteness. Basso (1970) and Scollon & Scollon (1979) explain the cultivation of silence for constructing stances (social distance, caution, modesty) in situations impacted by discourses of ethnic (white or Native American) group membership, gender, and politeness. Bauman (1983) describes seventeenth-century Quakers' paradoxical investment in both speaking and silence. Profoundly distrusting all things carnal, Quakers refrained from speaking idly and invested in silence as a means to hearing the voice of God within themselves. But because this pursuit of silence conflicted with the need to bear public witness to God and convert others, Quakers simultaneously developed a religious type of speaking, a plain speech free of sinful, frivolous, and untrue words (such as greeting rituals, honorific pronouns, or oaths), through which non-Quakers ideally were to hear God's voice but more frequently were offended and in which they found occasion for persecution.

Silverstein (2003) demonstrates how also involuntary agrammatical and incoherent speech, as former US President G.W. Bush legendarily produced, can muster voter approval rates competitive with those obtained by counterparts usually found to be more articulate. Conditional to this success is a political communication culture that throws suspicion on complex expository discourse as the register of intellectuals asking "all those trick questions" (Silverstein 2003, p. 125) and that maximally invests in conveying stances such as concern or determination regardless of specific issues. In this context, malapropisms, anacolutha, and bumbling statements, despite significant amounts of ridicule about them in mainstream media, can be recruited for marketing their producer as a sincerely "normal guy," who is "really, really attempting to grasp things—whatever they are—with his whole being" (p. 70). Graham (2011) makes a similar point about the changing fortunes of an indigenous Brazilian politician in the 1970s and 1980s. Even though Mario Juruna's basic Portuguese was grammatically amplified in the written press as long as it served business elites' attempts to contest the military government, it was later quoted verbatim and exacerbated in an effort to undermine his public image. Relaxing restrictions on audiovisual broadcasts, however,

offered a new outlet for his views and, at least for a while, made "[h]is actual speech signa[l] that Juruna was not a member of the elite and indicated that he spoke as a representative of, and for, the masses" (p. 173).

Linguistic vice can thus be turned into a virtue against a background of widely valued but suspected fluency. But it helps to have a team of image doctors to create the conditions for such appreciation: Juruna's budding linguistic attractiveness was overshadowed by its recontextualization in the mainstream media as far less alluring, illustrating that local valorizations remain vulnerable to overruling by longer-standing evaluation trends.

Other signs that disfluency can be valuable, indeed a hallmark of high social rank, are found by Irvine (1990) who explains that rural Wolof in Senegal see fluency as a characteristic of low social rank. Wolof nobles therefore abstain from an elaborated, grammatically correct, and embellished speech style they call griot speech and invest in relative incorrectness and a taciturn style, marked by short utterances in a low pitch and volume, often by stammering, lisping, and a hoarse, breathy voice. Rather than viewing griot and noble speech as absolute properties of specific ranks, however, Irvine (1990) argues that both types of speech are used as registers "signaling *relative* rank (of the speaker as compared to the addressee or relevant other) and signaling types of situations—those in which differences of rank are to be attended to" (p. 136, emphasis in original).

In a different context, Bourdieu (1991) indicates that upper-class speakers in France, to maintain their distinction from members of the petite bourgeoisie who seek to emulate them, innovate their speech habits through being "hypocorrect," that is, speaking in a sloppy, inaccurate way that "combines confident relaxation and lofty ignorance of pedantic rules with the exhibition of ease on the most dangerous ground" (Bourdieu 1991, p. 63). Condemned to imitate a moving object, the petits bourgeois become painfully aware of their visibility as verbal copycats and "have no choice but to opt for the broken forms of a borrowed and clumsy language or to escape into abstention and silence" (Bourdieu 1991, pp. 83, 97–101). One speaker's disfluency is not another's then, or (dis)fluency can be both a valued trait and a stigma at the same time. Such competing valorizations depend on the fact that ways of speaking, once they are socially recognizable, can be "reanalysed" (Agha 2007), that is indexically revalued and formally transformed, so that competence in its new forms is reallocated to an avant-garde. Newly disfluent speech can so be recruited for signaling indifference to traditional correctness while the "broken forms of a borrowed and clumsy language" may be valued by petits bourgeois as emblems of achieved identity but scorned by bourgeois as signs of desperate ambition.

These studies show that (dis)fluency can be differently conceptualized, to the extent that speech phenomena usually considered signs of fluency (e.g., accuracy, long speech turns, high speech rate) can be devalued while their opposites are found attractive. These studies also show that the social value of actual linguistic forms, however (in)coherent, depends on local metapragmatic judgments that must be investigated rather than assumed before exploring their potential dissemination across social groups and their conflict with larger-scale valorization schemes. As the next section shows, alternative typifications of (dis)fluency are also possible in what are conventionally called multilingual societies.

(DIS)FLUENCY IN MULTILINGUAL SETTINGS

Attention to diminished grammatical and lexical competence among speakers in multilingual settings came to feature prominently in language obsolescence research. Contradicting standard disregard for disfluency, Dorian's (1982) work on "semispeakers" of disappearing languages such as Scottish Gaelic emphasized their successful participation in speech events involving speakers with a more elaborate command of the language. Others have highlighted the symbolic use of

an ancestral, largely defunct language by speakers with limited knowledge who are pursuing the enactment of heritage identities (Büscher et al. 2013)—although this symbolic use may be vetoed by more fluent members (Kroskrity 2009, Tsitsipis 1989). Ferguson's (1975) work on "foreigner talk" is an early example of attention to the forms and functions of imperfect language outside of language-shift settings.

In the wake of processes usually known in the social sciences as globalization and the discursive turn, sociolinguistic attention to partial knowledge has all but exploded. Globalization has been understood to create a new empirical situation: The complex diversity and new types of communication resulting from current trends in migration (at least in the West), mobility, and the spread of audio-visual technology have spoiled the imagination of separate linguistic communities. In addition, they have intensified "the experience of transition between places, institutions and groups" and the "salience of nonshared knowledge" (Rampton 2010, pp. 289–90), apart from bolstering a critical mass of new speakers—whether of ethnic and traditional minority languages or English—that can no longer be ignored or presented as objects for linguistic improvement (O'Rourke et al. 2015). Increasing contact and awareness of nonshared knowledge of sociocultural and linguistic difference have thus extended the analytic compass and inspired explorations of speakers' management of "contact zones" (Pratt 1987; also see Blommaert 2014, Charalambous 2012, Creese & Blackledge 2011, Harris 2006, Madsen 2013, Maryns 2006, Meeuwis 1994, Valentine 2008, Varonis & Gass 1985). It has furthermore motivated analyses of speakers' creativity, enjoyment, and bricolage with ways of speaking that they are not usually seen to own and to master only imperfectly and analyses of the invocation, amplification, or minimization of various kinds of (dis)fluency. Important work here is the analysis of adolescents' adventuring or "crossing" into their friends' heritage varieties (Rampton 1995) and the study of usually young speakers' adoption of widely commodified and gendered linguistic resources, often Black English, across a range of on- and offline contexts (Androutsopoulos 2007, Bucholtz 1999, Chun 2013, Cutler 1999; also see Pujolar 2003 on the use of Castilian for displaying a "simplified masculinity"). Jaspers (2014b) demonstrates how adults such as teachers can just as well be observed experimenting with their pupils' home languages.

Others describe how a foreigner talk style occurs in the service of intersubjective tactics such as interethnic distinction (Hinnenkamp 1991 on whites reproducing images of nonwhites' incompetence; cf. Hill 1993 on Mock Spanish); the construction of intergenerational sameness (Chun 2009); intraethnic Othering (Jaspers 2011, Rampton 1995, Reyes & Lo 2009, Talmy 2009); and various kinds of commentary on interethnic relations when minority speakers evoke mock-disfluent images of themselves. Rampton (1995, pp. 75–86) illustrates in this context how adolescents with Asian backgrounds in the UK Midlands could be observed producing a "Stylized Asian English" on purpose when in the presence of white adults they actually knew, if not liked, briefly suggesting that they spoke like recent arrivals. Rampton explains that, rather than being signs of straightforward resistance to adults in authority, such practices constituted a double-edged sword: They mobilized problematic intergroup relations and the possibility of a worst-case scenario involving a racist adult and an incompetent Asian adolescent, but they simultaneously invited participants to demonstrate their understanding of the jocular frame at hand and to display their dexterity and readiness to playfully transcend such interactional hiccups. If the outcome was positive, such interactions could reassure participants that intergroup friction did not threaten local relationships and foster participants' acceptance of institutional expectations (see also Jaspers 2011). Discussing an Asian American stand-up comedian's revoicings of Mock Asian, Chun (2004) points out that mock-disfluent images potentially reproduce racializing discourses. Speakers' nonracializing use of them is thus constrained by their successful framing as jocular and by others' perception of mockers' ethnic identity (intraethnic mocking generally being found

more acceptable or harmless), reputation, and performed persona (e.g., being committed to racial justice). In addition, some studies indicate that urban speakers distinguish and invest in a habitual but less than conventionally fluent speech style that is characterized by heritage languages, fragmentary use of surrounding varieties, and opposition to a nationally sanctioned "posh" variety [see Rampton (2011) on "contemporary urban vernacular" and Blommaert's (2014) identification of an "eucumenical Dutch," a "range of heavily 'truncated' and accented Dutch varieties [that] serves as the transcommunity vernacular" (p. 434)]. From this perspective, there has been much attention as well to language that defies the erstwhile beacons of linguistic competence such as "polylingual" (Jørgensen 2008), "metrolingual" (Otsuji & Pennycook 2010) and "translingual" practices (Creese & Blackledge 2011, García & Li Wei 2014). Sociolinguists emphasize that such language use, despite views that it is a failed bilingualism or a type of "zerolingualism," may be quantitatively more significant than the relatively exceptional single-variety use. Attention to mixed speech practices has been reinforced by a growing dissatisfaction with the concept of language as a bounded, enumerable code. Inspired by poststructuralist historicization of the emergence of and rise to hegemony of a range of modernist concepts, scholars have exposed the ideological character of imagining one-variety speech communities (Gal & Irvine 1995, Makoni & Pennycook 2007, Silverstein 1979, Woolard & Schieffelin 1994) and have deconstructed bounded languages as a "myth" (Harris 1998) or a "western ambition" (de Certeau 1984 in Canagarajah 2013, p. 19), although the spread of labels such as "ethnolect" illustrates that old habits die hard (Jaspers 2008).[2]

This growing discontent nevertheless poses challenges. If technical knowledge of separate languages previously served as symbolic capital to claim marginalized speakers' social value, its deconstruction now undermines sociolinguists' authority and makes acute the question of how to respond to a social order anchored in conceptions of separate languages in which it matters to be seen as fluent (Jaspers & Madsen 2016). The tried-and-tested strategy of proving the systematicity of undervalued practices may still be a useful initial step, as has been the promotion of new speakers into "linguistic models in and of themselves" (O'Rourke et al. 2015, p. 10). The traditionally dignifying connotations of vernacular may also carry over into its reconceptualized version (Rampton 2011). Others argue for the normalization of mixed practices (García & Li Wei 2014; Jørgensen 2008; Makoni & Pennycook 2007, p. 21) or associate them with "eucumenism" (Blommaert 2014), "conviviality" (Williams & Stroud 2013), "creativity and power" (García & Li Wei 2014, p. 25), "meaning making" and "new subjectivities [. . .] that defy ethnolinguistic identities defined by a nation state/colonial paradigm" (Flores & García 2013, p. 246). This is not unlike earlier attempts to authoritatively qualify linguistic practices as in tune with widely sanctioned, now postmodern, values. Still others declare a universal incompetence through suggesting that, instead of languages, all speakers have limited repertoires, that is, "biographically assembled patchworks of functionally distributed communicative resources" (Blommaert & Backus 2011, p. 23; also Busch 2012, Snell 2013). Consequently, no speaker at any point in life can claim expertise in all of a language's resources (cf. Agha 2007 on speakers' mastery of only a subset of the available registers). We are all disfluent, in this perspective, and sociolinguistics can prevent us from seeing otherwise.

It is clear, though, that any universalization of disfluency, linguistic mixing, or partial knowledge mirrors the erstwhile universalization of fluency, not to mention that it must face up against the widely popular and less convivial countervalorizations of what sociolinguists hope to

[2] Rampton's (2011) use of vernacular seems to repeat the "look for systematicity at a lower level" credo of the "linguistics of community" (see the section, There Is No Problem Here: Problematizing Disfluency). Note, though, his reconceptualization of the notion of vernacular into "sets of linguistic forms *and* enregistering practices (including commentary, crossing, stylization)" (p. 291, emphasis in original) through which this register is set off from other recognized speech or writing styles.

normalize. This is neither to make light of the negative effects of popular wisdom nor to ignore that sociolinguistic knowledge is qualitatively distinct from it, but to emphasize that normalizing linguistic practices, and associating them with particular social qualities, is indexical of competing ideas over acceptable language use within a cultural formation. Proposing the disfluency of all does not avoid that people need to, or will find valid reason to, invest in particular conceptions of fluency. Rather than dismissing such investments as naïve, the point is to understand the competing speech-evaluation processes through which linguistic resources are converted into social facts as acts of fluency, disfluency, or something in between and to investigate their effect on the organization of local and larger-scale social arrangements.

Useful analyses in this regard draw attention to the ambivalent, negotiable social value of linguistic practices. Thus, Chun (2009) describes how Asian foreigner talk at an American high school could be framed as positive accommodation toward recently arrived Asian immigrant peers but that such framings were inherently unstable, making the facilitative talk vulnerable for unintended readings. Such risk could be reduced if speakers were known for engaging in accommodative strategies. But when speakers' reputation was less clear-cut, or when accommodative acts were reported in humorous narratives, the local valorization of foreigner talk was easily recontextualized according to longer-standing, negative, Asian-immigrant stereotypes. The same type of conventionally disfluent talk could thus be framed as positive, normal, and similar-to-self or instead as negative, abnormal, and Other, depending on its (re)contextualization across interactions, with implications for speakers' positions or reputations at school. Such ethnographic reports draw attention to the fact that local contextualizations of language are constrained by wider-scale valorizing schemes and that ways of speaking may be the object of competing meta-discourses, that is, can be found fluent and disfluent at the same time by different groups of people (cf. Agha 2007). Sociolinguists' countervalorization of popularly pejorated varieties is a case in point. Woolard et al. (2014) show that mediatized linguistic humor can contribute to such competition: Although nonfluent Catalan and Catalan-Castilian mixing have been derisible against the backdrop of intense linguistic separation campaigns, Catalan prescriptivism is increasingly being drawn into the mocking limelight. Indicative of a more positive alignment to language contact phenomena and the speakers who produce them, this humorous metapragmatic commentary now more prominently competes with a discourse of linguistic purism. Such competition can subsequently deliver a winner, as Agha (2015) argues when controversial types of talk such as slang shed their traditionally negative reputation and retain the more positive valorization produced by their speakers. But it may also produce something of an impasse. Rampton's (2013) analysis of "styling in a language learned later in life" exemplifies how the impact of prominently competing metadiscourses on linguistic form within the science of language (a sociolinguistic celebration of skill versus a description of deficit in foreign-language acquisition research) complicates the emergence of a perspective that goes beyond a mere focus on form and that includes these forms' situated contextualization by speakers who so define their social relationships with others.

CONCLUSION

(Dis)fluency is a permanent site for legitimizing social relations through transforming facts of linguistic difference into social facts within the discursive zones that people make available for each other. This review argues that, rather than being an inherent characteristic of particular linguistic forms, (dis)fluency depends on relationships between these forms and their metapragmatic typification, which varies according to the perspective and position of the evaluators, who are themselves influenced by wider-spread metadiscourses on types of language. Taken together,

such processes and their effects offer a display board of permanent conflict over the value of specific linguistic practices against a background of competing "hopes and dreams about how the world should be" (McDermott & Varenne 1995, p. 337).

This insight is not particularly new. But it has been developed here to point out that although sociolinguistics may alleviate the damaging effects of commonsensical ideas about language, doing so may come at the cost of legitimating the discursive regime in which it made sense to identify problematic speakers in the first place. Representing all speakers as intrinsically fluent or disfluent risks obscuring the sociohistorical existence of competing (dis)fluency conceptions that people wish or have to take into account as they navigate their own social arrangements. While producing knowledge of what speakers can(not) do linguistically in particular contexts of use, then, a critical sociolinguistics cannot afford to leave unaddressed which linguistic practices are valuable to whom on which occasions, with which effect, and how these competing evaluations are connected to visions of a desirable moral and political order.

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