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Maria Sabaté’s book makes an important contribution to the sociolinguistics of globalisation (Blommaert 2010) and the new economy (Heller 2003, Duchene and Heller, 2012) through a critical ethnographic analysis of the ways in which migrants challenge the restrictions imposed by nation-states and international communication companies.

Her work presents the case study of a locutorio, – a shop selling “international telephone service[s]” (p. 60) – located in an urban district of Catalonia near Barcelona. In this area, as in the rest of Catalonia, the arrival of speakers of other languages adds further complexities to the sociolinguistic situation of the region. Migrants need to communicate, both locally and with their families back in their countries of origin, so locutorios become central places to facilitate this communication and at the same time to display ethnicity. More importantly, a locutorio can function as a locus for socialisation in diaspora since migrants use them as places to meet friends or look for work, and at the same time they are institutions in which migrant users contest and challenge official communication procedures and state control. She constructs her arguments over the course of six chapters that allow her to show both the top-down constraints and some of the bottom-up (sometimes subversive) ways in which migrants navigate and contest such impositions.

Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework and different layers of context that underpin the study. From the theoretical point of view, the author problematises and defines the central concepts of the book: migrant, ethnic business, transnationalism, globalisation, resistance and locutorio. Interestingly, the author chooses to maintain the Spanish term locutorio for ICT Businesses (i.e. internet centres, cyber cafés, etc.), which she does for different methodological and analytical reasons. The community upon which the research focuses is a product of the recent international migratory flows to Catalonia, the most important migrant groups present in the area (East European, African, Latin Americans), the consequences of the presence of these speakers’ allochthonous languages for the already linguistically diverse Catalonia and its disputes with the central government in Madrid, as well as the migrants’ legal and work situations. Special attention is paid to the
working conditions that these new migrants experience, the effects of the economic crisis of 2008 for unskilled workers (mostly Moroccan and Rumanian men) and for those who have set up their own businesses (often the Chinese or Pakistanis). Finally, she presents the details of her fieldwork and the circumstances that motivated and led her to conduct her research on a Pakistani locutorio located in a peripheral area of a small city near Barcelona, in a predominantly Spanish-speaking neighbourhood she nicknames El Paso. Two years of “mobile ethnography” (pg 18), inspired by Howard’s (2002) network ethnography and Wittel’s (2000) ethnography of networks allowed her to capture and analyse the complex communicative routines, mobile trajectories, family and social configurations, daily practices, and multilingual uses of 20 participants (aged 27–52) whose point of connection was the locutorio. This section is embedded with personal comments on the researcher’s methodological reflexivity over the choice of tools and procedures used. Data collection included, mainly, detailed descriptions, images and quantitative data reporting the daily life practices at the locutorio and in the neighbourhood, audio-recorded interviews with 17 informants, field notes and informal conversations with the participants. She also included official documents on public communication regulations and observations and interviews with three officials from multinationals offering ICT services in the city. The researcher participated as client and worker in order to have more insights into daily life at this site.

Chapter 2 demands a lot from readers who are not familiar with the Catalan situation in order to understand some of the critical points made. The chapter addresses controversial historical, political, and economic complexities in the relationship between Spain and Catalonia, and between Spain and the European Union. Sabaté presents a detailed historical account of the role of the Spanish communication companies in the participation of Spain in the global market during the 20th and 21st centuries: “the private business sector, in synergy with the nation-state, seems to participate in the machinery of an exclusionary citizenship regime through legal and commercial barriers which control who is granted full citizenship rights and who is not, via technology” (p. 39). Concretely, Spanish companies classify users and control access to ICT resources (SIM cards, telephones, but also information on the services offered and the conditions of contracts) by implementing the migration regulations adopted by the Spanish state and thus excluding “illegal residents” from these services. At the same time, they impose various constraints on “legal” users by regulating access through the use of contracts that are not sufficiently clear, whilst mobilising particular language ideologies and tropes, such as the “multilingualistic rhetoric” on language diversity. Such tropes are contrary to the real linguistic regimes based on offering services in only Western systems, or by providing services in dominant European languages (mainly Spanish, English, French and German), which legitimises a commercial
multilingualism (Kelly-Holmes, 2010). Migrants schooled in other literacy and numeracy systems (eg Arabic, Chinese) find difficulties in accessing such systems.

Chapter 3 presents a bridge between local practices and wider social issues by focussing on an ethnographic account of the locutorio as an institution of migration. Several complex issues are discussed, such as the ways in which migrants challenge marginalisation by the Spanish communication companies. The author discusses the social and economic circumstances under which the business boom of locutorios took place, hand in hand with the liberalisation of the Spanish telecommunications sector in 1997 and the immigration flows of the late 1990s. At the beginning the locutorio businesses were controlled by the Spanish telecommunications sectors’ elite but gradually, self-employed migrants started to establish their own businesses. The business was adapted under the migrants’ control as they gradually started to work independently from the official Spanish communications companies. This chapter presents detailed statistics that demonstrate the increasing presence and impact of the locutorios in urban areas of Catalonia over a short period of time (2001–07). It was precisely the fact that locutorios became ethnic businesses that made them suitable places for migrants’ social and economic activities beyond mere communication with their home countries and use of Internet. By analysing a set of relevant examples, the author shows us how these locutorios became meeting points where migrants could offer services, seek entertainment, send and receive remittances, received legal advice and strengthened their social networks. They became focal points within the migrant community that allowed their clients to use cheaper ICT services and evade the impositions of the official telecommunication companies (inflexible contracts, expensive phones and long distance calls, amongst others). Locutorios offered migrants the possibility of access to ICT in their own languages and alphabets, something that had been excluded by the Spanish companies, and gave employees an active role as intercultural mediators between newcomers and the local society. In this sense, locutorios were consolidated as sites for resisting difficult citizenship regimes and certain governmental practices of the Spanish nation-state and the Spanish telecommunications sector. This chapter also shows the uses of locutorios by migrant clients in order to negotiate institutional, legal, economic and communication barriers.

Chapter 4 presents the ways in which migrants use ICT. Basically, they exploit the resources offered by the Spanish telecommunication companies, but they subsume them within their own forms of consumerism. She discusses and illustrates how migrants have gained some autonomy from the multinational companies and are able to choose. Then, she documents a set of practices that show how migrants have developed creative ways to redistribute their technological resources amongst their own networks. The clients of this locutorio avoid local companies’ charges by drawing on a range of what the author dubs “subversive” strategies.
Examples of this include the creation of a sort of code wherein short calls are made, often without speaking, for certain communicative purposes (e.g. to indicate to the recipient that the caller is now ready for a meeting, to indicate that he/she does not have credit and needs a call-back, etc.), by using long distance cards, by having two mobile phones from different companies in order to take advantage of promotional offers (cheaper international calls, work calls, personal calls, etc.), or by sharing phones. In the second part of the chapter, she focuses on the practices that challenge the stereotypes on migration portrayed mainly in the advertisement of multinational communication companies (e.g. migrants suffering from uprootedness, distress, and emotional weakness) to show how migrants, supported by ICT resources, manage to organise themselves, with new ‘virtual’ friendships and new forms of parenthood. She devotes the final section to present how, in the face of advertising pressure from the multinational communication companies to maintain traditional family roles, migrants use the locutorio to develop new forms of family interaction, including transnational parenthood. This part addresses important issues that would benefit from further illustration since the stereotypes are not sufficiently fleshed out.

As part of the complex discursive world of locutorios, chapter 5 focuses on the bottom-up construction of multilingualism and the identities displayed by the participants of this site. The author gives an account of the internal linguistic organisation of the locutorio, by presenting the multiple linguistic repertoires speakers have at their disposal and analysing the social meanings and values they assign to them. The locutorios become “contact zones” where allochthonous codes coexist with Spanish and Catalan, the languages of the dominant society. Even though all the participants have diverse repertoires, a dominant monolingual ideology causes Spanish to be categorised as “the most important language” in the practices of the locutorio (e.g. interactions with clients, advertisements, technology). This creates a monolingual front that hides the actual diversity. The Spanish language itself is spoken in different varieties, something that gives rise to some dispute over what counts as the norm (Castilian peninsular vs. Latin American varieties). Translinguistic Spanish amongst non-Spanish speakers dominates the intercultural communication in this site. Sabaté offers interesting examples of how literacy practices index certain identities. English emerges as a second option for some business exchanges and a central aspect of identity for certain participants, such as many Pakistanis. Catalan was identified as the language of administration, and usually associated with the private sphere of elites among the local society. The widely documented practice of Catalans addressing migrants in Spanish rather than Catalan was also reported by the participants at this site, as well as the linguistic attitudes of Latin Americans towards Catalan. Migrants’ language repertoires are explored bringing to the fore the fact that the less prestigious allochthonous
languages spoken by some of them are silenced most of the time. Finally, the trans-
lingual Spanish used in this *locutorio* that the author calls “Everyone’s Spanish”
(pg 139) is explored through a series of examples of literacies revealed in SMS
messages and advertisements produced by Spanish speakers and those who do not
have Spanish as L1.

Chapter 6 presents tensions amongst the groups (the “conflictive together-
ness”) of social actors who participate in this site, by looking at the ways identities
are negotiated amongst migrants. The first part explores how language becomes
a marker of affiliation and creates borders between ethnic groups when migrants
offer services or rooms to rent on the notice board of the *locutorio*, addressing
their compatriots in their shared language and alphabet and creating a distance
between themselves and the “others”. Tensions amongst migrants are mobilised
in conflictive situations where assigned identities are defined through oppositions
(e.g. Latinas as “scroungers” (gorronas), questions of religion between Pakistaní
and Moroccan males, such as who counts as a legitimate Muslim, consumerist
identities). The second part of the chapter presents the case of Naheem, one of the
workers in the *locutorio*, which allows the researcher to illustrate the various ways
migrant workers are positioned amongst clients and bosses. This case illustrates
ways in which a migrant worker in late capitalism needs to deal with tensions, on
the one hand with clients, who see them as privileged migrants, and on the other
hand with bosses, who exploit them in taking advantage of workers’ vulnerable so-
cial and legal situations. Heavy workloads without legal employment contracts, no
training for the job and demanding multiple activities are some of the conditions
employees suffer at *locutorios* in Catalonia. Language use, in the form of accent
and language skills, can represent a pressure for these migrants.

This book is of interest to scholars and students in Discourse Studies, Linguistic
Anthropology or Intercultural Communication. It presents a very comprehensive
approach and opens up avenues of inquiry into the intersectionality between lan-
guage, mobility, identity and new technologies. Some of the important issues at
stake here are coloured by the complex historical and ideological relationship be-
tween Catalonia and the Spanish state, greater clarification of which might benefit
readers less familiar with the context. This book discusses central issues surround-
ing the socialisation processes of migrant newcomers in new societies and the
roles speakers give to their linguistic repertoires. Thus we see how the linguistic
distribution amongst the clients of the *locutorio* reflects monolingual, one nation/
one language ideologies, the negotiation of identities and the migrants’ own posi-
tioning in relation to one another as well as to the dominant host society.
References


