What kinds of diversity are super? Hidden diversities and mobilities on a Mediterranean island

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ABSTRACT

In this article, ethnographic data from the island of Corsica are used to explore the concept of superdiversity. The first looks at a historical society hike, tracing "hidden" forms of diversity at the micro-level that counterbalance normative, traditional narratives of language, place and culture. The second examines a new cultural park on the island that is both organized around heterogenous themes and, in the philosophy of its founder, exhibits "tactics of superdiversity" that disrupt conventional narratives and models of authenticity and coherence.

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1. Introduction

The superdiversity paradigm in contemporary sociolinguistics has emerged as a new focus for sociolinguists' enduring interest in social and linguistic diversity, along with the perception that global flows have accelerated the pace and intensity of social and linguistic contact, change, multiplicity and hybridization. As such, it can be seen to respond to the need for appropriate analytical tools with which to approach new "superdiverse" conditions "on the ground" which include both the diversity of persons and codes (typified by urban, multilingual contexts infused with global pop culture) as well conditions of "heightened reflexivity" in the post-modern world (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011; Chapter 5 in Pietikäinen et al., 2016). At the same time, superdiversity has been articulated as a theoretical stance; a "tactic" (Blommaert, 2015: 1) that takes uncertainty and multiplicity as an analytical starting point, and focuses on context as inherently multiscalar (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011: 9; Varis and Wang, 2011: 723). This tactic shares with longstanding currents of scholarship in linguistic anthropology and critical sociolinguistics a commitment to *deconstruct* a variety of objects and categories – languages/codes; speakers; communities: to take a critical focus on how they are produced, reproduced and changed in situated practice and discourse (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011:3), over time and across a variety of spatial and temporal trajectories.

As Reyes (2014) points out, superdiversity as a concept is constructed in implicit opposition to "old" and "regular" diversity. In the following analysis, I turn a multiscalar lens on a cultural event that I took part in on the island of Corsica, exploring the interplay of "old" and "new" diversities present in persons, practices and forms of communication. In doing so, I emphasize a point that is anticipated by Blommaert and Rampton's (2011) framework: that if multiple possible scales are always present and potentially activatable in any given moment of linguistic or semiotic practice, there are no a priori grounds for defining any given place, set of participants or practices as **not** superdiverse. In other words, I define superdiversity as a function of what scales of differences get mobilized or made relevant in varying ways. That is, like "language," "speaker" and

"community," the superdiverse in sociolinguistic research needs to be seen not as a given but as an **emergent** quality of a particular context.

Secondly, I propose a further operationalization of superdiversity "on the ground" as a reflexive stance, disposition or quality of experience towards types of diversity and all of the objects and categories that are indexically tied to it (codes, speaker types etc.) This stance involves the situated, simultaneous engagement with multiple frames, ideologies and scales related to authenticity of place, person, language and their connections (see Chapter 3 in Pietikäinen et al., 2016). This engagement is not necessarily a stable or smooth state; it can be a focus for tension or contestation and it is subject to regularization or regimentation, narrowing/closing down of options/assertion of traditional hegemonies. As Blommaert and Rampton point out, the study of superdiversity is not just the celebration of the fluid and hybrid, but also, a critical examination of the conditions in which fluidity or hybridity may be sustained or not. These conditions, as Reyes points out, include persistent hegemonic and political discourses, frames and structures.

Taken together with an ethnographic attention to the standpoints of participants, this kind of analysis paves the way for the examination of what might be seen as an oxymoron: "micro-superdiversity": superdiversity activated at the smallest of local scales. This follows a longstanding insight of sociolinguistics, which is that the tiniest of differences can be mobilized as an index and as a tool of social differentiation. And of course it relates to the notion of indexical orders (related to scales): differences at one level/order are available to be projected on subsequent orders (Gal, 2012; Silverstein, 2003).

The ethnographic examples I present are taken from fieldwork on Corsica. Places like Corsica are often imagined in opposition to ethnically and linguistically superdiverse urban centers. This opposition arises both from material, geographic conditions–peripheral regions are not always dramatically affected by global migration flows and from political-ideological frameworks. That is, Corsica and other similar places are viewed as exemplars of "old" ethnoregional and sociolinguistic diversities that are traditionally articulated within traditional nationalist, essentialist paradigms and then potentially modulated with reference to global imaginaries.

In the ethnographic data explored below, I examine the imbrication of authenticities of place, person and language in themed cultural activities and sites in which geographies and trajectories at multiple scales are made relevant. On the one hand, this data attests to the presence of "conventional" authenticities (see Pietikäinen et al., 2016) that are made particularly salient for minority communities in contexts of linguistic and cultural shift. Within the ideological framework of conventional authenticity, the fact that not all Corsicans speak the Corsican language is experienced as a form of loss or rupture that is deauthenticating at both the personal and collective level. Linguistic and cultural activity is directed at reclaiming forms of heritage; "repairing" or completing relationships with language, place and traditional cultural practices that are conceived of as ideally seamless, unitary and homogenous. At the same time, in practice, these "unitary" authenticities take more complex discursive and representational forms that align more closely with what Pietikainen, Kelly-Holmes, Jaffe and Coupland have called "transactional authenticities." Unlike conventional authenticities, transactional authenticities do not require "essential," unbroken relationships between individuals and linguistic forms and legitimate intermittent, self-conscious performances in which the "true, real, original, essential and natural rest lightly on products, people and performances for whom authenticity is claimed" (2016). This stance, I will argue, can be seen as a tactic of superdiversity.

2. Example 1

In the summer of 2014, a local association Nanzi è Oghje (Before and Today) in the small, medium-altitude Southern Corsican town of Aullène organized and advertised a week-long program of events around the theme of "transhumance." Transhumance is the practice of moving livestock from one place to another for grazing; in Corsica, sheep and goats were traditionally brought down to the coasts in the winter and moved up into the mountains during the summer. The program included a temporary exhibit, several academic lectures (on topics such as the architecture of shepherd's shelters and cheese storage buildings, the ethnography of pastoralism, malaria and transhumance), a theater workshop, a storytelling event, several documentary screenings, a picnic and some musical performances as well as a guided hike. I attended the exhibit, a documentary and discussion and the guided hike.

2.1. Association events I: exhibit and documentary

The temporary exhibit on transhumance was located in the recreation/public meeting room of the Aullène town hall and was organized by the Nanzi è Oghje Association. Displays included several mannequins dressed in traditional Corsican costumes and a variety of old wooden tools associated with shepherding and cheese-making, identified with hand-made plaques on which the names of the objects were written in both Corsican and French. A large photo-illustrated display board depicted contemporary local shepherds engaged in the process of cheese-making, showing a timeline from milking the animals to the final, refined cheese product. Local honey was another featured product: on a table, visitors could taste several different varieties. Pamphlets explained the criteria Corsican honey had to meet to receive an "Appellation d'Origine Controllée" label designating it as authentically local. A large wall was taken up with a display with moveable wheel in the center. One hemisphere of the wheel was labeled with the Corsican term "a muntagnera," designating transhumance movement up from the coast into the mountains; the other hemisphere represented the movement down from the mountains to the coast, and was labeled with the corresponding Corsican term "l'impiaghjera." Each "slice" of the wheel contained handwritten excerpts in French from a book on transhumance that was cited on the poster describing different aspects of the process.