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## Language &amp; Communication

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/langcom](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/langcom)

## Discursive struggles about migration: A commentary

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## ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online xxx

The question of migration is as politically fraught today as ever in the last half century. In the United States as in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, East Asia and Africa, talk about migration is one way in which people struggle over policies and practices that impact the movement of populations. As the papers in this Special Issue suggest, discursive struggles about migration also implicate speakers' positions and opinions about many other issues: economic inequality, racial difference, liberal tolerance, national sovereignty, ideals of home and family, and forms of personhood. Moreover, there are many participants in the often virtual conversations about migration. These papers show that everyday talk about migration is part of a cacophony of "voices," including the official declarations of governments, legal and legislative strictures, census categorizations, political campaigns seeking votes, corporate policies of hiring/firing, justifications for capital investment, social movements to protect or exclude – and the talk often occurs via internet mediation. Thus, "migration discourse" is evident at many scales of time, space and social dispersion, at many institutional locations. In considering these, and by often juxtaposing them, our authors subtly demonstrate that there are no neutral descriptions of migrants and migration. Speakers inhabiting roles in any one social location react to the others, if sometimes only implicitly. They echo, support, refuse, refute or dispute emanations from other sites, or respond to nearby voices positioned to contrast with their own. Discursive struggles over migration therefore constitute a very rich and heterogeneous source of evidence from linguistic and semiotic interaction about sociopolitical conflict and tension.

Surely, talk about other sociopolitical processes is also heterogeneous in this way. Yet, migration discourse is distinct in a number of ways. It includes the participation of the *objects* of discourse (migrants) in a way that, for instance, talk about the environment cannot. Talk about migration foregrounds geographic movement and position "into/out of" states, cities, and regions, making geography a handy but deceptive metaphor; the *spatial* imagery of insider/outsider comes too easily to mind for characterizing the *social* location of participants in migration. Relatedly, because movement in space so often implies movement between linguistic conventions that seem to be spatially distributed (e.g. national and regional languages), migrant/non-migrant distinctions can too easily seem to be indexed by differences of language, dialect or accent. Such spatial imagery hides the ways that social inclusion and exclusion are shifting phenomena, produced through interaction. As Perrino and Wortham note in their introduction, this is a major theme of the Special Issue: Identifying participants on the basis of linguistic practices, sociological categories (migrant/citizen; local/newcomer) or spatial metaphors (inside/outside) will not suffice for understanding the political effects of talk about migration. Rather, that effect relies on the flexibility of speakers' self-positionings in interaction, and it depends as well on the interdiscursive cross-currents among the multiple sites from which migration discourse emanates. This simultaneous engagement with stance and scale is analytically powerful: Stance is interactional positioning among speakers within participation frameworks (Wortham, 2001; Du Bois, 2007); scale is how this

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Please cite this article in press as: Gal, S., Discursive struggles about migration: A commentary, *Language & Communication* (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2017.12.002>

positioning brings global and regional perspectives into face-to-face encounters. As a result, discourse seems to “move” or spread across speech events (Irvine, 1996; Agha and Wortham, 2005; Carr and Lempert, 2016).

While sharing Perrino’s and Wortham’s enthusiasm for this approach, I wish to amend their introduction’s observation that “the classic dichotomies such as outsider/insider, exclusion/inclusion, and public/private which have long preoccupied social scientists, are no longer useful analytical tools ... outsidership and insidership are not dichotomous, but are instead heterogeneous and blurred, with porous boundaries.” The papers do show subtle gradient distinctions, “states of in-betweenness,” and contradictory combinations: “exclusionary intimacies,” “distant closeness,” the outsider-as-part-insider. But I argue that stark dichotomies – as aspects of participant knowledge – must remain part of our analyses. Through the use of stance and scale, participants position themselves *with reference* to the dichotomies that they presuppose. Thus, we need both the metadiscursively apparent dichotomies as well as the nuanced in-between positionings that speakers accomplish by aligning with/or against type-level terms (often dichotomies) as they simultaneously align with/or against their real-time interlocutors of the moment (Gal, 2016a,b). These papers will show how “in-betweenness” is achieved through positioning, while leaving in place (often stronger than ever) the dichotomous (type-level categories) categories that enable in-betweenness. I shall return repeatedly to this point as I touch on several other significant contributions of these papers: *analytical open-endedness*, *perspective*, *scale-making* and *shifting role inhabitation*. As my contribution to this strong collection, I sometimes draw out different aspects of their materials than the authors have, to illustrate these processes.

### Open-endedness

It is impressive that all the papers provide glimpses into on-going social change. This is more than attention to *process*, since interactional processes have often been found to reproduce rather than change the parameters of social life. Here, however, the studies reveal that narratives, personae, positions and stances are not only multiple and processual but also open-ended, potentially or actually transformed and transformative. For instance, Nichols and Wortham locate two narratives of migration-produced change in the community of Marshall, citing the community’s ongoing demographic history. But they also foreshadow further change by asking how long White residents of Marshall will retain a positive view of Mexican immigrants as revitalizing the community. De Fina discusses the new combination of genres that young activists quickly learned to perform as publicity for DACA, but she also notes the drastic changes they will doubtless experience due to the Trump executive orders on migration. Leone-Pizzighella and Rymes sketch the changes in students’ linguistic self-concept that emerge through group interviews and in interactions with the maps on campus. With their close analysis of snippets of conversation, Dick and Arnold give us a sense of being *in medias res* – when next steps are open-ended, never quite predictable. Attention to the ubiquity of change is very welcome in ethnographic studies. Such genuine openness to change is impressive and not easy to achieve as a theoretical matter, nor easy to embrace in the writing up of results, since the very notion of “result” implicitly invites closure.

### Perspective

Linked to change, the papers also recognize that migration discourse is necessarily and fundamentally perspectival. Like all discourse, talk about migration is always issued from some social point of view. But I mean more than this: In each paper there are suggestions that instances of migration discourse “answer” – in the classic mode of Bakhtinian (1981) dialogicality – various other, often implicit and hegemonic voicings presumed to emanate from other social locations, often from powerful institutional sites. In De Fina’s paper, the narratives provided by young people on the UWM website do not mention negative stereotypes of Mexican migrants, yet we cannot understand the denotational content of these first person stories without hearing them as evoking negative presumptions in the act of contradicting them. The stories present the young people as exemplars and witnesses *proving* the insufficiency of the negative images. In turn, each speaker’s alignment *with* a positive view of migrants as real Americans and *against* negative views is the interactional move that makes their stories (potentially) effective as political action, inviting listeners to take up the positive view and thereby to spread it.

A similar process – dialogical speech against the presumed, hegemonic system of classification – seems to be evident in campus metacommentary. The study by Leone-Pizzighella and Rymes provides evidence of student reaction to the University’s ethnolinguistic stereotypes that work to track “diversity” on campus. The student-migrants’ revelations about their origins and linguistic knowledge are initiated by a seemingly simple question: “Where are you from?” Note that the query invites students to choose a scalar anchor for the famously indeterminate deictic “here” that will allow them to specify a contrasting “from there.” As Schegloff (1972) showed many years ago, how one “formulates place” in interaction depends on one’s assumptions about and strategy towards the perspective and knowledge of one’s immediate interlocutors. (Whether I caption my origin as California, San Francisco, the beach, the Mission, or the West Coast depends not only on geographical location but on audience design.) Mutual stereotypes and assessments of perspective are crucial in understanding why categories are invoked. I would argue this is especially so if the goal is to subvert stereotypes. As the authors note, the University’s bureaucratic system of ethnic categories erases migrants’ realities, “lumping” together social types that migrants separate. Indeed, any category system will have lumpings and erasures, whether the classifier is an institution or an individual speaker. Bureaucratic lumping has its own (management) functions; it is usually not designed to reflect migrants’ realities, or even to benefit those it classifies. The question is rather: what harm is done and to whom by institutional management techniques. As Leone-Pizzighella and Rymes note, the investigator’s job is to figure out how “citizen sociolinguists” classify,

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