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Lived languages: ordinary collections and multilingual repertoires

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Abstract

Until recently, the role of material culture in language has been little studied or seen as the context where language use is situated (Aronin *et al* 2018). This article looks at the materiality of language in a new light by arguing that everyday objects such as kitchen utensils and personal wardrobes can be seen as deliberate and conscious collections that are entangled with speakers' multilingual repertoires, subjectivities and embodied agencies. Clothes stored away in one's wardrobe, or ordinary kitchen utensils reveal themselves as the site where multilinguals' complex biographies and 'jigsaw repertoires' (Blommaert and Backus 2013) can be traced and made sense of. Such a view of language sees the construction of subjectivities as both situated and relational. Situated because subjectivities are firmly anchored in embodied chronotopic continuums (Busch 2017), relational because they align to a post-human approach to subjectivity (Pennycook 2018) that conceives it as the confederation of different types of human and post-human agencies. Drawing on a study of 6 personal collections of ordinary objects, this paper investigates to what extent personal collections can be read as a 'laboratory' for multilingual practices, where multilingual agencies are played out in relation to time-space coordinates and the materiality of the self.

Key words: new materialism, subjectivity, lived, multilingualism, post-humanism, repertoires

Introduction: ordinary collections and meaning-making

Material culture studies have for some time studied the significance of everyday materialities to understand our society. Individual's collection of jeans (Miller and Woodward 2012) or mantelpiece collections (Hurdley 2006), are just two examples of ordinary collections that reveal the preoccupations, moral values, behaviours and lifestyles of their owners. Domestic personal collections, however, do not only reflect the present time and space, they also link the present with other-times and other-worlds. These collections invoke stories of absences and horizons beyond the past and the future. Objects are selected, stored and organised as part of an ideal self. In other words, objects may become extensions of the self and part of one's subjectivity. Although clothes and other domestic objects have for a long time been linked to the expression of one's subjectivity and individuality, such a view underplays the radical 'thing power' of objects (Bennet 2009) for

exercising agency. Following this argument, this paper claims that clothes and other domestic and cultural artefacts, such as kitchen utensils, may be seen as active players in the formation and deployment of agency in communication and meaning-making. Indeed, these mundane artifacts will be conceived as active agents that take part in creating and transforming individuals' subjectivities with and in-between languages.

This article aims to contribute to the emerging field of the materiality of languages and cultures (Aronin *et al* 2018, Cavanaugh and Shankar 2017, Johnstone 2009; Lee and Lou 2019, Lou 2018, Lou 2017, Pahl, K. and Rowsell, J. 2010) by focusing on the perceptual and tangible properties of materials by following a phenomenological and multisensorial approach to language (Merleau-Ponty 1962, Deleuze and Guattari 2004, Busch 2017, Blackledge and Creese 2019, Pennycook 2018, Author 2016, 2020) and how language, as an embodied experience, can add to the building of multilayered and multiple subjectivities (Pennycook 2018, Kramsch 2009, Blackledge and Creese 2019).

The collecting and using of personal objects as examples of semiotic practices, however, is still in its infancy. This paper will look at the selection, storage and use of objects and personal artifacts as a way of meaning-making by investigating how different objects evoke, index and embody life experiences, memories and feelings. In doing this, it describes how the use of different materialities becomes part of a semantic chain and *assemblage* that contributes to the multilingual practices speakers engage in and the formation of their multilingual subjectivities. Several authors have already seen the potential of looking at material culture as an instrument that influences and changes multilinguals' practices and identities (Aronin 2012, Aronin *et al* 2018).

A key point in the study of these semiotic materialities is the fact that they are firmly situated in time and space. The notion of the 'spatial repertoire' has helped us understand these practices as semiotic chains that include embodied practices in concrete time-space coordinates (Blackledge and Creese 2017, Canagarajah 2018, Pennycook and Otsuji 2014, Author 2018). Rather than seeing language as permanently fixed in time and space, the 'spatial turn' sees it as mobile and changing, pointing both to the past and the future, whilst focusing on the articulations of meaning that are established in relation to speakers' social and material environments. This paper will add to this body of work by looking at the role materiality has on the subjectivity and identity of the speaker. In doing this, it puts forward the view that materialities and the objects stored in homes or other private spaces contributes to the building of multilingual practices and the negotiation of a sense of self. By moving away from the idea that languages and objects are fixed to particular meanings and ideas, it seeks to promote a fluid approach to meaning-making that opens up connections between the two by forming a deictic understanding of objects and an embodied and material approach to language. In this way, language

and object, mind and body give meaning to each other. Echoing Goffman's (1963 in Blackledge and Creese 2017:3) notion of the 'body idiom', we could say that personal collections and the objects in them act as some sort of 'artifactual idioms' that help the organis[ation], dismantle[ing] and re-assembl[ing]' of a multiplicity of linguistic and cultural configurations of the self.

Whether it is a traditional mantelpiece collection (e.g. decorative figures, vases, clocks, framed pictures), a quirky arrangement of everyday objects (e.g. hats on a wall, musical instruments, or skateboards) carefully stored and curated in one's home, or a more pragmatic collection of essential objects (e.g. pots and pans, spices or a collection of fountain-pens), mundane personal possessions can be read as a vibrant and intentional assemblage closely tied up to individuals' identities and subjectivities. This article takes the stance that although more common in affluent western multilinguals of the northern hemisphere, arrangements of small collections of personal objects can also be a feature of many people's lives. The value of such personal collections is to do with the personal and affective meanings that these objects give to the individual. Objects contribute to give the individual a sense of history over time and space as such artifacts sediment one's experience and are remnants and traces of one's life. Far from being just superfluous companions that index one's position in society, when observed and analysed in depth, this paper argues that ordinary objects become part of a semiotic chain that narrate one's life. This article takes the view that personal objects are central not only to day-to-day living but also to multilingual practices and the building of one's multilingual subjectivity through them.

Such a view, however, can only be possible by applying an ontological change in the way we look at ordinary objects and personal collections. From entities that are static and just contextual to the agency of the individual, to looking at personal belongings as active agents who are key in constructing the multilingual self. In order to argue this, I will draw on a data-set of six personal collections of clothes and kitchen utensils and focus on the personal collections of two speakers: an ordinary wardrobe collection and a cookie-cutter's collection in order to answer the following question: How are subjectivities constructed in relationship with speakers' personal collections of ordinary objects? And how are such subjectivities entangled and embodied with speakers' trajectories and lived experiences?

Theoretical Framework

Multilingual entanglements

As multilingualism becomes the norm and permeates our superdiverse societies (May 2014, Vertovec 2007), the ways in which materialities form part of our experience of languages and cultures has become an increasingly key aspect of multilingual speakers' experiences, including their relationships with the material culture around them. As Aronin *et al* (2018) point out 'The material dimension of a globally multilingual world is moving to the fore and materialities are essential in any meaningful dialogue between individuals and communities' (p.3). In this section we will argue why this is so.

The study of the materiality of language started with linguistic landscaping of different cities and public spaces. Such an approach was followed by key contributions to the field of material culture in multilingualism by Aronin and Laoire (e.g. 2007, 2013). Studies on the materiality of language and that of 'spatial repertoires' (Blackledge and Creese 2017, Canagarajah 2018, and Pennycook and Otsuji 2014) have added a new dimension to the study of linguistic landscaping by posing that materialities in language use are not merely a setting and external to our mental life but rather, they are inhabited spaces where feelings, memories and experiences are processes that contribute to one's identity. From this point, the material culture of multilingualism is not only concerned with those objects that contain signs, labels, inscriptions or writing on them, but also those multilingual objects that are culturally and linguistically marked as a result of being used in a bilingual or multilingual environment (Aronin *et al.* 2018:11). This marking however, is not a one-way connection that goes from the speaker to the object, but rather it is a more complex one, one that has a particular view of language that already acknowledges its materiality and embodiment, where linguistic resources are integral with embodied resources (Blackledge and Creese 2017).

The collection of objects that will be discussed in this paper falls in this category. Personal collections will be seen as an example of embodied semantic resources by virtue of being selected, collected and used by multilingual individuals in their households. I will argue that, like gestures in communication, which become deictic between the body and the physical world (Blackledge and Creese 2017), ordinary objects in personal collections also act as an extension of the self and, like 'gestures' of the body, they index events in the past or in the future or point to ideas and notions as if they had a physical location in the world' (*ibid*: p.253).

The following section will outline how such a perspective is articulated in the context of personal collections and how it can be rooted in a 'new materialism' (e.g. Barard 2007, Bennett 2010, Pennycook 2018) and post-humanism (Pennycook 2018, Braidotti 2013) framework to analyse the building of multilingual subjectivities through personal collections. A new materialism view of the world proposes a new way of being-in-the-world that challenges the idea that humans are the measure of all things at the top of a hierarchical world. Instead, a new world-order is proposed, where both organic and inorganic matter have 'intelligent' and 'self-organising' properties. The understanding of

multilingualism this article proposes is based on the understanding that objects are not opposed but rather in a continuum and entangled with culture (Pennycook 2018). In this way, the materiality of objects that individuals collect and use for their multilingual practices, such as metal or plastic cookie-cutters, silk scarves or leather jackets are not mere props or anecdotes that accompany the multilingual subject but have their own histories and ‘historical bodies’ (Scollon & Wong Scollon 2004 in Blackledge and Creese 2017). In other words, matter and objects are part of a world ecology where individuals are in constant intra-action with matter (Barad 2007) to create new multicultural meanings.

Material subjectivities

In giving a renewed role and protagonism to objects and their materialism in conceptualisations of the multilingual subject, this study positions itself within a post-human understanding of subjectivity that is no longer reliant on bounded and closed-off identities, but rather on subjectivities created through relationships with objects and their materiality (Author 2020) . Within this view there is no separation between matter and the human, rather, life permeates and connects all things (Braidotti 2013). Bennett’s (2009) eloquently explains how our relationship with ordinary objects is fluid, life-affirming and our sense of self is in a continuum with matter.

‘through the porosity of things and people, things such as our clothes are not entirely separate from us as they externalise memories, former selves or relationships’
(Bennett 2009:23)

This has great implications for how individual’s subjectivity is constructed, as the boundaries between individuals and other matter, and individual’s relationship with objects and personal collections is erased. So much so that *‘the objects collected become part of the owners’ extended self’* (Belk 1995, in Woodward and Greasley 2015:14)

Relational and distributed agencies

In a non-hierarchical understanding of life, human agency is seen running in parallel with other forms of agency, the agency of ‘things’ or ‘thing power’ (Bennet 2009). Agency is not the sole privilege of human beings, but is distributed to the universe as a whole, with its other forms of life, e.g. animals, machines, the planet, our ordinary ‘stuff’ and personal objects. A focus on the multiagency and relationality of cultural identity shifts the locus of processes of subjectivity from the abstract and symbolic plane of languages to instances of how languages and cultures are materialised in the relationships and entanglements that are established between individuals and the objects and

materiality they use and relate to (Smythe *et al* 2017). As Canagarajah (2018) sustains in proposing a new paradigm that goes beyond structuralist and less mentalistic orientations to language, ‘as the power of mind over matter is questioned, cognition is understood as distributed across bodies, objects, and social networks, calling for distributed practice in thinking and communicating’ (p.33). In this view, personal ordinary multilingual collections can be viewed not only as simply bundles of things that acquire meaning in isolation but in relation to each other. So that their potentiality for meaning is also on how these objects are arranged, relate to each other, and, how they relate to their collector. As Coleman and Ringrose (2013:4) point out ‘*focus shifts from the subject and/or the object to their entanglement; the event, the action between (not in-between), is what matters*’ so that multilinguals’ collections work both relationally intra-actively both with other objects and with human agencies.

The next section will help clarify how these multiple process of relational agencies can be applied to understanding meaning-making in languages and material collections.

Lived repertoires & embodied becomings

In order to move away from binary understandings of the multilingual subject that separate objects from subjects this article seeks to approach the subjectivity of a particular speaker and her multilingual repertoire as a relational process of successive material becomings. Such an understanding departs from the idea of language as a stable entity. Instead, languages are seen as a series of dynamic ‘semiotic chains’ and repertoires that unfold and are contingent to individual’s life experiences. Languages and their materialities (e.g. multilingual objects) get entangled with different times and spaces so that individuals build bridges between the time-space co-ordinates of their biographies and build new ‘cartographies of the self’ (De Freitas and Curinga 2015).

Busch’s (2017) and Blommaert & Backus’ (2013) idea of linguistic (and cultural) repertoire is key here to understand the linguistic experience as a fluid, multiple, but also, collaborative phenomena. As Busch and Blommaert’s argument goes, one’s connection to languages and cultures should not be defined as competences, fixed and measured at a particular point in time. Rather, languages are in movement and traceable so that the relationship between the self and a set of languages and cultures should be seen as a jigsaw of linguistic and cultural memories that are assembled and deployed at different times throughout one’s life. According to Blommaert and Backus (2013:29).

‘Repertoires change all the time, because they follow and document the biographies of the ones who use them. In that sense, repertoires are the real ‘language’ we have and can

deploy in social life: biographically assembled patchworks of functionally distributed communicative resources'

Repertoires therefore are no longer finite bounded entities of language and cultural knowledge but transient, unexpected, and unique to the individual, so that languages feed on lived experience. Rather than knowledge, the multilingual repertoire then is made up of patterns of learning and encounters with language that are traceable to one particular individual, her records of mobility and interactions with the world around her. Such an understanding places great importance to the time-space coordinates, itineraries of the multilingual experience (Pujolar and González 2012, Author 2018).

In such historical and biographical processes of becoming, the body and its materiality is also key. As Busch (2017) explains, language (and our linguistic repertoires) is not detached from our bodies but is tangible and inscribed on our bodies. When we experience language we constitute ourselves viscerally, through our perceptions and emotions *with* and *in* the language through our life experiences.

'take[ing] the bodily constituted, perceiving, feeling, speaking and meaning-making subject as their point of departure and thereby open the path to a first-person perspective, allowing for the exploration of lived experiences, feelings, emotions and reflections' (Busch 2017:50)

When we learn languages we do not only ‘acquire’ it or ‘learn’ it, we embody it and ‘live’ it (Author 2016) and return *marked* by the ‘body memory’ resulting from the experience. (Busch 2017). In this article, I will argue that these lived experiences and body memories can be the mundane objects we collect and surround our daily lives with such as clothes or cooking utensils.

Methodology

This study draws on a six month ethnographic-style study that investigates the use and storage of ordinary collections in multilinguals’ homes and the relationship between materiality, subjectivity and the intercultural experience. It adopts an ethnographic perspective that uses visual and textual data derived from the observations and in-depth interviews to six multilingual speakers and their personal collections over a period of 6 months. Such an ethnographic-informed approach sought to foreground participants’ voices but also the materialities that were present in their homes and how these related to their multilingual life trajectories.

Participants in this study were selected by applying a criteria of personal connection which would facilitate access to the participants' intimate home-spaces such as their kitchens and their bedrooms. These were people who were well known to the researcher and thus trust and rapport was quickly established. The participants were also all well-educated subjects who were not only interested in the research but who were highly articulate about their multicultural make up and engaged reflectively with the topic and questions in the interview. They also constantly made connections between their material collections and their sense of self thus a high level of inter-subjectivity developed in the interviews (Macdonald and Holliday 2019).

By moving beyond the linguistic in the multilingual experience and focusing on a multisensorial and wider experience of languages this study challenges the traditional supremacy of the linguistic sign in language (Pennycook 2018) and the focus on language in intercultural ethnographies. It seeks to provide a multimodal 'thick description' by including a visual element to *'provide a detailed knowledge of how people feel, think, imagine, and perceive their world'* (Kharel, 2015:148) as well as to better capture *'the remnants of lived worlds and the behaviours exhibited in them'* (Mead 2003). As Pink (2005) has observed, ordinary life is ubiquitous with visual data and O'Reilly (2009) laments how traditional ethnography has relied on the hegemony of text and has not been able to offer a lens that documents more faithfully the visual and aural information that one observes in fieldwork. In my ethnography of artefactual personal collections I have intended to achieve this nuanced description through the use of a visual lens. One that not only gave me the description of clothes and other objects that the participants displayed and talked about, but one that recorded the different senses in the noticing, recording and interpretation of the data (Pink 2013). My research focused both on the semiotics extracted from the text, but also on the colours, the textures and smells of the objects in the collection and the narratives of the participants.

In conducting the interviews and field observations with the participants, pictures of the personal collections were taken as examples and corroboration of what had been mentioned but also points of departure for a new narrative or story about their multilingual trajectories. Whereas the interviews often started without the objects being present, later on, the presence of the objects prompted different and new stories that were recorded. The arrangement of objects to be photographed often prompted new stories, e.g. the laying out of a dress on the bed, or the arrangement of groups of cookie-cutters in the same picture. In this way, the materiality of the objects often acquired a new prominence and centrality that was not present in the spoken narratives without the object being in view.

The collections were self-selected by the subjects interviewed according to whether they had a special meaning for them and whether they were embedded and used in their ordinary lives (even if only on certain occasions). The interviews and observations took place in the participants' homes, the

researcher home, public places and on-line. Although the five participants making up the larger data set had a number of ordinary collections in their household: books, objects in their mantelpieces, crockery, plants, etc., some of these collections, such as books, of which many language learners and multilingual speakers are fond of, were disregarded as they did not appeal to the artefactual interest of this project.

The table below (Table 1), gives a summary of the six personal collections this study is part of. The two collections marked with a star are the ones that are referred to in this paper.

Table 1: Participant's biographic information

	Type of collection	Languages spoken	Participants' profile
Renata	Kitchen utensils	French, Spanish, German	German, University Teacher, she/her, over 25 years in the UK
Simha	Wardrobe	Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, French	French, University lecturer, over 25 years in the UK
Alma	Wardrobe	Finnish, English	Finnish, Hat designer, 20 years in the UK
Marie	Wardrobe	French, English	French, Cake-maker and Teacher
Grace	Wardrobe	Hebrew, Ugric, Yiddish	English, University Lecturer
Karen	Kitchen utensils	Croatian, Russian, Serbian, English	English, MA student of Croatian-Serbian.

In the next section I describe the context of the two of the collections of my data set.

Two collections and their owners

The two participants I analyse in detail in this paper were chosen because they presented a complex and rich example of how multilingual speakers' trajectories can be appreciated through the history of their material assemblages or ordinary collection of objects.

Renata's kitchen-utensils story

Renata is a specialist in German language in a HE institution. She moved to the UK as a young woman, got married and has now three grown up children. She also speaks Spanish which she studied at university, but has not pursued it over the years. English and German, however, are her main languages and over the years she has made an effort to integrate the two in the family. Renata's house is an Aladdin's cave and one can say that contains several collections of objects. Although for her, some of the most important objects in her life are books in several languages which she keeps on a shelf by her bed, this is not the collection this study concentrated on as it did not evoke the type of

multisensorial objects (by indexing too strongly the written word and abstract language) that this study was after.

Instead we both agreed to concentrate on her kitchen utensils, a more ordinary and embodied activity. Being quite a homely person who relishes time with her family in the house, one of Renata's 'everyday' collections within her cooking utensils is a collection of cookie-cutters. Whilst (according to her own account) this is quite a common practice in German households, these objects appeared to be a useful collection to investigate the entanglement of materiality with Renata's multiple cultural threads. This was a collection that did not have a particular place of pride in the house (i.e. a mantelpiece or visible shelves) but rather, it lived in a cupboard in the kitchen away from public view. Whilst her cookie-cutter collection was assembled over a long time and was periodically used, it only came out of the cupboard occasionally, and in particular, at Christmas time for making ginger cookies with her children.

Simha's wardrobe story

Simha is an academic in the UK and lives in the south of England. She was born in the south of France and she moved to the UK in her twenties. Simha's family is from Algeria, from a Jewish community, a religion that she still observes and practices. She speaks French, English and Hebrew with the family and studied Russian at university. This rich and cultural trajectory of her Simha's life can be seen in her wardrobe collection.

I interviewed Simha in her family house. We had lunch together and did the interview after lunch over a two-hour session over coffee and sweets. After the interview, I took some pictures of her clothes and wardrobe. I kept in touch with Simha and met a few times over the next six months, face to face at my place, at a conference where I presented some of the findings of her interview, and on email to comment on the data and analysis.

In the analysis section below I describe and discuss the common patterns that I found in five of my case studies but will only comment on the two case studies that I present in this paper. The two common patterns and themes I found were (1) the entanglement of multilingualism through memory and biography and (2) the non-linearity and branching nature of the multilingual self. In the next section I will analyse in detail how such themes are performed in the practices and experiences of Simha's and Renata's personal collections.

Analysis

Biographical junctures and material itineraries

In order to understand how objects contribute to not only the experience but also the building of subjectivity of the multilingual speaker, this study reflected on how participants' cultural meanings emerged from the relationships they established with their everyday possessions: how objects acquired meaning through their multilingual experiences and how their multilingual experiences infused objects' existence with a purpose. One of the emerging patterns in my data is how participants' objects made a link with specific people and times in their life.

In the next extract, Renata talks about her collection of cookie-cutters and how such objects evoke a particular time in her biography, when her son was little and she made cookies with him. Through the baking of Christmas cookies, Renata is able to make links with her cultural past in Germany and her present in London, UK. Through the home-making practices of cookie-making, Renata conjures up and sketches an 'itinerary' of her cultural identity.

Below are the selected cookie-cutters that we photographed with Renata as she thought they would be most representative of her collection. She arranged them into three groupings: there were the old metal cookie cutters (Figs. 1) and the new metal cutters (Fig. 2), which testify to her classification of her relationship with cookie-cutters and authenticity in how they enacted her memories of Christmas in Germany and how this was re-enacted in London.



Figure 1: Old metal cookie cutters



Figure 2: New metal cookie-cutters

In this first extract we see how Renata's experience of baking cookie cutters for a German Christmas is clearly materialised in her specific practices of cookie baking with her son and the particular cooking rituals they engage in. Renata's son's cookie practices are personalised with the mentioning

of her son's preference of shapes: animal shapes, and in particular, that of a cat, which she introduced to him as a young boy. As well as her son's childhood, cookie-cutters also evoke memories of particular places. In particular, her life in Germany. Cookie-cutters are the materiality that connects two places and two worlds, her world in Germany -when she was little and the Christmas preparations in Germany-, and her world in London and the celebration of German Christmas in her multilingual family in London. The importance of the materiality of the cookie-cutters is best illustrated in the following extract where cultural meanings and the material the cookie-cutters are made of are entangled to construct a narrative of her own multicultural make-up.

-
1. *'In the same box we have ones which I had as a child in Germany and I brought them*
 2. *with me and I use them and I like using them, but particularly for Christmas. Mostly*
 3. *for making Christmas cookies. So these are silly kiddies plastic ones. I don't really*
 4. *know where they come from. These <pointing at metal cutters> are the traditional*
 5. *ones that we used when I was a child in Germany and I brought them with me and*
 6. *I like using them. And we use them to cut our biscuits. I'm pretty sure these are fifty*
 7. *years old. And maybe my mother already had them before, in which case they are*
 8. *even older. I don't know. And then, at home, when I was a child we use the same*
 9. *ones every year so we never bought new ones. We had a set of you know six, seven*
 10. *different shapes and we used them to make the Christmas cookies every year.*

(Renata's interview)

In talking about her cookie-cutters and how these link the different points in her geography and biography, Renata not only evokes different times and different places, but also invokes the materiality of the baking utensils and how these objects intra-act with her life-story. Different cookies are made of different materials and these influence how different times and places are remembered and have a place in her life. Indeed, the plastic cookie-cutters have a lower value and are not even given a denomination (*I don't really know where they [the plastic cookie cutters] come from* (line 3-4). In contrast to this, metal cookie-cutters acquire a place of pride in her narrative as they can be traced to the family history. Indeed, the metal cookie cutters connect Renata to her Christmas in Germany and an inherited tradition ('*I'm pretty sure these are fifty years old. And maybe my mother already had them before, in which case they are even older. I don't know. And then, at home, when I was a child we use the same*' lines 6,7,8).

'Multilingual artefacts' such as cookie-cutters and the practices they perform are not only a way of indexing different memories and unlocking a hidden past, but they are also a way to re-visit the present. For Renata her collection of cookie cutters is not just representative of another world, her German childhood, and a life removed from her present. Rather, it is a way for her to have access to such memories and maintain her connection with the practices and meanings that she experienced in the past. By using her cookie-cutters in a new time and place, Renata mobilizes and actualises her

past. Cookie-cutters enable Renata to re-organise and re-assemble these memories in a new system of relations, in other words, to create an ‘assemblage’ (Canagarajah ,2018, Author 2020) in a horizontal set of relationships. In this way, Renata is able to constantly revise her practices and the place that particular ‘multilingual artefacts’ have in her life and how these relate and help her construct her linguistic and cultural world through mundane and ordinary practices such as baking.

Similarly, the materiality of Simha’s wardrobe collection plays out in how she traces her biography and her multilingual itinerary in the objects she describes.

-
1. *‘Again, it’s not about particular clothes, but about particular material. I love natural material. So, yes I am always attracted in silk and things made out of silk. Not at all practical, so I like the beauty of it. When I was younger, when I was a teenager I used to do a lot of silk painting, so I have this particular relationship with this material. I have been painting on it for years. So, I love it. I like the ink going into the fabric. I like the noise when you move, the noise it makes. I think it’s a beautiful fabric and it’s made. When you see how it is made, it is just a bit miraculous. So, I like silk. I like natural material but I have a bit more of an issue nowadays about growing old and [I am]*
 9. *thinking more about nubuck and leather . I like very soft leather. Or very soft nubuck*
 10. *jacket and I am always on the look for something...you know, you have a lot in second hand shops. If you buy this new it’s too expensive’.*

(Simha’s first interview)

We see how the materials used in Simha’s wardrobe are related to her memories of the different stages in her life and her biography. She contrasts the preference for silk in her youth: the way she used to paint silk, the colours and the noise of the ink going into the fabric and the noise that silk makes when you move. In contrast to this, nubuck leather is now her material of choice, as its natural softness and texture makes her connect with her self-perception as a mellow mature woman.

Indeed, the extracts tell us how Renata and Simha’s ‘biographical junctures’ (Pujolar and Puigdeval 2015) can be traceable through some of the most ordinary objects, their materiality and texture.

Material repertoires

In this section I continue to analyse the data within the idea in my theoretical framework that cultural artefacts and multilingual practices are mutually constituted in time and space through materiality. I

will connect to such an understanding the sociolinguistic notion of ‘repertoire’. Here, multiple languages and cultures are not seen as finite and complete competences, but as partial and shifting relationships that combine bodies and objects to keep traces of multilingual encounters. Indeed, this was one of the most salient findings in my data: objects become part of the multilingual and translingual repertoires by momentarily fixing speakers’ lived experience and bearing the mark of their fleeting encounters with other-worlds and other-cultures.

Below, I illustrate how this notion of linguistic repertoire emerges from my data, one of my subjects’ relationship with her wardrobe collection. In this extract we can see how Simha’s description of her linguistic repertoire is presented as a multilingual patchwork, where her clothes and her translingual identities are interwoven to the extent that they almost mirror each other:

Its many influences interweaved. It's a tapestry of French, but not mainstream French culture, as I explained I am the only one in my family that was born in France, metropolitan France. They were all born in Algeria, in Oran, and before that, my ancestors were also from North Africa, it's not that we crossed...you know...we are not pied-noirs, we are Jews from North Africa. And if there are any roots in Europe it may be more Spain than France originally. So obviously, French is part of my identity, but, as I said, French but Oriental French. French from North Africa, which has an impact on the way we speak, the way we eat, the way we behave, the way we dress. So, being French is not such a simple statement, you have to go deeper... {laughs}..from where?

In the figure below, we can see one the dresses Simha showed me in one of my visits as one of her favourite items of clothing. This looks as if is made out of different materials, a patchwork of different cloths, as if to symbolize how her identity is made up of different sources and cultural influences.



Figure 3: Simha's dress

When she talks about her clothes collection, Simha emphasizes the heterogeneity of her ‘bundle’ of things and the indispensability of each collection piece. When I ask her about her favourite piece of clothing, she assertively states that there is no one favourite, in the same way that she would say that there is no one language representing her. Her patchwork repertoire of clothes makes up who she is.

Simha points out the connection to the different aspects of her biography and her activities in life. Each item of clothing has a purpose, a feeling, a memory. Clothes, therefore, do not reflect who she is, but are all part of who she is, until they stop being so.

As Backus and Blommaert theory of repertoires argues, pieces in a multilingual jigsaw are traceable and acquire meaning in relation to one’s biographical trajectory and current social needs. Similarly, in Simha’s intercultural ‘wardrobe repertoire’, her clothes also acquire meaning in relation to different events in her cultural biography so that her wardrobe collection is not only linked to her biography because of some ‘functional need’ but because certain pieces of clothing evoke powerful memories and are part of her multilingual repertoire.

Subjectivity, body-idioms and body-boundaries

The existence of different repertoires rather than languages in one’s multilingual experience is also ‘materialised’ in one of my participants’ experience through the way they experience their bodies as non-finite entities, experienced as the layers of the onion’s skin. The body is perceived as porous and in close contact with the outside, where a layer binds the inside with the outside. In the following extract, Simha talks about the intimate connection that clothes have with her skin and her body in her description of clothes as ‘sparks of the soul’, *klippah*. The word *klippah*, however, can also be spelled

'qlippah', which then means ‘a covering or a container’, like a shell or a peel. Interpreting the word with the meaning of a covering gives a new meaning to Simha’s clothes so that clothes become some sort of outer skin of her soul.

‘And perhaps, unconsciously, I make the link between those different skins I put on when I try different dresses with the different parts of myself it represents or perhaps the soul, you know. Sparkles of soul. In Hebrew it is called ‘klippah’. It’s like the outer layer, the skin of the fruit’

(Simha’s interview)

Clothes for Simha are not just a play on words, they are the embodiment of an extension of the self, as Simha’s extract below shows. In one of her stories, Simha tells me that the outfits that she tries in front of the mirror are not only new layers added to the self, but they are powerful detonators for a transformation of the self, like ‘body-idioms’ (Goffman 1963 in Blackledge and Creese 2017) that externalise who she is. These artefactual body-idioms are not only situated at the surface of her body and in close contact with her skin, but they link the outer and the inner of her being, they are also in her head: *‘there is a lot going on in the head’*. Here, the image of her body and her mind are connected. In line with the idea of relational identities and distributed agencies in new materialism (Bennett 2009), clothes are not just matter, but ‘vibrant matter’ that becomes an agent for personal transformation.

Conclusion

In this article, two ordinary personal collections, Simha’s wardrobe and Renata’s cookie cutters have illustrated how the materiality of multilingual ordinary personal collections are tightly entangled with processes and ways of becoming. The analysis of such processes of entanglement of the material and the human have uncovered the ways in which multilingualism is lived in relation to material culture and what forms and processes subjectivity may take. Indeed, the lived repertoires of the two focus participants analysed in this paper are both multiple and dynamic collaborations between the human and the material where objects confederate with their owners’ experiences to create something new.

Simha and Renata tell us how their collections of clothes and cookie-cutters, their material ordinary collections are part of who they are and how they contribute to their subjectivities. The materiality of their collections are in complex relationships and entanglements with the time and place where these women have lived, their life junctures, and their biographies. This is what Byram (2019) may have

referred to when he talks about living '*into*' languages, a deeply experiential, concrete and tangible engagement with languages.

'Artifactual multilingualism' then concerns meaning-making that not only expands the semiotic possibilities of human-to-human interaction, but it also points out that communication is not limited to relationships with other humans. The memories, feelings and sensations that are triggered and embodied in multilingual collections allow the participants in this study to weave in a complex pattern of threads and connections between different points and spaces in their lives that would not be possible without these objects. Multilingual subjectivities are not only lived on the surface or in the abstract, but they transcend binaries and entrenched divisions between matter and humans and point towards an extended concept of the development of the self that involves 'artefactual body-idioms' and histories.

The idea of lived material repertoires then focuses on how languages and cultures are not only embodied in the here and now, the small acts of everyday living and the materiality of ordinary daily rituals, but also how they are re-interpreted and re-organised to fit in with one's material traces of the past, embodied in personal collections. It explores how the languages we speak, write, read, and listen may also be present outside the confines of what has so far been considered language, to include other semiotic systems and multisensorial assemblages of meaning. Kitchen-cabinets and bedrooms closets become spaces where meaning-making takes place. Such an idea adds to the multimodal and multisensorial understandings of spatial repertoires by adding a new dimension to the multilingual repertoire: the materiality of living multiple languages. This understanding of intercultural and multilingual practices sets out to articulate a new understanding of subjectivity where material events and practices do not pre-exist and are separate from the individual's agency, but rather, it emanates from the relational energy and desire that connects human beings with matter and their becoming.

This paper has argued that wardrobe collections and kitchen paraphrenalia can be seen as both the space where subjectivities rest, but also where subjectivities are embodied, felt and made sense of. Cultural artefacts then become the time-place juncture where the inside and the outside of the individual and her multilingual and translingual practices meet. It is now necessary to challenge understandings of multilingual subjectivities where there is not only a separation of body and mind and a mentalistic understanding of language, but a mind-matter dichotomy. By moving away from this binary ontology of language and meaning-making we open up new possibilities for the construction of subjectivities. Artefacts then become the nexus where the 'embodied' aspects of language and personal lived histories are negotiated.

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