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Language Ecology in Multilingual Settings. Towards a Theory of Symbolic Competence

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This paper draws on complexity theory and post-modern sociolinguistics to explore how an ecological approach to language data can illuminate aspects of language use in multilingual environments. We first examine transcripts of exchanges taking place among multilingual individuals in multicultural settings. We briefly review what conversation and discourse analysis can explain about these exchanges. We then build on these analyses, using insights from complexity theory and interactional sociolinguistics. We finally outline the components of a competence in multilingual encounters that has not been sufficiently taken into consideration by applied linguists and that we call 'symbolic competence'.

1. INTRODUCTION

When Diane Larsen-Freeman gave her groundbreaking talk on chaos theory and SLA at the Second Language Research Forum (Larsen-Freeman 1997), few language teachers imagined how chaos/complexity science could possibly be relevant to their daily task of having to teach grammatical forms and functions, communicative strategies and cultural knowledge in language classrooms. Yet complexity theory was soon picked up by American and Dutch educators interested in language ecology (van Lier 2000, 2004; Kramsch 2002; Leather and van Dam 2002); it was connected with the work that had long been going on in Europe in ecolinguistics (Haugen 1972; Fill and Mühlhäusler 2001; Steffensen 2007), and was brought to bear on the way the teaching of foreign languages and cultures was being conceptualized (Larsen-Freeman 2003; van Lier 2004; Risager 2006; Kramsch and Steffensen 2007).

Ten years later, the increasingly multilingual and multicultural nature of global exchanges is raising questions about the traditionally monolingual and monocultural nature of language education, and its modernist orientation. The prototypical communicative exchange, used by researchers to explore the processes of second language acquisition, and by teachers (and textbooks) to teach communicative or intercultural competence in a foreign language, usually includes two or three interlocutors, who all conduct the interaction in the same standard target language, all agree on what the purpose of

the exchange is and what constitutes a culturally appropriate topic of conversation, all have equal speaking rights and opportunities. But, as recent work in pragmatics and sociolinguistics has shown (e.g. Rampton 1995; Johnstone 1996; Blommaert 2005; Coupland 2007), in multidialectal and multilingual settings the reality can be quite different, especially in our late modern times.

In the many places around the world where multiple languages are used to conduct the business of everyday life, language users have to navigate much less predictable exchanges in which the interlocutors use a variety of different languages and dialects for various identification purposes, and exercise symbolic power in various ways to get heard and respected (Rampton 1998, 1999). They have to mediate complex encounters among interlocutors with different language capacities and cultural imaginations, who have different social and political memories, and who don't necessarily share a common understanding of the social reality they are living in (Blommaert 2005). This presents a double challenge. For researchers, the lack of a shared understanding, due to global migrations and deterritorialized living conditions in late modern societies, poses a problem because much of applied linguistic data only make sense on the basis of a shared understanding of reality between the researcher and a given speech community. For language teachers, it complicates the teaching of what has been traditionally called 'communicative competence'. For, in such environments, as we shall see below, successful communication comes less from knowing which communication strategy to pull off at which point in the interaction than it does from choosing which speech style to speak with whom, about what, and for what effect.

This paper draws on insights from complexity theory and post-modern sociolinguistics to explore how an ecological approach to language data can illuminate aspects of language use in multilingual settings. We first present transcripts of exchanges taking place among multilingual individuals. We then examine what various contextually-oriented approaches to discourse can reveal about these multilingual interactions. We extend these analyses by drawing on insights from complexity theory and recent work in interactional sociolinguistics. We finally outline the components of a language competence in multilingual encounters that has not been sufficiently taken into consideration by applied linguists and that we call 'symbolic competence'.

2. AN EXAMPLE OF LANGUAGE ECOLOGY IN PRACTICE

We first turn to data collected by Anne Whiteside (AW) as part of her research on Maya-speaking immigrants from Yucatan, Mexico, now living in San Francisco, California (Whiteside 2006). Attempting to understand their patterns of language use and the reasoning behind them, Whiteside spent over two years working closely with four focal Yucatecans, following them in

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their daily lives, helping to organize community events, and exchanging English, Spanish, and computer literacy lessons for lessons in Maya.

There are now an estimated 25,000 Yucatecans living in the greater San Francisco Bay area, and some 50–80,000 in California, many of whom left Yucatan over the last decade (INDEMAYA 2005). Like an increasing number of migrants crossing the Mexico/California border, many arrive without legal papers (Passell *et al.* 2004; Passell 2005), lured by service sector jobs that have replaced entry-level manufacturing jobs in California's post-industrial economy. Their situation is typical of workers in a global economy that knows no national borders, no standard national languages, and thrives on the informal economic and social margins of national institutions.

Whiteside found that since many work two and three jobs, and with long-term residence uncertain because of undocumented status, learning English often takes a back seat. Her informants worked in restaurants where as many as eight languages were routinely spoken, with English, if spoken, as the highly accented lingua franca. Spanish use was common, linking Yucatecans with other marginalized Spanish-speaking workers and allowing undocumented individuals to blend with Latino legal residents and citizens. Yet informants also complained of discriminatory treatment by speakers of other varieties of Spanish, and noted a tendency of fellow immigrants to disguise their Yucatecan accents. English provided an escape from such distinctions. And English is seen as portable capital, motivating some to learn it to teach future migrants back in Yucatan. By contrast, Maya can be a social liability, and speakers described a sense of 'shame' speaking Maya in public, inhibited by racialized colonial discourse and stereotypes linking Maya with poverty and ignorance (Güemez Pineda 2006). Maya was used predominantly at home and among work teams, where it provided a safe code in which to vent about oppressive conditions.

Whiteside collected data between January 2004 and June 2005, using participant observation, videotapes, interviews, and a language and literacy survey of 170 Yucatec Maya adults.[1] The data presented below are taken from 12 multilingual conversations she recorded in stores located in a predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhood. The speakers in these conversations are Yucatecans Bela Chan and Don Francisco Canche (DF) (pseudonyms), some local merchants, and the researcher. These conversations were transcribed and analyzed using conversation analysis, looking in particular at preferred and dispreferred responses, repairs, evaluations, alignments, and indexicalities. It was in the course of these analyses that the need for a more ecological approach to the data emerged, which might link the microanalysis of the conversational data to the broader ecological context.

In the first set of data we discuss here, Don Francisco, 49, who runs an informal restaurant out of his apartment, is taking the researcher through his neighborhood as he shops for food. He has agreed to help her research project since she has been teaching him to read in Spanish, which he never learned. As DF chaperones AW around, he is regularly interrupted by

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greetings in Maya and Spanish from fellow townspeople, now San Francisco neighbors, who know his status as a successful farmer in Yucatan. To local merchants DF is a preferred customer, one who makes frequent trips to supply his busy restaurant and who spends a lot of money. On this occasion he is stopping in to check out supplies and place orders, eager to show the researcher his routines and to demonstrate the Maya the merchants are learning. We next present the data with brief descriptions, followed by more detailed analyses in sections 3 and 4.

At the Vietnamese grocery

The first excerpt occurs in a grocery story with Vietnamese writing on its awning. The Vietnamese owner, whom DF introduces as Juan, has been speaking to DF in English, who answers him in Spanish. Juan is busy loading meat from the freezer into the display case, and this exchange comes at the end of a short conversation about the meat DF needs.

Excerpt 1

1	Juan:	how much *panza* you want?	(tripe)
2	DF:	*voy a comprar cinco libras de panza mañana*	I'm going to buy 5 lb of tripe tomorrow.
3	Juan:	OK *mañana*	
4	DF:	**/\ma' alob**.	good
5	Juan:	_/OK!	
6	DF:	**\/Dios bo dik**	thanks
7	Juan:	**_/bo dik**	
8	DF:	**_/saama**	tomorrow
9	Juan:	@@,	
10		@@	
11		**_saama**	
12	DF:	ah	

'Juan', who has adopted a Spanish name for his Spanish-speaking customers, and has demonstrated his understanding of DF's Spanish earlier in the conversation, uses mixed utterances in #1 and #3. DF closes in Maya (#4) to which Juan answers in English, but DF persists in Maya (#6). Juan echoes him (#7), but his laugh in #9,10 marks an affective change. Juan's final 'saama' (#11) indexes a willingness to let the customer have his way. We give a more extensive analysis of this excerpt in section 4.2.

At the Chinese grocery

The next five excerpts take place in a Chinese-run grocery store, where DF has stopped to find out how much *masa* (corn-flour dough) his son had

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picked up earlier in the day. DF, who is four foot ten, makes an odd pair with AW, Anglo-American and five foot nine.

Excerpt 2

1	DF:	((TO BUTCHER IN MAYA))	
2	Butcher:	si si si	
3	DF:	((TO CLERK)) *buenas...*	
4		*vengo <?> mi maestra*	I'm with my teacher
5	AW:	<LO HI LO>	
6		teacher	
7	Clerk:	OH [@]	
8	DF:	[ah]	
9		*es mi maestra*	She's my teacher
10		ah	
11		*eh-nomás, este, pasé a preguntar/*	I just uh came to ask
12		*la masa que agarró mi hijo*	the masa that my son
13		*ochenta y ahora/*	took, 80 and now
		...	
22	Clerk	*si bien.*	yes good.
23		*le toco masa acá ahora*	he'll take masa here now

DF first speaks with the butcher, a fellow Yucatecan, in Maya, then turns to the clerk in Spanish, introducing AW as '*mi maestra*'. He then asks about the order in #11–13.

The clerk answers him in broken Spanish (*Si bien. le toco masa acá ahora*) which can be glossed as 'OK good, he'll come and get the masa here now'. In Excerpt 3, DF explains why he sent his son instead of coming himself to pick up the order.

Excerpt 3

31	DF:	*estamos de paseo con la= maestra*	we're out walking with the teacher
32		*por eso yo no /\vine*	that's why I didn't come
33	Clerk:	ah/	
34	DF:	*si*	
35		ah	
36	Clerk:	((to AW)) my Spanish is really limited	
37		but I try to understand him	
38		@[@@@@]	
39	AW:	[that's	
40		good]	
41	DF:	[si ah ha]	

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In #36, the clerk addresses AW in English, aligning herself with the English speaker, now referring to DF in the third person, and laughs. AW evaluates this positively, as does DF. In the intervening lines, the clerk tries to explain to AW her routine with DF, but her English is not much clearer than her Spanish: 'the masa I always send it there, he always pick it up there already'. In Excerpt 4, DF turns to an older woman—possibly the clerk's relative—who is sorting beans.

Excerpt 4

74	DF:	*mucho trabajo*.	a lot of work.
75	Older lady: ah @@@		
76	DF:	*eso es el* ticher.	this is the teacher.
77	Clerk:	((TO OLDER LADY: IN CHINESE))	
78	Older lady:	hi @@@	
79	AW:	hi	
80	Clerk:	((TO DF)) *mañana* when you come [I give you no *español*]..	
81	Older lady:	[@@@@@]	
82	Clerk	[[*solo* English]]	
83	DF:	[[@@@]]	
84		NO,<@ no@>.	
85	Clerk:	Jose, tomorrow when you come in I don't speak Spanish with you any	
86		more.	
87	DF:	[@@@@]	
88	AW:	[no, no, I'm]not teaching him English.	
89		I'm teaching him to read and writing in Spanish.	
90		I'm not teaching him English.	
91	Clerk:	oh, oh,	
92		read and write Span-[ish.]	
93	AW:	[yah,] read and write Span-ish	
94	Clerk:	that's good 'cause he like he not even recognize the numbers	

The older woman laughs in response to DF's Spanish, but he persists, introducing AW as '*el* ticher', a mixed utterance that the clerk translates into Chinese for her. The Clerk then addresses DF as 'Jose', threatening to use only English with him. DF responds with a laugh (#87). In #88, AW jumps in, correcting what she perceives as an erroneous assumption on the part of the clerk that she is teaching DF English, which the clerk is enforcing by

addressing him in English. Her statement suggests that DF, who spends most of his time in his Spanish- and Maya-dominant restaurant and apartment building, has made learning Spanish literacy, not English, his priority. AW's emphatic 'no no' can also be seen as an attempt to save DF's face, which has been threatened by the clerk's scolding tone, and by her use of a stereotypical name not DF's own. AW's repetition in #90 can be interpreted as 'teacher talk' to the NNS clerk, and her adoption of the prosody of the clerk's English in #93 as 'foreigner talk'. The clerk realigns herself with the revised teaching agenda in #91, noting that DF cannot read numbers. After a few other remarks the conversation returns to this topic. We shall return to this excerpt at greater length in section 4.2.

Excerpt 5

107	AW:	we're going to learn to read the numbers	
108		((TO DF)) *dice que vamos a aprender a leer los numeros para que*	
109		*[puedas . . .]*	she says we're going to learn numbers so that you can . . .
110	DF:	[hm]	
111	Clerk:	[that's the] most important part first:	
112		one, two three four five six seven eight nine ten.	
113	AW:	that's right	
114		yah	
115		where did YOU learn English?	
116	Clerk:	America	
117	AW:	[oh=]	
118	Clerk:	[many] years ago	
119		<HI you know I start from beginning	
120		I start from one, two three four five. HI>	
121		I never know it in my life because my mother come	
122		when I come in 19 uh 80	
123		I still went to ESL program	
124		I still learn	
125		that's why he [can too]	
126	AW:	yah]	
127		yah yah	

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128	Clerk:	((to DF)) when me *aquí*	when I (was) here
129		twenty years early	twenty years ago
130		*nada* speak English	I spoke no English
131	DF:	*nada*	none
132	Clerk:	*nada*	none
133		*todo* English *aquí*	everything/all English here
134	DF:	ah	

In #108, AW translates for DF, acknowledging that DF may not understand her exchange with the clerk, but the clerk persists in English, taking an authoritative stance, 'that's the most important part first'. As the *maestra* and English expert, AW then asserts her own authority to approve of this priority, but then turns the topic (#115) to the clerk's status as English learner. The clerk takes this opportunity to launch into a 'can-do' story that draws on the immigrant frame 'pulling-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps'. Her story ends with a moral ('that's why he can too') that draws a parallel between her and DF. However, by referring to him in the third person in his presence and talking 'over' him in a code he doesn't understand, the clerk distances herself from DF. Considering that he is her preferred customer, this move can be taken as an affront.

The clerk then turns to address DF in #128 in a mixture of broken English and broken Spanish or 'foreigner English' that further positions her in the English speaking camp ('*todo* English *aquí*').

Excerpt 6

135	Clerk:	learn first	
136		ABCD	
137		*todo aquí*	everything here
138	DF:	*ah, entiendes Maya,*	*a*h, you understand Maya
139		*año más*	(one) more year
140		*ah*	
141		*entiendes Maya*	
142	AW:	a lot of people speak Maya here, huh?	
143	Clerk:	yeah	
144	AW:	you're learning some Maya?	
145	Clerk:	uh:: not much	
146		Latinos is <LO??LO>	
147	DF:	*ahí esta?*	that's it?
148		e*h= en la tarde/[y=/]*	In the afternoon and
149	Clerk:	[OK]	
150	DF:	*bueno, (?)*	Good.

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151		*nos vemos*	See you.
152	Clerk:	OK	
153		good to see you.	

In #138, DF counters her suggestion that he 'learn first ABCD' by predicting that a year from now the clerk will be speaking Maya. Given the recent influx of Maya-speaking clientele in the neighborhood, DF suggests that her customers, not the all-English melting pot, will prevail through their buying power. We return to this interaction in section 4.2.

At the Vietnamese butcher

In the next two excerpts, AW and Bela Chan, both women in their 50s, are out pricing meat in anticipation of an upcoming fiesta, for a typical Yucatecan pork dish, *cochinita pibil*. Raised in a Maya-speaking family, Bela stopped using Maya after being ridiculed for being 'country', code for backward/Indian, and has trouble speaking it. With a Maya and a Chinese grandmother, an Afro Honduran and a Spanish grandfather, all of whom spoke Maya, Bela has roots in four continents. After 15 years in San Francisco, Bela has made little headway in English, which she uses neither in the Spanish-dominant neighborhood where she lives nor at the Spanish Baptist church she attends. In the Yucatan, she held a managerial position in a Korean-run garment factory or *maquiladora*; by contrast, she has worked 'on her knees' in the USA, a consequence she attributes to her undocumented status.

This butcher shop is advertised with a sign in Vietnamese; its customers speak English, Spanish, and several Asian languages, presumably including Vietnamese. The two Asian-looking butchers, whom we call Butcher A and Butcher B, both use some Spanish, although Butcher B is more proficient. The butchers stand behind a tall rectangular case full of meat, making fairly transparent what's going on. Bela, who is under five feet tall, is hard to see from that height; AW, at five foot nine, is closer to them. Yet Bela doesn't strain to make herself heard or understood: the implication is that if the butchers want a sale they will do what it takes to understand her. The whole interaction, 51 turns of talk, involves 27 instances of code-switching, during which everyone speaks everyone else's language, with the exception of side-play between butchers in their L1.

Prior to the following exchange, Butcher B tells them the price in Spanish ($1.97 a lb) and they negotiate the amount needed, with Butcher A tactfully repairing Bela's ambiguous 'fifti pound' ('One five or five-0 you want?'). Having established the quantity, they negotiate the price:

Excerpt 7

60	Butcher A:	<you need two leg . . . 20 pound each>

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61		so I order two.	
62	AW:	((TO BELA))	
63		<HI p*regúntele si es más barato* HI>	ask if its cheaper
64	Bela:	¿*sí*?	yes?
65	Butcher A:	oh	
66		¿*habla español*?	you speak Spanish?
67	Bela:	*es más barato*	it's cheaper
68		uh huh	
69	Butcher A:	oh ((SPEAKS TO OTHER BUTCHER IN WHAT SEEMS TO BE CHINESE)).	
70		<he said OK>	
71	Butcher B:	*uno cincuenta y nueve la libra*	$1.59 a pound
72	AW:	*uno cincuenta y nueve si compramos más*? . . . (3) if we buy more?	
73		ok. (??)	
74	Butcher B:	¿*quiere?*	you want it?
75	AW:	a*h..*	
76		[v*amos a*]	we will . . .
77	Bela:	[next week]	
78	AW:	[[v*amos a*..]]	we will . . .
79	Bela:	[[next week]]	
80	Butcher A:	[ok]	
81	Bela:	[next week]	
82	Butcher A:	¿*cuándo quiere*?	when do you want?
83		next week ¿*cuándo*?	when*?*
84		¿*que día*?	what day?
85	AW:	ah, *todavía estamos pensando* <LO *verdad* Lo>	we're still thinking, right?
86	Butcher A:	[ok]	
87	Bela:	[ya]	
88	Butcher B:	si *bueno*	OK good

AW's side play to Bela in Spanish in #63, to which the butchers respond with side play in Chinese (#69), is a common haggling strategy, the team huddle before the play. Butcher B comes back in #71 with a reduced price ($1.59) after which he asks for a commitment. This is followed by hedging in Spanish and English, at which point Butcher A in #82 switches to Spanish, in which

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he is far from fluent, aligning himself with AW and Bela's sideplay in Spanish. As they close the encounter in the next excerpt, Butcher A presents them with a Spanish name.

Excerpt 8

95	Bela:	What's your name?	
96	Butcher B:	Felipe	
97	Bela:	Felipe (.)	
98		/\OK Felipe	
99	Butcher A:	*Felipe sabe español muy bien*	Felipe knows good Spanish
100	Butcher B:	this one with my name	
	((LEANING OVER THE COUNTER TO GIVE BELA A CARD))		
101	Bela:	@@[@@]	
102	AW:	[thank you]	

Bela responds to Butcher B's introduction (#97) by repeating his name. The rising–falling tone in her next turn (#98) indexes surprise/acceptance at the butcher's Spanish name, which she follows in #101 with a laughter of recognition. Bela is no stranger to Asians who adapt themselves to new linguistic and cultural contexts: her Chinese-born grandmother spoke Maya, and the Korean factory owners she worked for in Yucatan spoke Spanish and English. In an interview with AW, Bela expressed impatience with fellow townspeople in the USA who pretend to be from other parts of Mexico. She is clearly aware of how this game of masks is played to strategic advantage in such multicultural contexts.

3. CONTEXTUALLY ORIENTED DATA ANALYSES

How can we analyze these data? Several approaches in applied linguistics take a situated, contextualized view of language use in social settings, in particular conversational analysis and mediated communication studies. We consider each in turn. As we shall argue, what becomes salient in these interactions is how problematic the traditional notions of context have become in a global environment.

3.1 Conversation analysis

First we turn to conversation analysis (CA). Both in its 'pure' and in its 'applied' form,[2] the branch of the sociology of language called conversation analysis provides an epistemological way of looking at what the participants in these encounters are doing. 'Pure' CA, represented by such foundational work as Sacks *et al*. (1974), Sacks (1992), Schegloff (2007), and inspired by

ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), revolutionized the study of talk in interaction by rigorously confining its analysis to observable phenomena and the organization of sequences of turns-at-talk. Its strictly emic perspective has encouraged researchers to do close readings of conversational phenomena. It does not ask: what did the participants have in mind, or what larger forces prompted them to say what they said? but, rather: what do speakers orient to in their turn-by-turn contributions to the ongoing exchange? what normative expectations and assumptions inform and underpin the production of their conversational sequences (Schegloff 2007), their membership categorization devices (Sacks 1992)?

In Excerpt 1, for example, by showing the unfolding of an unproblematic closing routine consisting of three adjacency pairs: good/OK, thanks/thanks, tomorrow/tomorrow, CA can show evidence of the familiar accomplishment of the expected leave-taking between merchant and customer. In Excerpt 8, the identification routine in which Bela's turn 'What's your name?' elicits Butcher A's turn 'Felipe' is expected to set up an environment that will facilitate future transactions. Bela's repetition of the name Felipe momentarily flouts that expectation, as it offers a dispreferred response to the previous Q/A pair: 'What's your name?'—'Felipe'. Of course, Bela's surprise only makes sense to us because we share her expectation that a Chinese butcher should bear a Chinese name, not a Spanish one. In Excerpt 2, CA would find it significant that DF categorizes AW as 'mi maestra' while AW categorizes herself as 'teacher', and that DF, in Excerpt 4, picks up on AW's self-categorization by referring to her as 'el ticher'. Inferences could be drawn as to the kind of social structure these two participants are constructing through these categorization devices. The strength of CA as an epistemological approach rather than a mere tool of analysis lies in its constructionist view of the social world that emphasizes participants' local, situated, ethnographic understanding of social reality. The analyst's membership knowledge of this reality is crucial for the analysis. For, while the participants themselves might not be able to verbalize their orientation to this or that aspect of the interaction, the analyst can recognize and interpret it based on his/her shared understanding of the social world.

While pure CA has dealt mostly with monolingual, symmetrical exchanges between native speakers in everyday life, it has been adopted and expanded by researchers in the broader field of microethnography and discourse analysis (DA), with varying degrees of adherence to ethnomethodological analytical principles. CA has been applied to the analysis of bilingual and multilingual interactions in cross-cultural settings (e.g. Moerman 1988; Gafaranga 2005; Torras 2005) and to second/foreign/lingua franca talk (e.g. Firth 1996; van Dam 2002). In particular it has informed analyses of the social symbolic meanings of code-switching, both the 'on the spot observable' and the 'in the head' meanings (Zentella 1997). The literature on the application of CA to bi/multilingual interaction and language alternation is

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extensive (see, e.g., Auer 1984, 1998; Richards and Seedhouse 2005; Wei 2005) and it varies in its tolerance to interpretations that go beyond what is strictly demonstrably relevant to the participants themselves.

The distinction between pure and applied CA has become somewhat blurred as applied CA has overlapped with much of DA. As Wooffitt (2005) puts it: 'Whereas in CA the analytic focus is on people's own sense-making practices as they are revealed in the turn by turn unfolding of interaction' (2005: 84), in DA 'the action orientation of language is located at a broader level, on the wider interpersonal or social functions served by a passage of talk' (2005: 80). Our data cannot be understood without factoring in the broader societal language ideologies at work in the participants' choice of this or that code, their exercise of this or that symbolic power.[3] CA is not intrinsically incompatible with the analysis of power relations and other macrophenomena like ideology, history, and cultural values, but rather than assume that social interaction merely reflects preexisting power relationships, it shows how 'the sequential structures out of which the differential distributions of resources emerge are not a natural but an *oriented to* feature of the interaction' (Hutchby 1999: 90 cited in Wooffitt 2005: 194). In other words CA can serve as a reality-check for DA. For example, at the Vietnamese butcher in Excerpts 7 and 8, CA can show how Bela's economic power gets interactionally generated through her words as well as through her silences and how these are taken up by the butchers and the researcher in the store. However, neither CA nor DA can deal with the multiple levels of the global context itself, which is not restricted to a Vietnamese store in San Francisco but now includes the reenactment of practices carried out in Yucatan or ventriloquated words by a Chinese clerk mouthing Anglo prejudice.

3.2 Mediated communication analysis

Mediated discourse or sociocultural communication studies (e.g. Wertsch 1990; Scollon and Scollon 2001; van Lier 2004) focus less on the individuals than on the mediated action itself as a kind of social symbolic action. For example, in Excerpt 7, the accomplishment of the interaction is *mediated* through gestures like cutting, pointing, etc. and artifacts such as the tall rectangular meat case, the short stature of the customer, and the multiple languages used in the sideplays and the main track exchanges of butchers and customers. The relationships between the participants and their environment, or *affordances*, are seized upon and constructed as 'opportunities for or inhibition of action' (van Lier 2004: 4), as when butcher A overhears Bela and AW's sideplay in Spanish and seizes this opportunity to switch from English to Spanish, negotiate a lower price with his colleague in Chinese, and have Butcher B return to the customer in Spanish. This exchange is also a good illustration of this approach's notion of *activity*, grounded in physical, social, and symbolic affordances, among which

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language plays an important part as 'a system of relations' (van Lier 2004: 5). In the encounters above, the participants are vying not only for economic goods and services but for symbolic power and recognition. We can see this particularly well in the dialectic between two opposite perceptions of DF in Excerpt 5: that of a lazy, reluctant learner of English presented by the Chinese clerk and that of an eager learner of Spanish literacy presented by AW. DF himself resolves this tension by reaching for a synthesis—a third identity, namely that of a proud and well-respected speaker of Maya who, moreover, casts himself as a teacher of his native language to non-native merchants in his neighborhood. But this dialectic itself is perhaps too neat; it does not account for the unstable play of perceptions and counterperceptions between a Chinese clerk who recognizes her former self in the Yucatec migrant and the Maya speaker who styles himself as the successful resident that the Chinese clerk has become.

The approaches discussed above: conversation and discourse analysis, and the study of mediated communication provide a useful basis for understanding what is going on in our data. However, they presuppose a social reality bound by the usual constraints of time and space. Globalization has disrupted this social reality. The protagonists in these exchanges are physically and emotionally living on several axes of space and time that are embodied in their daily practices. Erickson (2004) makes the distinction between *kronos*, that is, 'the quantitative aspect of time, time as continuous and thus as measurable'; and *kairos*, the subjective time of 'tactical appropriateness, of shifting priorities and objects of attention from one qualitatively differing moment to the next' (2004: 6). The use of multiple codes in the data at hand and the exploitation of their various subjective resonances by the participants require taking into account not only the measurable communicative time of turns-at-talk within an activity, but the subjective, embodied time of cultural memory (Damasio 1999; Gibbs 2006). The Yucatecans in these encounters may be objectively present in a store in San Francisco, but their bodies carry subjective traces of their experiences living in Yucatan, crossing the border, learning to negotiate the vicissitudes of daily life as undocumented residents of the Bay Area. On certain streets they may move discretely, like stage crew executing a scene change, but among people they trust, speaking Maya, they become lead actors. The Maya language is for them embodied memory that, while located in individual bodies, resurrects a collective memory of group practices in the present. DF's voice speaking Maya with a fellow Yucatecan recreates the Yucatan in San Francisco. Without the notion of subjective time, it is difficult to understand the importance DF attaches to teaching Maya to so many of the merchants in his neighborhood or to explain Bela's dispreferred response in Excerpt 8—two aspects to which we return in section 4.2. In the following we propose an ecological approach that combines insights from complexity theory and postmodern thought in sociolinguistics.

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4. ECOLOGICALLY ORIENTED ANALYSIS

4.1 Aspects of complex dynamic systems

Dynamic systems theory, also called complexity theory (Byrne 1997; Larsen-Freeman 1997; Cilliers 1998; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008; Mason 2008; Peters 2008) is, when taken to its logical conclusions, a late modernist theory that hails more from Bakhtin's dialogism (Bakhtin 1981) than Marxist dialectics. Dialogism, the principle behind Bakhtin's existentialist philosophy of the relativity of self and other, and of the openness of time, shares with complexity theory and with postmodern sociolinguistics some basic tenets that can be summarized as follows:

1. *Relativity of Self and Other*. In complex dynamic systems like human relations, both the self and the other are intrinsically pluralistic, and possibly in conflict with themselves and with one another. Because the I is not unitary, but multiple, it contains in part the other and vice-versa; it can observe itself both subjectively from the inside and objectively through the eyes of the other. Hence the frequency of stylization, parody, double-voicing in the discourse of everyday life observed by sociolinguists like Rampton (1995) and others. The researcher is part of this subjective/objective observation game. His/her categories of observation and their relevance for the researcher are themselves relative to his/her subject position and to the perspective of the participants.
2. *Timescales*. A dynamic systems theoretical model of language shows that the meanings expressed through language operate on multiple timescales, with unpredictable, often unintended, outcomes and multiple levels of truth and fantasy, reality and fiction. Our memories are not in the past but live on as present realities in our bodies to be both experienced and observed (Hofstadter 2007). Blommaert (2005) refers to this phenomenon as 'layered simultaneity'. 'We have to conceive of discourse as subject to *layered simultaneity*. It occurs in a real-time, synchronic event, but it is simultaneously encapsulated in several layers of historicity, some of which are within the grasp of the participants while others remain invisible but are nevertheless present' (2005: 130). Simultaneity does not necessarily mean congruence. Blommaert notes that the participants in verbal exchanges might speak from positions on different scales of historicity, thus creating 'multiple and contradictory temporalities' that may lead to different intertextual references and to communicative tensions (2005: 128), such as we have in Excerpt 5.
3. *Emergentism*. Complexity theory has in common with postmodern sociolinguistic theory the notion that any use of language, be it learning a language or using it to haggle, assert yourself, or exercise power does not derive from structures in the head—beliefs, rules, concepts and schemata—but are new adaptations that emerge from the seamless

dynamic of timescales. As Blommaert writes: 'Meaning emerges as the result of creating semiotic simultaneity' (2005: 126).

4 *Unfinalizability*. Complexity theory does not seek dialectical unity, or bounded analyses of discrete events, but on the contrary open-endedness and unfinalizability. It counts under 'participants' not only the flesh and blood interlocutors in verbal exchanges, but also the remembered and the imagined, the stylized and the projected, and the objects of identification (Hofstadter 2007). Similarly, sociolinguists have problematized the notion of bounded speech communities and focused our attention on open-ended, 'deterritorialized' (Rampton 1998) communicative practices rather than on the 'territorial boundedness' posited by the 'one language—one culture assumption' (Blommaert 2005: 216).

5 *Fractals*. Complexity theory, like postmodern sociolinguistics, is concerned with patterns of activities and events which are self-similar at different levels of scales, that is, which are fractal figures for larger or smaller patterns. In the encounters above, stereotypical names like *Jose* or *Felipe* are fractals of a whole Hispanic culture, Maya greetings and leave takings are fractals of a Maya culture, and the stigmatization of Maya speakers as poor Indians in Yucatan is refracted in the stigmatization of Maya speakers as illegal immigrants by the US immigration authorities.

In the following analysis we draw on a complexity theory of language learning, as proposed by Larsen-Freeman (1997) and Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008: 115–161) and a sociolinguistic theory of language use as proposed recently by Blommaert (2005) to suggest an ecological reading of the data at hand.

4.2 An ecological analysis of the data

An ecological perspective on the data can build on the other analytic approaches, and view the unfolding events as the enactement, re-enactment, or even stylized enactment of past language practices, the replay of cultural memory, and the rehearsal of potential identities.

The ecology of multilingual spaces

By performing English, Maya, Spanish, or Chinese, rather than only learning or using these languages, the protagonists in these data signal to each other which symbolic world they identify with at the time of utterance. In the Vietnamese store in Excerpt 1, DF's and Juan's little *pas de deux* around the use of English, Spanish, and Maya indexes the various ways in which the protagonists wish to position themselves in the ongoing discourse. At the end of a transaction in which Juan has been speaking a mix of English and Spanish, and DF has been speaking exclusively Spanish, Juan and DF take leave—Juan in English, DF in Maya. Taking leave is always a delicate part of any verbal exchange as it has to sum up the exchange, make plans for future exchanges, and perform a recognizable and acceptable leave-taking routine.

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But in multilingual exchanges like this one, it is doubly delicate, as language choice can always become foregrounded. Since Juan had addressed DF in English and had been responded to in Spanish, Juan's OK in line 3 can be seen to be oriented not only toward the content of DF's utterance, but toward the language that DF chose to speak in. A gloss of this 'OK' might be 'I agree to sell you 5 lb of tripe tomorrow' but also 'I agree to respond to you in Spanish' or 'I acknowledge the legitimacy of Spanish in my store'.

In #4, DF suddenly switches to Maya. Because the store is located in a predominantly Spanish speaking area of San Francisco, DF's efforts to get Juan and other merchants to respond to him in Maya has been a form of public resistance to a Spanish colonial discourse which holds Maya in low esteem among Mexicans.[4] Here, a Vietnamese clerk serves as an unwitting catalyst for DF's efforts to provide a place for himself between the polarity Spanish–English that divides much of California today. Whereas speaking Maya can be a social millstone in Yucatan and marks speakers as belonging to a recent wave of migrants with dubious immigration status, in some neighborhoods of San Francisco Maya can be made to yield a different social capital vis-à-vis third ethnic groups, that is, immigrants who are neither Mexicans nor Anglos, DF's use of Maya gives him a prestige of distinction vis-à-vis Mexicans, Spanish gives him a distinction on a par with Anglos.

Juan's laughter in #9–10 is both amused and slightly embarrassed at having to produce Maya sounds in front of the Anglo visitor. In the usual hierarchy of codes in this Hispanic neighborhood, English and Spanish would be the two unmarked codes, followed perhaps by Vietnamese as the storeowner's language, but Maya is definitely marked. However, it has, in this case, acquired some historical presence due to DF's repeated efforts to teach the local merchants some Maya, so we can interpret Juan's chuckle as a sign that he is both willing to respect DF's language and ambivalent about his own legitimacy as a Maya speaker. It is worth noting that DF does not administer his little Maya lesson in all stores. In the Chinese store, for example, he uses Spanish throughout even when admonishing the clerk that her ability to understand Maya is improving (Excerpt 6, #138–141).

The Chinese clerk in Excerpts 2–6 also plays with the languages available in her store. She alternately speaks Chinese with her old relative, Spanish with putative 'Mexicans' like DF, and English with Anglos like AW. These three languages index respectively: her ethnic or cultural identity as a Chinese, the accommodating role that she wants to assume and cultivate with Spanish-speaking customers, and the public voice she feels appropriate to adopt with Anglos. But she clearly uses these languages to align herself symbolically with the shifting centers of power in her store. For her in these data, Chinese is the language of intimacy with fellow customers, family, and friends; Spanish is the useful service language of local transactions, but it also indexes for her the stigma of non-assimilated immigrants; English is her public transactional language but she can also use it as a way of distancing herself from Mexican newcomers.

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Viewing these exchanges as dynamic complex systems enables us to see the various languages used by the participants as part of a more diversified linguistic landscape with various hierarchies of social respectability among codes, and added layers of foregrounding of the code itself rather than just the message. To the multiplicity of languages we must add their subjective resonances in the speakers' embodied memories.

The ecology of embodied time

It is important to note that the protagonists' choice of language is not dictated by some pre-existing and permanent value assigned to each of these languages, rather, the meaning of these choices emerges from the subjective perceptions of shifting power dynamics within the interaction. It draws on multiple timescales of experience, for example, at the Chinese grocery, the clerk's memories of learning English in America (Excerpt 5 #118 ff), DF's reminders of past Maya lessons with the clerk and his prediction of her future progress (Excerpt 6, #138–141), and, as mentioned in the previous section, reenactments of similar transactions between DF and the Yucatecan butcher in their native Yucatan (Excerpt 2, #1). This last timescale is particularly important for an understanding of the social prestige accorded to DF in this neighborhood of San Francisco. His weekly tours of the grocers and butchers recreate the network of Maya-speaking connections he had in his hometown. They also show that social capital varies greatly at different scales, so that in Yucatan, DF can be a wealthy respected merchant, while at the Mexican national level he may be perceived as poor, Indian, and illiterate. The connections between these different timescales bolster the invisible symbolic power of his undocumented presence in the United States. They cast a halo around his words that cannot be captured by looking only at the utterances produced in the present. For example, DF's broad smile and assertive posture when he turns to the Chinese clerk in Excerpt 2 #3 and proclaims '*buenas*...', carry evidence of the self-assuredness displayed a minute ago by a successful merchant chatting with his fellow Yucatecan in their common language.

The conflation of timescales can be further exacerbated by imprecise tense markers in the various grammars used by the participants. For example, between Excerpts 2 and 3 in an exchange not presented here, DF asks the Chinese clerk about the remainder of the 80 lb of masa that he ordered earlier. But because Maya has no verb tense morphology, DF's use of tense markers in Spanish is intermittent (DF: *ochenta llevo ahora* = I take 80 now). Chinese does not have any verb tense morphology either, so the clerk, who tries to clarify things by responding in Spanish: *aquí treinte* (here thirty) does not help matters by using *aqui* (here) instead of *ahora* (now). When DF then answers: *mas al rato* (later), the temporal confusion is extreme. Will he or will he not take the 80 lb of corn flour? Will he do it now or later? This can only be disambiguated through reference to their prior arrangements. It seems to

suggest that the transaction might be in fact the reenactment of an exchange that took place earlier and is now being performed again for the benefit of the guest of honor, the researcher herself, who is being 'toured around' (cf. #31 '*estamos de paseo con la = maestra*'). If that interpretation is correct, then the analysis has to take the words not as the spontaneous productions typical of natural conversations, but as a reflective replay for the benefit of a third party, a staging of sorts. Of course, this staging or styling serves also to nurture the human and commercial relations DF is keen on keeping up with the merchants in his neighborhood.[5]

Besides the conflation of timescales in the performing bodies of these social actors, we notice another aspect of embodied time. Spanish, Maya, English, Chinese, all acquire a subjective overlay of Mexican-ness, Maya-ness, etc. that makes uttering Spanish or Maya words more than the sum of their grammars or of the communicative roles they perform. Beyond haggling over the price of meat, the protagonists in these exchanges are performing not only themselves, but their cultures, their families, their countries of origin or the mythic and emotional memories that these historical realities have become. They are not just performing 'being Maya', they are maintaining alive an idealized or 'de-territorialized' kind of Maya-ness that transcends geographic boundaries and awaits to be reterritorialized in the subject positionings of individual speakers (Rampton 1998). Each of their utterances is less the performance of a language than the enactment of a performative speech act that creates the very reality it purportedly refers to (Pennycook 2007: ch. 4). As Blommaert notes: 'The performance of identity is not a matter of articulating *one* identity, but of the mobilization of a whole *repertoire* of identity features converted into complex and subtle moment-to-moment speaking positions' (2005: 232).

A good example of this is given at the Vietnamese butcher shop. As we described in section 2, Bela's linguistic abilities include: conversational Spanish, limited English, and passive knowledge of Maya. At the end of the transactional encounter with the two Chinese butchers in Spanish (Excerpt 8), Bela asks Butcher B in English (#95) what his name is, presumably for future reference if she decides to buy meat in this store, since he is the one who earlier gave her—in Spanish—a good price. The reason for her switch to English is not immediately clear, but it makes the butcher's response all the more striking. Like Juan, the Vietnamese grocer in Excerpt 1, this Chinese butcher has taken on a Spanish name for his Spanish-speaking customers. Bela's choice of a dispreferred response to his name in #97—'Felipe (.)', a simple reiteration of the name rather than a vocative—draws attention to the name itself and what it connotes about the Mexican-ness of a Chinese butcher. Who says that a Chinese butcher cannot make himself into a Mexican butcher, since indeed, as the other Chinese butcher says: '*Felipe sabe español muy bien*'?, glossed as: 'Since he speaks Spanish well, he is entitled to give himself a Spanish name' or 'Felipe is not just any name he gives himself, it means that he also knows Spanish well'. With '/\OK Felipe' Bela accepts

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'Felipe's' unexpected Hispanic identity. Hoping that these two customers come back, and offering a personal contact as incentive, Butcher B hands Bela his card, adding in English 'This one with my name'. At the end of this exchange, the two butchers, who both know English, Chinese, and Spanish, make sure they cover all their bases with this elusive, multilingual customer: Butcher A addresses her in Spanish in #99, Butcher B in English in #100. If we take Butcher B's adopted identity for the linguistic construction that it is, then we have to admit that in the multilingual and multicultural environment of immigrant communities, the symbolic dimension of interactions is as significant as their pragmatic one.

5. SYMBOLIC COMPETENCE

An ecological analysis of these data reveals a much greater degree of symbolic action than is usually accounted for in applied linguistics. Social actors in multilingual settings seem to activate more than a communicative competence that would enable them to communicate accurately, effectively, and appropriately with one another. They seem to display a particularly acute ability to play with various linguistic codes and with the various spatial and temporal resonances of these codes. We call this competence 'symbolic competence'.

Symbolic competence is the ability not only to approximate or appropriate for oneself someone else's language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used. Such an ability is reminiscent of Bourdieu's notion of *sens pratique*, exercised by a habitus that structures the very field it is structured by in a quest for symbolic survival (Bourdieu 1997/2000: 150). Here, however, we are dealing with a multilingual *sens pratique* that multiplies the possibilities of meaning offered by the various codes in presence. In today's global and migratory world, distinction might not come so much from the ownership of one social or linguistic patrimony (e.g. Mexican or Chinese culture, English language) as much as it comes from the ability to play a game of distinction on the margins of established patrimonies. Because it depends on the other players in the game, we should talk of a 'distributed' symbolic competence, that operates in four different ways.

5.1 Subjectivity or subject-positioning

Different languages position their speakers in different symbolic spaces (see, e.g., Weedon 1987). In the data above, speakers take on subject positions regarding the symbolic power of this versus that language, the respective social values of Maya, Chinese, Spanish, and English. In Excerpt 7, for example, Bela is linguistically at a disadvantage in English but she is commercially at an advantage, because she is the one who has the purchasing power. Because she is perceived as a powerful customer, the butchers and the clerk will go along with whatever language she wants to speak: English

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at first when she looks like she prefers English; then Spanish in #66ff, when she is overheard speaking Spanish to AW. In turn Bela's ambiguity serves to play one language against the other and, after the price has been brought down, to gain time until next week. This could be seen as strategic competence on Bela's part, but strategic competence has been conceived up to now as an individual compensatory tactic (Canale and Swain 1980: 30), whereas the symbolic competence apparent here is a distributed competence that emerges from playing the game.

Subject positioning has to do less with the calculations of rational actors than with multilinguals' heightened awareness of the embodied nature of language and the sedimented emotions associated with the use of a given language. In Excerpt 2, the pleasure that the butcher and Don Francisco experience at using with each other the language of their common village in Yucatan is still visible in DF's self-assured demeanor when he turns around and switches to Spanish in #3. The clerk's volubility in English in Excerpt 5 indexes her pleasure at being able to converse in English with the researcher, something she cannot do with DF in Spanish. And AW's switch to Spanish in Excerpt 5 #108 aligns her emotionally with DF, who may have felt affronted by the clerk's use of English.

5.2 Historicity or an understanding of the cultural memories evoked by symbolic systems

Throughout the data presented here, we have been confronted with the cultural memories carried by words, gestures, body postures, and scripts taken from a different timescale in a different place and reterritorialized in a Californian grocery store. We have noticed the timescale of Yucatan irrupting in the timescale of San Francisco, but there are other examples. During a visit to another Vietnamese grocery, AW and the clerk engaged in a comparative account of the ancient history of the Maya in Mexico versus the ancient history of the Chinese in Vietnam (Kramsch and Whiteside 2007). Neither the clerk nor the researcher were really teaching each other a history lesson; rather, each was lending weight to her words by performing ritualized utterances about the ancient nature of Maya and Chinese civilizations—an exchange of social symbolic power that put both parties on an equal footing. The utterances in these exchanges sounded formulaic because they were what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, realms or archetypes of social memory (1997: 3031). Any utterance or turn-at-talk can become a *lieu de mémoire*, formed by the sedimented representations of a people. Whether these representations are accurate or not, historically attested or only imagined, they are actually remembered by individual members and serve as valid historical models. As Blommaert writes: 'The synchronicity of discourse is an illusion that masks the densely layered historicity of discourse' (2005: 131). Indeed, symbolic competence is the ability to perform and construct various historicities in dialogue with others.

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5.3 Performativity or the capacity to perform and create alternative realities

Within an ecological perspective of human exchanges, utterances not only perform some role or meaning, but they bring about that which they utter, that is, they are performatives. We have seen how the utterances of the protagonists in our data recreate environments from other scales of space and time, produce fractals of patterns from one timescale to another. Multilingual environments can elicit complex relationships between speech acts and their perlocutionary effects. Take for example Excerpt 4. The clerk clearly devalues DF by ignoring that his utterance: 'eso es el ticher' (#76) names the researcher as 'the teacher', and by taking on herself the teacher role (#80). She puts down his Spanish by embedding it in her English: '*Mañana* when you come I give you *no español*, *solo* English', then calling him 'Jose' in #85. The cartoon-like foreigner talk is not lost on the older lady and on DF himself who bursts out laughing. But we understand that it was an insult and not just a joke from its perlocutionary effect on AW. Her immediate overlapping response in English in #88 ('No no I'm not teaching him English') seeks to cancel the potential perlocutionary effect of the insult by resignifying the ESL issue into a Spanish literacy issue ('I'm not teaching him English. I'm teaching him to read and write in Spanish')—a symbolic move that reestablishes DF at par with the clerk: in the same manner as the clerk learned English, DF is now learning Spanish literacy.[6] Such a move exploits the time lag, materialized here by the general laughter in #81–87, between the illocutionary force of the clerk's derogatory utterance and its perlocutionary effect on DF, and reconfigures the whole environment. The actors in the Chinese grocery store are quick to adapt to the alternative configuration introduced by AW in #88 and DF regains the symbolic space that was his at the onset of the exchange. Thus a third aspect of symbolic competence is the capacity to use the various codes to create alternative realities and reframe the balance of symbolic power.

5.4 Reframing

Finally, the data highlight the importance of reframing as a powerful means of changing the context. In Excerpt 6, DF reframes the face threatening situation defused by AW's intervention into one that reestablishes his legitimacy. For the Chinese clerk, legitimacy as an immigrant comes from having learned English, knowing how to count in English and the English alphabet. For DF, legitimacy comes from having money and clout from the old country, and influence in the neighborhood, even though he is illiterate. In Excerpt 4, by resignifying the clerk's insult into an erroneous statement of fact (#88), AW reframed her relationship with DF (#88–90) from an ESL teacher to a Spanish literacy maestra. In turn, DF reframes his relationship with the clerk: at first it was the clerk who in #80 constructed for herself a 'teacher' role to 'Jose' the pupil. In Excerpt 6 #138–141, DF suddenly turns the tables as the Maya

'teacher'. His insistence that she will end up understanding Maya is less a statement about her than about him contesting and reframing the view that '*todo* English *aquí*'. Maya, he suggests, will be an increasing part of this world, as will Spanish. And, indeed, he gives leave in Spanish (#150–151), while the clerk closes the conversation in English (#152–153).

Symbolic competence could thus be defined as the ability to shape the multilingual game in which one invests—the ability to manipulate the conventional categories and societal norms of truthfulness, legitimacy, seriousness, originality—and to reframe human thought and action. We have seen that this kind of competence is multiply distributed and that it emerges through the interaction of multiple codes and their subjective resonances. It is true that symbolic competence is not reserved to multilingual actors in multilingual encounters. Analyzing exchanges between monolingual speakers of English, Gumperz (1982) found that the meaning of utterances there too lie not only in the way participants orient themselves to the ongoing exchange, but in the way they implicitly ventriloquate or even parody prior utterances and thereby create affordances in ways that are favorable to them. Multilingual encounters increase the contact surfaces among symbolic systems and thus the potential for creating multiple meanings and identities. In the late modern stance offered by an ecological perspective, symbolic competence is both semiotic awareness (van Lier 2004), and the ability to actively manipulate and shape one's environment on multiple scales of time and space. Symbolic competence in our view adds a qualitative metalayer to all the uses of language studied by applied linguists, one that makes language variation, choice, and style central to the language learning enterprise.

CONCLUSION

An ecological analysis of multilingual interactions enables us to see interactions in multilingual environments as complex dynamic systems where the usual axes of space and time are reordered along the lines of various historicities and subjectivities among the participants. While the global economy has deterritorialized and dehistoricized the spaces of human encounters, participants find a way of reterritorializing and rehistoricizing them in their moment-by-moment utterances. Our analysis of their interactions has revealed the importance of taking into account embodied perceptions, portable cultural memories, and the power that comes from resignifying the illocutionary force of performatives. In environments where the boundaries of the distant and the proximal, the past and the present, the real and the imagined have become blurred, when names have become arbitrary, and signifiers are no longer transparent, multilingual exchanges require us to position ourselves as researchers in much more multidimensional ways than is usually done in applied linguistics.

For language learners and educators, symbolic competence is not yet another skill that language users need to master, nor is it a mere component

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of communicative competence. Rather, it is a mindset that can create 'relationships of possibility' or affordances (van Lier 2004: 105), but only if the individual learns to see him/herself through his/her own embodied history and subjectivity and through the history and subjectivity of others. Our symbolic survival is contingent on framing reality in the way required by the moment, and on being able to enter the game with both full involvement and full detachment. In this sense, the notion of symbolic competence is a late modern way of conceiving of both communicative and intercultural competence in multilingual settings.

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APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS BASED ON DUBOIS (2006)

Boundary Tone/Closure		**Metatranscription**	
Terminative	.	Unintelligible	(??)[1]
Continuative	.	Comment	((WORDS))
Truncated intonation unit	-	Overlap	[ ]
Appeal	?	**Tone shifts**	
Vocalisms		Rising tone	/
Breath (in)	(H)	Falling tone	\
Laugh	@	Low to high tone	_/
Manner		High-low-high	V
Manner/quality	<MISC.		
Voice tone	<VOX>		

NOTES

1 The interviews were conducted with the four focal participants and with 13 non-Yucatecan service professionals working with this population.

2 The distinction between 'pure' and 'applied' conversation analysis was made by ten Have (1999: 8) to distinguish between a focus on specific interactional situations and how interactants orient to these situations and their requirements (pure CA) on the one hand, and a focus on the larger institutional arrangements as they pertain to the organization of interaction (applied CA) on the other hand. We apply this distinction to the two strands of CA we find in the literature today: the strictly local and the more ethnographically contextual.

3 Indeed, the study of talk in interaction has been associated with late modernist theories of structure–agency dialectic

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(Giddens 1991) and the construction of intersubjectivity and identity (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998).

4 This interpretation follows from Whiteside's general observation that the Maya speakers in this study tend to refrain from using Maya in non-Maya speaking contexts. DF's deliberate flouting of this general practice must be seen as an act of defiance.

5 Rampton (1995) has convincingly shown on the language practices of multilingual adolescents in British schools the interpersonal effects of 'styling', i.e. performing a language or language variety other than one's own for placating, teasing, mocking, or playful purposes (see also Goffman 1959). Coupland (2007) points out that stylization, like staging, is a form of multi-voiced utterance originally theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981).

6 What is perhaps at issue here is AW's attempt to deflect another possible threat to DF's face, a future-oriented one since, if DF is mistakenly perceived as receiving English lessons and then subsequently perceived as not making progress, he will be in danger of losing face as one who, in spite of instruction, is incapable of making progress in English. We thank an anonymous reader for this very plausible interpretation.

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