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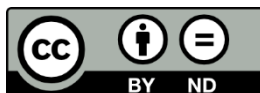# TilburgPapers in CultureStudies

Paper 177

Multimodality and superdiversity:
Evidence for a research agenda

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Abstract

In recent years, social science research in superdiversity has questioned notions such as multiculturalism and pluralism, which hinge on and *de facto* reproduce ideological constructs such as separate and clearly identifiable national cultures and ethnic identities; research in language and superdiversity, in translanguaging, polylanguaging and metrolingualism have analogously questioned concepts such as multi- and bi-lingualism, which hinge on ideological constructs such as national languages, mother tongue and native speaker proficiency. Research in multimodality has questioned the centrality of language in everyday communication as well as its paradigmatic role to the understanding of communicative practices. While the multimodality of communication is generally acknowledged in work on language and superdiversity, the potential of a social semiotic multimodal approach for understanding communication in superdiversity has not been adequately explored and developed yet – and neither has the concept of superdiversity been addressed in multimodal research. The present paper wants to start to fill this gap. By discussing sign-making practices in the superdiverse context of Leeds Kirkgate Market (UK), it maps the potentials of an ethnographic social semiotics for the study of communication in superdiversity and sketches an agenda for research on multimodality and superdiversity, identifying a series of working hypotheses, research questions, areas of investigations and domains and fields of enquiry.

1. Introduction: Superdiversity, language(ing) and multimodality

In recent years, the notion of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007, 2010) has emerged in the social sciences – along with others[1] – as an attempt to define and describe the increased socio-cultural complexity resulting from the fast-changing transnational phenomena connected with migration. Vertovec's superdiversity (originally conceived to describe the UK context) has tried to give sense to the social complexity produced by enhanced mixing, layering and differentiation of multiple waves of migrants, whose identities, life styles and communicative practices – it is argued – are no longer describable through traditional country of origin or community-bound categories. There emerges a questioning of notions and discourses of 'pluralism' or 'multiculturalism', which assume the existence of separate entities such as national cultures or ethnicities. These are ideological constructs that have generated hegemonic discourses and policies on 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism' ultimately re-producing 'othering' processes, and reinforcing separation, forcing individuals into pre-given and fixed socio-cultural variables (Parkin, 2016). Analogously, in linguistics, notions such as translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Garcia, 2009; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Wei, 2011), polylanguaging (Jørgensen, 2008; Jørgensen, Karreboek, Madsen, & Møller, 2016) and metrolingualism (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010, 2011, Pennycook & Otsuji, 2014a,

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[1] For a discussion, cf. Arnaut et al. (2016a). The present paper will not delve into the debate on the usefulness of the concept of superdiversity in relation to others (as an example of criticism, cf. Pavlenko, 2016); it aims to pinpoint the potential of multimodality to advance understanding of communicative practices in a world characterized by enhanced 'polycentricity', 'mobility' and 'complexity', as detailed in Blommaert (2017, pp. 33–34) – it will use 'superdiversity' as an umbrella term for this changed social scenario, as to contribute, through a semiotic perspective, to what I believe is the most promising sociolinguistic research in the field up to date.

2014b, 2015) are questioning concepts such as multi- and bi-lingualism, which again assume the existence of entities such as bound, separate and identifiable national languages, which speakers are supposed to master to be fully proficient. Minute observation of everyday interactions in today's superdiverse contexts evidences the need of a paradigm shift to account for the linguistic resources used and communicative practices enacted by speakers living and acting in multiple and interconnected (offline and online) spaces, intersected by a complex layering and conglomeration of global and local influences, and social, cultural, individual and context-specific variables. When confronted with actual instances of communication, notions such as national languages, native-speaker proficiency, mono- or bilingualism, standard and non-standard varieties reveal themselves not only as inadequate analytical categories but also as ideological constructs that encapsulate in frozen and discrete categories what is instead a much more complex, fluid and layered phenomenon of day-to-day interaction (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Speakers combine features traditionally attributed to separate languages (polylanguaging), drawing on resources that rise from their socially-framed yet personal experiences and are functional to the specific situation, activity and interactants involved. Through language practices from below (metrolingualism), they co-produce dynamic spatial and socially situated repertoires. The result is ever-changing practices of 'translanguaging'. When diverse people inhabit the same space, they develop dynamic repertoires (not limited to language resources, see Rymes, 2014) that are situated in place and specifically related to actions that need to be carried out, as evidenced in Pennycook and Otsuji's (2015) investigation of what they term 'metrolingualism'. The notion of repertoire

> dispenses with a priori assumptions about the links between origins, upbringing, proficiency and types of language, and it refers to individuals' very variable (and often rather fragmentary) grasp of plurality of differentially shared styles, registers, and genres, which are picked up (and maybe then partially forgotten) within biographical trajectories that develop in actual histories and topographies (Blommaert & Rampton, 2016, p. 26)

In a programmatic paper, Blommaert and Rampton (2011) discuss the implications of superdiversity for the study of language practices, tracing a series of paradigm shifts in (socio)linguistics derived by and trying to respond to the changes in the transnational composition of today's communicative environments, and sketch a research agenda for the investigation of language and communication in superdiversity. One of the paradigm shifts they identify is multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001); humans make meaning through a multiplicity of semiotic resources (or modes), of which language – in its spoken and written modal realizations – is only a part.

In the last couple of decades, stemming from the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), research in multimodality (Jewitt, 2009, 2014; Jewitt, Bezemer, & O'Halloran, 2016; Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) has increasingly questioned a logo-centric approach to communication and interaction. Multimodal theorizing and empirical research (for a recent review, Adami, 2016) has refuted the assumption that language is the predominant, most developed and articulated resource in communication, hence paradigmatic for the understanding of communication as a whole. Communication is multimodal; we normally combine different semiotic resources whenever we represent and interact; each of these resources, or modes, has specific affordances and potentials for making meaning. When combined in actual representations and interactions, each mode has a different functional load. Hence to describe and explain meaning in all instances of communication, we need to attend equally to the function played by each semiotic resource, and, chiefly, to the meaning made through the relations of different modes combined together in a communicative event or artefact.

Research in sociolinguistics is increasingly acknowledging the multimodality of communication and interaction (Garcia et al., 2017). The contribution of non-verbal resources to meaning-making is considered in most studies on language and superdiversity (Arnaut et al., 2012, 2016b; Rampton et al., 2015), translanguaging, polylanguaging and metrolingualism, as well as in research on linguistic landscape (for a recent review of the field, see Huebner, 2016) – stemming from the pioneering work by Scollon and Scollon (2003), further elaborated in Blommaert's (2012, 2013) ethnographic linguistic landscaping. Yet the focus of these works is predominantly on verbal resources, and understandably so; adopting a linguistic perspective, they provide data and analyses that are mainly language-based and -driven, with minor analytical detail to resources deployed in other modes.

In using phrases such as 'multimodal translanguaging' (García-Sánchez, 2017, pp. 12, 16, 18, 25–26; Garcia & Kleyn, 2016, pp. 167–169; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015, p. 197) or 'multimodal languaging' (Busch, 2014, p. 40; Gynne, 2015, pp. 513, 523; Joutsenlahti & Kulju, 2017), some of these works implicitly ascribe multimodality to (features of) language, instead of considering language as a semiotic resource that combines with others in multimodal communication – thus *de facto* reproducing a power regime that considers language as a superordinate of all semiosis, and its processes and practices as inclusive of (and the interpretative lens for) all sign-making.

Research in multimodal studies, in turn, has increasingly developed theoretical perspectives and analytical tools that enable a semiotic approach to meaning- and sign-making, allowing for a balanced account of each and all resources used in communication and interaction, language included (for a detailed review on different theoretical perspectives to multimodality, see Jewitt et al., 2016). Yet multimodal studies have not addressed the issue of superdiversity. To my knowledge, no thorough attempt has been made to adopt a semiotic perspective to investigate how people communicate, interact and make meaning multimodally in contexts characterized by a complex interplay of fluid, dynamic and extremely diversified social, cultural, linguistic and individual variables, where, as Blommaert and Rampton (2011) show, non-shared knowledge is the norm, rather than the exception, and indexicality is foregrounded against referentiality.

This is producing a two-faceted gap in research on communication and superdiversity, broadly conceived, which the present paper aims to address. On the one hand, while acknowledging multimodality as a phenomenon, yet still focusing primarily on language, linguistic research fails to embrace the potential paradigmatic shift that the notion of multimodality can bring to our understanding of communicative practices; this risks ultimately to reproduce hegemonic discourses unbalanced towards the paradigmatic role of language to account for all communication – cf. in this regard Parkin:

> Our interest may indeed be in a general semiology, of which language is but one strand, possibly absent altogether in, say, silent rituals lacking verbal and textual comment. But, as a matter of heuristic choice rather than of theoretical stance, it can be argued that language normally provides an empirically convenient starting point for tracing out the other different visual and acoustic sign systems that accompany, substitute for, blend with, and shadow speech. (Parkin, 2016, p. 86)

On the other hand, by disregarding empirical contexts of and current theorizing in superdiversity, studies in multimodality are failing to (1) provide insights on semiosis and communication (multimodally rather than linguistically conceived) in times of superdiversity, and (2) test and further develop their theoretical, methodological and analytical apparatus against a changed and fast-changing social scenario.

In an attempt to establish a fruitful dialogue between research in multimodality and the one in different disciplines interested in communication and interaction in superdiverse contexts, the

present paper discusses the potential of a social semiotic multimodal approach for the understanding of communication in superdiversity, and the implications of current theorizing on superdiversity for research in multimodality. In supporting the argument through evidence of sign-making practices in a superdiverse context, drawn from the findings of an ethnographic social semiotic research in Kirkgate Market (Leeds, UK), the paper advances a series of hypotheses and directions for future research for multimodality and superdiversity.

2. Communication is multimodal: And so what?

We make meaning with far more than language. We can give directions with a hand gesture, negate through a head shake, and mitigate embarrassment through a smile; we can show focus through gaze, solidarity with touch, and distance by positioning our body; we can express our (momentary) identity through pieces of clothing, or a profile picture; we can shape gendered affiliations through colour, and professionalism with font type; we can communicate abstract ideas through a diagram, and mood through music, or an emoji. While these, together with writing and speech, are all semiotic resources that humans have developed to make meaning, we seldom use each of them in isolation. Communication is multimodal because we normally combine these resources in the texts, interactions and communicative events that we daily produce, perform and interpret. If analytically it may be convenient and useful to consider each mode as heuristically separated (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2010) to identify its specific function, a full account of meaning can only be given by considering what is produced in the layering and interrelations between different modal resources co-occurring simultaneously and in sequence in any given act of communication. Research in multimodal analysis has provided an increasingly expanding body of evidence to support this, along with an increasingly differentiated and refined theoretical, methodological and analytical apparatus for scientific enquiry (for different approaches to multimodal analysis, see Jewitt et al., 2016).

When communication occurs in superdiverse contexts, with people sharing little or only partial background knowledge, we can predict that the multimodality of communication is enhanced, with non-verbal resources achieving a greater functional load. The idea is, when language and culture are no longer assumed to be shared, you gesture more, you draw, point to and handle objects, use images, and combine at best whatever resources you have available to find common ground, make meaning and have your interlocutors interpret it the way you intended. You also rely more on your interlocutors' non-verbal resources (the way they move, dress, gesture, smile etc.) to make sense of them and their meanings – with the unavoidable risk (as happens also with indexical meanings of language) of re-producing stereotypes, or of applying your own semiotic repertoire (that is, forms associated to meanings as resulting from your individual sociocultural experience) to interpret as indexes of identity other people's resources, which instead may be associated to entirely different meanings in their own repertoires. This sounds quite commonplace, yet nobody has verified this yet. We do not know how people communicate in superdiverse contexts, if by communication we intend all sign-making, in intertwined verbal and non-verbal resources. We do not know how semiotic resources circulate, are transformed and appropriated from one context to another in today's world, and how they are used to make meaning in times when everyone is potentially a semiotic 'other' for some aspects, and yet 'kin' for others.

What we have instead are (1) theories and evidence on processes and practices of multimodal sign-making, yet with no reference to superdiversity, and (2) theories and evidence on language processes and practices of superdiversity, which we cannot – as now – assume as valid for the whole of semiosis.

In other words, the question is:

- If we apply a (social) semiotic perspective on superdiversity, what can we understand differently about both superdiversity and communication?

This involves asking also:

- Which theories and tools of multimodality are most apt to describe and explain communication in superdiverse contexts?
- How do semiotic resources other than language circulate, are appropriated, used, understood and transformed in the current socio-political landscape?
- What is the relation between transnational circulation and national coding ideologies for modes other than language, such as images, objects, gestures and face expressions?
- What is the relation between normativity, social practices and individual agency in sign-making in all resources?
- How do people make signs and indexical meanings when non-shared knowledge is the norm?
- What can multimodal sign-making reveal of the social texture of a specific 'semiotic space' (Gee, 2005)?[2]

The paper cannot provide an answer to all these questions; it will rather provide evidence of analysis of sign-making practices that can show the potential of addressing these questions for research in communication and superdiversity.

Since the milestone work by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001), different theoretical perspectives have approached multimodal analysis, each with distinct interests and foci, together with interactions between them and crossing with other disciplines. These include approaches that are more interested and focused on finding systematic regularities in the use of semiotic modes, such as systemic functional multimodal analysis (Bateman, 2008; O'Halloran, 2004, 2008), and approaches aiming at observing the use of multimodal resources in the micro-level and minute processes of interactants' co-construction of meaning and regulation of interaction, such as multimodal conversation analysis (Deppermann, 2013), embodied interaction (Streeck et al., 2011), and multimodal interaction analysis (Norris, 2004). Jewitt et al. (2016) provide a detailed review of each, along with their tools and examples of analyses. In the next section I will briefly introduce social semiotics, the approach that I believe offers more potential to be used for research in superdiversity, by virtue of its interest in situated sign-making practices, as resulting from and revealing the complex interplay between social dynamics and the sign-maker's agency. The section is not a comprehensive review of the history and development of social semiotic theory and research; rather, it is a selective presentation of the main assumptions, concepts and tools that I find particularly useful for multimodal analysis of communication in superdiverse environments.

3. A social semiotic approach to multimodality

Originating in Halliday's (1978) framing of language 'as social semiotics', and applying a socio-functional take to the analysis of all resources for making meaning, Hodge and Kress' (1988) first sketch of a social semiotic theory has later been developed in the works of Theo van Leeuwen (2005)

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[2] I use Gee's (2005) notion of 'semiotic social spaces' as a more apt label than community (of practices or of interests) to describe semiosis as socially-situated practices in communicative contexts, where identities are performed socially through their semiotic practices rather than being defined by people's membership status.

and Gunther Kress (2010). Social semiotics is interested in socially-situated semiotic practices, with a focus on the sign-maker's agency and assuming the 'social' as prior to semiosis.

This means that, instead of considering modes as internally governed 'codes' or 'systems', social semiotics conceives of them as resources that social groups have developed to fulfil functions in their social organization; following Halliday's metafunctions for language, these include expressing something about the world (ideational function), shaping roles among interactants (interpersonal function), and shaping in particular ways the relation between reality and interactants in actual texts (textual function). The analysis of how the three functions are interrelated in actual representations enables to identify how sign-makers shape reality and themselves, and associate with, (re)produce or challenge certain views of reality (i.e., ideologies), power roles and identities, in relation to the communicative situation at hand and to broader social discourses.

Influenced by Kress' (1993) questioning of the arbitrariness of signs, social semiotics assumes a motivated association between signifier and signified. Every time we make a sign, we select a certain form from the resources available to us and associate it with the specific meaning we want to make, in reason of criterial features of the form that are 'best apt' to represent criterial features of the 'reality' we intend to represent. The motivation lying between form and meaning is revelatory of the interest of who makes the sign at the socially-situated moment of sign-making. Signs are never used; they are always newly made. Each time a semiotic resource is used to express meaning, a sign is newly made. Identifying the specific motivation in the relation between form and meaning in actual instances of sign-making enables inferences about the producer's 'interest' (Kress, 2010, pp. 35–36), defined as the momentary focusing of the sign-maker's subjectivity and positioning in relation to the actual communicative situation at hand, as resulting from his/her socio-cultural and personal history and experiences. Interest and motivation are hence heuristics that reveal the nexus between social variables and agency. When interpreting a sign, the motivation between signified and signifier drives our informed guesses on the sign-maker's interest (including both their focus in the situation at hand and their broader socio-cultural positioning); at the same time, prior knowledge of the sign-maker's interest enables us to confirm or refute our guesses on the motivation of the sign. This happens in all communication, when we read a news article, watch a film or interpret someone's post on social media. Tracing the motivation between signifier and signified enables also the semiotician to analyse meaning of signs as revelatory of the sign-maker's interest. In short, social semiotics analyses signs to reveal something about society and their producer's positioning in it, in the assumption that individual semiosis is a socially-driven process.

Social semiotics sees meanings as fluid and contextual; it does not conceive of modes as fixed or pre-given codes or systems of ready-made signs and rules for their use; rather, it considers them in terms of semiotic resources, which have an ever-changing set of meaning potentials as derived from their materiality and previous uses, as developed by specific social groups. Sign makers draw on the resources that are available to them to make signs in socially-situated contexts, in relation to their interests, their communicative purposes and their assessment of their audiences.

In social semiotics, modes have affordances – possibilities and limitations for meaning making – that derive from their materiality (e.g., their relying on visual or auditory senses for perception and production; their unfolding in time and/or in space) and from their (ever-evolving) level of development and articulation in given socio-cultural groups, that is, from their socio-cultural histories. This is another take of social semiotics that makes it particularly useful if applied in relation to superdiversity. In labelling principles and processes of semiosis, social semiotics does not use notions such as national codes, standard or non-standard varieties, let alone nativeness vs. non-nativeness of sign-makers. It rather identifies transformations in actual uses of resources through

provenance (derived from "myth" and "connotation" in Barthes, 1977), by tracing how their associated meanings change from context to context and among specific socio-cultural groups, as well as the influence of broader social dynamics of power in relation to these transformations, semiotically entexted in tensions between genres and actual instantiations of texts and communicative events (for provenance as used in multimodal analysis, see Adami, 2015).

Social semiotic multimodal analysis often focuses on instances of banal and everyday representation and communication; sites of observation include face-to-face interaction (including task- and activity-based settings where language has minimal functional load, such as surgical operations, dance performances and sport games), digital environments, printed documents, built environments and spatial representations (such as museum exhibitions). Through fine-grained analysis of usually small samples of data, it attends equally to social, cultural and personal/individual aspects of semiosis, including power relations and the influence of ideology, as entexted in both disembodied and embodied modes, such as objects, layout, light, font, writing, colour, image, clothing, sound and music, as well as speech, facial expressions, gestures, body movement and proxemics.

Because of its social take, its focus on practices, its interest in the intertwining between agency and social structures, and its conception of meaning-making as fluid, situated and transformative rather than relying on codes and varieties, social semiotics seems to resonate well with research in superdiversity. The next section presents a case of multimodal sign-making in a superdiverse space, as considered in a social semiotic perspective, before deriving implications for future research on multimodality and superdiversity.

4. Superdiverse sign-making practices in Leeds Kirkgate Market

In the last year and a half, I have been involved in the interdisciplinary project *Leeds Voices: Communicating superdiversity in the market* (British Academy/Leverhulme funded project http://voices.leeds.ac.uk/), which has combined different methodologies in the social sciences and humanities to the investigation of superdiversity in Kirkgate market, in the city centre of Leeds (Northern England, UK). Within the project, I have collected visual data, supported by extensive fieldwork observations and interviews, to understand how traders (encompassing British citizens and old and new migrants) use 'disembodied' modes, such as writing, font, colour, images, objects and layout, to shape the identity of their activity and to address the increasingly diverse demographics of customers populating the market.

Leeds Kirkgate Market is said to be one of the oldest still functioning markets in the UK and 'one of the largest indoor markets in Europe' (http://www.leeds.gov.uk/leedsmarkets/Pages/Kirkgate-market.aspx accessed 8 Oct 2016); it hosts nearly 400 stalls and shops providing a wide range of generally low-budget goods and services, spanning from fresh and preserved food, clothing and shoes, mobile accessories, second hand furniture and second-best white goods, up to massage, nail and beauty services, hairdressers, key cutters, shoe repair, sewing services, and take away and cafés. The market is located in the very city centre, in an area that is undergoing renovation and gentrification. The whole area North-West of the market has been made pedestrian and populated by shopping centres and high street chains, along with a high-budget shopping district, the Victoria Quarter, with luxury brand shops in its arcades. South of the market, old warehouses have been turned into high-budget residential buildings along the city canal. Instead, the area East of the market, with the bus station, is still relatively unaffected by gentrification, although the early signs can be already perceived. Kirkgate Market itself, managed by the City Council and traditionally attracting a low-budget population, has long been subject to plans for renovation – after various attempts, actively contested by traders in the past (Gonzalez, 2014), one hall has been closed for

work for several months in 2015 and has reopened in Spring 2016, intended as a hall for 'foodies', with the idea of upmarketing the image of the place and targeting a higher-budget and younger customer audience.

The population of the market has changed considerably in recent years, with an increasingly diverse demographics of traders and customers (Gonzalez & Waley, 2013). A preliminary survey, conducted by members of the Leeds Voices project in 2016, has identified 25 different nationalities among traders (the figure considers only the one person interviewed in each stall, hence it is likely to be even higher when considering all people working in the market). As emerges from the interviews among 21 traders working in the market, the customer population encompasses all ethnic groups living in the city, including old and new migrants as well as British citizens.

In what follows, I will discuss the sign-making practices resulting from data collected in a butcher's shop in the market, which are functional to highlight the potential of a social semiotic multimodal perspective for the understanding of communication in superdiverse contexts. Data were collected through observation, photos, and semi-structured interviews. While my data collection was specifically focused on sign-making, interviews (carried out by Penny Revlin as a research member of the Leeds Voices project) were tailored to cover the broader aim of the project, intertwining issues of culture, the specific superdiverse demographics of the market and communication in contexts of multilingualism – they are used in the analysis for the punctual insights they provide into the trader's interest in his sign-making practices. At the current stage of the project, no video-recorded data of interactions between traders and customers have been collected yet, so data considered here include only observation of disembodied resources present in the shop, while reference to resources used in face-to-face interaction will be done only by relying on data emerged from the butcher's interview.

- **Indexing selves (part 1)**

In contrast to most other shops in the market, butchers frequently deploy the Union Jack (the flag of the United Kingdom). In Fig. 1, the image of the flag on the top right of the banner below the butcher's window refers to the provenance of the activity and of the meat, i.e., 'this is a British butcher and we sell British meat', as the butcher also confirmed when asked for the motivation of the flag:

> Even though we are … sort of manipulating our stock to sort of provide for different cultures, and people from different countries, um, we are still priding ourselves on giving a different alternative but still keeping it, keep it as English meat

The flag indexes tradition, i.e., 'we've been here for generations' (the shop has been running its activity in the market for over 30 years). Tradition and permanence are further reinforced by the word "traditional" in the stall's banner at the bottom and by the materiality of the stall's name, with 3D letters mounted on the wall at the top of the stall (other stalls in the market have more temporary signage, such as plastic-coated banners pinned to the frame of the stall). On the top left, the banner displays also the symbol of Yorkshire (the city's county), functioning as an identity marker specializing further the cultural provenance of the activity, i.e., 'we are from here (and we're proud of it)'; it also ties cohesively with the "locally sourced" writing below, which also indexes ideas of 'terroir', feeding into current food consumption ideologies. National and county images, together with writing in the banner, and font and materiality of the upper signage construct multimodally a cohesive identity of the butcher's activity marked towards indigeneity. Yet in the overall multimodal deployment of the shop there are other signs, which serve other purposes, that articulate further and fragment this primary cohesive identity.

Fig. 1. B & J Callard Butcher's shop window in Leeds Kirkgate Market.

- **Addressing 'others'**

A lucky cat (called also 'welcoming' or 'happy cat') is placed on a shelf facing the butcher's window (Fig. 2). The butcher was asked about the lucky cat at a point in the interview when he was discussing the shopping preferences of his many regular Chinese customers:

> Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Is that why you've got the lucky cat in the window?
>
> Butcher: The lucky cat, yeah, exactly, that's a perfect example. Why would an English butcher have a lucky cat in the window? [both giggle]. That's purely because they love it, you know, the Chinese love anything to do with lucky cats! And it was just, it started off as a kind of novelty thing, we saw it in a shop one day, we thought we'd get one, and they love it, you know. The little Chinese kids, love waving to it.

Fig. 2. Enlarged detail of the right side of the butcher's window.

From the interview, it appears that the lucky cat is used as a sign functioning to befriend, welcome and attract Chinese customers. Here is thus a (multimodally marked) Yorkshire-British trader appropriating a sign that he perceives as coming from another culture ("Why would an English butcher have a lucky cat in the window?") to reach out towards a new niche of migrant customers populating the market. It would be a perfect case of 'translanguaging'; yet no language is used to address a culture-specific customer group; what is used instead is an object-as-sign.

In a social semiotic perspective, a sign has been newly made by the butcher/sign-maker, who has associated the signifier (the object 'lucky cat') to a signified 'Chinese culture', motivated by its assumed provenance, because of his interest, i.e., to address Chinese customers. In making the sign, the butcher has made an 'educated guess' ("it started off as a kind of novelty thing […] and we thought we'd get one"). He 'gave it a try' and then turned himself into an observer to check whether the sign had the desired perlocutionary effect ("and they love it, you know. The little Chinese kids

love waving to it"). The Chinese kids' waving to the lucky cat was interpreted by the butcher as a sign of appreciation – and positive feedback for his guess (i.e., something like 'the lucky cat speaks well to Chinese customers'); so he kept it on the window. In a context of assumed non-shared knowledge, the making (rather than the use) of signs is a tentative practice, and 'metapragmatic reflexivity' (Blommaert & Rampton, 2016, p. 31) is a crucial aspect of the semiotic processes that check against and inform the sign-making practice of the butcher; this invests all semiotic resources, not only language.

In the visual multimodal deployment of the shop facade, the Union Jack and Yorkshire images in the banner (further reinforced and articulated through 'traditional' and 'local' in the writing) and the lucky cat object are geo-culturally marked signs that point to different directions and serve different functions. The images index the cultural provenance of the activity; the object indexes the cultural specificity of the addressed customer audience. As Blommaert (2012, pp. 125–128) observes in his ethnographic linguistic landscape analysis of the written items on the menu of the Bellefleur tavern in a superdiverse neighbourhood in Antwerp, the relation between resources pointing to different cultural provenances reveals a multiplicity of meanings indexing the multi-layered attempt at positioning the butcher's activity to respond to the complex needs of a superdiverse environment. While Blommaert's ethnographic linguistic landscape enables a fine-grained analysis of this as resulting from language, multimodal analysis, through an ethnographic social semiotic perspective, enables to identify this in all signifying resources – as in the relation between an image (the Union Jack) and an object (the lucky cat), which would have escaped the radar of a linguistic investigation.

On the shelf above the one where the lucky cat is placed, the butcher has plastic grapes (as shown in Fig. 2). During an informal chat, the butcher explained why they had placed the plastic grapes on the shelf. Following the closure for renovation of the fishmongers' aisle in the market, fishmongers had been temporarily relocated opposite the butchers. While butchers have traditionally a low-budget type of customers, fishmongers in the market attract a higher-income clientele – this particular butcher (as emerged in the interview and as also indexed by the "locally sourced" writing in his banner) is trying to position his activity at a higher quality and price level than the others. So, with the fishmongers' "posh" clientele now walking by his window, the butcher has thought of decorating his shop. To do so, he has used plastic grapes, in the attempt to accommodate the design of his shop to the taste of a "posh" clientele. Traditional linguists would consider this as a case of hyper-correction; in order to reach out for a higher status speech community, the butcher has intended to produce their register, yet drawing on his own knowledge – and taste, in Bourdieu's (1986) sense – of what he believes that register to be.

A social semiotic analysis of the lucky cat and the plastic grapes as signs reveals in fact the same sign-making practice, which we could provisionally name 'trans-signing'. In both cases, the butcher has made a sign through the use of an object to reach out towards a perceived 'other', either in nationality or in social class. The specific resources in both signs have been chosen because the sign-maker has assumed that they belonged, and hence could 'speak' to that specific socio-cultural 'other'. Analysis of non-verbal resources rules out from the start artificial separations of what is the traditional domain of 'diversity' (that is, geographically-marked differences in cultural capital) and the one of 'internal' variation (that is, socially-marked differences in cultural capital). Through a social semiotic perspective, it is immediately manifest that the 'lucky cat' and the 'plastic grapes' are signs made through the same process, with an overarching common purpose, that is, to address socio-culturally perceived 'others'.

Further ethnographic investigation (through customers' interviews, for example) would be needed to see the extent to which signs such as the lucky cat and the plastic grapes are successful in

communicating with the intended target audience. In today's superdiversity, chances are that different individuals of the same (Chinese?) nationality or (upper?) class would interpret these signs considerably differently. As for the lucky cat, regardless of the butcher's observation ("they love it"), some Chinese customers may see it as a naïve or offensive attempt at stereotyping their culture; others, given the original Japanese provenance of the specific object[3], may not even see it as intended to address them, for example. In the current political situation in the UK after Brexit, to a migrant (who, like me, may have become increasingly aware of British citizens' xenophobic feelings), the exotic provenance of the object may serve to exclude or temper a nationalist meaning of the British flag in the butcher's banner – something like 'yes, he marks his Britishness, as the flag says, but he is also open to other cultures, given that he has a lucky cat; so I, as a migrant, may be welcome in his shop'.

As for the plastic grapes, high-budget customers are hardly likely to interpret them as a form of decoration that conforms to their taste, but some may appreciate the object as an index of 'authenticity', i.e., as a trace of vernacular. Thus – quite paradoxically in relation to the butcher's intentions in making the sign – the plastic grapes may appeal to them precisely because the object belongs to a different (lower class) taste, and hence fulfils their need to 'consume authenticity' (Zukin, 2008). In this regard, markets

> are seen by some members of the middle classes as being […] on the frontiers of daily lived experience as spaces to explore. […] one could envisage "pioneers" discovering the "quirky" side of markets, venturing into this space, and enjoying the "mixing" and the rubbing-along effect […]. These pioneers like the feeling of being in a different space not yet colonised by corporate values; they enjoy the fact that they have "discovered" a place that is still not frequented by people like them (ie middle and upper classes). (Gonzalez & Waley, 2013, p. 6)

Hence the 'plastic grapes' sign may be interpreted as 'exotic' in class rather than in nationality.

In a globalised world where goods have often more freedom of movement than people, non verbal resources such as the lucky cat and plastic fruit have wide transnational circulation; they have accumulated a vast meaning potential – while individuals may actualise these potentials highly differently, because of their personal trajectories and experiences in relation to the specific context in which the sign occurs. Analysing how different people (not only representatives of the two intended audiences, but along multiple demographic variables and personal trajectories) may interpret these signs would open new avenues of investigation into meaning that is made within a superdiverse space, and would unveil further the processes of semiosis taking place when non-shared knowledge is the norm rather than the exception.

Superdiversity as an overarching approach to socio-cultural complexity paired with a social semiotic perspective on signs being newly made (rather than used) highlights the multifaceted, fluid and fragmented nature of meaning making practices. This not only shows the potential of paying attention to resources other than language, but also reinforces further the need and potential of an ethnographic stance to semiotic research, in order to grasp adequately the nuances and intricacies of today's social complexity.

- **Focusing attention**

Multimodal analysis does not consider only individual signs or their co-presence, but also meaning in relations produced through the resource of layout (i.e., relative positioning of signifying elements in

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[3] For details on the origins of the object, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maneki-neko#Origins (Accessed 20 January 2017).

space, which invite specific semantic and pragmatic relations and preferred or dispreferred reading paths); in this it can offer an even finer-greater analysis of sign-making processes and practices.

After a long series of topic changes, the interview with the butcher proceeds on how communication works with customers who speak little English. After mentioning resources such as pointing and eye contact, the butcher highlights the value of experience in inferring buying preferences ("knowing what they'll probably want"). Referring again to Chinese customers, as an example, he says "You know, they'll definitely want belly pork". In his experience, only Chinese customers buy belly pork, and the butcher has started to supply it to respond to the needs of this fragment of customers. He would position the belly pork besides the lucky cat on the shelf on Tuesday (the day when the photo in Fig. 2 was taken), because in his experience Chinese customers come to shop for meat in larger numbers on that day. Hence, on a Tuesday, adjacent positioning of the belly pork and the lucky cat is used as a resource to signal Chinese customers that he sells that specific cut of meat.

Through positioning, a sign-complex is created between the lucky cat and the belly pork. The lucky cat has (1) an addressing function towards a specific audience (Chinese customers), and a (2) deictic function towards the intended focus of attention (the belly pork) – something like 'Chinese visitors of the market, look here: we sell belly pork'. Positioning in space is used as a focusing device, i.e., to direct a specific audience's attention to an aspect of reality that the sign-maker wants to make salient to them, because of his experience of what, in his shop and activity, could interest that specific audience.

This is all done by using non-verbal resources. Writing in the butcher's shop is entirely in English, including the labels identifying the cuts of meat on sale. To direct Chinese customer's attention to the availability of belly pork on sale through language, the butcher would have to resort to someone who could write Chinese (that is, to translation). Instead, he could make that specific meaning through the use of semiotic resources available to him. There is more. Language is particularly loaded in terms of national ideologies, which have great impact on common conceptualizations and attitudes towards language use (see in this regard evidence of attitudes of fixity towards language in Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010). Hence a Chinese script in the butcher's shop could index more markedly his will to address Chinese customers (only), thus risking to exclude others. Instead, in the age of globalization, with enhanced transnational mobility of goods, the presence of 'exotic' objects in our everyday spaces is so common as to be unremarkable. In sum, the use of a diversified range of modes enables the butcher to address multiple audiences at once: a general one, through the use of English for writing, which is an unmarked resource for an activity located in the UK, hence interpreted as addressing everybody; and a specific one, through an 'exotic' object, intended to address Chinese, but open to a series of other interpretations by others (such as mine, as a migrant customer, in the sense of 'this British butcher is not hostile to migrants').

- **Indexing 'others'**

From what emerges in our interviews, people who live in superdiverse contexts often perceive differences along a multiplicity of layered and complexly intertwined variables. Again, in a passage taken from the butcher's interview:

> we get a massive range, not just in cultures and religions and countries, it's different aspects of life, you know, the affluent, the, the whole range. And yeah, you can tell by the kind of things they're buying, the amount of money they're spending.

Indexes of what the butcher calls "aspects of life" are interpreted from non-verbal resources, in his words:

> You can kind of tell with their appearance; I know you're stereotyping people's appearance, but you can kind of tell by the way they hold themselves, their appearance, the things they're wearing, the products that they're buying.

In most traders' interviews, when asked about their customers' background, indexing from multimodal resources (including clothing, walking, touching or handling goods, besides 'the sounds of' language) emerges as the main meaning-making process. Everyday interpretation on what others 'give off' (Goffman, 1959) through multimodal resources confirms one of the paradigmatic shifts identified by Blommaert and Rampton (2016) in superdiverse communication, i.e., a shift from referential and denotative to indexical meaning-making. Indexing needs to be at centre stage of investigation, as Scollon and Scollon (2003) have suggested in their framework for an analysis of discourses in place. If we want to understand the full breath and impact of indexical meaning-making processes and practices – including how they diverge because of a non-coincidence of repertoires across people inhabiting the same communicative space –, we need to investigate it in each and all modes, not only in language. While Goffman considered 'impressions' that people intentionally 'give' as verbal versus those 'given off' as involving a range of actions, social semiotics would consider both as signs that could be equally actualized in a variety of modes. Whether these are intentional or not may be hard to ascertain.[4] In a social semiotic perspective, they are signs as far as meaning is associated to these resources by those who interpret them as such. In this, analysis of different indexical meanings given to the same resources by different sign-makers and interpreters, reveals their broader social positioning (or interest) and hence can unveil their (dis)association with specific ideological discourses within society. If we consider non-verbal sign-making as a starting point, rather than an accessory to communication, and different meanings associated to the same resource as traces of the different sign-maker's interests, we can analyse semiosis and communicative practices towards perceived 'others' in all their multifaceted complexity – and thus embrace (and maybe expand) the whole potential of the notion of superdiversity.

- **Making meaning with 'others'**

Multimodal communication in both embodied and disembodied modes is used extensively to compensate for non-shared linguistic resources in the exchange of information. As for embodied resources, the butcher makes the following example of interactions with a customer:

> she won't speak a word of English, but we will get a product for her and she'll get what she wants. And there'll be no communication; it's purely pointing, eye contact, knowing what they'll probably want.

Fine-grained multimodal analysis of video-recording of actual face-to-face interactions between customers and traders would be required, but, as observed by Blackledge et al. (2015) in exchanges in Birmingham Bull Ring market, non verbal communication is deployed extensively when linguistic resources are little shared. We can hypothesise that, in order to carry out socially-situated actions in superdiverse contexts, greater functional role is assigned to non verbal modes, such as face expression, gestures, gaze and body movement; if exchanges involve participants who share very little in terms of linguistic repertoire, language is unavoidably only an accessory to communication (providing indexes of speech acts for invited attention, such as whether a question is being asked or an invitation is being made, through intonation, for example). Observation could not only ascertain

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[4] Are two people kissing in public making a statement to let everybody know about their intimate relation, or are they rather 'lost in their intimacy' and do not even realise they are in public? It could be well a bit of both – and the unaware/intentional approach could vary between the two, and could also change during the act-as-sign, for example.

the role of each resource, but also how these are deployed in broader interactional processes of tentative requests, attempted guesses, checks and requests for feedback (e.g., through pointing to the picture, gaze, smile, head nods, showing the meat on the butcher's shelf, and so on). Longitudinal observation of multiple interactions between the butcher and the same customer could also reveal how information exchange develops in time and becomes more efficient – hence providing insights into situated practices of informal learning in superdiverse contexts that develop specific shared knowledge by virtue of (equally developed through time) multimodal communicative strategies – it could also provide useful insights on how linguistic resources are learned from co-deployment with non-verbal ones, and may become part of the shared repertoires between specific habitual customers and traders (pursuing further what observed for learning in Blackledge et al., 2015).

As for disembodied modes, two large posters representing beef and lamb cuts are attached to the left wall when entering the shop (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Image of beef and lamb cuts in the Butcher's shop.

When explaining how communication works with customers who have little English, the butcher added:

> we've got pictures on the back wall of the pigs and the lambs, um and the cows, so we always take them to the wall; can you pick it out on the picture? If not, we just take them around.

The posters are positioned at eye level, on the wall facing the customers' space in the shop; positioning is functional to facilitate exchange of information (as the butcher says "we always take

them to the wall"); the posters are at an easy reach of customers, so they can easily access them when interacting with the butcher. In the butcher's account of the use of the posters with non-English speaking customers, they function by virtue of the meaning deployed through their depicted elements, while writing is disregarded, that is, has no functional role for the specific uses in the interaction. Further ethnographic investigation could verify whether any of the comustomers use the posters even without the butcher's prompt, as to retrieve, from the relation between the pictures and the written labels, the English naming of the desired meat cut to then formulate a verbal request to the butcher.

In all cases, the posters – by virtue of their pictorial resources – serve as an aid for mutual learning, both for the specific communicative needs of the moment and for possible future uses. Identification of information through the use of the poster may serve not only for the specific shopping activity, but also to expand the customer's personally-tailored resources for 'English meat cuts' to be used in future interactions with this or other butchers. It may also augment and refine the butcher's experience of individual customers' preferences in meat, further generalized into broader (stereo)typical cultural ones (e.g., Chinese customers are likely to want belly pork), which will then inform his guesses for future interactions with other customers.

What is significant is that non-shared linguistic knowledge is not only assumed (as in the tentative sign-making with the lucky cat), but also explicitly factored in, addressed and compensated by the butcher in the multimodal design of his shop. The butcher has designed his shop to facilitate communication through choice and positioning of specific multimodal resources that will serve the purpose of exchanging information in the superdiverse context where he operates. Here again, two methodological lessons can be derived, i.e., given the English language of the posters, their valence as a communicative aid in superdiversity would escape a linguistic landscape investigation; at the same time, a traditional multimodal analysis of the artefacts themselves would equally not be able to account for the actual and intended uses of these artefacts-as-signs, which only an ethnographic approach to social semiotics can reveal.

- **Constructing superdiverse selves (or indexing selves – part 2)**

The butcher as sign-maker has made use of different modal resources in his stall to make a complex and layered set of meanings, aimed at fulfil different functions – and to respond to the needs of his specific superdiverse context. The sign-maker's choice in different modal resources evidences his multiple interests; through the use of different modes, the shop is intended simultaneously to:

- index values of
    - o national and local cultural provenance (image: Union Jack and Yorkshire)
    - o tradition and permanence of the activity (writing, font and materiality)
- address multiple target customer audiences, i.e.,
    - o a culture-specific one (object: lucky cat)
    - o a life-style/income-specific one (object: plastic grapes; writing: locally sourced)
    - o a generic one (unmarked writing: English)
- foregrounding specific aspects of reality to specific addressees (positioning: lucky cat in front of the belly pork)
- exchange information (drawing+photo+writing: the multimodal posters used to identify the desired cuts of meat), used as a support in face-to-face communication involving embodied resources such as pointing, gaze and body movement.

The multimodal deployment of the butcher shop has been designed through time, by adding signs in multiple layers, following changes in customer groups, through tentative guesses on how to accommodate to them and by supporting them through interpreted feedback. Through multiple choices among available resources, he has shaped visually the public space he manages, to fulfil his multiple communicative needs, which include interpersonal functions (such as addressing specific socio-cultural niches of customers) as well as ideational (such as exchanging information), and textual ones (such as focusing attention on specific aspects for specific addressees).

The multimodal deployment of the butcher's shop along with the developed sign-making in face-to-face exchanges with customers can be considered as the result of complex hetero-semiotic vernacular practices, to adapt to the whole semiosis Parkin's notion of 'heteroglossic urban vernaculars' (2016, p. 79). These practices, of which we know very little when considered in their overall semiosis, are being developed to serve the specificities and complexities of communication in a superdiverse context such as Kirkgate Market.

5. A research agenda on the multimodality of superdiversity

The analysis of the butcher's sign-making practices in Leeds Kirkgate Market evidences the potential of a social semiotic perspective onto communication in superdiversity, and enables to sketch directions for research in the future. In what follows, I sketch an agenda for research in multimodality and superdiversity. I first discuss the potential of integrating social semiotics and research in superdiversity, then I formulate a series of working hypotheses as deriving from observation in the market, along with the kinds of research questions that need to be addressed. I will then point to the need of a refined theoretical and methodological approach (ethnographic social semiotics or social semiotic ethnography), for an apt investigation of these questions, as well as areas of investigation and domains and fields of enquiry.

- **Social semiotics and superdiversity: a mutually influencing dialogue**

As evidenced in the above analysis, a social semiotic perspective offers potentials for the investigation of communication in superdiversity in the following respects:

- Detailed focus on and analysis of resources other than language enables to investigate practices that would escape the radar of linguistic analysis (such as those in the butcher's shop);
- Conceiving of signs as newly made each time a resource is used, and tracing the motivation between signifier and signified as revealing the sign-maker's (socially-framed) interest is particularly apt for the investigation of processes of semiosis in superdiverse environments, in which non-shared knowledge requires sign-making through tentative guesses, interpretation of feedback and metapragmatic reflexivity (each of which is a meaning-making process on its own);
- Analysis of non-verbal resources enables to identify common sign-making practices and processes that reveal perceived 'otherness' in all its multifaceted complexity; trans-signing can be not only aimed to address people of a different nationality but also from a different social demographics, or possibly generation, gender, lifestyle and so on – in revealing the same 'othering' + 'reaching out to others' process, semiotic analysis can help to destabilize ideological hierarchies of otherness vs kinship across nationalities, languages spoken, and class (as well as gender, age and so on), and relate them to specific intersecting and situated variables such as lifestyles, situated activities, interests and practices.

In times when political agendas are fuelling nationalism hinging on racist discourses, and low-income citizens are motivated to associate with and elect billionaires to 'take their country back' from migrants, a semiotic perspective onto superdiversity seems particularly necessary. In revealing the same semiotic processes at work to bridge cultural gaps that are potentially equally wide across all demographic dimensions within our societies, it can reveal the ideological basis of assumed hierarchies of differences (with nationality and ethnicity as weighing more for cultural 'otherness' than class and life-style, for example). People spend effort to accommodate their sign-making practices to reach out to 'others'; these 'others' may well be linguistically, ethnically, and legally identified as part of the same community, as native speakers, white British, and co-citizens (rather than non-native speakers, Chinese, and migrants); yet sign-making can hinge equally on non-shared knowledge (as in the case of the plastic grapes) and can reveal equally non-coinciding repertoires.

If contexts of superdiversity are characterised by blurring of traditional separations among national cultures and languages, by enhanced fragmentation of meaning following individual trajectories, histories, experiences and aspirations, and an assumed non-shared knowledge, modes other than language – which have broad transnational circulation – seem more paradigmatic to understand superdiverse communicative practices.

At the same time, a social semiotic multimodal analysis of texts, representations, artefacts and communicative events cannot alone grasp the complex interlayering of meanings made in superdiverse contexts. The analyst's interpretations need to be combined with an ethnographic approach to sign-making, to achieve a richer spatially and historicised contextualisation of individual practices and personal trajectories, and to account fully for the multifaceted, layered and nuanced communicative processes and practices in superdiverse semiotic spaces.

In sum, interrelating multimodality and superdiversity can contribute both to empirical and theoretical knowledge. Multimodality can contribute to empirical understanding of superdiverse contexts by exploring analogous processes and practices identified in language and superdiversity yet in semiotic spaces which – because of their eminently non-verbal realisation – would not be considered by linguistic research. A social semiotic perspective on diversity could open new avenues of theoretical understanding of meaning in superdiverse environments.

In its turn, superdiversity has equal potential to contribute both empirically and methodologically to multimodality. At the empirical end, we know very little about the impact of culture and transnational circulation on sign- and meaning-making; at the methodological end, text analysis (as is traditionally done in multimodal analysis) seems to be less and less adequate alone to explain and interpret meaning and needs to be complemented with ethnographic research, thus opening the avenues for an ethnographic social semiotics or a social semiotic ethnography in superdiverse context (for the start of a promising dialogue between ethnography and multimodal analysis, see the special issue in *Qualitative Research*, Dicks et al., 2011).

As much as studies of languaging in superdiversity need to argue extensively to dismantle national language ideologies – within the academic community itself, even before than in policies and common knowledge – studies in multimodality need to devote a great deal of effort in dismantling a language-centric approach, that is the idea that language is the most developed, articulated and shared 'code' for communication, while others are merely iconic, or too subjective to be systematically analysed. To counter-argue this criticism, there may be a tendency to stretch multimodal analysis as to prove that semiotic modes are internally organized systems; in doing so, the risk is to adopt again (a structuralist view of) language as paradigmatic, hence to look for 'grammars' in other modes. If instead we take superdiversity as the normal state of affairs, with

personal trajectories and subjectivities, and socially-situated actions impacting more to what is shared in communicative practices, than national grammars and standards, modes can be investigated more adequately by embracing (inter)subjective meaning-making in all its possible realisations and implications. In times of superdiversity, where non-shared knowledge is the norm, the intersubjectivity of all meaning-making has become apparent and intersects the complex global and local intertwining of vernacular practices, polycentric normativity, situated genres, multifaceted identities, and thick and light social groups (Blommaert, 2017). Actualized meaning is intersubjective in all resources; hence agentivity, creativity and fluidity of practices intersect with past uses and powerful centres of normativization and stylization.

Embracing superdiversity in social semiotic research can not only strengthen the approach of social semiotics but also allow to formulate hypotheses and address questions that investigate communication in all its complexity.

- **Working hypotheses**

From the evidence on multimodal communication in the superdiverse environment of the butcher's shop, a social semiotic perspective can formulate the following working hypotheses on multimodal communication in superdiverse environments:

- Non-verbal resources are readily available and particularly apt for sign- and meaning-making in contexts of superdiversity;
- Meaning-making relies heavily on indexical meanings on people's embodied and disembodied resources well beyond language;
- Sign-making from below in superdiverse contexts relies on semiotic resources for a wide and articulated range of functions: to exchange information, to index identity, to focus and frame, and to address particular socio-cultural groups;
- Multimodal composition enables the simultaneous display of nuanced, multifaceted and multi-layered meanings, through the fulfilling of multiple functions pointing to different interlocutors at once (e.g., English writing paired with the 'Chinese' object), best apt for the diversified communicative needs of superdiverse environments, characterized by 'polycentricity', 'mobility' and 'complexity' (Blommaert, 2017, pp. 33–34).

These are mere hypotheses based on evidence of what has been briefly examined in the case of the butcher's shop. Many others may be formulated by looking at different types of data, and communicative settings. These and further hypotheses need to be verified through research that addresses a series of questions.

- **Research questions**

If we take a semiotic approach to communication in superdiverse contexts, that is, we consider principles and practices of semiosis that are not specific to language but are common to sign-making in all modes, then the layering, complexity and fluidity of communication among people becomes foregrounded, while national culture separations are recontextualized in their ideological force, as one of the many ideological separations in force in society, but also contested and refuted (as well as reproduced) in the individuals' experiences of their everyday encounters. That is, we could finally start taking 'superdiversity' as the normal state of communication, and address questions such as:

- How do people communicate when non-shared knowledge is the norm rather than the exception?

- How does communication work? When does it not instead? What relies on 'universal' human perception, biology and cognition and what instead on socially-situated experience and (inter-)action?
- What is shared and how is sharedness constructed? When do uses of resources based on educated guesses become regularities and shared repertoires?
- What is the role of power relations in the circulation of meanings and forms? Who has (greater or lesser) agency in innovating and circulating uses of resources?
- Who is the 'other' and who is 'kin' when semiotic resources supersede national boundaries and variables?
- What is the role of cultural ideologies on (1) normativity of semiotic resources, both insititutionalized (as in the case of national regulations on women dress code, e.g., the recent case of burkini in France) and produced by influent practices (as in the gendered use of colours for children's toys), and on (2) people's actual interpretations of resources as indexes of (stereo)typified cultures?
- What is the role of everyday interaction practices in superdiverse environments (both offline and online) in reinforcing, challenging or dismantling ideological cultural stereotypes, beliefs and values produced by the above mentioned normativity?

Finding answers to each of these questions requires apt theoretical, methodological and analytical tools, and demands investigation across specific areas of enquiry and sites of observation, along with comparison and integration among them.

- **Apt theories and methodologies: Ethnographic social semiotics / Social semiotic ethnography**

Social semiotics offers particularly flexible concepts for the analysis of the situated complexity of superdiverse communication. As shown in the case of sign-making practices in the butcher's shop, social semiotics needs to be integrated with ethnographic investigation. As also advanced in linguistic research in superdiversity (Blommaert, 2013; Blommaert & Rampton, 2016), analysis of texts, representations and communicative events cannot rely only on the analyst's interpretation; it needs extensive and immersive work aimed to understand the principles driving individual sign-makers (considered in their socio-cultural histories as well as in their particular interests and aspirations) in their choices of resources for meaning-making in specific situations. Longitudinal work is required to observe changes in practices. Investigating the semiosis of superdiversity requires hence an ethnographic social semiotics, or a social semiotic ethnography.

Observations need to be integrated with methods that are suitable to provide insights into the sign-makers' choices and motivations. Interviews, as in the case of the butcher, can be a useful support – yet also in this, a semiotic perspective can enhance the methodological apparatus of ethnographic investigation. Interviews again rely on the interviewees' accounts through language, which offers only one possible representation of reality; social semiotic research has attempted at eliciting multimodal data from research participants (see for example the investigation on museum visitor's meaning-making through their drawing of concept maps, instead or along with interviews in Diamantopoulou et al., 2012). Asking research participants for multimodal feedback on and insights into their meaning- and sign-making practices could not only uncover voices, stances and perspectives that may escape their articulation through language; in superdiverse research settings, it could also empower the voices of participants with linguistic repertoires that do not coincide with the researcher's.

The dialogue between social semiotics and ethnography could be mutually fruitful. Because of the long-standing tradition that sees language as the most developed and analysable resource to express

and understand culture, ethnographers in the social sciences are not trained to see sign-making in all its possible realisations. As I have also had the chance to observe in the Leeds Voices project, in the interviewer's questions and follow ups from the interviewee's replies, attention to communication practices may be skewed towards discourses about language and language practices, with instead reflections on other modes as considered 'generically' as (stereotyped) cultural observations. To account for attitudes towards and practices of communication in all its forms, research practice needs to embrace fully the idea that (1) anything can be (made into) a sign as far as someone gives meaning to it, and (2) that apt tools need to be employed to analyse each and all signs, at the same level of precision and refinement that we are used and trained to adopt for the analysis of language. In sum, if a social semiotic perspective is integrated into our research practice – and not only in specialised semiotic multimodal research – we could have a more fine-grained, nuanced and articulated account of social phenomena and people's ways of acting and living in them and making sense of them, in all ethnographic research in social sciences and humanities more broadly.

- **Areas of investigation: Vernacular sign-making and power**

In the case of the butcher's shop, questions could be raised as to the extent of 'literacy' with which the sign-maker has used the multimodal resources available to him, or to the overall non-cohesion resulting from signs indexing and addressing multiple socio-cultural segments/values, and/or the resulting aesthetics of the stall as a visual multimodal composition. What seems certain is that multimodal sign-making has occurred 'from below' (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015; Ribeiro, 2006). Although driven by the same needs of projecting identity, focusing attention and targeting specific customer groups of corporate business activities, it has outcomes that contrast sharply with literacy and aesthetic practices of brand-image design professionals. That is, an ordinary (rather than professional) sign-maker has used the resources he had available to shape the public space he manages, to fulfil his multiple communicative needs.

The multimodal deployment of the butcher's shop and the face-to-face interactions that we could observe taking place in there, can be considered as the result of complex hetero-semiotic vernacular practices, to adapt Parkin's notion of 'heteroglossic urban vernaculars' (2016, p. 79) to the whole semiosis. We know very little about these practices, not only in how they function in their own situated-context, but also in relation to a wider socio-semiotic ecology and economy, in how they differ from (or are appropriated by), for example, professional design elites (in chain shops branding themselves towards elite cosmopolitanism, for example), and in how they are threatened by institutional attempts of regulation. In the case of Kirkgate Market, for example, stall holders relocated in the renovated hall (opened at the end of 2016 and intended to attract a more upmarket type of clientele) were sent a letter from the management of the market listing regulations in terms of permitted uses of multimodal resources in the design of their stall, encompassing for example, size and materiality of the stall banner, admitted colour palette, number, size and positioning of images in relation to writing in the signage. In an attempt at homogenising the aesthetics of the market to conform it to a gentrified taste, regulations tend to limit the traders/sign makers' agency and will unavoidably have consequences on their vernacular heterosemiotic practices through disembodied modes.

We know very little not only of how vernacular practices work and how they are threatened by normativity, but also of their cultural value and how we could learn from these vernacular practices in shaping our public and private communicative spaces and semiotic practices to accommodate to the needs of a superdiverse social composition.

As work in language and superdiversity is committed in revealing both power dynamics of social exclusion and the cultural value and resourcefulness of languaging from below for communication in today's spaces, a social semiotic perspective on superdiversity should commit to raise awareness on the social role and value of vernacular sign-making in all resources in our public spaces, increasingly regulated and sanitised at the benefit of corporate design and communication. This involves investigating both sign-making practices from below and global and local powerful centres of normativity and regulation. Each requires in-depth investigation to understand its specific processes and dynamics, while, at the same time, attention needs to be paid to their mutual influence and intertwining, to sites of accommodation and appropriation as well as to sites of contestation. This needs to be done in all communicative forms and domains.

- **Domains and fields of enquiry**

The empirical observation used to evidence the research agenda sketched in the present paper has involved sign-making in a market, which has specific commercial objectives shaping the character of the relations between the people inhabiting it. Investigation should involve offline and online places and spaces in all domains, encompassing both public and private spheres of communication, activities based on affiliation and interests, as well as institutional affairs (such as education or public services in health and administration), and involving diversified relations, from occasional to familial and intimate settings. In all these domains, three broad field of enquiry need to be addressed, i.e., sign-making in the built environment, face-to-face embodied interaction, and digital communication – along with their interconnectedness.

- *Emplacement and the built environment*

The analysis of the butcher's shop above considered mainly disembodied modes as signs in place. This area of investigation (for a recent edited volume in this area, see Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010) requires further research and further development in theoretical and analytical frameworks. The field involves broadening the perspective and methodological apparatus of linguistic landscape research, to understand how people shape their environments, how they express their identities and affiliations, and how they reach out to others through sign-making in their visual landscape, through uses of semiotic resources such as font, writing, colour, image, objects, layout, light, and architecture. It also involves asking what the multimodal deployment of specific spaces can reveal about their social texture, that is, about the dynamic emplaced identities of the people that inhabit these spaces. As to power, research on emplacement needs to assess the room for people's agency and freedom of expression in each single space and the level and forms of regulation of semiosis in public spaces, as in our visual urban landscapes, increasingly shaped by professional-design aesthetics of chain and corporate brands. Finally, within or contesting specific regulatory regimes, investigation needs to focus on how people develop means for expressions 'from below', that is heterosemiotic vernaculars in disembodied resources that do not conform to mainstream aesthetics. While critical approaches in urban geography are addressing the phenomenon of gentrification, also in relation to social exclusion, ethnographic social semiotics could provide them with fine-grained evidence-based multimodal analyses to support, strengthen and further refine their interpretations.

- *Face-to-face and embodiment*

In the interview, the butcher mentioned how he would use embodied non-verbal resources (such as pointing and gaze) to communicate with his customers. The investigation of all semiotic resources in face-to-face interactions in superdiverse contexts is another area that requires attention. Conversation analysis (Deppermann, 2013), embodied interaction research (Streeck et al., 2011) and

multimodal interaction analysis (Norris, 2004) have produced a substantial body of work on the multimodality of face-to-face interaction, yet these studies usually involve relatively homogenous linguistic groups of interactants; when they do not, they still use interpretative lenses and frames that classify participants following a native vs non-native speaker frame (Gullberg, 2011, 2014), and focus on one specific non-verbal resource, e.g., gestures. Understanding how face-to-face interaction works (and when it fails) in superdiverse contexts involves observing how interactants from different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds use all modal resources available to them (including objects and signs in place – as in the case of the multimodal poster of meat cuts in the butchers' shop), and how they draw on guesses, on contextual inferences and spatially and socially-situated factors to co-construct meaning – Blackledge et al. (2015) have started to account for this within their sociolinguistic investigation of translanguaging. Along with a micro-analytical approach (as is normally adopted in the research traditions mentioned earlier), a social semiotic perspective could consider further how discourses of community, culture and identity are presented, reinforced or challenged in interaction – and hence relate the micro-level to broader issues of power and ideology.

- *Digital environments*

The case study of the butcher disregards a broad area of communication that has become increasingly pervasive in our semiotic landscape, that is, the one enabled by the widespread availability of digital technologies. Research is needed on superdiverse sign-making in digital environments. Also this area is object of investigation in a flourishing body of work in multimodality (see for example the recent special issue in *Visual Communication*, Adami & Jewitt, 2016), which however does not consider issues of diversity, while these are mainly addressed in linguistic research. How representations circulate transnationally in social media, and how their meanings are transformed is but one subject of investigation. Others include: how increased mobility of people and increased interconnectedness through digital technologies is contributing to mobilize visual resources, styles and relations between genres and forms; how people develop semiotic repertoires in different online spaces; how power regimes function in the online semiotic landscape; what practices of heterosemiotic vernaculars are possible online, and what are the current dynamics for regulation, self-regulation and homogenization of semiotic resources, when, for example, service providers make increasingly available templates for creating blogs and websites, which follow patterns of professional design aesthetics – and so do social media, which enable users to post multimodal content, yet in a pre-given layout – or when styles of pictures shared online tend to conform widely to a mainstream aesthetics, in what Manovich terms 'Instagramism' (2016).

- *An artificial separation: multimodality, interconnectedness and transmediality*

The above are broad domains of enquiry, or rather, typologies of forms of communication that can serve as an heuristic starting point for analytical investigation of specificities; yet separation between them is artificial. Disembodied signs in place, embodied modes in face-to-face interaction and online representations are usually combined in our daily communicative events and practices. Each need proper tools for investigation but all of them are interconnected in today's semiotic landscape. This is even more so when considering people moving from country to country while still keeping connections (through online media) with their social networks in their country of origin and in countries of temporary permanence. Research needs to pursue the interconnectedness of communicative situations and the transmediality of semiosis as much as the specificities for each.

6. One last hypothesis on national coding ideologies: A foreword

In facing and embracing the complexity of the contemporary global, local and transnational flows of people, goods, and ideas, sociolinguistics has come to question national language ideologies; it has arrived from the opposite end (the one of structure, code and national normativity) to where social semiotic research in other modes has always had to deal with, that is, the profoundly complex social-situatedness of individuals' communicative practices, in between intersubjectivity and normalization dynamics that escape the lenses of national descriptions, prescriptions, proficiency levels (or literacies), and standards.

Against a view of considering other modes as complement to language and explainable by linguistic processes, a social semiotic perspective on all resources – including language – could see the burden of 'national ideologies' as an exception rather than the norm in human communication; or better as only a part of semiosis. Certainly, language is a highly significant part, and so is national ideological work – because of the greater power and relevance historically attributed to language (by the academia, education and political institutions) in the construction of society and culture.

If we take a linguistic stance, we need a lot of argumentative effort to dismantle notions of national languages – because of the whole prescriptive, descriptive and proscriptive history (and politics) that has organised, named and taught languages as national standards (and sub-varieties). Even when dismantling this tradition, as translanguaging and metrolingualism do in their empirical investigation of everyday spoken interactions, a hardly solvable labelling problem persist in the transcription and annotation of data – most scholars acknowledge this and still need to resort to 'named' languages (English, Arabic, French etc.) to transcribe, annotate and describe translanguaging practices that draw on the speakers' specific and co-constructed spatially-situated repertoires.

In this, taking common principles of semiosis in all resources as the empirical starting point of observation enables the investigation of the nature of communicative practices in its whole complexity. This involves verifying through detailed analysis in a wide range of contexts the hypothesis that non-verbal resources – both embodied, such as gestures, face expressions or proxemics, and disembodied, such as clothing, objects, images or music – may circulate across national (physical or cultural) borders more freely than verbal resources. After all, we still need translators and interpreters for language; we need subtitling or dubbing for speech in film, while non-verbal filmic resources are not subject to translation (except in exceptional cases, which we normally call 'adaptations' or 'remakes' – as we call 'localisation' the restructuring of visual contents in websites for different countries). This does not mean that non-verbal resources are necessarily more iconic or less articulated than language; rather, also due to the absence of a tradition of translation, their conventions develop and change along dimensions that are more transnationally connected, such as professional communities and domains (of film-makers, graphic designers, wine tasters, photographers, dancers), and separations in practices and meanings can be perceived more readily in terms of expertise (that is, in term of transnational centres of power) than between sign-makers in one country and in another. Also because of the absence of translation traditions, even geographically-specific signs can circulate transnationally more than language (through films, images, music, videos, and so on), while nation states have not devoted the same energy, power and resources into developing nation-specific prescriptive uses of these resources (consider the disproportion in the education system of the attention devoted to literacy into national language standards than literacy in other modes).

The development of language (especially writing but also speech) has a long history of national codification (that is power imposed on how people use the mode of writing and speech within given

geopolitical borders); studies in translanguaging, metrolinguialism and poly-lingualism are questioning language ideologies, by looking at everyday vernacular practices in superdiverse environments, where people are developing repertoires that defy notions of national language standards, native-speaker proficiency and competence. Yet along with fluidity, fixity persists (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010), which affects people's perception on others on the basis of (stereotypes about) the way they use writing and speech. This is the result of centuries of prescriptions, proscriptions and literacy education in national languages, and, at a broader socio-political level, as testified and influenced by nationalist political agendas.

Other semiotic modes instead have not been subject to the same level of and (economic and political) effort in national codification; they circulate transnationally and transmedially, as pieces of clothing, colour palettes, images, gestures, music and font types; their centres of prestige and power are transnationally dispersed, diffused and interconnected and generally relate more to expertise, practice, power and market relations of production and consumption than to national boundaries and institutions. Traditional meaning potentials, cultural values and praised/accepted or stigmatized/banned uses of non verbal resources have been normally developed by professional elites specialised in one or more specific modes, such as the fashion industry, graphic designers, and typesetters, for example. Certainly, geopolitical areas of influence do invest non-verbal signs (as in the case of dress code for women, regulated by law in different countries), but, in order to account for common principles of semiosis in each and every mode, the role of power, ideology, normativity and regulation – and how this intersects with social practices and individual agency in sign-making – needs to be considered in all its dimensions (including local normativity). In sum, if we look at modes other than language – or, rather, if we consider language practices within a broader semiotic framework, as part of multimodal semiotic practices – we may be able to observe semiosis in superdiverse communication in its full transnational character and complexity.

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