


RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Reports from British Association for Applied Linguistics with Cambridge University Press Seminar 2024

Language and onward migration: Bridging applied linguistics with migration studies

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1. Introduction and rationale

The two-day British Association for Applied Linguistics–Cambridge University Press (BAAL–CUP) seminar, organised by the three authors of this article, was held on 13–14 February 2024 at the University of Westminster. A total of 42 academics from the fields of applied linguistics and migration studies, working with a range of onward migrant groups and communities in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, engaged in an interdisciplinary conversation around the concept of the onward migrant (OM) over the two days. The term ‘onward migrant’, which we broadly define as a person whose life course involves extended stays in two or more destination countries (Ahrens & King, 2023, p. 5), has primarily received attention from migration studies. These studies address language as a key aspect that shapes the experiences of OMs. Research within applied and sociolinguistics has only recently started to pay attention to OMs and how they mobilise and reconfigure their linguistic repertoires in complex social and communicative contexts. Our main aim was to critically reflect on the affordances, limitations, and possibilities of working together across traditional disciplinary boundaries to enrich our understanding of this concept. We collectively reflected on some of the following questions: What does the social category OM mean, and for whom? When does it become relevant? What do we use this category for? What do OMs need and understand as important for them to investigate? When does language matter in processes of onward migration, in what contexts and for what purposes?

The seminar was organised into two interdisciplinary in-conversation sessions, 12 presentations, and two methodology sessions (one on qualitative methods and one on quantitative methods), offering attendees various ways to engage with the topic.

2. Background and insights from the seminar

Applied and sociolinguistic research has provided an account of how OMs draw on the linguistic resources they acquire throughout their migration journeys to socialise, build networks, and create sites, places, and spaces for socialisation. These spaces are often, though not exclusively, marked by ethnic distinctiveness (Márquez Reiter & Patiño-Santos, 2021). Onward migration can also reshape OMs’ linguistic repertoires, either by prioritising the dominant language of the destination country over that of the country of origin (Goglia, 2021), or by introducing new linguistic resources into established migrant communities, thereby influencing language ideologies regarding the preservation of heritage languages (Sankaran, 2021). This body of research has also documented the lived experiences

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of OMs across the different geographical spaces in which they have settled. Despite gains in economic and social capital, they have often occupied vulnerable positions (Karatsareas & Ndoci, 2024; Patiño-Santos & Márquez Reiter, 2019). Research in migration studies has also recognised language as both a contextual and demographic factor that shapes the experiences of OMs. Language can serve as a barrier to social integration, confining OMs to precarious jobs and vulnerable conditions (Berg, 2019; McIlwaine & Bunge, 2019). Linguistic differences can also create divisions between OMs and other migrant groups, based on factors such as socioeconomic status, country of origin, and variations in migration experiences and trajectories (Della Puppa *et al.*, 2021; McIlwaine, 2020).

The seminar contributed to this emerging field of inquiry by uniting two strands of theoretical and methodological work to explore the dynamic, complex, fragmented, and temporary trajectories and experiences of OMs. The first strand draws primarily on qualitative studies in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, which foreground the truncated, deterritorialised, and mobile nature of postmodern linguistic practices and resources, as well as the tensions between fluid and fixed forms of language and identity (Blommaert, 2010).

The second strand stems from migration studies, which often employ quantitative and mixed methods approaches, and has moved away from viewing migration as a linear process defined by a single point of departure and destination, occurring only once in a person's life and being permanent (Jeffery & Murison, 2011; King & Karamoschou, 2019). These advances also highlight the agency displayed by various categories of OMs (Montagna *et al.*, 2021).

Over two days, participants from Austria, France, Greece, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States, spanning both applied linguistics and migration studies, collaborated to deepen the understanding of the language and onward migration nexus. Twelve presentations discussed original research on underexplored migratory trajectories, including the different routes and strategies used by various social groups to migrate to the UK: Albanians through Greece, Bangladeshis and Brazilians via Italy, Colombians via Spain, East Timorese from Portugal, and Sri Lankan Tamils from various EU countries to the UK. Central to the discussion was the role of language, inherited from colonial processes, as a commodity used by migrants to facilitate their migratory experiences. Other contributions examined the communicative practices of those moving between West Africa, North Africa, and Western Europe; the role of language skills in the dequalification (or, deskilling) of highly skilled migrants in Austria – that is, the process whereby the formal qualifications of skilled migrants are undervalued, underutilized, or not fully recognised in a host country, creating barriers to employment and/or limiting migrants' options to lower-skilled or lower-paying jobs that do not align with their educational and professional credentials and experience; and early childhood education and care for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

The presentations helped to achieve the following THEORETICAL objectives:

1. To advance our understanding of the ways in which OMs are (un)able to mobilise all the different forms of language that they acquire and develop during their life courses to:
 - a. communicate ways of being, in the sense of Bourdieu – that is, patterns of behaviour and thought that guide how individuals act, perceive themselves, and are perceived by others, shaped by the individuals' unique combinations of capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) that they hold, and experiences within various fields (structured social spaces or settings of everyday life);
 - b. develop forms of linguistic and intercultural awareness that enable them to thrive in the societies, communities, and spaces they inhabit; and
 - c. address needs and achieve aspirations linked to migration, such as improving their socioeconomic conditions.
2. To highlight some of the ways in which OMs' linguistic repertoires are linked with experiences of racism, xenophobia, and other types of discrimination as well as downward occupational mobility.

3. At the same time, to foreground ways in which OMs' linguistic repertoires are linked with positive migration-related experiences, including senses of belonging, community building, achievement, and advancement in life.

The presentations helped achieve the following *METHODOLOGICAL* objectives:

1. To understand the scope of qualitative research, represented by narrative inquiry and linguistic ethnography, as suitable methods for capturing and exploring the lived experiences of OMs. By establishing social relationships and spending time with them, the researchers were able to encourage participants to share their experiences as OMs and to make sense of what this entails.
2. To reflect on the complementarity of mixed methods in research on OMs. We observed how different types of data appeal to different stakeholders. Quantitative data, such as statistics, engage policymakers and governmental institutions; qualitative data resonate with social science researchers and the general public interested in human experiences.

The seminar also featured two interdisciplinary in-conversation sessions and two methodology workshops, which proved to be engaging activities for all participants. Adriana Patiño-Santos facilitated the discussion between Rosina Márquez Reiter (The Open University) and Cathy McIlwaine (King's College London), who share a common interest in researching onward migration of Latin Americans from southern Europe to London, albeit from different disciplinary perspectives (sociolinguistics and geography, respectively). During the conversation, the researchers discussed their academic trajectories and epistemologies. McIlwaine highlighted the importance of mixed-methods and foregrounded the role of statistics in making OMs visible to policymakers. Latin Americans arriving from Spain are largely invisible to the UK government, which has consequences for these migrants, who often need support in accessing healthcare and social services. Márquez Reiter, on the other hand, emphasised the need to understand not only what OMs reveal in their personal accounts but also how they express themselves. She advocated for a detailed analysis of the interactional data that interviews with OMs provide. The way researchers frame their questions shapes the data that are gathered.

Vally Lytra facilitated the conversation between Prue Holmes (Durham University) and Manolis Pratsinakis (Harokopio University of Athens), who reflected on their individual trajectories as researchers in applied linguistics and migration studies. Holmes proposed an expanded understanding of language to reconceptualise OMs' linguistic repertoires that moves away from logocentric perspectives to encompass embodied, sensorial, and affective resources. She discussed the possibilities of multimodal, arts-based methodologies to explore OMs' trajectories and linguistic stratification and of harnessing the researchers' multilingual capabilities in the OM research process in multidisciplinary, multilingual, and multinational contexts. Pratsinakis reflected on his evolving interest in language from a macro demographic social category associated with the nation to how language resources may facilitate (or not) access to social networks and occupational mobility, and to OMs' narratives. He argued for the synergies between socially situated approaches to language and approaches that understand language as a macro demographic social category. Holmes and Pratsinakis called for sustained dialogue across disciplinary boundaries and collaborative dialogue with non-academic stakeholders.

The methodology workshops invited participants to engage with two distinct methodological approaches to studying the language and (onward) migration nexus. Prue Holmes facilitated the workshop titled 'Researching in multilingual environments of onward migration: Negotiating positions of linguistic power', where she discussed the 'researching multilingually' framework. This framework focuses on how researchers draw on their own and others' multilingual resources during the research process, including in the reporting and representing of multilingual participants (Holmes et al., 2013).

Manolis Pratsinakis led the session 'Mixed methods and sampling techniques in the study of language and onward migration', highlighting the advantages of large-scale surveys and respondent-driven sampling (RDS). RDS, a method that relies on social networks, is particularly useful for gathering data

from ‘hidden’ or ‘hard-to-reach’ populations. OMs are one such group often made invisible in national statistical data due to factors such as their undocumented status (Tyldum & Johnston, 2014).

The next step is to develop a journal Special Issue on the topics of the seminar with contributions from the seminar participants and the wider academic community.

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