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# Multilingualism, literacy and migration

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Language and literacy in migration context  
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Erasmus+

# Which migrations?



Workshop on migrations, 2016  
Scuola di Lingua italiana per Stranieri (ItaStra)  
University of Palermo  
<https://www.unipa.it/strutture/scuolaitalianastranieri/>  
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# Words: «migrating», «migration», «migrant»

- «An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons» (IOM 2019: 132)
- «[A]ny person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties to this country» (UN/DESA 1998: 9)
- «Migrants are fundamentally different from refugees and, thus, are treated very differently under international law. Migrants, especially economic migrants, choose to move in order to improve their lives. Refugees are forced to flee to save their lives or preserve their freedom» (UNHCR 2013)

## Words: «migrating», «migration», «migrant»

- «In this narrow sense, “migrant” indicates one of the subcategories of which the set of people on the move is composed. Specifically, it designates the residual (but quantitatively predominant) category that emerges after the subjects for whom there are forms of administrative and/or legal protection (“unaccompanied foreign minors”, “victims of trafficking”, “asylum seekers”, etc.) have been listed. This set of labels is often used in studies aimed at investigating the social, psychological, linguistic and educational aspects of men, women and children who arrive by sea or land, crossing state borders without having the required visa.» (D’Agostino & Mocciaro 2021b: 34)

# What's new in «new migrations»?



## New migration paths and profiles

- Individual, young (male) mobility
- Transience, fragmentary paths
- No migration networks in Europe
- Low planning, weak networks

D'Agostino (2021: 93); D'Agostino & Mocciaro (2021a, 2021b).

# What's new in «new migrations»?



Key notions (D'Agostino 2021)

- «trajectory»
- «connection»
- «immobility»

# What's new in «new migrations»?



Key notions (D'Agostino 2021)

- «migration trajectories»  
«open spatio-temporal processes with a strong transformative dimension. They may consist of multiple journeys going in different directions»  
(Schapendonk et al. 2020: 212)

# What's new in «new migrations»?



Key notions (D'Agostino 2021)

- «connection»
  - digital media for planning and information exchange, before, during and after departure
- «connected migrants» (Diminescu 2008)



# What's new in «new migrations»?



## Key notions (D'Agostino 2021)

- «immobility»
  - «mobility is regulated, mediated and intrinsically connected to forms of immobility and unequal power relations» (D'Agostino & Mocciaro 2021b: 32)
- «mobility regime», «bounded mobility» (Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013; Hackl et al. 2016)

# «New migrations» and linguistic repertoires

- Linguistic specificities and needs
  - Multilingualism
  - Low exposure to local languages
  - Frequent lack of literacy skills

D'Agostino (2021: 93); D'Agostino & Mocciaro (2021a, 2021b).

# «New migrations» and linguistic repertoires

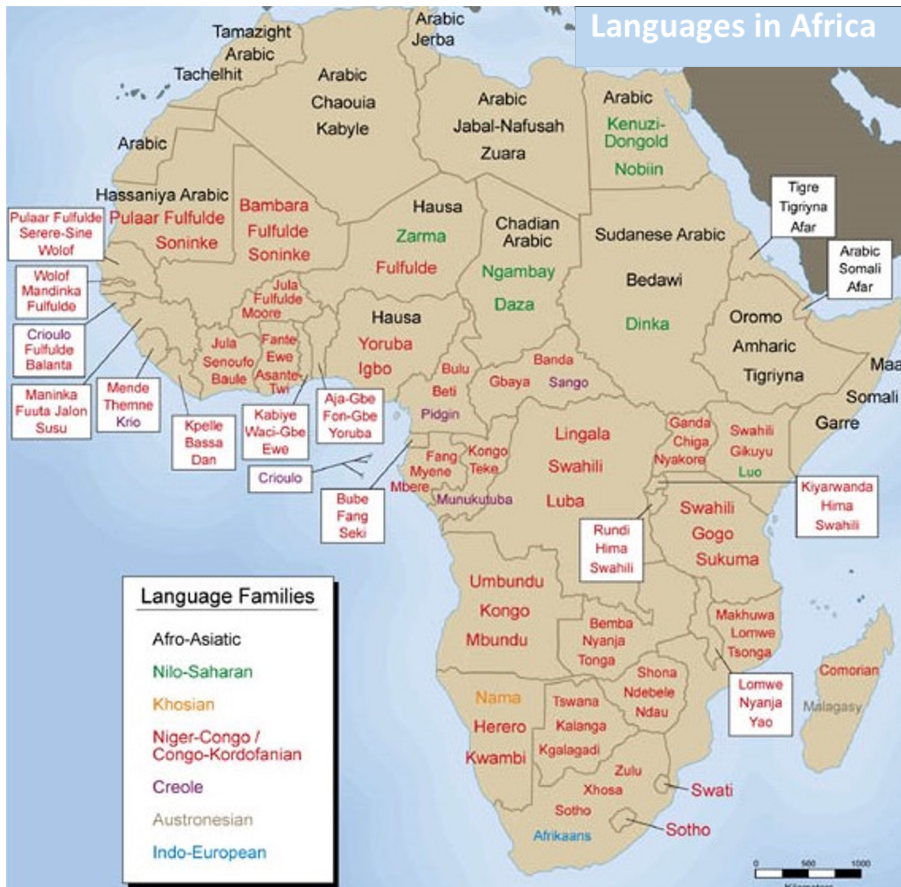
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D'Agostino (2021: 93); D'Agostino & Mocciaro (2021a, 2021b).

# What definition of «multilingualism»?

- «Repertoire» (Gumperz 1964)
  - Set of linguistic resources available to a language community or a speaker
  - Languages, dialects, varieties, etc.
- Societal multilingualism and individual plurilingualism ([Council of Europe 2009](#))

# Points of departure



- Internal mobility (traditional practices, education, work)
- Societal multilingualism and individual plurilingualism
  - Cross-border languages (e.g., Wolof, Mandinka, Pulaar)
  - Patrimonial languages
  - Colonial heritage languages (English, French)
  - Contact languages (pidgins)

[Michigan State University](https://www.msu.edu/).  
See also Adegbija (1994); Turchetta 2007; Wolff et al 2019.

# Plurilingual repertoires

- «In many African situations, languages are added to individuals' repertoires throughout their lives and occupy positions of varying centrality in them depending on a variety of factors. Adults continue to be socialized in languages they have “acquired” before, and in new ones, when they move house, migrate, marry, divorce, retire, and foster children.» (Lüpke 2015: 308)

# Plurilingual repertoires

- Narrative of a Senegalese plurilingual speaker (D'Agostino 2021: 121)

«I learnt Creole with my friends, my schoolmates, and it's a language that I haven't used since I've been in Italy. They were the friends I played football with. We in Senegal have a border in Guinea, a border in Mali, **I played football in Guinea and came back, in Mali and came back. I played football in a team in Senegal under 16, then in a team in Ivory Coast, even there I learnt a language, there they speak Bambara. I speak it well and I learnt to speak it like this, I am good at speaking languages.** [...] When I started to have friends who come to us on holiday, we do something, I don't know how it's called, a game: players from Gambia come, they come to the sport centre where we play football and they come here, they stay three or four days, then they go back. Also people from Guinea ((i.e., Guinea Bissau)), they come to us, they stay two days, one week, so. **I started speaking their languages and some of them also started speaking my language.** They started speaking Pulaar, they started speaking Mandinka. [...] But before they didn't understand, they couldn't speak Pulaar or Mandinka. They only speak Creole, those from Guinea, they speak Creole, they only study Portuguese.»

# Plurilingual repertoires

- Set of mobile resources (vs sum of linguistic competences)
  - Truncated repertoires (Blommaert 2010: 106)

«truncated complexes of resources often derived from a variety of languages, and with considerable differences in the level of development of particular resources. Parts of these multilingual repertoires will be fairly well developed, while others exist only at a very basic level.»

- Language mixing
  - «Polylingualism» (Jørgensen 2008; Jørgensen et al. 2011)
  - «Multilingualism at the level of discourse» (D'Agostino 2021)
    - alignment to communicative needs (Canagarajah & Wurr 2011)
    - acquisition strategies of additional languages during mobility (limited input)



# On the move



Plurilingualism from (im)mobility  
(D'Agostino 2021: 106)

- Addition of new languages
- Addition of new varieties of a language
- Reactivation of existing skills
- Literacy processes
- Refunctionalisation

# Plurilingual repertoires

- Narrative of a plurilingual Burkinabe learner (Mocciaro 2020: 85-86)

MLG: Here I don't use Bissa because I haven't met anyone speaking Bissa.

INT: But you speak French.

MLG: I always use French and also Italian. [...]

MLG: Where I work, here in Palermo, they speak Italian, more than French.

INT: Yes, sure, but do you speak French with the other guys who speak French?

MLG: Yes, even if I didn't speak well in French. In my country, I used to speak Bissa and Mòoré. Because in my village I didn't study at the French school. But when I arrived here in Italy, I didn't find anyone who spoke my language. I had to use French, that's why I now understand a bit more French than before. **I started to understand French here in Italy.** [...]

MLG: I can say that I also learnt the Italian language. I can say that I know the name of many things in Italian, more than in French.»

# «New migrations» and linguistic repertoires

- Linguistic specificities and needs
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  - Frequent lack of literacy skills

D'Agostino (2021: 93); D'Agostino & Mocciaro (2021a, 2021b); Mocciaro (2020).

# Plurilingual repertoires

- Burkinabe speaker, two years later (D'Agostino & Mocciaro 2022: 39)

MLG: no:: I don't understand Sicilian /: [...] something: little mmh: I can say no (...)

INT: but do you happen to have someone speaking to you in Sicilian?

MLG: no MLG: because they mix /: they say "ciao compa' [hi fellow] xxx' /: they mix a bit /: (...)

INT: the people you worked with, aren't they Sicilian?

MLG: no:: they are:: they speak Sicilian they are Sicilian

INT: and yet when they spoke to you:: they only spoke Italian?

MLG: Italian /: but they also speak Sicilian among themselves (...)

INT: [...] were there Sicilians who played ((football)) at the Foro italico?

MLG: yes yes, there are

INT: and did they speak Sicilian among themselves?

MLG: yes, they speak Sicilian too (...) but **they don't speak Sicilian with us**: /: because we don't: understand Sicilian (...) that's why when they speak with us they speak Italian (...) **but they use bad Sicilian words but I don't remember (...) they want to speak badly of us**

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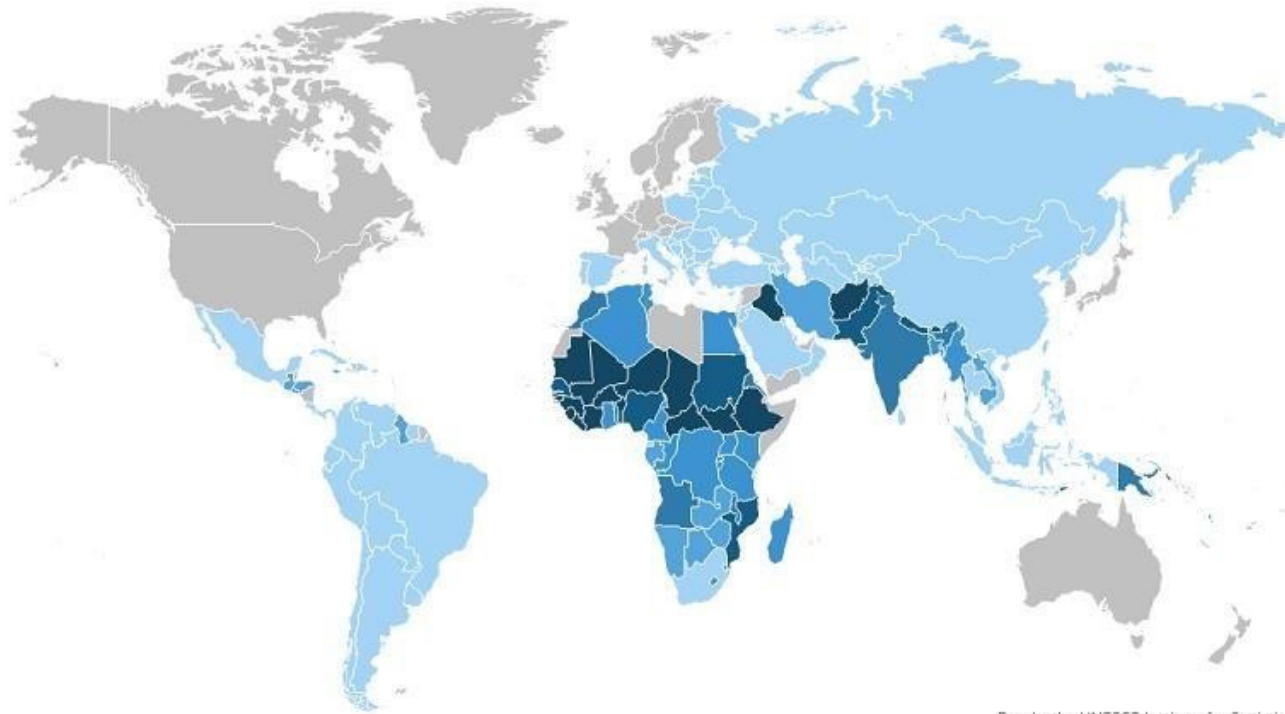
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# Literacy rate Worldwide

Adult literacy rate (2017)

[UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#)



Data by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

90%-100% 80%-89% 70%-79% 60%-69% 50%-59% Less than 50% No data

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# What is literacy?

- The scope of literacy

«At the core of literacy lies a competence with a script (an external, permanent symbolic representation of a language) and the skills to access and use the wealth of currently available documentary resources. [...] [L]iteracy is not restricted to the sole domains of reading and writing. As long as a domain makes use of a script and rests on the accumulation of documents and strategies to handle them, that domain needs to be considered a specialization of the literate mind. This is why we often hear about all sorts of literacy (e.g. health literacy, financial literacy, digital literacy, etc).» (Alves 2019: 520)

«[L]iteracy has both dimensions of reading the world and reading the word.» (Nicholas 2012: 268)



# What is literacy?

- Types and levels of literacy (in mother tongue)
  - Preliterates. Individuals who live in an oral culture and whose language lacks a written form or only acquired it recently.
  - Non-literates. Individuals who do not write or read in any language but live in a literate society.
  - Semi-literates. Individuals who have some writing and reading skills but can't use them properly (functionally not literates).
  - Non-Roman alphabet users. E.g., Russian, Chinese, Punjabi etc.

([Canadian Language Benchmark 2000](#))

# What is literacy?

- Literacy and schooling do not always coincide
  - Inadequate models of schooling (e.g., drop out)
  - Different models of schooling (e.g., traditional religious school)

Qur'anic school model:

- Suras are written with chalk on a wooden tablet and copied by the students, without any prior training in reading and writing.
- The Arabic text, a foreign language in Africa, is memorised in both oral and written form as a single string and without any process of segmentation of the text into smaller elements with meaning.

(D'Agostino 2021: 93; Saleem 2016)

# What is literacy?

- Literacy and schooling do not always coincide
  - Inadequate models of schooling (e.g., drop out)
  - Different models of schooling (e.g., traditional religious school)

## Results:

- Children are able in hand-eye coordination and in controlling and leading the graphic gesture; they are also often able to spell the letters of this alphabet (many of them are also able to spell in English or French).
- Young people who have only attended these schools do not develop the ability to segment long phonic and/or graphic sequences into smaller signifying elements (they therefore do not even recognise word boundaries). (D'Agostino 2021: 93)

# What is literacy?

- Literacy and schooling do not always coincide

- Informal literacy (e.g., group of peers, migration journey, social media)

«[I]n areas of the world where access to education is not generalised, it is not uncommon to learn numbers and operations, or how to read or even write, in the most diverse situations outside the classroom. It may happen in a shop or tailor's shop, from a friend who goes to school, from a brother or sister, etc. In many cases one may know numbers but not read, or one may know how to decipher a sentence but not know how to write. Therefore intermediate situations next to absolute illiteracy and full literacy are widespread: knowledge of numbers, recognition of letters (in Roman or other alphabets), ability to sign, slow decoding of certain words, etc. This means that even those who claim not to have attended any schooling can have partial or significant writing skills.» (D'Agostino 2021)

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# Digital practices: a case study

- Multilingual digital writings of 20 sub-Saharan migrants (18-30 y.o.)
  - low or non-literate and/or schooled
  - literate and/or schooled (at least 10 years)
  - collection and analysis of Facebook interactions (arrival to 2019)
  - «Networked multilingualism» (Androutsopoulos 2019)

[D'Agostino & Mocchiato \(2021a\)](#)

# Digital practices: a case study

- Multi-/mistilingual posts (Ibrahim, literate)
  - Posts in individual languages (non-autonomous/autonomous)
  - Posts in different languages (e.g., American slang *nigga*, Libyan Arabic *ayuwa* 'let's do it')
  - «Copy posts» replicating the same information in multiple languages (e.g., greetings)

(1) Mandinka / *Djola* / *Wolof* / *English*:  
Sungu *Asunya saacha thief*  
*or what so ever call him is undone, this is against any form of humanity.*

# Digital practices: a case study

- Multi-/mistilingual posts (Ibrahim, literate)
  - «Completion posts» with distributed content
    - (2) *inglese / mandinka / wolof*  
*So it's like the government has being lying and playing around with the youths all this while*  
*Ka sappo la sappo 'From frying pan to fire.'*  
***Chei Gambia!** 'To bad about the Gambia!'*
  - «Mixed-language posts»
    - (3) *inglese / mandinka*  
*Congrats sister!! Abaraka for uplifting the Gambia.*



# Digital practices: a case study

- Emergent multilingualism (Yero, non-literate)

(4)	○ (Sept 2016)	Comment on a Yero's picture
	IP	Yero nice
	RP	
	Amico 1	nice
	Yero	merci
	Amico 2	tres coul
	Yero	merci grand fr (Fr. 'frere')
	Amico 3	cool
	Yero	merci
	Amico 4	nice fr
	Yero	merci mn frère
	Amico 5	tres chic
	Yero	merci
	Amico 6	cool
	Yero	nice

# Digital practices: a case study

- Emergent multilingualism (Yero, non-literate)

(5a) [Oct. 2018 Comment on a picture \(copied\)](#)

IP	je salut tous mes amis la vie c'est comme ça je suis fiere de tous le monde	
RP		
Friend 1	on te salue toi aussi frère	'I greet you too, brother'
Yero	<b>merci star</b>	'Thanks, star'
Friend 2	AMICO 2 BOROM SISILIA	'Friend 2 from Sicily'
Yero	Boy <b>bamba samahart</b>	'My friend, the brave' (= <i>samaharit</i> , <b>wolof</b> )
Friend 2	La yalla def déh	'May God accept it' ( <b>wolof</b> )
Friend 3	COURAGE BRO.ON TE SALUT profondément	'Come one, brother. I greet you deeply'
Yero	merci star <b>nakal dagabak</b>	'Thanks star, how are you?' ( <i>dangabah</i> , <b>wolof</b> )
Friend 4	Yé broh	'Yes, bro'
Yero	<b>merci bro</b>	'Thanks, bro'

# Digital practices: a case study

- Emergent multilingualism (Yero, non-literate)

(5b)	Friend 5	Nice mn bro	
	Yero	merci	
	Friend 6	Nice fréro	(fréro = Fr. frère)
	Yero	merci monami	(monami= Fr. mon ami)
	Friend 7	Tu sei molto bello	'You are very beautiful' (It.)
	Yero	grazie amico	'thanks frien' (It.)
	Friend 8	cool	
	Yero	fréro grazie	'Brother, thanks' (It.)
	Friend 9	cool	
	Yero	<b>adiarama mawdo FRIEND 9</b>	'Thanks great Friend 9' ( <b>pulaar</b> )
	Friend 10	Bellissimo il mio fratello	'Very beautiful my friend' (It.)
	Yero	<b>grazie amiko mio come stai</b>	'Thanks my friend how are you'
	Friend 11	Machalla c'est très valide	'God has willed it' (Ar.)
	Yero	merci FRIEND 11 tu très gentil	(trè = fr. très)
	Friend 12	MachAllah	'God has willed it' (Ar.)
	Yero	merci frère	

# Digital practices: a case study

- Emerging writing: Operations
  - Copy-paste from other posts.
  - Repetition of holistically interpreted (vs. decoded) formulas, e.g.,
  - 'happy birthday' or 'happy year'.
  - Repetition of short segments, e.g. adjectives of appreciation (nice) or formulas (goods) (with overextensions, e.g., goods 'like')

# Digital practices: a case study

- Emerging writing: Operations
  - Continuum of progressive autonomy in the use of written forms
  - Facebook = context of naturalistic exposure to written language
  - Analogy with widely documented operations for oral acquisition in naturalistic contexts (cf. inter al. Bybee 2008)

# Digital practices: a case study

- Emerging writing: final remarks
  - Writing on FB does not reflect language skills recorded through tests (oral and written, ItaStra tests).
  - It reflects literacy strategies that are generally ignored in formal language learning These strategies are highly connected to plurilingualism

**Questions?**

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