

TRANSIDIOMA: LANGUAGE AND POWER IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract

The experience of linguistic globalization, and the communicative disorder it entails, requires a serious retooling of most basic units of linguistic analysis. The chaos and indeterminacy of contemporary flows of people, knowledge, texts, and commodities across social and geographical space affects most sociolinguistic assumptions behind social interactions. In particular, we can no longer assume that shared knowledge, especially indexical knowledge, still serves to bind people together, facilitate interactions, and negotiate conflicts. By introducing the concept of *transidioma*—i.e. the ensemble of communicative practices of people embedded in multilingual environments and engaged in interactions that blend face-to-face and digitally-mediated communication—this lecture explores the problematic nature of late-modern communication, characterized as it is by asymmetrical power, multiple communicative agents with competing agendas, multilingual and hybridized talk, and multimodal (especially digital) forms of interaction. Using data from various ethnographic sites (but in particular from asylum hearings), this lecture documents the renewed reliance on denotational references as a primary strategy to handle interactions in multilingual, power-saturated settings. The claim is that it is time to go even beyond a “linguistics of contact” to examine the transidiomatic strategies (such as denotational-heavy interactional moves) which are the building blocks of a sociolinguistics of multilingual mixing, communicative recombinations, and xenoglossic becoming.