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## **GRANITE ISLAND PEARLS: “UNACCOMPANIED FOREIGN MINORS” IN A CORSICAN FLE CLASS**

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**Abstract:**

This article explores the intersection between globalization and language learning, as experienced by “unaccompanied foreign minors” in a French as a Second Language class on Corsica. The analysis of linguistic-ethnographic data makes use of an extended metaphor, pearls, to develop multilayered conceptualizations of phenomena such as liminal multilingualism, mobility and (im)migration, and the post-national economy. Linguistic ethnography and metaphor prove useful for operationalizing a complexity approach in sociolinguistics (Blommaert 2016: 247), while the context under analysis allows for the investigation of globalizing surges (Ramanathan 2013a: 9–10; 2013b: 254) and peripheral multilingualism (Pietikäinen et al. 2017: ix, 225) among a vulnerable population. The case of these students offers an opportunity to look at the consequences of globalization on (im)migrant youth.

**Keywords:**

Globalization ♦ linguistic ethnography ♦ Corsica ♦ unaccompanied minors ♦ French as a Second Language

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## Introduction

Corsica is a Mediterranean crossroads. Its annexation to France (1769) sets the foundation for a perspective of the island today as a colonized space subsumed by the French State. The island boasts a rich regional culture whose contemporary sociolinguistic situation is characterized by reclamation of the minority language, Corsican (Leonard 2011: 153). Corsica is highly affected by globalization, as attested by the dramatic increase in tourist populations in the summer months (INSEE 2017: 7). Globalization has brought other highly mobile groups to the island: (im)migrants, both adults and children, particularly from North Africa and Europe. These dynamics make Corsica a unique place to explore interactions between diverse multilingual speakers and how to best represent them. What I present here is a very partial answer that highlights the Francophone institutional context which dominates.

*Collège du Sud*<sup>1</sup> is a middle school (*collège*) in an urban area in Northern Corsica whose population, including the contiguous sprawl, is approximately 60,000.<sup>2</sup> It is one of the largest schools on the island, with a student body of approximately 760 students<sup>3</sup> across the four grades. The school is part of the *Réseau d'éducation prioritaire* (Priority education network)<sup>4</sup>, and the principal describes its setting as “les quartiers un peu plus populaires” (“neighborhoods [that are] a bit more working-class,” interview, June 13, 2016). Sud is also home to intensive French courses (*Français langue étrangère*, French as a foreign language, FLE) offered for newly-arrived middle schoolers in the region. Four students in Sud’s 15-student FLE class during fieldwork in 2016 were *mineurs isolés étrangers* (MIE, unaccompanied foreign minors); their experiences shed light on contemporary mobility and multilingualism on Corsica.

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<sup>1</sup> This and all names that appear are pseudonyms. Where seemingly pertinent information does not appear, it is most often due to the fact that I was not allowed access to further details regarding minors’ backgrounds.

<sup>2</sup> This is big for Corsica; the largest city, Ajaccio, in the south, is comprised of approximately 84,000 inhabitants.

<sup>3</sup> At the time of fieldwork, Spring 2016.

<sup>4</sup> This network fights inequalities in education; these are what we might think of as “priority” schools.

Sociolinguistic work on the “Granite Island”<sup>5</sup> has illustrated the continued predominance of the rural in discourses of “authentic” Corsican language and culture (Pietikäinen et al. 2017: 85). An urban setting such as Sud provides the opportunity to explore multilingualism (beyond French and Corsican) and transnationalism in educational settings on Corsica. A focus on the learning of the language of the State (French) by (im)migrants in a culturally and politically minoritized space, such as Corsica, pushes for the further destabilization of center-periphery dynamics (ibid.: 194), that is, between the national, the regional, and the foreign. My linguistic-ethnographic approach, which takes into account “considerations of various translocal scales into the analysis,” attempts to connect local speech with global dynamics (Blommaert 2013: 621).

The analysis I present here is based on transcripts of interactional data from an FLE class during semi-participant observation (Bonacina 2010: 121, 138) in the style of ethnographic discourse analysis (Copland and Creese 2015: 86). In asserting the importance of advancing complex sociolinguistic inquiry, Blommaert (2016) declares “the need for new images, metaphors, and notions to cover... what we observe” (247). My analysis develops an extended metaphor, pearls, for the interpretation of speech events in order to illustrate the consequences of globalization on (im)migrant youth. The pearl metaphor facilitates the work of moving between micro, mezzo, and macro levels of interpretive analysis.

This article will first present theoretical frameworks on sociolinguistic complexity and the Corsican periphery. I next provide background information on newly arrived (im)migrant youth in France / Corsica, explain my methodology, and introduce the focal participants. I then survey work in applied linguistics that utilizes metaphor and introduce two ideas I’ll engage with in my analysis, globalizing surges and pearls. Next, I present the analysis of three excerpts of interactional data from the FLE class with my interpretations woven throughout. I conclude with a discussion of how this case contributes to broader inquiry beyond Corsica and France, as regards the intersection of multilingualism, mobility, and refuge.

### **Theoretical orientations**

Within the study of globalization, Blommaert (2010) explains that sociolinguistic phenomena can be understood as existing polycentrically on multiple scale levels, and that social behavior

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<sup>5</sup> Granite is a recurrent placemaking trope linking Corsican culture with the local space, the most mountainous island in the Mediterranean. Extending from Carrington’s (1971) seminal volume *Granite Island: A Portrait of Corsica* that details traditional Corsican culture, what I present focuses on ways in which the island is affected by globalization, namely (im)migration and multilingualism.

(linguistic, political, economic) is oriented to centers (e.g., Paris) and peripheries (e.g., Corsica) depending on context (39; Chapter 2). As globalization shifts our understandings of entities / identities to plural, multiple, and hybrid conceptions, (im)migrants' cultural and linguistic experiences on Corsica present fruitful opportunities to investigate sociolinguistic complexity<sup>6</sup> regarding multilingualism and mobility. Blommaert (2013) explains that complexity does not entail complete chaos, rather a “complex, non-categorical, non-equilibrium, and nonlinear form of order” (619). The complexity shift in the study of multilingualism (ibid.: 621) requires the foregrounding of mobility, instability, and unpredictability in sociolinguistic inquiry, wherein “the task of analysis... [is] to demonstrate complexity” (Blommaert 2016: 252).

Pietikäinen et al. (2017) explore new circumstances faced by minority language communities in late modernity, asserting that “globalization makes it impossible to treat centrality and peripherality as stable attributes of social spaces” (28–29). They argue against a superdiverse<sup>7</sup> conception of Corsica (ibid.: 30), though Jaffe (2016) clarifies that no setting is inherently superdiverse or not: nothing is a priori central or peripheral, rather these heuristics depend upon scales engaged in analysis (5). The (im)migrant situation on Corsica can be considered doubly peripheral—what Luciani (1995: 12) calls *la minorité de la minorité* (minority of the minority); (im)migrants are a minoritized people on Corsica, while Corsicans are a minoritized people of France. The Corsican (im)migrant context is thus constituted not by binary centers and peripheries, but rather by complex constellations and constantly shifting mobilities.

The educational contexts in which (im)migrant students on Corsica find themselves (FLE classes) can be understood as micro-hegemonies: “restricted, ‘niched’ hegemonies that co-exist with others in polycentric environments” (Blommaert 2010: 62). FLE course content and pedagogical materials align with French national values—that is, integration by way of acquiring standard French.<sup>8</sup> FLE classes are made unique by the backgrounds of their members; no FLE class across France would include students with identical experiences of transnationalism. The micro-hegemony of the FLE class is defined by its ultimate orientation

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Larsen-Freeman 2013: 370.

<sup>7</sup> Blommaert (2013) explains superdiversity as “diversity within diversity, a tremendous increase in the texture of diversity in [globalized] societies such as ours” (4). Superdiversity's rise to superstardom in sociolinguistics is critically traced by Pavlenko (forthcoming) who argues that the term's popularity is largely due to the workings of academic branding. Corsica—interpreted as superdiverse or not (see Jaffe 2016: 5)—is certainly not immune to the workings of globalization.

<sup>8</sup> MEN 2012: 6; Bonacina 2010: §3.2.2; Lazaridis & Seksig 2005: 161; Durand 2017: 21; see also Adrey 2009 on Corsica.

to national language ideology at the same time that it engages transnational participants. Sud's FLE class represents a confluence of French, Corsican, and foreign elements.

So, how do (im)migrant students' socioeconomic, transnational, and personal situations surface as they navigate old and new multilingual realities and begin their French studies? How do the stories of their experiences navigating phenomena relating to globalization and mobility manifest in class? The quotidian multilingualism of Sud's FLE class reveals the experiences of (im)migrant students in the Corsican *collège*. The urban Corsican context allows for the exploration of two under-examined sociolinguistic contexts, namely FLE education and (im)migrant multilingualism on the island. This focus contributes to destabilizing notions of center-periphery dynamics (cf. Pietikäinen et al. 2017: 194) in the spirit of complex sociolinguistic inquiry.

### **Newly arrived (im)migrant students in France / Corsica**

The French Ministry of Education provides intensive French language instruction (FLE) for allophone students, so that they can be mainstreamed into normal classes as soon as possible (Bonacina 2010: §3.4). These students usually attend FLE for the majority of their school day but may attend certain classes where command of French is considered less imperative, such as PE, art, music, math, and foreign language (Bonacina 2010: §3.4.3.2; MEN 2012: 5). Newly arrived (im)migrant students are usually considered those who have been in France (and French territories) less than a year (Bonacina 2010: 58). *Mineurs isolés étrangers* (MIE), the main focus of the present discussion, are unaccompanied foreign minors<sup>9</sup>; in French, *isolé* can also be understood as lone, secluded, stray, or segregated. Many of the newly arrived students are also learning to learn within the French educational system, encountering new school practices and in some cases a new alphabet.

Via their transnational trajectories (im)migrant students bring their home-language experiences and global linguistic biographies to a multilingual reality that exists simultaneously upon two interwoven sociolinguistic planes: as part of the island's French-Corsican bilingual society and within the multilingual *collège* curriculum.<sup>10</sup> Though many (im)migrant students on Corsica are of Moroccan, Portuguese, or Romanian heritage (three of the largest (im)migrant groups on the

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<sup>9</sup> See Durand 2017 for a detailed discussion of MIEs.

<sup>10</sup> Languages available at the *collège* level in the Corsican school district include: English, Corsican, Italian, Spanish, German, Chinese, and Latin and Greek. English, Corsican, and Italian are offered in intensive / bilingual tracks, and Arabic is also offered as an extra-curricular class.

island), their language backgrounds are not limited to the national language of their home-countries. Mobility<sup>11</sup> is a defining characteristic in the FLE classroom, where students' personal histories take center stage in explaining the *mélange* of languages present. For example, Diego, a Lusophone student in Sud's FLE class, was of Brazilian descent rather than Portuguese. Aside from Portuguese and French, he spoke Italian and some English and held both Brazilian and Italian passports. These students' linguistic repertoires reflect eclectic transnational experiences which, in the case of MIEs, can often be attributed to desperate economic and / or family situations (lack of work, financial instability, absence of parents).

MIE students are sometimes sent by family members to France with the hopes that they will be able to find work there afterward.<sup>12</sup> In more extreme cases, these children were already alone in their home countries and ended up being conveyed to Corsica rather randomly. For example, one student from Mali came to France alone after spending some time in Spain. The child reached Paris to find the network of *maisons d'enfants* (children's homes) inundated. It is protocol for these institutions, in such cases, to reach out to their partners in other regions of France to see who can take in the children, and they subsequently end up in provincial regions, including Corsica. In this way, Corsica serves as a kind of overflow for the French mainland, further complicating the make-up of the Corsican periphery and (im)migrants' place therein. This kind of unpredictability with regard to destination, the wanderings of an adolescent across borders, continents, and seas, complicates the notion of agentive mobility, as they end up in the care of a foreign child welfare system.<sup>13</sup>

Foreign students' participation in FLE programs and the French school system are not dependent on students' residency status since all children have the right to education in France (Bonacina 2010: §3.4). However, MIEs who have entered the child welfare system above the age of 16 do not have the automatic right to residency once they reach the age of majority, and must obtain a *carte de séjour* (temporary residence card) by way of either enrolling as a

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<sup>11</sup> Mobility as a facet of globalization which affects language teaching and learning (Block and Cameron 2002: 7; Harris et al. 2002: 32–33).

<sup>12</sup> This information is synthesized from interviews with the *Conseillère d'orientation psychologique* (Psychological Orientation Counselor, COP) at Sud and the CASNAV (*Centre académique pour la scolarisation des enfants allophones nouvellement arrivés et des enfants issus de familles itinérantes et de voyageurs*, Academic Center for the Schooling of Newly Arrived Allophone Students and Children of Migrant and Travelling Families) office of Haute Corse, which receives and oversees newly arrived students in the area (May 24, 2016; June 9, 2016). For reasons of confidentiality, I was not privy to some information regarding the students' backgrounds, including detailed specifics as to how they arrived in France. The example of the student from Mali (who was not a student at Sud) was recounted by the COP.

<sup>13</sup> Namely, *L'Aide sociale à l'enfance* (ASE, see Durand 2017).

university student or securing work as a salaried or temporary worker (Durand 2017: 27). In short, these older MIE students face the task of maintaining their legal status, as the stories of the focal participants illustrate.

Despite the fact that much work has addressed the language situation of Corsican (Cotnam 2014; Jaffe 1999; Ottavi et al. 2012; Quenot 2012), relatively little work has addressed that of (im)migrants on the island.<sup>14</sup> Though other work has explored academic performance (Mendonça-Dias 2013) and classroom practices of newly arrived students in continental France (Bonacina 2010, 2012), this article offers a still somewhat neglected perspective as to how the circumstances of MIE students surface in the classroom and interact with FLE class content. FLE students' transnational experiences shine through in class; their situations of mobility as a displaced population on Corsica offer a unique context in which to examine multilingualism and globalization.

### **Methodology and focal participants**

The fieldwork period for this research took place in spring 2016 over approximately 18 weeks at *Collège du Sud*.<sup>15</sup> The methodological approach was based in linguistic ethnography (Copland and Creese 2015; Jaffe 1999; Heller 2011; Blommaert 2013), and more specifically in semi-participant observation of the FLE class (Bonacina 2010: 121, 138). Linguistic ethnography is apt for the study of multilingualism and transnationalism since it is an approach that is highly sensitive to socio-political and cultural contextualization. I had spent the 2012-2013 school year as an English language assistant at *Collège du Sud*, and my experience as a former colleague at the school facilitated my re-entry for fieldwork in 2016. What's more, my time living with a host family and enrolled in Corsican language classes<sup>16</sup> for adults have influenced my social networks and knowledge of the terrain, aiding in the interpretation of the data I present here.

The primary interactional data consist of field notes taken during classroom observations, as well as transcriptions from recordings of the same class periods. Observations took place in classes of approximately fifty minutes, and attendance ranged from three to fifteen newly arrived students. The field notes were guided by close attention to language-learning interactions including pedagogical methods and practices, which languages students used when,

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<sup>14</sup> Notable exceptions include Géa's (2005) and Madhi's (2014) work on Moroccan and Berber groups on Corsica.

<sup>15</sup> Fieldwork was funded by the Department of French & Italian at the University of California, Davis, and was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

<sup>16</sup> Referred to in the school district's curricula as *Langue et culture corses* (Corsican language and culture, LCC).

which students were called on and when, and how students interacted with the teacher, one another, and class content. After transcription of the recordings (following Copland and Creese 2015 and Blommaert and Jie 2010), the data were coded for recurring themes, moving from “open coding” to “amalgamate and reduce codes” where necessary (Copland and Creese 2015: 213–214). Subsequent readings of the coded data led to a focus on globalization as a salient theme.

Other data collection included interviews and surveys. One-on-one interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately an hour; discussions were based on interviewees’ experiences of multilingualism and globalization in the field of education on Corsica. Surveys were circulated to educators and newly arrived students in the Corsican school district. Questions were themed on curricular policy and language teaching for the former, and French- and Corsican-language-learning for the latter. I have holistically synthesized some findings from these other data, as in the discussion of MIE students (above) and the vignettes (below). In what follows, I focus on the transcriptions from classroom observation as they give particular insight into the everyday multilingual experience of the FLE class context.

The language use in the excerpts I present reveals stories that reach up and out from the FLE classroom to multiple other scales (Blommaert 2010: Chapter 2). The following are portraits of the focal participants, snapshots of the students and teacher that highlight information pertinent to the discussion of multilingualism and transnational experiences.

**Dritan** is preparing to enter high school. He is from Albania and has also lived in Greece. Aside from Albanian, he speaks some Greek, Italian, and English. He tends to flip his r’s rather than using the French uvular [ʁ]. One day in class, Emmanuelle (the teacher) asked him why he’d taken off his shoes, to which he replied that they didn’t fit. Though he is sometimes scolded for being off-task, when the principal visits the class, he jokes in a very friendly way with him; it is obvious he is well cared for by the adults at Sud.

**Faizan** arrived from Pakistan during the middle of the fieldwork period, toward the end of the schoolyear, and is also preparing to enter high school. He once wore a UCLA tee-shirt to school, but when I asked him about it, he couldn’t understand my question. He speaks very little French, and often does not include subject pronouns when using verbs. Emmanuelle, the teacher, spends a lot of class time<sup>17</sup> working with him one-on-

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<sup>17</sup> Though FLE is offered five days per week, Bonacina (2010) explains the logistical nightmare teachers face in attempting to address the multiplicity of schedules and needs of students of drastically varying backgrounds and competencies: “children spend some parts of the school day in their induction [FLE] classroom and others in their mainstream classroom, walking in and out of their induction classroom all day long. Furthermore, each

one on his handwriting and spelling. He and a Ukrainian student are the only students who do not share a home language with another classmate.

**Tarek** is from Egypt. He is often referred to by teachers, aides, and administrators at the school as *en difficulté* (in difficulty), and has only beginning reading and writing skills in both Arabic and French. Tarek has a hard time distinguishing when to use *tu / vous* (informal / formal “you”), which is often the source of friendly joking with the entire class when he addresses the teachers saying, *tu vois ?* (you (informal) see?). Teachers and counselors mention to me that he enjoys the *atelier de bâtiment* (construction workshop). He had been on Corsica for a year at the time of fieldwork and would attend FLE full-time for a second year the next year, a rare occurrence.

**Emmanuelle** is an FLE and French (letters) teacher at Sud. She co-teaches FLE with another teacher, Yvette. She is Corsican. She uses English in class a few times throughout the fieldwork period to try to clarify course content. She employs some characteristics of *français régional de corse* (Corsican Regional French, FRC), for example in stress patterns.<sup>18</sup> She expresses the opinion that Greek and Latin should have a more prominent place in the *collège* curriculum and is explicitly concerned with the FLE students’ *intégration* (integration) into school and French society by way of the French language.

MIE students’ experiences of globalization that come to light in class reveal important interactions of globalization and the lives of (im)migrant youth in the Mediterranean. Everyday classroom moments offer the opportunity to explore how MIE students’ experiences of displacement arise in their language-learning.

## Metaphor

The excerpts I present here are those in which, upon rereading the data, I realized language-learning and pedagogy were not central as such; rather, the students’ personal experiences jump to the wheel, as class content takes the back seat. Locating these key points in the data involved identifying where themes of language, globalization, and personal history appear in a concise, compact exchange. In these moments, class content is decidedly less primary, and globalization

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child does so at different times of the day according to the timetable of his or her mainstream class[es]. As a result, induction teachers rarely teach the whole class at the same time and children have sometimes to put aside an activity they are conducting in the induction classroom to attend a lesson in [a] mainstream one.” (65)

<sup>18</sup> Especially with names, for example “Cesari:” Corsican [tʃe.za.ri] versus French (always phrase-final) [tʃe.za.bi] (Jaffe 1999: 116).

phenomena make their presence felt. I became convinced that a metaphor could be useful to illustrate this layering.

Metaphor has proven a fruitful tool with which to approach globalization-related phenomena and language (cf. Catalano 2016: Chapters 3, 11). Aronin and Politis (2015) illustrate the array of metaphors already present in sociolinguistic work, such as distance, flux and fluidity, boundaries and borders, and edges (5–6). Metaphors can serve in imagining and understanding new kinds of complexity, as they “capture the essence of a phenomenon under exploration, and open up researchers’ minds for generating new solutions” (ibid.: 3). Whether they provide a dramatic flair or a convenient shorthand, metaphors are useful as we broaden our understandings of complex sociolinguistic phenomena (Blommaert 2016: 247). I will briefly introduce two metaphors, globalizing surges and pearls, that I will use in my analysis. While the former brings terminological nuance to my discussion of globalization, the latter represents an analytic approach, namely engagement with metaphor in the interpretation of language data.

Globalizing surges (Ramanathan 2013a: 9–10; 2013b: 254) offers a term with which to refer to phenomena that we readily associate with globalization<sup>19</sup>, for example intense mobility and transnationalism, multilingualism, new forms of communication technologies, and the workings of the post-national economy. Ramanathan’s original use of the term (ibid.) refers to trends in global phenomena including and beyond language spread / contact: “migrations, outsourcing, networks, and social media” (Ramanathan, personal communication, January 2016). These phenomena are multiple and messy; Ramanathan explains that “[a]s globalizing surges make us aware, while our modernities are heterogeneous, they are translatable; they are also collages of histories, policies, borders, and crossings that do not add up to tidy snapshots” (2013a: 9–10).

Rather than use globalizing surges completely synonymously with “globalization,” I posit that “surges” offers a nuanced illustration as to how one experiences such phenomena. “Surge” calls to mind powerful swelling forces such as an electrical burst or tidal wave. Surges in the natural world, like volcanic eruptions or tsunamis, occur at large scales—outside the influence of humankind. These surges highlight the unruly characteristics of globalization in which we are submerged. Phipps’ (2013) concept of unmoored multilingualism weighs the anchors of people and place: “the unmoored are more often than not the migrants, the refugees and asylum seekers who live amongst us” (100). She explains that “To be unmoored suggests possibility—potential pain, insecurity, escape, freedom, hope, danger, release and a sea-ward flow...radically

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<sup>19</sup> “the catchword for a particular historical phase (the capitalist present, so to speak)” (Blommaert 2010: 1).

unpredictable in the turbulence of a tossing sea” (ibid.: 98). The term globalizing surges similarly addresses the consequences of globalization, especially as experienced by vulnerable populations such as (im)migrant / unaccompanied youth, underscoring their precarious position at the mercy of these phenomena and their “lack of agency and control” (Ludwig 2016: 36).

A pearl is a metaphorical heuristic that I propose for qualitatively interpreting instances of complex sociolinguistic phenomena.<sup>20</sup> A pearl is a speech event in which discourses of linguistic, cultural, and personal experience collapse into a minute, charged exchange. A pearl is a speech event, not a person or word, and its formation (its interpretation as a pearl) requires deep contextualization. A pearl can be said to form when a language-related element<sup>21</sup> necessitates the incorporation of cultural and personal experience in an exchange such that linguistic, cultural, and personal factors are understood as inseparable.

In aquaculture, pearls are formed by the introduction of an irritant into an oyster, which is then recurrently layered with nacre. It is a language-related element that serves as the “irritant” which spurs the formation of a pearl, calling into play the other factors (cultural, economic, legal) which layer themselves onto it. The iridescence of pearls—their unique luster—highlights the subjectivity inherent in the process of interpreting them. The hues one observes in a pearl change depending on one’s perspective and the light. These colorful refractions highlight our partial and biased perception in beholding pearls. In their analysis of contemporary minority language situations, including Corsica, Pietikäinen et al. (2017) find “a kind of metalinguistic and metacultural ‘shimmer’—the brightly visible but unstable and shifting images of small languages that we have to deal with in the many peripheral spaces of late modernity” (69). (Im)migrants’ multilingual trajectories obviously also contribute to peripheral multilingual contexts, adding to this shimmer.

Like pearls inside oysters, those I present are often hidden, sheltered, and isolated; they are usually small. The pearl metaphor also gestures to the island setting from which this data emerges, a way of thinking about language that takes environment into consideration.<sup>22</sup> MIE students and the complex transnational situations in which they find themselves are akin to

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Blommaert 2013: 621; 2016: 247; Aronin and Politis 2015: 3.

<sup>21</sup> This varies from one situation to the next, and can involve a letter or handwriting practice, a word or discourse, a verb tense, or an ideological orientation to language.

<sup>22</sup> Language work as “the work of relation, with each other and with the land.” (Phipps 2011: 371)

pearls: resilient,<sup>23</sup> uniquely shaped and colored, undergoing a process of formation<sup>24</sup>, with figurative nacre shining with layers of their often-turbulent personal histories. Using the pearl heuristic, I analyze transcripts from classroom interactional data to interpret speech events as related to globalizing surges.

### Reading the data

In this section, I present excerpts from classroom observation data from two moments in the 2016 FLE class at *Collège du Sud*. From these, I present three pearls centered on interactions involving the focal students, Faizan (from Pakistan), Dritan (from Albania), and Tarek (from Egypt). My goal in this exercise is to interpret speech events in light of globalizing surges in order to ask how MIE students' personal experiences of globalization interact with the classroom context. The data illustrate how MIE students' transnational trajectories shape them as multilingual subjects (cf. Kramsch 2009: 16–17). MIE students' circumstances as multilinguals in a French-Corsican context of hyper-mobility and displacement obviously involve multiple layers of nacre which contribute to the build-up of pearls. I present the pearls as transcript excerpts bolstered by contextual information (synthesized from field notes/observations) and my interpretations woven throughout.<sup>25</sup>

### New Year's Resolutions

May 30, 2016, 10-11am class. Emmanuelle, the teacher, circulates through the classroom. Each student is writing their New Year's resolution. The activity concentrates on the formation of simple future conjugations themed around the French cultural practice of making resolutions for the New Year. Emmanuelle approaches Faizan's desk and asks him what his resolution is.

10. Emmanuelle - Et toi, tu arrives, Faizan? à imaginer ? On imagine. Là, on est en 2016, d'accord ? Qu'est-ce que tu voudrais changer en 2017 ? Pour toi. Qu'est-ce que tu aimerais ?
11. Faizan - ((speaking very softly)) (xxx) ((mumbling)) (travailler)
12. Emmanuelle - Tu voudrais travailler?
13. Faizan - (Oui...)

<sup>23</sup> Though I do believe MIE students are resilient, I do not mean to project a romanticized vision of resilience or a cliché, typified notion of overcoming hardship. Resilience, in the sense of overcoming, is not the central point of the pearl metaphor.

<sup>24</sup> The French *formation* can also refer to education or training.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Copland and Cresse 2015: 86. My analysis is also similar to Bonacina's (2010) analysis of conversation wherein attention to specific turns sheds light onto the active and dynamic co-construction of local context (87; §4.2.5), and Johnson's (2009) combination of discourse analysis with other sources of ethnographic data (140).

14. Emmanuelle - Oui.  
 15. Faizan - (et peinture)  
 16. Emmanuelle - dans la peinture  
 17. Faizan - (xxx) ((mumbling)) (oui dans la peinture)  
 18. Emmanuelle - [[oui, oui  
 19. Faizan - (et carrelage)  
 20. Emmanuelle - oui trouver du travail dans le bâtiment  
 21. Faizan - oui

10. Emmanuelle - And you, are you getting it, Faizan? Can you imagine? Let's imagine. Now, we're in 2016, ok? What would you like to change in 2017? For you. What would you like?  
 11. Faizan - ((speaking very softly)) (xxx) ((mumbling)) (to work)  
 12. Emmanuelle - You would like to work?  
 13. Faizan - (Yes...)  
 14. Emmanuelle - Yes.  
 15. Faizan - (and painting)  
 16. Emmanuelle - in painting  
 17. Faizan - (xxx) ((mumbling)) (yes in painting)  
 18. Emmanuelle - [[yes, yes  
 19. Faizan - (and tiling)  
 20. Emmanuelle - yes to find work in construction  
 21. Faizan - yes

The “irritant” that begins to yield a pearl is the discourse of *travailler* (“to work”), in line 12. So much is implicated in this one uttered word: Faizan’s transnational background, his experiences in a French school, and his unknown future trajectory. These are the layers of nacre we begin to see. I would argue that the fact that a newly arrived adolescent possesses such limited French that he cannot string together a full sentence, yet knows rather technical vocabulary (i.e., *peinture* “painting” in turn 15, *carrelage* “tiling” in turn 19), reflects a type of complexity in and of itself: a story of transnationalism interacting with post-national economics. That is, his limited French repertoire is infused by the economic prospect which drives his transnational endeavor: his need to secure work (we assume) to obtain a residence card. In turn 20, Emmanuelle provides him with the term to say that he wants to work in construction, *le bâtiment*. In the following turn (22), Emmanuelle continues to help Faizan construct a full sentence to express his resolution, attempting (though confusingly at times) to explain what a resolution is and means.

22. Emmanuelle - D'accord ? Alors... ça c'est simple ta résolution... c'est comme un c'est comme une espèce de, c'est comme un vœu, tu espères, tu prends, mais c'est quelque chose qui est, mm, umm, la résolution ? tu vois ? c'est presque, c'est comme une décision que tu prends, et tu vas essayer de de de le faire, tu comprends, ce que, c'est une décision, oui, je veux vraiment que ça arrive, c'est comme une décision... Donc, ça

serait par exemple... eh... ((Emmanuelle writes in his notebook)) En 2017, je... tra-vai-lle-rai, ça c'est le futur, c'est le verbe, c'est l'avenir... le futur... dans, le bâtiment, c'est ça ? je travaillerai dans le bâtiment... le bâtiment ((finishes writing)). D'accord ? C'est un "t." Tu le recopies?

22. Emmanuelle - Ok? So... your resolution is simple. It's like it's like a type of, it's like a wish, you hope, you make, but it's something that is, mm, umm, the resolution? you see? it's almost, it's like a decision that you make, and you're going to try to to to do it, you understand, what, it's a decision, yes, I really want this to happen, it's like a decision... So, it would be for example, uh... ((Emmanuelle writes in his notebook)) In 2017, I will work, that's the future [tense], it's the verb, it's the future... the future [tense] in, construction, right? I will work in construction... construction ((finishes writing)) Ok? That's a "t." Will you recopy [it]?

Faizan's completed resolution, *Je travaillerai dans le bâtiment* ("I will work in construction"), which has been dictated to him, reflects how his presence on Corsica and in the FLE class are tied to his economic situation as an MIE, that is, his need to find a job to remain in France. Indeed, Faizan will most likely need (minimal, functional) French, like what he learns in FLE, as he seeks employment. The content of the lesson, including the definition of what a resolution is and means, gets muddled as Faizan's personal life is increasingly foregrounded. This first pearl is constituted by layer upon layer of figurative nacre: language learning, legal status, and work.

As turn 22 continues, Emmanuelle turns from Faizan's desk and walks toward Dritan at the front of the room to see how his resolution is coming along.

22. Emmanuelle - Et toi, Dritan, tu as des idées ?  
 23. Dritan - Mm, oui.  
 24. Emmanuelle - Des décisions que tu prends pour l'année prochaine? Uh?  
 25. Dritan - Oui. Je va en Albanie.  
 26. Emmanuelle - J'irai, j'irai.  
 27. Dritan - Ah. J-j'irai. ((pronounces flipped [r]))  
 28. Emmanuelle - Oui.  
 29. Dritan - Je reste deux semaines.  
 30. Emmanuelle - Je resterai deux semaines.  
 31. Dritan - Je resterai deux semaines... avec famille ((pronounces [l]))  
 32. Emmanuelle - avec la famille... pas-pas avant 2017 ? Pas avant ?  
 33. Dritan - Non.  
 34. Emmanuelle - Non, c'est pas possible ? D'accord.  
 35. Dritan - Non, je veux, je sais pas.  
 36. Emmanuelle - [[Tu aimerais, d'accord.  
 37. Dritan - Et, c'est ça.  
 38. Emmanuelle - Oui, c'est ça. Alors, tu me l'écris. D'accord ?

22. Emmanuelle - And you, Dritan, do you have ideas?  
 23. Dritan - Mm, yes.  
 24. Emmanuelle - Decisions that you'll make for next year, huh?  
 25. Dritan - Yes. I go to Albania.  
 26. Emmanuelle - I will go, I will go.  
 27. Dritan - Ah. I-I will go.  
 28. Emmanuelle - Yes.  
 29. Dritan - I stay two weeks.  
 30. Emmanuelle - I will stay two weeks.  
 31. Dritan - I will stay two weeks... with family  
 32. Emmanuelle - with family... not-not before 2017? Not before?  
 33. Dritan - No.  
 34. Emmanuelle - Non, it's not possible? Ok.  
 35. Dritan - No, I want, I don't know.  
 36. Emmanuelle - [[You'd like to, ok.  
 37. Dritan - And, that's it.  
 38. Emmanuelle - Yes, that's it. Well, write it down for me. Ok?

Beyond issues of employment and legal status, Emmanuelle's interaction with Dritan illustrates another layer of an MIE student's existence: personal / family relationships and (implicitly) finances. Depending on the situation the MIE students eventually find themselves in (regionally, institutionally), and depending on what is happening at home, they may or may not retain family ties. In turn 32, Emmanuelle asks Dritan if he won't be able to see his family before 2017 (recall that fieldwork took place during spring of 2016). He replies no, and she again asks in turn 34 if it's not possible, to which he responds that he does not know. Here, it is helpful to make use of Aronin and Jessner's (2016) concept of a spacetime of multilingualism, "a multidimensional cross-section of reality in reference to a speaker(s), the languages involved, and the environment, in which time is its essential dimension" (6). Emmanuelle's prodding Dritan about his upcoming visits to Albania to see his family gestures away from the spacetime of the moment to that of his future travel plans. The fact that Dritan isn't sure when he will again see his family highlights a key idea within the spacetime framework, that "the world around us is characterized by irregularity, fragmentariness, fuzziness, and is on the verge of chaotic" (ibid.: 4-5). The uncertainty regarding when and how Dritan will be able to finally see his family underscores the unstable and non-linear workings of his transnational life: "intimate contexts of family broken up, unmoored, split apart in the tossing and turbulence and flotsam and jetsam which create myriad forms of migration and mobility" (Phipps 2013: 99). Durand (2017) contends that MIE students can encounter difficulties at school related to their hyper-mobile trajectories, which at times prevent them from projecting themselves into the future (21). Given Emmanuelle's roundabout and at times contradictory explanation of resolutions

(turn 22: “hope,” “wish,” “try,” “decision”), the orientation to the future tense in the activity is one that expresses elusive “maybes” occurring (or not) at an indefinite future point. Language ability and life circumstances reflect one another: MIE students with nascent French skills, like Faizan, barely have command of the present, much less the future. The questions as to when Dritan will see his family in Albania, not to mention how he would finance the trip, remain vague and unanswered. Time, mobility, financial resources, and family matters can be understood here as the layers of nacre which yield this second pearl.

Within the New Year’s Resolution activity, the students are learning:

1. French cultural practices (i.e., New Year’s Resolutions), and
2. French grammar (i.e., future forms), while these are tightly bound up with
3. their socioeconomic situations (e.g., Faizan’s need to find work).

The latter, socioeconomic situations, are clearly foregrounded. Though it is not grammar or culture in and of themselves that are crucial, Faizan’s knowledge of France and French will obviously facilitate his job search. Meanwhile, Dritan’s ability to visit his family who reportedly sent him to France will depend on his finances and surely many other factors.<sup>26</sup> Neither resolution is a promised reality. Faizan’s resolution revolves around work, mobility, and legal status, while Dritan’s involves family, mobility, and finances; as the students grapple with expressing themselves in French, what they say exudes these globalizing surges. Rather than read these exchanges as banal biography, the New Year’s Resolution pearls highlight how multiple factors (linguistic, personal, socioeconomic, political, (trans)national, etc.) are revealed in a condensed classroom moment. The final pearl I present includes another factor that has not yet figured in the present discussion, namely religion.

### **The Intern**

May 31, 2016, 10–11am class. At the beginning of class, Emmanuelle walks to Tarek’s desk to ask him about a packet of paperwork for his upcoming *stage* (internship). As she inspects the documents, she is shocked to read that it says that he will work 45 hours in one week, which she insists is too much (turns 46–65). Tarek then begins to try to explain that he was not the one who filled out the paperwork (turn 66), and attempts to justify the long hours.

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<sup>26</sup> Recall that, as the COP and CASNAV office explained, families of MIE students often send their children to be educated “in France.”

66. Tarek - beh, oui, mais, tu comprends, c'est pas moi je l'ai mis ça [sic.]
67. Emmanuelle - Ils savent pas compter, eh.
68. Tarek - Ah, oui, eh, dans le Ramadan, (dis-moi), parce que, uh, (xxx), dans le Ramadan, il commence à sept heures et il finit à (neuf)
69. Emmanuelle - Non, mais, Ramadan, pas Ramadan, non. Toi, tu n'es pas un adulte, Tarek. Et t'as pas le droit de faire plus de trente-cinq
70. Tarek - [[oui, mais je fais pas ça moi, je fais pas ça, j'ai pas corrigé encore, parce que j'ai trompé
71. Emmanuelle - ça c'est pas bon.
72. Tarek - Oui, j'ai pas corrigé encore.
73. Emmanuelle - Moins - trente-cinq - maximum. D'accord ?
74. Tarek - J'ai pas corrigé encore.

66. Tarek - well, yes, but, you understand, it wasn't me [who] put [wrote] that
67. Emmanuelle - Well they don't know how to count.
68. Tarek - Ah, yes, uh, during Ramadan, (tell me), because, uh, (xxx), during Ramadan, it starts at seven o'clock and it finishes at (nine)
69. Emmanuelle - No, but, Ramadan, not Ramadan, no. You, you are not an adult, Tarek. You do not have the right to do more than thirty-five [hours]
70. Tarek - [[yes, but I don't do that, I don't do that, I didn't correct it yet, because I make mistake
71. Emmanuelle - that is not good
72. Tarek - Yes, I did not correct yet.
73. Emmanuelle - Less [than] - thirty-five - maximum. Ok?
74. Tarek - I did not correct yet.

Tarek claims he was not the one who wrote 45 hours in his schedule (turn 66), and then asserts he can work longer hours, since the internship will take place during Ramadan (turn 68). Emmanuelle firmly counters, telling him that as a minor he is not allowed to work more than thirty-five hours per week (turn 69). It is unclear who exactly wrote in the quantity of hours Tarek is supposed to work. Emmanuelle is suspicious upon observing that the numbers on the document don't add up correctly (turns 67 and 77). Given her reaction—surprise and unrelenting opposition to the long hours—it would seem that Tarek may be being taken advantage of. That is, someone could be suggesting he work longer hours during his religious holiday, which he would not have necessarily been able to notice since his reading skills are limited and since he is seemingly unaware of French laws limiting child labor. In this way, the employer in question would gain free labor for longer. Emmanuelle forcefully advocates to Tarek that he must clarify to his internship supervisor that he will not work above thirty-five hours (turn 73 and 75).

75. Emmanuelle - C'est pour ça que je voudrais un-donc, tu le dis. Tu dis, ma prof, elle a dit, trente-cinq heures-maximum.
76. Tarek - D'accord, d'accord.
77. Emmanuelle - Sinon, c'est non. D'accord ? Et ça, tout ça, ça fait pas quarante cinq, ça fait quarante.
78. Tarek - D'accord.
79. Emmanuelle - D'accord ? Regarde, je compte avec toi, pour que tu comprennes, Tarek. Pour que tu sois intelligent.
80. Tarek - Mais c'est pas moi, j'ai mis ça
81. Emmanuelle - Non, mais c'est pas grave. Tarek, c'est ton papier. Et tu es responsable de ça. Tu comprends ce que je veux te dire ? Quand on a un papier, il faut regarder pour voir ce qui est écrit. Parce que, c'est toi ce papier. C'est comme si c'était toi. Mais, tu peux pas laisser écrire n'importe quoi.

75. Emmanuelle - That's why I'd like an-well, you say it. You say, my teacher, she said, thirty-five-maximum.
76. Tarek - Ok, ok.
77. Emmanuelle - Otherwise, it's no. Ok? And that, all that, does not add up to forty-five, that makes forty.
78. Tarek - Ok.
79. Emmanuelle - Ok? Look, I'll count with you, so that you understand, Tarek. So that you be smart [about it].
80. Tarek - But it's not me, I put that.
81. Emmanuelle - No, but it's ok. Tarek, it's your paper. And you are responsible for it. Do you understand what I'm saying to you? When you have a paper, you have to look to see what is written. Because, you are this paper. It's as if it were you. But, you can't let just anything be written.

After asserting that Tarek must insist his supervisor lower the amount of hours he is to work, Emmanuelle elaborates on the importance of this kind of official paperwork. In turn 81, she equates Tarek himself to the document at hand, underscoring the weight of the written word and the potential consequences of one's not being able to access it. That is, she evokes literacy in advocating that Tarek be careful as he assumes employment responsibilities. Her statement hints at other, much more serious issues involving official documentation and employment, namely residency status. Religion plays an interesting role in this exchange. Given the confusion, it seems that Tarek has somehow been convinced that he should work taxing hours during Ramadan in exchange for internship hours. Issues of employment, legal status, and religion intersect with dynamics of the post-national economy and budding literacy skills to contribute to the layering of nacre in this pearl.

(Im)migrant workforces on Corsica often participate in physically-engaging labor such as construction and agriculture, and Faizan and Tarek are obviously positioned for such kinds of

employment.<sup>27</sup> Like other migrant workers, they are at the mercy of the post-national economy, since (im)migrants are frequently limited, in terms of access to work opportunities, to these kinds of demanding labor. It is easy to interpret MIE students' search for employment in manual labor, like construction, as systemically maintaining cycles of oppression of (im)migrant populations. Though this may be true, the same systems that one could blame for such inequalities in opportunity are made up of social actors (teachers and counselors) who flock to help MIE students find work to remain in France.<sup>28</sup> In this way, we can see that the line between oppression and aid is not always clearly defined.

These data revolve around themes of work, mobility, legal status, family, and religion as they relate to the students' transnational trajectories; these stories emerge from and in multilingual environments. The students' nascent French skills also come into play: Faizan and Dritan's ability to express themselves in the future, and Tarek's (in)ability to read. Whether they are stated implicitly or explicitly, these factors are densely compacted in small exchanges—layer upon layer of nacre in each pearl. In these exchanges, globalizing surges interact with the classroom context; the many layers of MIE students' stories gleam in distinct ways as we consider them from one angle and then another.

## Discussion

MIE students in a Corsican FLE class represent a unique multilingual context where globalizing surges are easily detected. They learn French as an additional language amid French Republican ideologies of integration<sup>29</sup> and Corsican revitalization efforts<sup>30</sup>, and offer the opportunity to explore a kind of peripheral multilingualism (Pietikäinen et al. 2017: ix). These students' transnational experiences, family situations, legal statuses, and liminal multilingual repertoires are functions of their histories of mobility as a displaced population, which gestures to the need for multilayered interpretation of their speech.

Developing an extended metaphor from one's data presents an opportunity to expand the breadth of work in complex sociolinguistics (Blommaert 2016: 247). Pearls are slowly

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<sup>27</sup> Regarding (im)migrant populations and their employment on Corsica, see Géa et al. 2008; Tempier, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> It is a question of attempting to provide education and resources for MIE youth and allowing them as much choice as possible in their future endeavors while operating under a sometimes very limited time constraint with regard to their age. See Durand 2017: 18, 26–27.

<sup>29</sup> MEN 2012: 6; Bonacina 2010: §3.2.2; Lazaridis & Seksig 2005: 161; Durand 2017: 21; see also Adrey 2009 on Corsica.

<sup>30</sup> Cotnam 2014; Jaffe 1999; Ottavi et al. 2012; Quenot 2012.

produced over time, which reflects their emergent character; the pearl metaphor thus foregrounds time and history as essential elements. Other metaphors such as snapshot, portrait, or moment exclude a sense of time in their attempt to freeze it; though a pearl references a stable (synchronic) material object, its formation suggests a steady yet dynamic diachronicity. Pearls, charged exchanges that carry the weight of time, engage multiple trajectories at play.

As with the production that takes place in the layering of nacre onto the irritant within the oyster, productive tensions are observable in the pearls I've presented. Pearls involve dynamic processes of lived experience; they are “a metaphor for the enlanguaged condition” (Phipps 2013: 112). Rather than present personal traits and biographical experience as explanatory, pearls emphasize productive tensions which arise in interaction, dependent on context and “newly elaborated subjectivities” (ibid.: 113).<sup>31</sup> For example, the word *travailler* (to work) conveys a particular story in Faizan's resolution that would not index the same things had it been used by a different person in a different context. Productive tensions arise in the divergence from normative conditions, that is intersections between socioeconomic status, national background, experiences of mobility, and orientations toward the national or standard language that deviate from the majority. When such a tension manifests in language, an irritant in a particular interaction yields a pearl in this emergent way.

We can imagine the school space as the confining and restrictive space of the oyster, which determines the formation of a pearl. This could include teachers' actions and assumptions regarding students' trajectories and learning. Yet, while the institutional space is limiting and unyielding in certain ways, it is also the protective shell that allows the growth of the pearl therein. Recall, for example, Emmanuelle's forceful defense of Tarek from potential exploitation. It is thus both thanks to and in spite of rigidity—regulations of the institutional setting, adherence to national language ideologies of assimilation—that one can see a kind of care: there is no doubt that FLE offers students protection and attention in the microcosm of the classroom.

From a commercial, capitalist point of view, pearls are treasure, valued aesthetically and often harvested. The commodification of pearls points to an explicit process of cultivation at work in the social (f)actors contributing to their formation. This points to French national linguistic ideologies of integration in cultivating French speakers, the acculturation and valuation of certain social (linguistic) practices over others, namely the prioritization of French in MIE students' learning. The ebb and flow of tides from which the pearls emerge are the globalizing

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<sup>31</sup> See also Kramsch 2009: 19–20 on intersubjectivity.

surges of the extended metaphor, the larger environment outside their control. As we've seen, these surges can include economic, political, and even relationship factors, among others. Pearls are at the mercy of the immediate context of the oyster, those that cultivate them, and the ebb and flow of tides.<sup>32</sup> The pearl metaphor has offered a way of interpreting speech events in light of globalizing surges in a multilayered way.

Blommaert (2010) explains that in the sociolinguistics of globalization, aside from social phenomena occurring at multiple scale levels (polycentricity), spatial and temporal mobilities are also at play (197). Globalizing surges inhibit the navigation of space and time with agency and control, as we've seen in the case of children being sent to *maisons d'enfants* in different regions of France where there is reported to be available space. With such a lack of agency and control, we are also left to wonder, for example, when will Dritan see his family in Albania again? MIE students are at the mercy of globalizing surges and institutional systems, and their search for a secure situation is as emergent, dynamic, and unstable as any other element constituting their transnational lives. The families who send their children alone to France, like Dritan's, represent a particular relationship to transnationalism. MIEs' situations do not necessarily involve flight from a warzone or political asylum; rather, the child's presence in the host country may represent the parents' volition for educational and economic opportunities. This is seemingly made possible by the workings of globalization—transnational mobility, foreign child welfare and legal systems, and the post-national economy. The possibilities of refuge and care are bound to globalizing surges in messy ways.

The stories of MIE students on Corsica and others like them merit our attention in the spirit of critical pedagogies (Morgan and Ramanathan 2005: 154; Pennycook 1999: 332), critical language policy (Tollefson 2006: 44), and multilingualism and social justice (Piller 2016: 5), especially as a vulnerable population. Future work should explore encounters between historic, place-based speech communities (like Corsican) and those of (im)migrants, as well as how conviviality (Blommaert 2013: 89) is fostered between such groups. Linguistic ethnography can contribute to the investigation and interpretation of social life—language, culture, politics, economics—and link everyday interactions to larger global trends. This methodology is fitting for both theoretical and applied work concerning multilingualism and contexts of mobility and refuge; beyond academic research and education, non-profit work, social work and welfare, and policy analysis and development can benefit from such an approach. In this way, linguistic ethnography and the study of multilingualism can be powerfully interdisciplinary and steadfastly within the realm of social justice work (Piller 2016: 5). Though these MIE students'

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<sup>32</sup> That is, influences from multiple scale levels, polycentricity (Blommaert 2013: 11).

stories show that being *isolé* means living an unpredictable, complicated life, linguistic ethnography offers a hopeful way for scholar-allies to listen and engage, to endeavor to support vulnerable populations braving the consequences of globalizing surges.

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