

Mobile messaging by migrant micro-entrepreneurs in contexts of superdiversity

Caroline Tagg and Agnieszka Lyons

SUMMARY

This chapter explores an aspect of contemporary social life that is only now coming to the attention of either the superdiversity or business communication literature, that of the use of mobile phones by small business owners, including those who have migrated to the country where they now work. In contrast to research which points to the role played by the internet in fostering superdiversity, the chapter draws attention, firstly, to the use of mobile messaging apps by migrant micro-entrepreneurs in establishing ethnically and linguistically homogeneous social support networks; and, secondly, to the way in which their virtual interactions are grounded in their everyday social lives and business transactions. Importantly, the chapter documents how migrants draw resourcefully on their mobile phones as a tool for getting things done and maintaining relationships in contemporary superdiverse city spaces.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores an aspect of contemporary social life that is only now coming to the attention of either the superdiversity or business communication literature, that of the use of mobile phones by small business owners, including those who have migrated to the country where they now work. A growing body of research has focused on the role played by the internet in fostering superdiversity, both by enabling migrants to maintain links with their home countries, and by bringing people together into groups shaped by common interest or purpose, regardless of geographical distance or of ethnic, cultural and linguistic difference. As we shall see, research into such groupings often focuses on internet forums and other public, multiparty online spaces. In contrast, a focus on migrant business owners suggests that private, often one-to-one communication through mobile messaging apps such as WeChat and Viber can play a very different role for individuals working and living within a superdiverse neighbourhood. Firstly, it reveals how mobile messaging apps may be used by migrant micro-entrepreneurs in establishing somewhat ethnically and linguistically homogeneous social support networks; and, secondly, how their virtual, seemingly decontextualised interactions are in fact grounded in their everyday social lives and business transactions. In this chapter, having outlined the core topics and issues around the role that digital technologies play in superdiversity and in contemporary business communication, we elaborate on the observations made above, drawing on examples from our own research.

Our research data come from a large AHRC-funded project called *Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities*. We explain and discuss the project's aims and methodologies below. Key to the effectiveness of the project in exploring how the mobile phone may be

transforming communication is its focus on individuals and their communicative practices across a number of online and offline, formal and informal, contexts. While other research projects have taken *space* as their starting point – for example by focusing on a particular workspace such as a market or kitchen (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015) – our focus on the individual usefully highlights the ways in which the mobile phone cuts across different spheres of life and blurs the boundaries between them. This is not to say that earlier technologies – such as the landline or the fax – did not fulfil similar functions, but it is certainly true to say that, for the micro-entrepreneurs we worked with, these technologies have been supplanted by the mobile phone (and in particular, by mobile messaging apps) and our aim is to explore the particular ways in which the use of mobile technology shapes the kinds of interactions that these migrant business owners have across their personal, social and business lives.

Importantly, in this chapter, we show that entrepreneurial migrants are able to draw resourcefully and purposefully on their mobile phones in order to get things done, maintain relationships and establish identities as entrepreneurs of a particular heritage background, within and beyond a superdiverse city space. Thus we point to the migrants neither as victims nor passive users of the technology – a position which it is often easy to fall into – but as active agents able to exploit available technologies as they deem necessary to navigate the superdiverse city spaces in which they live and work.

CORE ISSUES AND TOPICS

Superdiversity and the internet

The issue at the centre of this chapter is the role that the internet plays in contemporary conditions of superdiversity; that is, within societies shaped by increasingly complex and layered patterns of migration (Vertovec 2007) where public and parochial interactions can be characterised by an unprecedented degree of linguistic difference, a combining of communicative resources, and acts of translanguaging (Creese and Blackledge 2010; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). Whilst opponents challenge the argument that this kind of ethnic and linguistic diversity constitutes a new phenomenon (Deumert 2014), ‘superdiversity’ has proved useful within academia and elsewhere in establishing new and potentially more useful ways of understanding diversity. Key to recent sociolinguistic thinking has been the notion of superdiversity not as a description of social reality but as a lens through which to understand social relations (Arnault 2012). As a perspective on language and society, superdiversity challenges straightforward associations between an individual’s linguistic repertoire and their demographic background, calling into question the validity of ‘community’ as a way of explaining and structuring language use and providing a framework within which sociolinguists can explore instead the concepts of the individual linguistic repertoire and the individual life trajectory (Blommaert and Rampton 2011). Whilst accepting the value of superdiversity as a lens, our focus in this chapter lies rather with the initial use of superdiversity as a descriptor of social reality, as we explore how migrant

business owners use mobile phones within the very diverse city neighbourhoods in which they live and work.

Much research into superdiversity has, unsurprisingly, focused on public or parochial city spaces, because it is in such spaces that superdiversity most clearly manifests itself, as people from different backgrounds meet to do business, educate their children, shop, eat and so on (e.g. Wessendorf 2014). The city market in particular has often been put forward as the superdiverse space *par excellence*: in Pennycook and Otsuji's (2015: 3) words, '[m]arkets, more than any other city space, perhaps define human engagement with difference'. Business contexts such as the market, then, have formed the basis of much superdiversity research and researchers such as Pennycook and Otsuji (2015) have documented the way in which people from diverse backgrounds draw fluidly on a range of communicative resources in carrying out business transactions, whilst conducting 'convivial' relational work. Much of this work is characterised by a focus on the public spaces in which business is conducted, with less emphasis on how business-related communication intersects with other aspects of individuals' lives. Very little has yet been written on the impact of superdiversity on identity performance or relationship maintenance in private or domestic contexts (although see, for example, Blackledge et al's (2014) work on how identities are produced and community belonging expressed within family settings).

Research into superdiversity and the internet has similarly tended to focus on public, rather than private, online interactions (see, for example, the special issue edited by Androutsopoulos and Juffermans 2014). In such research, the internet and digital communication technologies are generally found to facilitate superdiversity, in two main ways. Firstly, digital technologies assist migrants in maintaining links back home, whilst also forging new connections in their host country. Such research recognises that migration is best seen as being fluid, temporary and 'partial' (Madianou and Miller 2012), often involving only some members of a family and leading to the creation of extensive transnational networks (Zontini 2004). Importantly, mobile technologies enable perpetual and immediate contact between migrants and people back home, heightening intimacy within transnational networks and enabling the co-construction of social proximity (Ito and Okabe 2005). As such, migrants are able to move more fluidly between their connections in their host country and those back home. As mentioned above, most of this research has tended to focus not on private transnational communications (one possible exception being Androutsopoulos's study of 'semi-public' Facebook networks) but on public spaces dedicated to a particular heritage language, including internet forums (Heyd 2014), Facebook (Belling and de Bres 2014) and YouTube (Sharma 2014). In these public online diasporic spaces, linguistic resources can be playfully appropriated and localised (and also policed) as migrants re-negotiate their identities, language ideologies and political positions.

Secondly, the internet also enables the bringing together of people regardless of geographical background or current location, often around shared interests or goals such as football (see Kytölä, this volume) and hip hop (Varis and Wang 2011). As an example of this, a number of studies have focused on the appropriation of commercial or mainstream cultural artefacts by internet communities: Jonsson and Muhonen (2014) show how young multilingual girls in

Sweden affiliate with global manga communities through their linguistic choices and multimodal self-presentation on Facebook; while Staehr (2014) explores how a group of ethnically diverse students in Copenhagen appropriate symbols and imagery associated with the conspiracy theory of Illuminati. Such online contexts are often characterised by a great deal of language contact, and by innovative and creative acts of translanguaging, script mixing, and respelling. Androutsopoulos (2014), for example, explores the translanguaging practices of Greek-heritage teenagers in Germany, who move between English, Greek and German on Facebook in ways shaped by their individual linguistic repertoires and migration histories (see also Leppänen, this volume).

While there is no denying that the internet can afford such diversity, we must be careful not to assume that there is anything inherently superdiverse about the internet nor indeed to make general assumptions that apply to all online spaces. Crucial to this point is the notion of affordances (Lee 2007), and the argument that while the internet *affords* the formation of superdiverse groups, people may neither recognise nor take up this affordance and instead choose to exploit the technology in very different ways. For example, research into Mumsnet finds that, despite being potentially linked only by dint of having children, participants on this public site are largely white, middle-class, female, working parents (Mackenzie 2016). Meanwhile, research into people's private (or 'semi-public') Facebook newsfeeds carried out by Tagg et al (2017) suggests that online networks on the social network site are often characterised not by superdiversity but by 'intradiversity', a kind of diversity that is shaped and constrained by people's mutual relationships with a node user. That is, when a user posts a status update, the potential audience is likely not simply *anyone*, but instead usually constitutes individuals from a range of people the user knows from offline contexts and who they met throughout their life trajectories: at school, travelling, at work. Whilst this kind of ego-centred network can result in a user facing a diversity of opinion around different issues in their newsfeed, it often entails similarities in class, education and world outlook (Tagg et al 2017). Following the 2016 US presidential election, this issue came to public attention in the form of concern about Facebook 'filter bubbles' (Pariser 2011), the idea being that Facebook users are only exposed on the site to views they agree with, thus reinforcing those views and stifling debate and dissent. The kind of diversity often engendered on a site like Facebook, then, is very different to that described elsewhere in internet forums.

The conclusion that emerges from the above discussion is that claims about the superdiverse nature of any one online space must be made on the basis of research into that particular context, rather than on assumptions regarding the internet as a whole. As we shall see when we go on to explore the ways in which some migrant micro-entrepreneurs are integrating the mobile phone into their personal, social and business lives, internet-enabled interactions can also be exploited in very different ways to that which most often appears in the literature.

The use of technologies in business settings

Our focus in this chapter on the use of the mobile phone by micro-entrepreneurs in the UK has a number of parallels with a growing body of research exploring how mobile technology is being taken up and exploited by workers in the 'global south'; that is, in regions of the

world where communication channels are otherwise underdeveloped and livelihoods are often precarious (Ling and Horst 2011). The research documents the ways in which farmers, rural workers and urban migrants use mobile technology for communication purposes and to access information in supporting their livelihoods, alongside personal or social uses (Furholt and Matotay 2011; Jagun et al 2008). In such contexts, mobile phone use is not the result of a planned initiative but emerges from below, as people appropriate elements of the technology that they see as helpful for meeting immediate needs, with two effects; on the one hand, rather than being revolutionary, the mobile phone has instead ‘adjusted and reshaped’ existing activities (Ling and Horst 2011: 370); on the other hand, people’s appropriation of the mobile phone has often led to innovative uses not intended nor foreseen by developers, in a way that shows that people are far from being passive users of technology (Sey 2011). Another point we take up in our research is the refusal in the literature to distinguish between social and economic uses. This is not only because most mobile phones are used simultaneously for both personal and business purposes, but also because mobile-enabled social networks can be drawn upon for business expertise, opportunities and support (Sey 2011) and because the transformations in social networks brought about by the mobile phone can lead to new business contacts (Donner 2006). It should be noted that mobile phone access is not always beneficial for users in the global south, particularly women: although the technology can be liberating, opening up channels of communication and changing local power dynamics, it can also be exploited as an instrument of control (Ling and Horst 2011). However, there is as yet little or no research which explores the way in which migrant entrepreneurs make use of mobile technology for personal, social and business purposes in developed countries such as the UK.

There is of course a large literature on business communication and discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini 2009; Mautner and Rainer 2017), much of which has some relevance for an understanding of business in superdiverse contexts. Of particular relevance to this chapter is the growing literature on the use of communicative technologies in the workplace (Darics 2015). Usefully, this literature devotes a great deal of attention to the interpersonal aspects of business communication, with studies focusing on, for example, how the use of digital technology by virtual teams enables colleagues to level power relations within a team through humour and other strategies (Julsrud and Bakke 2009; Mullany 2004). However, it is fair to say that the bulk of the research into business communication via digital technologies has focused not on micro-entrepreneurs or on how mobile phones are exploited by business people in their everyday lives, but on the use of computer-mediated communication (including email and instant messaging) by employees and virtual teams within large corporations; in other words, on desk-bound, work-related and often closely regulated communication.

In relation to our interest in micro-entrepreneurs’ use of the mobile in superdiverse contexts, this focus has a number of implications. Firstly, it tends to neglect consideration of the impact of *mobility* on business interactions, whereby online activities occur alongside, and are integrated with, offline activities (Cohen 2015). As we shall see, the micro-entrepreneurs we researched use their mobiles to stay in touch with friends and conduct business while on the

move and while carrying out other tasks. Secondly, the focus of the existing literature tends to downplay the many effects of digital *convergence* (Androutsopoulos 2010), whereby different spheres of activities and modes of communication are brought together into one (online) space. Unlike the global south literature, then, one relevant gap in the current literature is consideration of the way in which the mobile phone facilitates the convergence of domestic, social, economic and work spheres into the ‘personal and private sphere’ of an individual’s mobile phone (Papacharissi 2011) and even, in some cases, into one mobile messaging app. The issue of balancing both social and work-related contacts is tackled, for example, in analysis of CEOs’ social media practices and how they face the challenge of constructing e-versions of themselves which include their corporate and private personae (Girginova 2015: 42). Managing the effect of ‘context collapse’ (boyd 2008), where individuals from various personal and professional offline contexts can form the same audience on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook or Twitter), CEOs strive to avoid “compromising their own sense of self” (Papacharissi 2012: 1989). With few exceptions, however, the digital business communication literature tends to assume a distinction between people’s personal or social use of social media and their working lives, portraying social media as a problem to be managed and, as Darics (2016: 199) points out, focusing on the ‘outcomes’ for the corporation. At the same time, however, there is some useful discussion of the potential communicative pressures that the mobile phone in particular may incur, namely due to employees’ feeling of ‘connected time’ (Reinsch et al 2008); that is, the burden of being constantly available as the boundaries between work and home become increasingly blurred (Maier and Deluliis 2015).

Having outlined the current state of knowledge regarding the use of technology across a range of business-related contexts, this chapter addresses gaps in the existing literature by focusing on how migrant micro-entrepreneurs exploit mobile phone messaging apps for communicative purposes that span their working, social and personal lives. Our analysis highlights the role that mobile messaging can play (within contemporary superdiverse societies) in the creation of an ethnically homogenous social support network, as well as the extent to which it contributes to the blurring of boundaries between different spheres of life and between the offline and the online.

NEW DEBATES

The project on which we draw in outlining recent thinking in this area is a large AHRC-funded project called *Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities*, or TLANG.¹ The project explores how people draw on resources from across multilingual, multimodal communicative repertoires in order to work and communicate across ethnic, social and linguistic difference in superdiverse city spaces. We work with a number of key participants (KPs) in four UK cities (Birmingham, Cardiff, Leeds and London). Our linguistic ethnographic methodology involves observing and recording KPs at work, asking them to record interactions in their homes, and collecting examples of their digital communications. The latter were obtained in

close collaboration with KPs: having gained their trust, we worked with them to determine what digital data they were happy for us to access and how best to access them, with the KPs either sending us selected messages or giving us direct access to their phones (Tagg et al 2016). Throughout our research, we strive to collaborate closely and ethically with KPs, inviting them to take part in a Practitioner Training Programme (for which they were paid) and ensuring that their voices feed into the research findings. As documented by Goodson and Tagg (this volume), our diverse and interdisciplinary team adopted a highly reflexive approach in order to generate new insights into superdiversity.

In this chapter, we focus on the digital communication data collected in two of the research settings: a Polish shop in Newham, London; and a Chinese butcher's stall in Birmingham's central market. Whilst we cannot generalise from two case studies, the fact that similar patterns of mobile phone use emerged from these quite distinct contexts gave us some confidence in positing potentially significant trends. After briefly outlining some of these trends here, we go on to discuss and illustrate them with examples from our data. Firstly, in both settings, the small business owners made extensive use of mobile messaging apps (largely SMS and Viber in London, and the Chinese app WeChat in Birmingham) in ways that cut across their personal, social and working lives. This blurring of traditional boundaries between different spheres of life cannot solely be put down to the mobile technology, but to the nature of the KPs' businesses and how they were run: in both cases, the KPs constituted a husband-and-wife team. Secondly, of particular importance to the arguments made in this chapter was our finding that KPs in both settings used their mobile phones overwhelmingly to interact with people of similar ethnic and linguistic backgrounds: that is, with Polish speakers from Poland and people speaking various Chinese languages from across China and Hong Kong, respectively, with potential implications for our understanding of migrants' maintenance of social support networks. Finally, in focusing on the migrants' transnational communications – their interactions with friends and family back home – we find that the mobile phone opens up an ongoing channel for informal, everyday communication, alongside personal support and the discussion of work-related matters.

In exploring this data, we observe that the mobile messaging apps, in these instances, serve not to foster superdiversity, but rather to enable migrant business owners to manage and navigate the superdiverse contexts in which they live and work. In this, the mobile technology undoubtedly supplants older technologies such as the landline, and the ways in which the micro-entrepreneurs perceive the affordances of this newer technology serve to shape their communication practices.

Polish shopkeepers, London

The London context was a Polish shop on the high street in Newham, London, which was run by a Polish couple, E and T. The couple were from the south of Poland and had moved to the UK around seventeen years previously. Their ten-year-old daughter had been born in the UK and attended a mainstream school. Although based in what could be called a superdiverse neighbourhood (the ward had been selected by the project for study on that understanding), the couple's shop functioned as a Polish space which attracted mainly Polish customers (as

well as people from Eastern Europe) and which specialised in goods imported from Poland. We thus noted a focus on cultural sameness between the shopkeepers and their customers, and the prevalence of the Polish language in their business transactions. In some ways, their digital interactions via mobile messaging apps constituted an extension of this Polish space, enabling their network to expand beyond the shop and to transgress traditionally-conceived boundaries.

Convergence of business and personal concerns through the mobile phone

The data we collected from E's iPhone contained a number of instances in which her conversations with her husband moved between domestic and work matters. They exchange SMS text-messages that concern their business (see Figure 1a), including updates about stock availability (in this case, *ślaska* and *swojska*, types of sausage) and plans for future orders. At the same time, their personal relationship enables T to exclaim *Kurna to nas zrobili* ('Damn, they've screwed us over').

Figure 1a: There is no *ślaska*



T: Maybe we'll order more for Friday. I'll ask on R's phone in a moment

T: *Ślaska?*

E: Ah yes we need some because there are no cold meats it hasn't even covered the counter. I'll order For Friday tomorrow. There is no *ślaska*

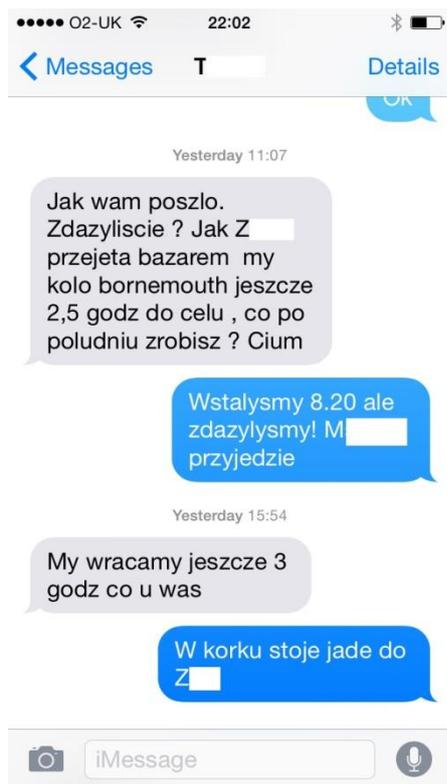
E: Russians are coming for cold meat and there isn't any no *swojska* I've already sold the one from underneath [*in the fridge under the counter*]

T: Damn, they've screwed us over

E: Not to worry maybe they'll bring some on Friday

On other occasions, the couple use the same messaging app to engage in more personal communication, as signalled in T's first message in Figure 1b below, where he asks how E's day is going and sends her a graphic representation of a kiss: *Cium* in Polish (the equivalent of 'Mwah' in English).

Figure 1b: Did you make it?



E: Ok

T: How did it go? Did you make it? How is Z____ excited about the bazaar we are near Bournemouth 2.5 hours to go , what will you do in the afternoon ?
Mwah

E: We got up 8.20 but we made it! M____ is going to come

T: We are on our way back 3 hours to go how are things with you-PL

E: I'm in a traffic jam going to Z____

Although this intermingling of home and work matters into the same messaging app is neither new nor surprising given their circumstances, it is possible to see how E and T's use of mobile technology shapes what they are able to achieve. Firstly, we can see how their personal and work spheres converge into the intimate space of their partner's mobile phone: there is no need, as perhaps with the landline which they once used in the shop, for them to worry about being overheard in the public environment and so T can exclaim *Kurna to nas zrobili* ('Damn, they've screwed us over') in the middle of a business-related exchange and the couple can move freely between business and more private concerns. Secondly, in Figure 1a, we can see from the lack of time stamps (which indicate that not much time has passed between turns) that they are exploiting the technology for its quasi-synchronicity (Garcia and Jacobs 1999) – the fact that it affords almost immediate replies – but at the same time, that the SMS messages from both interlocutors are grounded in, and serve to organise, other activities: T also phones R (their supplier) and E is checking stock in the shop. Figure 1b offers a more striking illustration of the way in which online interactions are embedded into offline activities, as T and E update each other on their movements and 'micro-coordinate' their day in ways that ensure 'the progressively exact arrangement of their day' (Ling and Yttri 2002: 143) rather than, for example, laying out all their plans in the morning. And finally, we can see that, far from fostering superdiversity, as a private, one-to-one digitally-mediated space, the mobile phone acts as a tool through which the couple can simultaneously keep in touch and co-ordinate their business activities.

Opening up a channel for transnational communication

As discussed above, digital technologies are often associated with increased intimacy through the way in which they facilitate the opening up of an ongoing channel of communication; that

is, one co-created as participants dispense with traditional conversational opening and closing sequences and experience ‘ambient copresence’ (Ito and Okabe 2005). As also noted above, this can occur regardless of geographical distance, serving to maintain intimacy between migrants and their friends and family back home. E maintains regular contact with a small group of close friends in Poland via the messaging app, Viber, which (according to E) the friends prefer because it is easily accessible and encourages visual and playful communication. Although they only meet a few times a year, E and her friend A check in on each other throughout the day in a way that resembles practices of dispersed families. In Figure 2, the friends appear to be seeking personal support from each other as well as – in E’s case – diversion from the boredom of the working day. E told us in interview that her days were very *prozaiczny* (‘mundane’): ‘I know what each day will look like after opening the shop, I always perform the same procedures ... and I finish my day with the same things’ (translated from the original Polish).

Figure 2: I howled today

	<p>A. I don't feel like doing anything what a nightmare</p> <p>A. Even write properly</p> <p>E. I howled today</p> <p>A: Because</p> <p>A: ??</p> <p>A: Why did you howl</p> <p>E: I don't know just like that out of boredom hi hi</p> <p>A: That's fucked up..</p> <p>E: I know !</p>
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Figure 2 illustrates how the mobile phone affords a particular kind of transnational communication and the support it offers to E as a migrant working in another country. Firstly, the speed of the interaction is again evident (this time through the time stamps, rather than the lack of them as in the SMS text messages), particularly on the part of A. In fact, we see evidence of the expectations of perpetual and immediate contact, when A prompts E with *Bo* (‘Because’) and then again, a minute later, with *??* and *Czemu wylas* (‘Why did you howl’)

when E does not immediately reply. The pattern of interaction, and the topic, suggests that the objective of this exchange is not conveying information but sharing small moments of everyday life ('I howled today') and remaining in a state of contact across geographical distance. We can also see, in these and other messages sent between E and her friends back in Poland, how the mobile phone is not always exploited to form new relationships and to cross cultural boundaries, but can also be used to maintain an ethnically homogenous network of people who speak the same language and share similar personal and cultural backgrounds.

As mentioned earlier, despite living and working in the superdiverse ward of Newham, London, these Polish shopkeepers maintain strong links with their home country, importing Polish goods and serving mainly Polish-heritage customers. The mobile phone can be seen as an extension of these practices, affording an intimate and informal space in which they can co-ordinate their business and personal concerns throughout the day, whilst also sustaining an ongoing and easily accessible channel of communication with members of their social support network in Poland.

Chinese butchers, Birmingham

In Birmingham, our KPs were a Chinese couple who ran a butcher's stall in the central Birmingham market. MYC was from Malaysia, while her husband, KC, was from mainland China. Both had migrated to London ten years previously, where they met, before moving together to Birmingham. They had three young children. Our research in the superdiverse public space of the market documents how stall owners and their customers communicate across linguistic and ethnic difference in order to fulfil business transactions and to maintain convivial relations, drawing on gesture and exploiting shared linguistic resources (Blackledge et al 2015). In contrast to the wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds we observed of people in the market, the Chinese-heritage couple appeared to use their mobile phones (and the mobile messaging app WeChat in particular) to build up a network of ethnically-homogeneous, Chinese-speaking network of support which intersected personal, social and business concerns.

Transnational communication as a source of advice and support

One example of transnational digital communication is the Chinese butchers' contact with KC's brother (CTX), who lives in China. While their communication is largely personal in orientation rather than being directly work-related, there are occasions in which KC uses WeChat to raise business matters with his brother. In this extract, KC contacts his brother as part of his attempt to find a cure for his employee's ongoing stomach problems, for which he often took time off work. The extract illustrates the way in which business and personal spheres can overlap for micro-entrepreneurs (and others), as KC draws on his family network for help in solving a work-related problem.

Figure 3a: do you know the treatment for appendicitis?

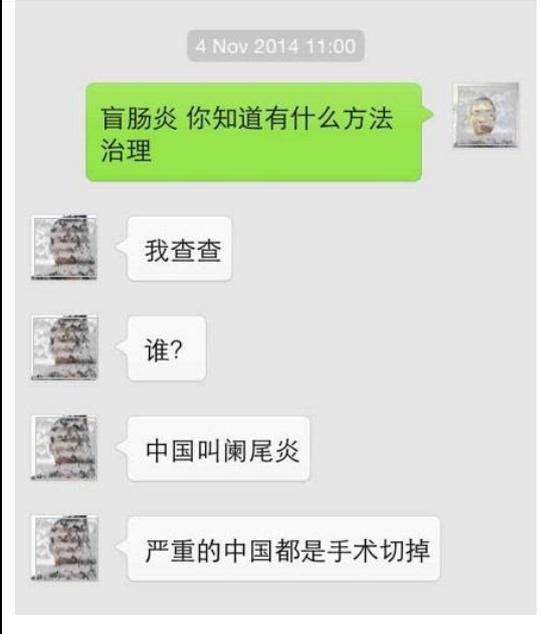
 <p>4 Nov 2014 11:00</p> <p>盲肠炎 你知道有什么方法治理</p> <p>我查查</p> <p>谁?</p> <p>中国叫阑尾炎</p> <p>严重的中国都是手术切掉</p>	<p>4 Nov 2014 11:00</p> <p>KC: Do you know the treatment for appendicitis?</p> <p>CYX: Let me search for it</p> <p>CYX: who is it for?</p> <p>CYX: in China it's called 'lanwei yan'</p> <p>CYX: if it's serious, the Chinese way is to remove it in a surgical operation</p>
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Figure 3b: the western doctor here won't remove it

 <p>4 Nov 2014 11:13</p> <p>我店里鬼老。老外医生不给切</p> <p>急性还是慢性?</p> <p>有一种微创手术</p> <p>7"</p>	<p>4 Nov 2014 11:13</p> <p>KC: the Brit working on my stall. The western doctor here won't remove it for him</p> <p>CYX: Is it acute or chronic?</p> <p>CYX: There is keyhole surgery</p>
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KC's request likely reflects his distrust of Western medicine and doctors, as documented also in our other datasets (Blackledge et al 2015). It appears in this exchange that KC works to distance himself from the UK context through his reference to 'the Brit' and 'the western doctor', and instead aligns himself with his brother in a way that heightens their social proximity despite the physical distance. Given that KC could presumably look up the information he requests himself, we can interpret KC's message to his brother as a call not only to traditional Chinese knowledge but also to his brother as someone he can trust and seek advice from. At the same time, whilst invoking traditional Chinese authority on the medical matter, KC's query remains grounded in his everyday life ('The Brit working in my stall'), and he is intent on finding an immediate solution to a specific problem. Far from being decontextualised, this virtual interaction is embedded into the physical context of the market stall and KC's everyday working life, whilst also orienting towards China as a source of

authority. As with a phone call, the technology constricts time and space, enabling the brothers to hold this casual quasi-synchronous conversation across a vast distance.

In an earlier age, it is likely that these brothers would have kept in touch through other means, such as cheap landline calls and prepaid cards (Vertovec 2004). However, the affordances of WeChat likely shape their exchange in particular ways. Firstly, mobile messaging enables the brothers to establish an ongoing channel of communication (Ito and Okabe 2005), in which they do not appear obliged to engage in lengthy opening sequences. KC's opening question 'do you know the treatment of appendicitis' is blunt and does not engage in the niceties you might expect when opening up a long-distance communicative space, a feature which is present also in the transnational exchanges of the Polish KP discussed below but which does not reflect the opening exchanges which you might expect to find in a landline call. Secondly, although the mobile appears to facilitate quasi-synchronous interaction, it in fact permits a more complex turn-taking mechanism, one which allows for multitasking, delays between turns, and monologic sequences. These occur as CYX moves between the exchange taking place in WeChat and his internet browser (what Jones 2009 calls 'engaging in multiple mediated activities'), posting information as he finds it and questions as they come to him, and as KC, who is likely working at the market stall while the exchange is taking place, re-joins the conversation after 13 minutes to respond to his brother's questions. Finally, the fact that mobile phones afford users a number of communication modes means that KC can switch to a voice recording (in the final turn shown in Figure 3b), presumably for ease of communication. With these extracts, we see how mobile messaging facilitates a particular kind of communication – involving multimodality and multitasking – which in turn serves to maintain, and exploit, transnational family ties and connections to Chinese traditions.

Mobile-enabled co-ordination of offline transactions

These final extracts are from an exchange between MYC and V, a friend of MYC's for whose birthday party the butcher is supplying meat and oysters. In other words, this is someone MYC knows on an intimate and personal level, but who is now involved in what to MYC also constitutes a business-related transaction. Their WeChat exchange takes place while the birthday party is being set up and MYC is delivering the food. The interaction is noteworthy for the way in which it is intertwined with, and helps coordinate, the offline activities in which both are engaged: namely, trying to get hold of V's husband, to whom MYC had offered a lift home from work as she delivered the meat; and ensuring the delivery itself goes smoothly. V's status as an insider – a friend – gains her access to services from MYC through WeChat that 'outsider' customers could not request: not only the discounted meat but also the ongoing micro-coordination of activities. Business and social concerns intertwine. Figure 4a joins their interaction at the point where V has told MYC not to wait any longer for her husband.

Figure 4a: I want to cry

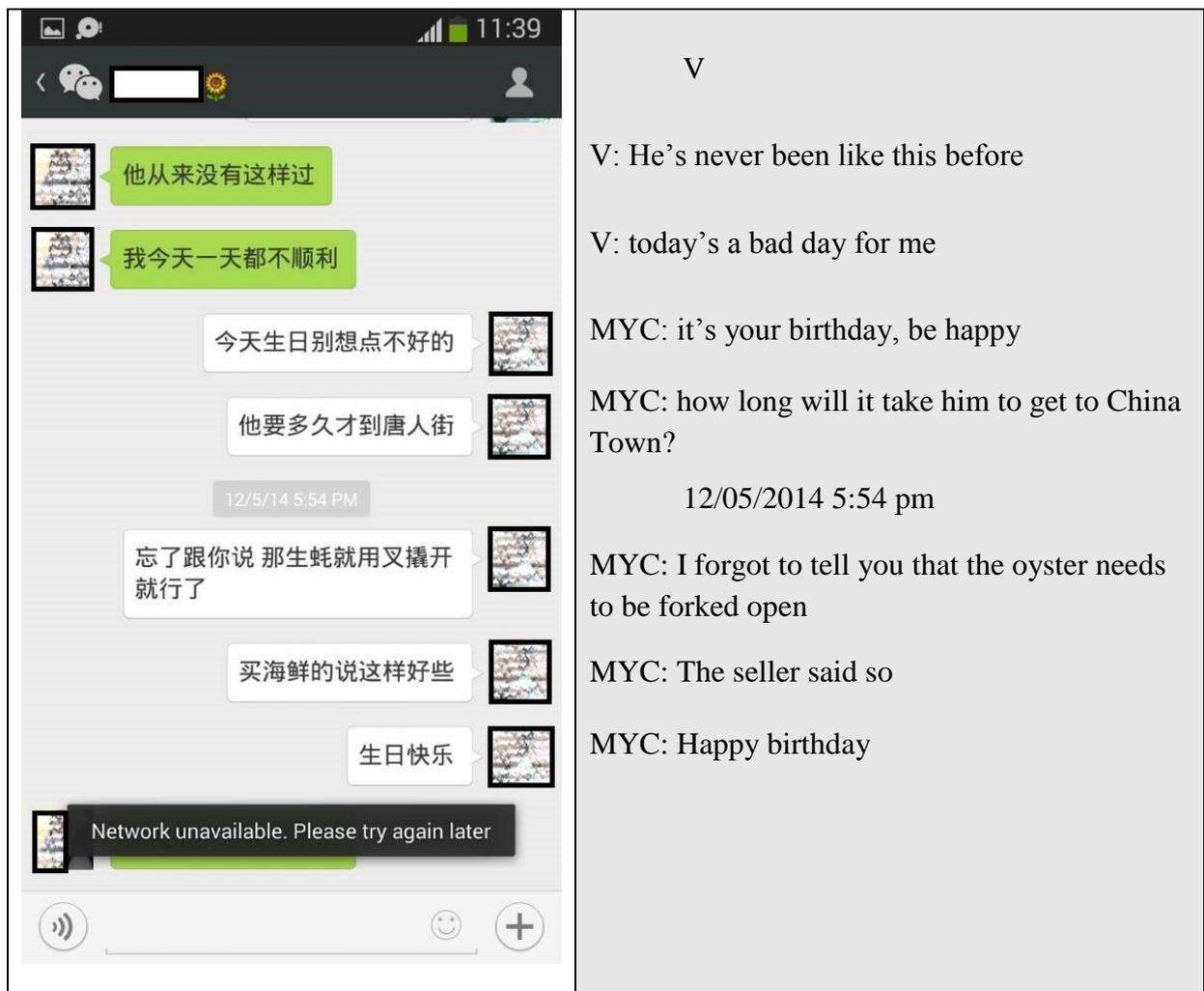
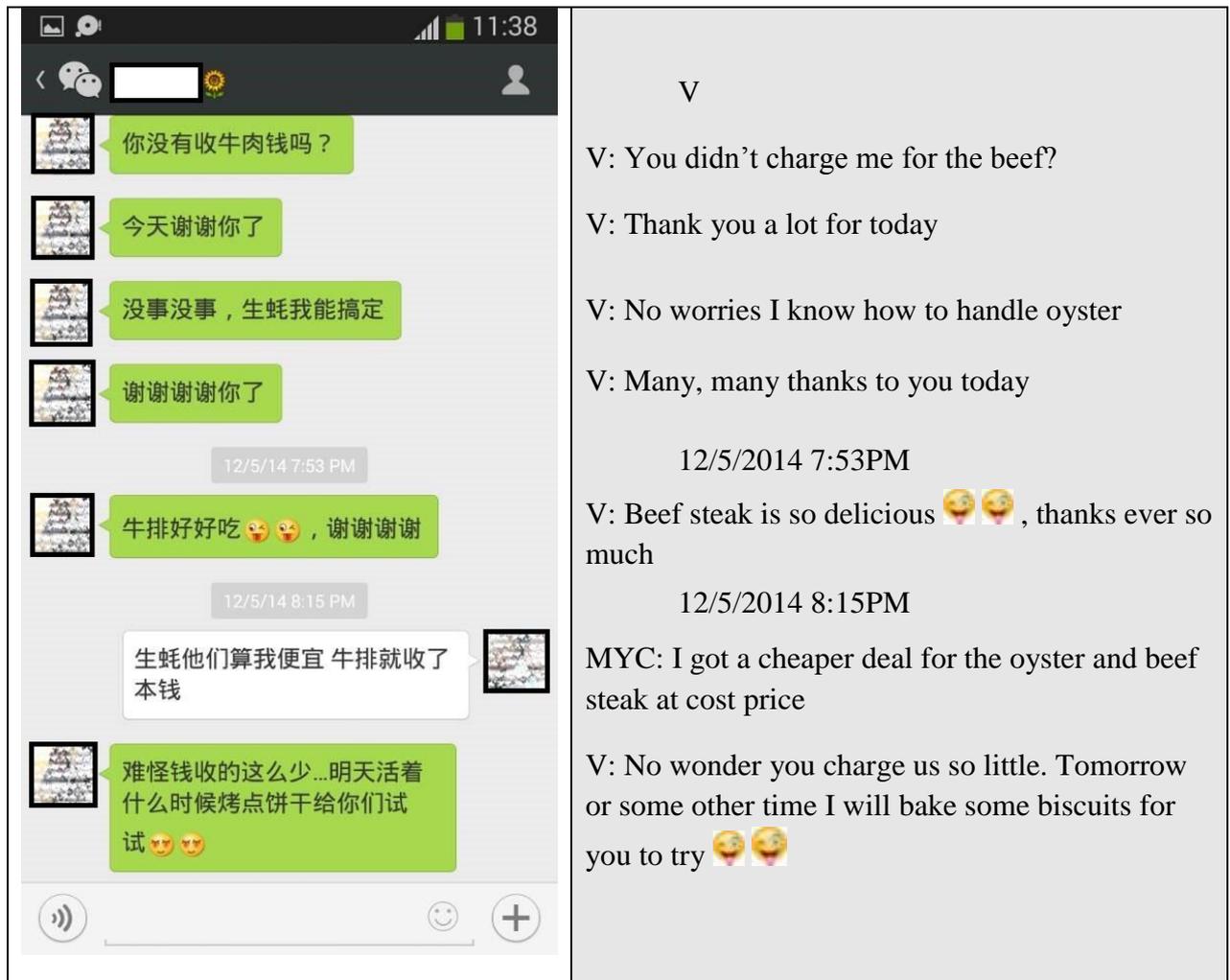


Figure 4b: you didn't charge me for the beef?



The example shows how mobile phone communication facilitates business-related transactions in a way that also enables the friends to carry out intimate relationship maintenance: their language is informal with business-related information ('I forgot to tell you that the oyster needs to be forked open') interspersed with socially oriented messages ('happy birthday') and friendly imperatives ('it's your birthday, be happy'). Emoji are used, and the chunking of their messages and omission of full stops suggest they may be working to keep the conversation open (Androutsopoulos and Busch, forthcoming). The example also confirms how deeply entrenched WeChat communication is in the KPs' everyday lives, and how the KPs move between different online and physical contexts (including, in this example, the voice calls and messages that V leaves her husband) in carrying out everyday tasks and maintaining personal and business relationships.

As in the Polish context, we can see how the Chinese butchers exploit their mobile phones (and, in particular, WeChat) to co-create a safe space in which they maintain contact with an extended, Chinese-speaking support network in a way that cuts across business, social and personal matters. In this context, it is also interesting to compare their use of WeChat with the superdiversity of the market in which they work and in which they regularly interact with customers and stall owners from a range of backgrounds and speaking a range of languages.

To some extent, WeChat appears to afford these butchers the opportunity to manage this demanding environment, and the other challenges of living in a new country, by carving out their own, ethnically and linguistically somewhat homogenous, support network.

SUMMARY

This chapter explored the way in which migrant micro-entrepreneurs working in superdiverse cities in the UK exploit mobile phone messaging apps to maintain relationships, engage in acts of self-presentation, and to do business. Elsewhere in the literature, the tendency has been to focus on the role that the internet plays in fostering superdiversity, particularly in public spaces such as chat forums or YouTube. Focusing on private communication, as carried out by business owners, highlights the fact that digital technologies are not inherently superdiverse, but that they offer certain affordances which can be taken up and exploited differently in distinct contexts. In our research, migrants to the UK from Poland and China/Malaysia used their mobiles not only to maintain close personal and cultural links with family and friends in their home countries (for which the migrants exploit the multimodal properties of mobile messaging), but also to co-ordinate their more immediate business-related concerns. Unlike other older technologies, mobile messaging apps afford immediacy (thus generating expectations of immediate replies) whilst also enabling multi-tasking, as digitally mediated communications occur alongside, and are embedded into, offline tasks. They also enable the co-creation of a private – and thus more intimate – space, in which interlocutors can move freely between business and personal matters. Of particular importance is the way in which these migrant micro-entrepreneurs are able to resourcefully exploit their mobile phones in order to effectively fulfil business purposes in ways that suit, and also in some instances reconfigure or transform, their working and personal lives.

The contexts in which these micro-entrepreneurs run their businesses are superdiverse, and the Chinese butchers in particular mix with people from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the course of their everyday working lives. From this perspective, their use of WeChat can be seen in terms of their seeking out ethnically similar people and building up a homogenous network as a way of navigating, or even counteracting, the cultural and linguistic challenges of the superdiverse context in which they work. This is not to say that this use of messaging apps is in any way restricted to superdiverse contexts or inherently bound up with superdiversity; rather, it points to the myriad and increasingly more diverse ways in which mobile technology is being exploited in contemporary society. These uses now extend beyond the social sphere to encompass – and to some extent reconfigure – people's business-related communication practices. Research in other contexts, superdiverse or otherwise, will no doubt highlight other ways in which small business owners are able to resourcefully exploit the technologies they have to hand.

Footnotes

¹AHRC *Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities*. (AH/L007096/1). Angela Creese

(PI). With CIs Mike Baynham, Adrian Blackledge, Frances Rock, Lisa Goodson, Li Wei, James Simpson, Caroline Tagg, Zhu Hua.

FURTHER READING

Androutsopoulos, J. and K. Juffermans (2014) Digital language practices in superdiversity: introduction. *Discourse, Context & Media* 4/5: 1-6.

The introduction to the special issue on digital language practices in superdiversity gives an useful overview of the relevant issues associated with the role of the internet in fostering superdiversity.

Darics, E. (2016) 'Digital media in workplace interactions' in Georgakopoulou A. and Spilioti T. (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Digital Communication*. London: Routledge, pp. 197-211.

This chapter provides an overview of the current state of play regarding research into digitally mediated business communication, although it does not touch on issues related to superdiversity nor micro-entrepreneurship.

Ling, R. and H. Horst (2011) 'Mobile communication in the global south' *New Media & Society* 13: 363-374.

This article gives an overview of the use of mobile technology by urban and rural workers in the global south.

RELATED TOPICS

Language and superdiversity in social media

Moving methods online: researching digital language practices

Race talk in discourse of football in digital media

Linguistic diversity in online and mobile learning

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Caroline Tagg is Lecturer in Applied Linguistics and English Language at the Open University. Her research interests are in language and social media, including multilingualism and language play. She is Co-I responsible for social media data on the AHRC-funded project ‘Translation and Translanguaging’.

Agnieszka Lyons is Lecturer at Queen Mary University of London. Her research interests include the discursive construction of identity in text-based mobile and electronically mediated communication, and multimodal discourse analysis. She previously worked as a research associate on the AHRC-funded project ‘Translation and Translanguaging’.