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Playful subversiveness and creativity: Doing a/n (Polish) artist in London

Zhu Hua, Li Wei, and Agnieszka Lyons

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1. Executive summary

Research Context and Objective. This report is based on our linguistic ethnographic investigations into the work and life of an artist of Polish origin in London, M, over a period of four months (March-June 2015) as the 2nd phase of the TLANG project. The principal research objective for this phase is to understand how M, our key participant, goes about working and living as an aspiring, young, female, multilingual, free-lance artist in London.

Data. A range of data are collected: field notes (33,806 words), interviews and discussion, audio recording (26 hours), social media (238 items), photos (80 items) and leaflets and documents (14 items).

The main findings.

- M's performance in life and work is highly original, replete with multiple voices, strategic stereotyping, acts of playful subversiveness, meta commentaries and reflection.
- For M, life is a performance. Her performance 'in the world' and performance 'on stage' feed into each other and become two in one: her life is the stage of her social and identity acts, embellished by her theatrical skills.
- Performance as a business. In learning the ropes of a performance artist, M relies on her business instincts and understands the need for, and in fact has devoted most of her energy to, collaboration, networking, sponsorship-seeking and self-promotion through social media.
- Performance as work in progress. For M and her team, art-making is work in progress and created in the state of flux. They thrive on ambiguity, spontaneity, and going with the flow, despite uncertainty, anxiety and chaos that come with it.
- Performing Polishness. Being often labelled as a Polish actress, or 'a token Polish girl in the crowd', M employs a subversive yet playful, strategic yet practical approach to manage the essentialised identities and roles ascribed by others.
- Performance of language. M's translanguaging practices are imbued with (performance) creativity, such as language play, double voicing, singing and mobilisation of multiple semiotic resources.
- Participatory performance and research. Participation observation, central to ethnography, takes on new meaning when the research team is invited to take part in M's performances. This adds another layer of complexity to the notion of performativity and to interpreting what we have observed and experienced during the data collection.

2. Introduction

In Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the researcher is ‘trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world’ (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Whilst we are not doing a strict IPA per se for our analysis, we are indeed trying to understand how our key participant M is trying to make sense of her own world. In doing so, we find anthropological and ethnographic studies of performance particularly relevant. Recognizing the commonplace occurrence of rituals and ritualized practices in everyday life, anthropologists such as Turner point out the need for human beings to break away from the social structures imposed on them to define activities and spaces where members of a specific culture can ‘think about how they think in propositions that are not in cultural codes and about them’ (Turner, 1969). Turner calls these activities ‘cultural performance’ or ‘social drama’, different from traditional theatres. Turner was particularly interested in the ‘anti-structure’ aspects of such performances. Others such as Sutton-Smith (1972, cited in Turner, 1982, p.28) emphasised the subversiveness of these ‘disorderly’ activities. Bakhtin, in his own brand of performance theory, also recognises performance as ‘the place for working out, in concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, new modes of interrelationships between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful hierarchical relationships’ (1984, p.123). Similar to Bakhtin who emphasises the transformative effect of performance on social relationships, Goffman (1956) is concerned with the relationship between audience and observers. Defining performance as ‘all the activities of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers (1956, p.22), Goffman analyses social events through theatrical frame or keying and hence places ‘strip of experience’ before an audience who can observe at length the activities of the performers without directly participating in those activities (1974, pp.124-5).

This report is based on our linguistic ethnographic investigations into the work and life of an artist of Polish origin in London over a period of four months (March-June 2015). It is the 2nd phase of the larger project, *Translation and translanguaging: Investigating linguistic and cultural transformations in superdiverse wards in four UK cities* (TLANG), funded by the AHRC’s Translating Cultures programme. The principal research objective for this phase is to understand language, cultural and work practices of a multilingual and migrant performance artist who is our Key Participant (KP). We are interested in how she goes about working and living as an aspiring, young, female, multilingual, free-lance artist in London and how she deals with Polishness in her work and life. In this report, which serves as a summary of both the research activities and the findings for this phase of our project, we adopt an emic approach and let the data speak. A significant part of the data is our field notes, which include our reflections and interpretations of what is going on at the time of observation. We start with an account of research methodology and data collected in this phase (Section 3), followed by an overview of the KP’s *modus operandi* or business model (Section 4), her art-making process (Section 5), and her experience of ‘doing’ rather than just accepting her typecast identity as a Polish artist in London (Section 6). In Section 7, we focus on her translanguaging practices. We also talk about our own experiences as researchers of participatory research and performance in working with the KP. In the final section, we try to make sense of the data, bring together the themes that emerge from the data and revisit the research questions.

3. Research methodology

The overall research design for the project, TLANG, is linguistic ethnography, a methodology that allows researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the meanings embedded in observable (cultural) practices and beliefs of people in a specific time and context. Wacquant (2003, p. 5) depicts ethnography as ‘social research based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do’.

As in the business phrase of the project (Zhu Hua, Li Wei & Lyons, 2015), the data for this heritage phase were collected through the means of ethnographic observations (field notes), recordings (audio and video recording and transcriptions), linguistic landscaping (photographs) and interviews (transcription). In addition, social media data were collected through screenshots and archiving. Table 1 offers an overview of the data collected through different means. Additional notes regarding the context and process of different types of data collection and analysis are given below. The profile and information about the KP will be provided in Sections 4, 5 & 6, as understanding who she is, in particular, her self-oriented identity, and how she operates as an artist has been a gradual research process. During this particular phase of the project, we became participant observers at some specific events. These will be discussed alongside the data in this report.

Table 1 Overview of data collected and analysed in the London heritage case study

Types of data	Details
Field notes	19 sets: 33,806 words + 80 photos
Audio recording at work	24 sessions: 21h 17m 00s
Audio recording at home	15 sessions: 4 h 34m 21s
Interviews	44m 42s (7,128 words of transcript) + discussions during training
Photos	80 items
Leaflets and documents	14 items
Social media messages	238 items (116 WhatsApp, 21 SMS, 101 Email)

Field notes

Field notes were written by researchers following the observations which took place between 2nd March 2015 and 15th May 2015. Typical of freelance performance artist, the KP in our study, who is referred to as M in the report, does not have a fixed office or workplace. In fact, she readily uses any available and accessible space. Observations in this phase took place in a number of locations in London, mostly in East London, where M primarily operates. The sites include the arts centre where M stages her performance, places where she works as a part-time employee, the cafés and the home of one of her collaborators, where she and her collaborator(s) meet and discuss artistic work. The main themes that run through most of the field notes are: space and sensory experience; semiotic

resources; being an artist; being researched and the research process; meta-language or linguistic meta-commentary; work and communicative patterns; and being Polish and national stereotypes.

The question of location and mobility was often discussed amongst the team members and in the field notes. In this phase of our project then, rather than observing a 'site', we observed a mobile KP who works at a range of physical locations depending on the particular project, collaborator, and availability of rehearsal/performance space. The range of locations described in the field notes mirrors M's typical working patterns, which are characterised by fluidity and flexibility and making arrangements on a last-minute basis as well as working at twilight hours. These features of the KP's working patterns differ from those of the researchers, who usually have clear timetables and pre-determined plans for the upcoming months. Consequently, it was not always possible to take up the KP's invitation to observation. Comments regarding these logistic difficulties and their consequences are frequently made in all the researchers' field notes.

The difficulty with this round of data collection is finding 'mutually convenient' time, which proves almost impossible for me (and for LW too). ... It is partly to do with the nature of job(s) and life style of Margot. She does not have one regular job. Rather, she is making do with small jobs or briefs offered here and there. While we (speaking of academics) have a rigid diary and like to know where we are going to be weeks ahead, planning ahead is not M's priority, which I could understand totally.

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There were also last minute arrangements and changes that affected what we actually observed. AL felt that in order to build and maintain her relationship with M, she had to be particularly flexible and adjust to M's way of working and being. At times this meant observations on Saturdays, evenings, or participation in post-performance social events.

I was supposed to meet M on Thursday (yesterday) and observe her during a meeting with xx - a meeting which had already been postponed due to the other side's unavailability. As I was about to set off to go to the venue, I got BCC'ed in an email in which M cancels the meeting - she's unwell. She texts me a couple of minutes later explaining that she is in bed with something that looks like flu and won't be leaving the house that day...

In the evening, I get another text from M; she sounds extremely excited and maybe "wired": "Agniesz! Mamy emergency spotkanie rano z N(name of her collaborator) em i będziemy potrzebować pomocy kamerzysty - potencjalnie ciebie . Możesz wpaść na Bethnal Green na 10:30am?? Xx" [We have an emergency meeting tomorrow morning with Nxx-INSTR and we will need the help of a cameraman - potentially you. Can you pop over to Bethnal Green for 10:30am?? Xx]. I responded in the affirmative and exchanged a few more quick texts with M to sort out the details: shall I bring a camera? I'm no cameraman. Yes, I can bring a list of interview questions...

LonHerFn_20150320_AL_006

The mobile ethnography not only poses logistical challenges, but also impacts on the nature of interaction between the researchers and M. Li Wei commented in the vignette written up as a reflection on the data collection process:

Because M does not have a fixed location for her work and her timetable seems rather loose in the sense that her work and social life are not clearly separated, I found the observation rather intimate, and sometimes awkward, as we are almost one-to-one (usually with N present). Both sides were under close scrutiny, totally different from the observations in the shop where the physical setting was a ‘protection’ of some sort and we could disappear into the background as observers. This time, there is no place to hide, and it is very obvious that M felt our presence, particularly mine. I had the feeling that she was very status conscious (gender, age and social-professional status). It wasn’t exactly like she was choosing every word for us to hear. But I did feel on occasions she was ‘performing’ during the observations. (Heritage vignette by Li Wei)

Audio recording

M was comfortable with being recorded from the beginning so the recorder was turned on during almost all of the observations throughout the heritage phase. The majority of work recordings come from M’s meetings with her collaborator N during observations. Home recordings are a mixture of M’s conversations with her friends and flatmates, some of which are recorded in public places and some in her flat. M was usually handed the recorder at the beginning of an observation phase and was in charge of turning it on and off. She would normally place the recorder on the table in front of her immediately. She occasionally checked whether the recording had stopped and turned off the recorder in the middle of her observation usually when her collaborator had left the table and – in her opinion – there wasn’t much going on. She did not turn off the recorder in order to communicate privately at any point. M took the task of seeking permission from her conversation interactants very seriously and she can often be heard asking other people she is recording for consent and at times explaining the aim of the project to them on tape.

The main themes that emerge through the recording are: playing Polish; ambiguity; creativity; metalanguaging; performing a persona; and multi-vocality and multimodality.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted in English, the language M uses most in her work context and prefers for the interview. They covered a range of questions concerning M’s background, language practices, work experience and working life, attitude towards multiple language use, and experience in doing language and communication in art. We also asked some questions that emerged during observations and the training through the Practitioner Research Programme offered by the project.

Photographs

Photographs were taken during observations to capture surroundings or transient moments of interactions which caught the researchers’ attention. They are incorporated into the field notes enabling us to situate practices and interactions in contexts and to understand the multimodal aspect of communication.

Leaflets and other documents

We collected leaflets and documents, consisting primarily of papers that M used for her artistic work such as scripts, audience feedback questionnaires, and draft bids. Notes made by M in her notebook

during artistic meetings with her collaborators were also photographed and included in some of the field notes.

Social Media

Data were collected across the whole research phase. They include screenshots of WhatsApp and text-message exchanges on M's phone as well as emails. M sometimes voluntarily copied the research team who were present in observations into her draft emails (e.g. a query to an event announcement) during observations in real time. An example of such an email correspondence can be found in Section 4.5 when she responded to a circular email on a project. We did not know what motivated her to copy the research team in in the first place, but this form of data forwarding had an impact on some of the observations, particularly with respect to establishing context and personae that were presented to the research team, as the researchers had access to the data in real time.

4. Performance as Business

M was born in the north-east of Poland, near the Belarussian border. She first came to the UK in 2003 to visit a friend. She was supposed to stay for ten days but decided not to return to Poland. She has a BA degree in acting from a drama school affiliated to a UK university and was working towards a diploma in Translation in a university in London in a period directly preceding our data collection. At the time of data collection, she was in her early 30s and lived in East London. She became a self-employed artist in 2014 when she resigned from a full-time assistant manager job in a café. Her linguistic profile is: Polish (first language), English (fluent), Podlaski Dialect (a dialect of Polish in her hometown, fluent), German (learned in her secondary school for four years, communicative) and Russian (mainly passive knowledge).

We got to know her through a theatre company based in Stratford, with which Birkbeck has some on-going collaboration. M attends research seminars and other academic events at the university regularly. One of our first encounters with M was in fact at a workshop by Deborah Cameron on written discourse analysis.

4.1 Work experience

In terms of her artist work, she is a co-founder and artistic director of a non-profit art organisation which offers support, mentoring and showcasing opportunities to artists of 'Polish origin', using the phrase from the organisation website, and was associated with an arts centre as an Artist in Residence for a short period of time. In addition to acting, she has some work experience as a voice coach, theatre director, and curator. During our data collection, she was working on a full-length theatre piece (referred to as D piece in this report) that deals with the question of language and language loss, communication and identity. Her digital identities are closely connected with her artistic work. On her twitter front page which is captured in Image 1 during the data collection period, she describes herself as 'theatre maker | producer | half of D collective | language obsessive'.

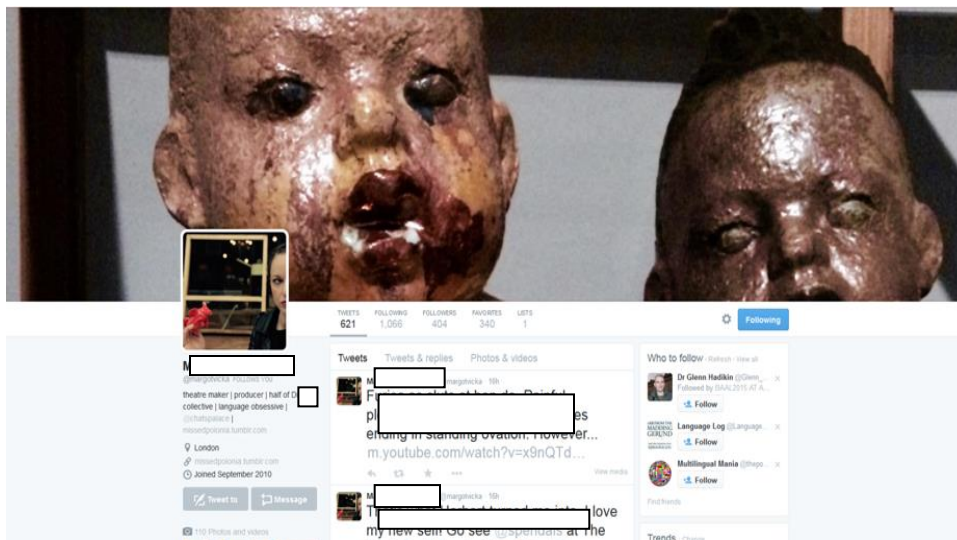


Image 1 M's twitter front page (anonymised)

In addition to her artistic pursuits, she has a portfolio of part-time jobs. She works as ‘front of the house’ staff/duty manager in an arts centre and her duties include welcoming visitors to the centre and ensuring smooth running of events. She also works as a ‘welcome team member’ in another arts centre where she was once an artist in residence. The responsibilities there involve looking after the front of the house, selling tickets in box office, minding a children’s centre, and being a bar assistant. She also works for an interpreting company as an English-Polish translator and interpreter. Before she became a self-employed artist, M worked in pubs and cafes and eventually moved up to the level of assistant manager in a cafe. But she quickly realised that “my heart wasn’t in it so I just like didn’t care” (interview).

With several part-time jobs going on, M’s working life is very hectic. She tends to work unsociable hours and often work for close to the minimum wage. Being able to pay her bills from jobs somehow related to the art world is very important for M, although these jobs aren’t very well paid or necessarily recognised as artistic. For example, she is happy to stand behind the bar in an arts centre café or look after children in a baby and toddler activity centre housed within an arts centre. For M, it is a way to get her foot in the door, and to work her way up ‘the connection ladder’, as she commented in the interview. It is interesting that she created her own phrase ‘connection ladder’ here, possibly by blending the word ‘connection’ with ‘career ladder’, and thus vividly portrayed the benefit of making connection – it will move one up the career ladder. The need to make connections and to network with others, such as people ‘who are doing it already’ is also evident in M’s self-promotion through social media (see Section 4.5) and her choice of collaborators (Section 4.3).

*M: I do everything that interests me and I do things to kind of um I know what I want to do overall and everything I do [aside] I do a lot of part-time jobs to fund the things that I really genuinely want to do and that is make some theatre which is at the moment isn’t fully financially viable for me but the other thing that really interests me is production and in order for me to get into production of um art events is to **make connection with people who are doing it already** and that’s the reason why I work in arts centres just kind of working my way um up the I don’t know **the connection ladder** whatever I mean I think it’s a natural thing ... (Interview)*

4.2 Learning instinct

M takes on challenges with a largely positive and enthusiastic attitude. Even if she has little experience doing some jobs, she is happy to try and work out a way to perform the tasks given to her. When she and her collaborator established an organisation which supports Polish artists, she hadn’t had any experience running an organisation, but used her instinct and knowledge she gained observing others to make it work.

*M: and because I was I still am the artistic director of ∞∞ I was basically I just ran it how I thought it should be ran **how my instinct was telling me***

*M: No, I mean I was very much cause I had no idea myself how to kinda go about it so I would just like copy everything other people did um and yeah slowly I learnt an awful amount um doing that from PR, marketing, writing press releases basically all the stuff that you put down on your CV or job application but **I’ve learnt a lot from the scratch just by watching other people but actually figuring it out as I go along making lots of mistakes on the way but really enjoying it** (interview)*

The above extract from the interview with her showed M's perspective on her learning. Firstly, she made an explicit reference to her reliance on 'instinct'. When probed further, she pinned it down as the instinct of learning by 'copying everything other people did', 'watching other people', 'figuring it out', 'making lots of mistakes on the way', but 'really enjoying it'.

4.3 The main collaborators

On her twitter account, M identifies herself as half of D (the title of a performance piece M developed during observation) collective. The collective in fact consists of three people: M, N and A. A is the sound expert, in charge of sound mixing and technical support on stage. A occasionally comes to M and N's meetings when their meetings are devoted to developing scripts. He contributes to discussions and asks questions, but usually lets M and N lead the conversation. N is, in fact, M's main collaborator. He is a native English speaker and speaks German fluently, as his partner is from Germany. AL found out a bit more about his background in a chat during the observation. It turned out that N helps people fill in funding applications (mainly arts and heritage ones) for money. He reports that he has worked as film co-op director, catwalk model/performance artist, postcard buyer, etc.

According to the interview with M, M and N met in a café where M used to work as an assistant manager and N sometimes dropped in to buy a coffee. M invited him to one of her performances and later he asked her to 'fix his accent'.

*M: and he's like I'll keep an eye on what's happening and then I invited him to a performance that I did with xx in 2014 he came to that and afterwards he was like oh my god I really enjoyed them and I'm like really? He's like yeah... so we started talking kind of creatively Oh I'm an artist as well and that's kind of how it started and then we started working together (2) oh but our first official outside of work meeting was um when I was... **I'm teaching voice cause I started doing that oh actually my accent (referring to N) needs fixing cause it's not perfect although I'm from London I was like [laughs] and I said that would be quite funny if I taught you proper English** and then I thought um it's like an art performance so that's how we started meeting that was basically first thing (Interview)*

M and N seem to have been negotiating the role of expert and novice and shared the interest in language from the beginning of their relationship. Being a trained actress and a voice coach, M takes on the role of an expert in voice projection on stage (also mentioned in the interview and observed during a technical rehearsal for a performance). N acknowledges M's expert status when he asks her to 'fix his accent' despite her non-native status. On other occasions, however, there seems to be some shifts towards N being more in control as an expert on language, i.e. English (more on this in Section 5)

4.4 Seeking funding

A large amount of the time M and N spend together is devoted to thinking about and filling in funding applications to finance their art projects. N has experience in obtaining funding and helps people filling funding application forms for a living at the moment. However, they often have very little time to fill in their own application forms for calls that they find online.

They then started working – discussing plans for their next project/performance. For that they need to apply for Arts Council’s funding. So most of the discussion was a mixture about getting funding (and putting the application together) and the content of the project/performance.

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N is taking a loo break and lets M find something regarding Mayfest/Theatre Bristol Commission 2016 online. It looks like they will be filling in an application form for funding from there. The deadline is on Monday 9am, so they don’t have much time.

LonHerFn_20150313_AL_005

Examples of last-minute application-filling are consistent with M’s general working pattern, which is based on last minute arrangements, the culture of saying ‘yes’ to challenges she has little expertise or experience for, and spontaneity in working on performance pieces.

4.5 Self-promotion through social media

In looking for collaborators, building networks and promoting her work, M is very active both in person and via the social media. She has a very clear understanding of the importance of social media existence and is present on a wide range of platforms where she frequently posts (all her accounts are very active) information about her artistic activity, performances she attends or produces and her achievements (e.g., her translation being published in a Polish theatre magazine), but also those that she would recommend for others to see. She has an active Facebook and Twitter accounts and publishes blogs on her tumblr page. Her Facebook, twitter and tumblr profiles are highly profession-focused. The persona that M presents in her social media front pages is that of a performer, an artist, and a person who crosses linguistic, cultural and artistic boundaries. There is very little personal information apart from some generic description of who she is. Both her Twitter and her Facebook posts (usually the same, since the accounts are interconnected) often contain links to other content online: articles, videos, etc. She also uses *hashtags* and *mentions* confidently in her posts, as in the following post from 26th August 2015 (Image 2).

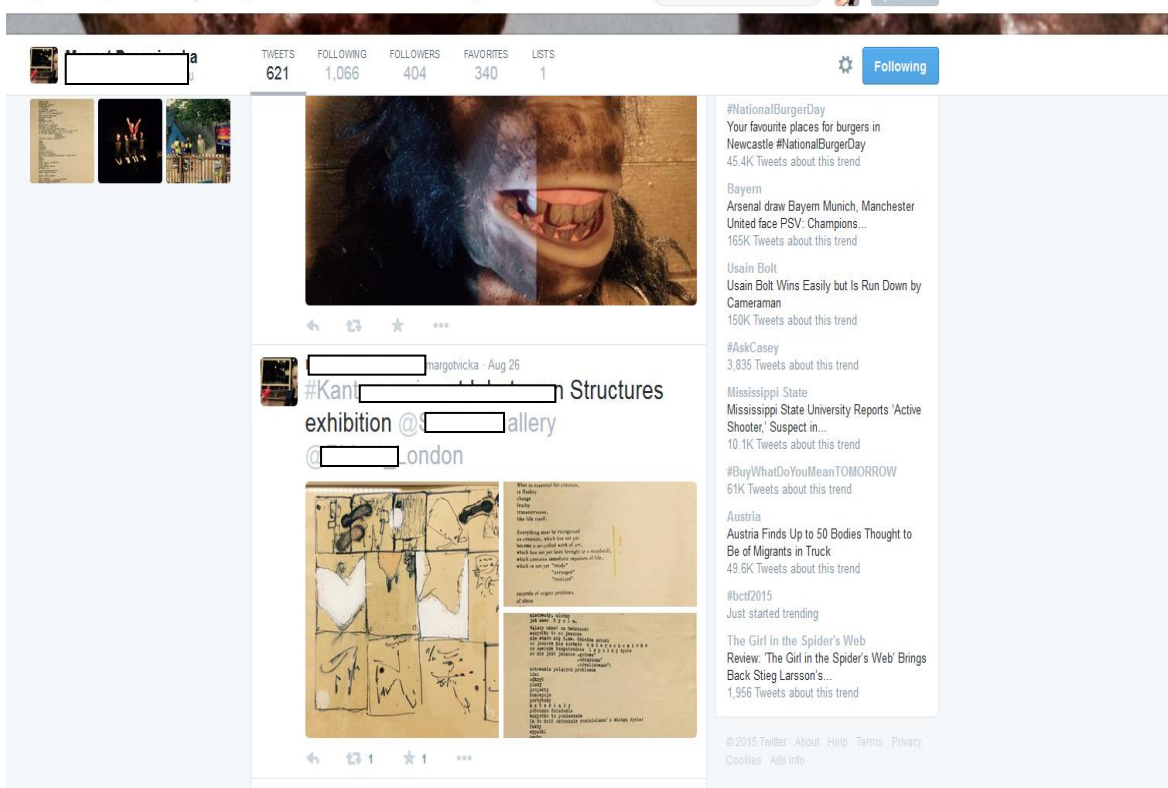


Image 2 An example of her social media post (anonymised)

In the post, M uses a hashtag to index the topic of the post – a Polish artist whose works are on exhibition in the UK. She also *mentions* the title of the exhibition, the name of the museum and the organisation to which she is a co-founder. The images in the post are an example of the art works in the exhibition and a poem in English and Polish (in that order) about ‘a work of art’ (see an enlarged version of the texts below). Some lines in the poems are slightly curved, suggesting that the images might have been taken on someone’s smart phone. The highlights along the poem in its English version tell what has captured the person’s attention.

A work of art,
an isolated
panelled piece,
brought to a deadlock
and closed up
in a structure and within a system,
unable to change or survive,
forms an illusion of creation.

What is essential for creation,
is fluidity
change
frailty
transitoriness,
like life itself.

Everything must be recognized
as creation, which has not yet
become a so-called work of art,
which has not yet been brought to a standstill,
which contains immediate impulses of life,
which is not yet "ready"
"arranged"
"realized"

records of urgent problems
of ideas
of discoveries
plans
projects
schemes
scripts and scores
materials
side activities,
all these
mixed together

Dzieło sztuki
wyodrębniony
wykafkowany odcinek
unieruchomiony
i zamknięty
w strukturze i systemie
niezdolny do zmiany życia
jest i l u z j ą twórczości.
Właściwością twórczości
jest stan płynny
zmienny
nieutrwały, ulotny
jak samo życie.
Należy uznać za twórczość
wszystko to co jeszcze
nie stało się t.zw. dziełem sztuki
co jeszcze nie zostało unieruchomione
co zawiera bezpośrednie impulsy życia
co nie jest jeszcze "gotowe"
"urządzone"
"zrealizowane":
notowania palących problemów
idei
odkryć
plany
projekty
konceptcje
partytury
m a t e r i a ł y
poboczne działania
wszystko to pomieszczone
/a do dziś sztucznie rozdzielane/ z miazgą życia:
fakty
wypadki
osoby
listy, gazety, kalendarze
adresy daty
mapy podróże bilety
spotkania ...
Staje się koniecznością
ZMIANA KONDYCJI WIDZA
i
ZMIANA SENSU WYSTAWY.
Brak "obrazów"
owych zastępych systemów formalnych
obecność płynnej żywej masy

M is aware that using *mentions* and *hashtags* will make her post searchable (Zappavigna, 2015) and allow people to participate in a conversation related to the same themes (when an account is *mentioned* in a Twitter post, the owner of the account gets a notification and can refer to the post and respond to the message). This was evident also in one of the audio recordings where M was explaining to a friend that the way to use Twitter is to create these connections. Thanks to this practice, M is able to be present in the online world and be part of arts-related discourse in London (and other contexts). She maintains connections also with the Polish arts scene, for example by posting information about a film festival in Gdansk. In general, M seems to aim to be a hub for artists, including those in Poland and with a Polish connection, a mission she assigned to her organisation.

M keeps in touch with potential collaborators and contacts via email. M has a gmail account and she is adept at approaching organisers and potential collaborators, gatekeepers in organisations with quite formal but friendly emails. She believes that her extensive use of emails is “what every freelancer has to do” (interview). On some occasions, she uses emails to provide a summary of meetings as a follow-up to previous meetings. In these emails, M positions herself as an equal, friendly and easy-going artist and does name dropping where she can. In the example provided below (Image 3), she mentions her connection with Birkbeck. In her signature, she gives her tumblr website address where she blogs about her work or work in which she is involved. She also includes her mobile number with the country code, indicating that she is considering an international audience.

From: M[]Gmail [mailto:m[]a@gmail.com]

Sent: Wed 04/03/2015 12:50

To: t[]w@gmail.com

Subject: Artists Anonymous

Hello T[],

I would love to find out more about your E-Publication project "Lie Back And Think of England". It sounds like an interesting opportunity for an anonymous artistic contribution.

I am a theatre maker and currently working with conceptual artist N[] on a couple of new pieces in collaboration with Birkbeck University, where we explore languages/ miscommunication and opportunities for development of new forms of communications.

Please feel free to follow the link below for more info.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

M[]a

[www.m\[\].a.tumblr.com](http://www.m[].a.tumblr.com)

mob: (00 44) 78[]

Image 3 An example of email (anonymised).

Other than looking for funding, M is constantly on the look-out for opportunities to get involved, promote herself, and network. She recognises the need to publicise herself and her work on social media: she uses Twitter, Facebook and a text message (Image 4) to promote her performances, but also art events with which she is connected.

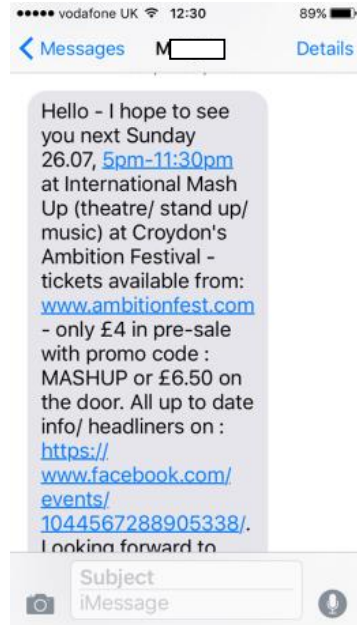


Image 4 An example of text messages

She cherishes any opportunity, prepares performances at very short notice (as in the case of the piece reported in Section 5) and accepts translation jobs purely because they have to do with theatre. We have observed numerous examples of her active pursuit of opportunities.

M says that you can't just be an artist anymore, you have to promote yourself, become your own producer. You can't just meet and 'happily create something', you have to straightaway be thinking about how it's going to work out.
(LonHerFn_20150302_AL_001)

M offers - half jokingly - to help develop the app the man mentioned. He asks whether they are IT people and M says that they aren't but that they are 'soft skills people'.
(LonHerFn_20150512_AL_017)

Both M and N tend to see potential for art projects everywhere as well. At some point, M said it would be a good idea to create an art piece based on nail varnish. N also has ideas for art projects inspired by a range of things around him.

N offers us something to drink again and we both decline. I comment that he is a great host and he says that he normally asks people to write a review on Trip Advisor for him. This leads to a discussion about a potential arts project involving inviting people to his house and offering them tea and biscuits. N is sure, "That IS art!"
(LonHerFn_20150512_AL_017)

Both M and N know what buzz words to use to get people interested in their project. Sometimes they discuss them in their funding-application planning but also in their ‘pitch’, as observed in the following example when they were approaching a sixth form college to discuss a possible project.

M presents their interest in working with community groups and in particular with young people as the piece is about how language comes about. They would like to do a performance and an installation. M’s voice is gentle, very different from her voice when she’s only with N and me. N steps in with a “general context” of the full length performance they are developing. N talks about the benefits that students could get from participation and I’m thinking “Yes! That’s the way to go – tell her about the benefits”. I really want them to do well and I feel they are selling what they’re doing brilliantly. (LonHerFn_20150402_AL_012)

4.6 Promoting Polish art

Although M’s work goes beyond Polish art, she caters for people with Polish heritage and explores the possibility of promoting Polish artists in her work in London through a Polish art group she co-founded. She sees the group as a ‘platform for people to share information about any kind of creative stuff they do, get involved in or are interested in and ... just something to keep in contact with people who are into culture, art and stuff with Polish heritage’ (interview).

But things are not always straightforward. It takes a lot of energy, sometimes to M’s frustration, to reach out to the gatekeepers in organisations which could provide either funding or networking opportunities to promote Polish art or support Polish artists.

M talked about her meeting with a lady from xx just before coming to Birkbeck. She used several swearing words, which I did not observe before, in her narration of the meeting, perhaps out of relief and frustration, the feeling that finally someone reached out after so many attempts. She said, “she (the lady M met) is genuinely interested in us”. She quoted the lady’s words “whatever you do, let us know” (LonHerFn_20150326_ZH_008)

4.7 Doing language and communication in art

M has a keen interest in language, communication and identity in art. She explains why language is important to her artistic work, as it is “the thing the last kind of external manifestation of your thought and your feelings and that’s why it’s really interesting there’s so many different languages in London here that I started questioning the whole need for speaking English” (interview).

During the observation period, M was developing a full-length theatre piece referred to as D here, which means ‘skeleton key’ in German. It is a story of an interpreter and a man who has lost the ability to speak his native tongue working through a fragment of Nibelungenlied (known as *The Song of the Nibelungs*, an epic poem written in Middle High German). In D #1 (public performance in December 2014), the story was staged in an interview room and towards the end, M brought up the issue of the relationship between language, culture and thought (linguistic relativity theory). In D #2 (public performance in April 2015), the story line was somewhat opaque. On the programme, it says ‘a man, a woman. A poetic, structuralist fable in four languages. 2 characters seek a shared understanding while 2 others observe. Do they find the key lying in a pool of silence?’. In the actual

performance, the characters performed by M and N, as the last two people in space, were controlled by an unknown force and given pointless tasks including playing badminton and counting in different languages. In the end, they retreated to silence. (More information about the play can be found in Section 8).

Language is at the forefront of discussions about their performances. We were pleasantly surprised by how language-focused their artist work was. There is always some mention or discussion about using language, the meaning or the choice of language, etc.

It seems to be a consistent pattern: talk about the piece is always largely about language use and the commentary around the piece demonstrates high levels of language awareness and interest. (LonHerFn_20150326_AL_007)

I was also nicely surprised about how much thought they have given to linguistic matters in their piece. For the piece performed then (referring to D #1), they were trying to capture the pain and emotional cost of operating in ‘other’ languages, German being the language. There was a ‘mini-lecture’ given by M as part of the show where she talked about linguistic relativity. The piece ended up with M singing a Christmas song in Polish and English and of course the audience was invited to join in the seasonal fun. (LonHerFn_20150401_ZH_009)

Our notes captured both M’s and her main collaborator N’s various discussions about language in the planning stage. Some of the discussions focused on which languages to be represented and the resultant symbolic meaning of the chosen language. In the following discussion, M and N were toying with the choice between the ‘real language of normal people’ and ‘dead language’ and wondering how they could ‘curate’, ‘choose’ and ‘place’ the language.

N checks whether they want to include real language in the piece and that of course they would curate it, choose and place it, but that it would be real language of normal people. (LonHerFn_20150313_AL_005)

N has a number of ideas now. He suggests recording other people to represent those contestants in the reality show they are planning to do who are already out. “The ghosts” – as they refer to them – would be speaking other languages and A could include recordings of their voices in the performance. M smiles and says that they could get people to record themselves speaking Latin and Esperanto. The idea is to use a dead language, either religious or literary, and get people to guess the translation. (LonHerFn_20150313_AL_005)

The use of a particular language could symbolise madness or obsession.

They talk about what language to sing the song in. The use of particular languages is intended as a choice but also indicates madness or unconscious slipping into a particular language in the piece. N seems fascinated with the choice of language as a result of an obsession. N tries his German lines and M laughs briefly. (LonHerFn_20150326_AL_007)

What seems to fascinate N in particular is the possibility of the message expressed by these languages to be ambiguous. This is evidenced in his playing with the idea of including inaccurate translations of phrases in their inter titles and using German as a language that is not quite understood by speakers.

What goes on the inter titles on the screen while the performance is ongoing will be translations of what these people are saying and what M and N are saying, if not in English. N seems fascinated by the idea that the translation could be not exact, but more like an approximation of what the people are saying. M doesn't seem to pick up this idea. (LonHerFn_20150313_AL_005)

There is an idea about using German only as a figurative language, as being there without being completely understood by the speakers. (LonHerFn_20150326_AL_007)

In addition to a focus on language and communication in their work, M and N demonstrated a high level of linguistic awareness throughout the observations. They use language related categories, labels and consider languages and their identifying or stereotypical features as a semiotic resource in their theatre-making. All researchers are explicit about this linguistic awareness in a number of field notes. In a field note by ZH (LonHerFn_20150326_ZH_008), she noted down some terms used by the team in their discussion. They include 'normal everyday language', 'made-up German' referring to not real but German-like words, 'not particularly good German', 'humming in German'. In her field notes, AL noted:

They mention N's French and German accents. Language awareness coming through. They are both linguistically aware and seem to be talking about language, linguistic categories (M: nouns, verbs), words (M: it's an obscure Canadian word) a lot throughout their conversation. Language seems to fascinate them. They pay attention to names, certain phrases, accents...

Then N says something about a particular word being his default adjective. The question of language and its use seems to be somewhere in the conversation constantly. (LonHerFn_20150304_AL_002)

Their discussions about language and the level of linguistic awareness meant that sometimes their discussions could be compared to those of linguists, as AL points out in her note.

As they all talk about using all these languages in the piece, it strikes me that their discussions resemble the discussions of academics concerning multilingualism in an urban environment (to some extent)... They talk about justifying using different languages, negotiating which languages to use in a particular space, the changes in the linguistic landscape of London... (LonHerFn_20150326_AL_007)

However, the researchers were not always sure whether M and N mentioned the language issue specifically for our sake or whether it was genuinely part of their interest. As LW discussed in his field note:

They talked about how to integrate multiple languages, and how many, in their full length show. I wasn't sure if they mentioned the language issue specifically for our sake or it was genuinely part of their interest. (LonHerFn_20150512_LW_018).

5. Performance as work in progress

M is making notes of the discussion in her black notebook. She summarises the notes she made of what needs to be done. She reads them out to N - there are four things: funding application, work on the Ambition Festival, work on the full project and the second phase of the project (not sure what it means). I see that in her notes it's represented as a table. In their discussion, they distinguish between "meetings like today" and "creative meetings in the rehearsal space". N suggests that they focus on developing the Ambition Festival piece now in their creative meetings for the next seven or eight weeks. (LonHerFn_20150512_AL_017)

As the above field note illustrates, there are two types of regular face-to-face meetings between M and N (and occasionally A). One is planning meetings where they discuss the schedule of work ('meeting like today') and the other is creative meetings which are M's primary art-making process with her collaborators. The field note also comments on M's role in these kinds of meetings: she is the one who organises the agenda, takes notes, and summarises key points. We had the opportunity to observe the construction of several pieces of work from the initial idea to a working performance through these face-to-face meetings (two of which will be reported in Sections 6 & 8).

5.1 *Conceptual development*

Conceptual planning of particular aspects of M's theatrical performances took up much of the meeting time and in fact, much more than any actual rehearsal.

M and N try to imagine different types of activities for students, thinking about involving them in their full-length theatre piece. Their ideas include working with the rope ("rope work" M says and N responds with laughter), inventing words and discussing what they could mean, improvisation. ... N brings up the idea of exploring dreams with the students: a workshop about the language of dreams. N reminds M that xx was suggesting organising an exhibition involving words from people's dreams spelt out on pillow cases which the participants' heads actually touched in their sleep. (LonHerFn_20150402_AL_012)

Gathering ideas for a performance is done as a brainstorming session with clear turn allocation that facilitates collaboration between M and N. They are very used to this kind of collaborative discussion, a process whereby each one brings their ideas to the table, bounces them off and generates new creative ideas. There are clear signals about where the turnings are going and a shared understanding that one should not 'talk over' each other. Some of their turn-allocating acts at different stages are noted in the field notes.

N said to M at the beginning "you have an idea. Tell us"

M: 'let me just interject'

M: 'Just to get clarification'

M: (summing up) a couple of things in the next couple of days.

M: Some questions. Are we going to ...

M: What I would like to

LonHerFn_20150326_ZH_008

There are times when conversational ‘troubles’ occur as one speaker attempts to talk over the other. In the same observation as the above, N started talking immediately after M began to talk. M threw her pen at N in a half-joking manner. N protested and quoted his friend’s words ‘my friend say you talk over me’. M ignored his complaint and went on with what she wanted to say ‘I just say very quickly’.

Occasionally, there seem to be some shifts towards N being more in control as a native speaker of English.

Overall, the discussion was on and off topics all the time. There were focused discussion and action plans and then there were also off-topic comments (usually started off by M, but she also brought the topic back, saying well, anyway, etc.) and jokes. The transitions between turns were seamless and there are quite lot of collegiality. There are also some traces of gender and age difference (I think). N was not hesitant to give his opinions and suggestions. ‘Two easy options. One is got something based on xxx and one on xxx. He was also relied on when M was struggling with the pronunciation of ‘Salisbury’. N also pointed about a spelling mistake ‘It is a seized opportunity, not seasoned’. M’s style was very collegiate. ‘Thanks for sharing’. ‘Shall I say that we pack...’ She tends to slip away from topics. While they were talking about a bid, M asked, ‘when is it Easter weekend? I’m seeing my parents’. M hummed quietly and naturally when she was working on the computer.

(LonHerFn_20150304_ZH_003)

M and N manage their relationship and differences in ways of doing things interactionally and, to their credits, skilfully. The collaborators had clear roles in their meetings. N often offered ideas and made suggestions while M took on a critical role as she questioned N’s suggestions. She was also the note-taker and organiser and a chair in meetings. She was in control of topics and sanctioned the direction of conversation, while at the same time, allowing and appreciating N’s contributions to ideas as an artist and experienced networker, corrections and help with her expressions in English, and emotional support as a friend. The small talks in between the work topics and their easiness with being physically close (e.g. sitting close to each other, putting an arm around the other’s shoulder) help to further strengthen their rapport and cushion any potential direct and open disagreement in opinions.

5.2 *Work in progress*

M and her team tend to approach their performances as work in progress. Even when we saw them perform in an organised and publicized event, it was presented as a work-in-progress performance (the arts centre where they performed use a technical term ‘scratch’ to describe this kind of work). They are happy to take unfinished ideas and test them on stage before proceeding with another round of development of the piece.

Their approach to ‘scratch’ the piece was an interesting one. Unlike other pieces on the same evening, their piece is neither ‘finished’ nor ‘polished’. It keeps evolving all the time. It was different from the plot they decided on 26 March and it may be very different from what they discussed just before the show. But it seems to work. M, N and A seem to know what they are doing on the stage and no one could tell which bits were spontaneous and which bits were not. The involvement of volunteers also adds to the feel of spontaneity and I thought they should be commended for coping with all the uncertain elements including the presence of AL and me as observers. They did not know how we were going to move and fit in and we did not know what was actually going to happen, but it seems to gel well in the end. (LonHerFn_20150401_ZH_009)

5.3 *Research element*

They approached the creative process methodically. When we first met M, she had been reading books on linguistic relativity to inform her first ‘scratch’ in December. She and N both realised that a lot of research was needed in order to prepare for theatre-making.

[M] says it’s impossible to make a play in three weeks because you need to research the things you want to represent, for example therapy or applied linguistics to find out exactly how they work rather than represent their idea about these things.
(LonHerFn_20150313_AL_005)

M wants to talk to some therapists and some applied linguists to understand these things better for the piece. N says that it’s probably impossible to understand what therapy is by just talking to therapists over tea. They then say that they are not sure whether they can find any applied linguists to talk to. I can feel their gaze on me as I’m typing my notes and I shake my head to indicate I have no idea where to find applied linguists. (LonHerFn_20150313_AL_005)

They were interested in documenting the process of art-making themselves. They were happy to record their meetings and considered (albeit briefly) making their process recordings available to the wider audience, including us as researchers.

M points out that it would be important for them to document their practice (which M says is what I am doing through the research) and upload snippets to a website ‘even if it’s a Facebook page’. N isn’t sure whether they want everything they do to be public.
(LonHerFn_20150313_AL_005)

5.4 *Technological confidence*

M and N use their iPhones and software on their Mac computers to create videos of their performance pieces. They are not interested in the use of more professional equipment as they value their familiarity with the software and the ease of processing. They do not need to learn to use new software or risk incompatibility.

They start filming using M’s iPhone. I offer to use the camera I brought, but they prefer their iPhones as they already know the software and are happy with the quality of recordings. N

sets the right LP on and guides M as to when to start recording. The first take is supposed to be a trial one, but it turns out surprisingly well and they are both very happy with it. They do two more takes and each time watch the video afterwards and talk about the position of the camera, light, the need to move furniture and so on. After the third take, they are happy with the finished product ... and they move on to M's piece. (LonHerFn_20150320_AL_006)

5.5 *Catering for the audience*

Feeling the need to cater for the audience was always present in M and N's planning where they considered the audience's ability to follow their art and the possibility to involve the audience in an interactive performance. There is a clear desire to include audience members and an understanding of the importance of their involvement. At the same time, M and N realise that it might at times be difficult to organise, especially as some of their ideas involve quite elaborate audience participation.

The conversation moves to the audience. M and N get talking about the possibility of involving the audience and physically managing it. (...) M expresses concern that they are going to construct an unrealistic audience to receive their art. There is discussion about ideas and layers of meaning that were incorporated into the scratch performance. N says it's interesting when you problematise who a person is and what it means to be an actor. (LonHerFn_20150302_AL_001)

They are thinking about the audience and the need to give them something they would understand. M says that in this context they can also discuss stereotypes and 'slag off other nationalities'. (LonHerFn_20150310_AL_004)

5.6 *Ambiguity*

Decisions about the details of performances are often made at the last minute and some aspects are played spontaneously, with very little rehearsal. On the afternoon of M and N's scratch performance on 1st April 2015, they were still discussing some parts of their piece an hour before they were due on stage and the final decision on the cue that would start the performance was made in the interval just before the start of the performance. Lack of clear decisions does not seem to cause them any excessive anxiety.

In the excerpt from audio recorded data below, M and N discuss the use of volunteers from the audience in their performance. The recording was made on the afternoon before the performance itself and clearly illustrates M's readiness to live with ambiguity.

Excerpt 1 (LonHerAud_20150401_AL_001)

(Context: M & N are sitting in the café within the arts centre where they are presenting the show discussing how many volunteers they need for the show).

N: so we have a smaller space (3) do you really want to do it with the volunteers rather than just having the volunteers come in and have the rope between us to be the net

M: what instead of having the full square

N: instead of having a save a big complication we just have two volunteers when we when we're together they come in

M: but the whole point is it's not about this thing it's about

N: I know
M: it's about defining the border and people [watching and what the fuck am I looking at
N: [I know it is alright are you ok to just run with it
M: ...
N: it's gonna be (2) [it's gonna be crazy
M: (animated) [it's gonna be hectic
N: it's gonna be crazy alright fine
M: it's gonna be like
N: but we're gonna dive in there
M: give me my ten minutes of my life back that's gonna be the moment
N: ...alright fine alright
M: ok let's go
N: let's go let's go and get the cake
M: awesome let's get out
N: let's get the cake I'm singing for
M: let's get the cake and eat it

Having just rehearsed the piece on stage, N realised that they had a smaller space than they thought and wanted to change the plan. He suggested that instead of having four volunteers to make the ropes into a full square, they could do with just two volunteers to avoid 'big complication'. M disagreed and reminded N of the purpose of the square. They decided to 'run with it', despite realising that 'it's gonna be crazy' or 'hectic'. In the actual performance, they indeed used four volunteers and their creative use of the rope in defining the border/stage was appreciated by the audience as the audience feedback showed (more in Section 8). There are a number of conversational features which are worth noting. Half way through the conversation, when N conceded to M's idea, M echoed N's words through an animated voice. The echoing, which is delivered in the form of partial repetition of N's short sentence, serves to mark the change in frame (using Goffman's term, 1974), i.e. from a serious discussion to a lighter and collaborative 'pep' talk. The rest of the conversation, in a pep talk fashion, consists of pairs of similarly partially repetitive lyric-like verses. M finished the conversation with another partial repetition of N's words, but this time she made it into a pun playing on an English idiomatic expression 'you can't have your cake and eat it (too)'.

The principle of ambiguity is consciously applied to the audience as well. N in particular repeatedly speaks for the idea of making the audience work to figure out the meaning of their performance, rather than having all the answers spelt out in the performance. Ambiguity is therefore good not only in the preparation stage of the performance but also in the interpretation stage.

Excerpt 2 (LonHerAud_20150326)

N: but I think it's quite good to leave the audience hanging and have the audience wonder what's that all about
M: mhm

A feature of M and N's communication which probably has its roots in their arts background is the principle of going with the flow, accepting and working with what one is given. We often observed examples of following this principle in planning/rehearsal meetings, but also in other types of interactions and activities. The extract below presents an example how M and N repair non-understanding in conversation. M and N were talking about publishing something under a

pseudonym. Interestingly M's immediate response to the suggestion was that they would be 'doing something offensive' whereas N's association was that of 'putting on a different voice', both of which turn out to be the key artistic approaches they bring into their work and communication (more on the notion of subversiveness in Section 6 and on voicing in Section 7). In talking about putting on a different voice, N not only acted on it by speaking in a different voice but also switched to another language and brought up a French phrase 'nom de plume' (meaning 'pen name'). M, probably not realising that it was a French phrase (an example of cross-linguistic misunderstanding) and confused by N's accent, asked for clarification of the correct grammar to use with this phrase by rendering two versions which differ on the use of the definite article and pronunciation, and signalled for repair. N repeated the phrase, but to no avail. M was still not sure and repeated the phrase in her way as 'nom the plume'. This time N responded with an exaggerated pronunciation and nasalised the vowel in 'nom'. In the subsequent turn, M made another attempt to establish the exact meaning of the phrase ('and that means exactly what?'). N did not answer her question and continued his own train of thought. He made a meta commentary about his French accent, hence acknowledging his responsibilities for the confusion. The rest of the conversation became banter about N's accent in French. N took on the role of a puzzled French speaker who was trying to figure out which language or what kind of French N was speaking. M went along with his role and turned the banter into a parody by exaggerating the unlikeness of N's French. Rather than disturb the flow of the conversation, M elected to 'let it pass' (a common strategy in lingua franca communication of managing misunderstanding through ignoring anomalies or ambiguities in order to focus on content rather than form, Firth, 1996) and follow N's lead in the subsequent part of the conversation.

Excerpt 3 (LonHerAud_20150304_MP_002, 29:24)

- N: [clears throat] just a thought that (3) if we contribute something anonymously ...maybe you should say that we're open to working anonymously um (3) maybe it's an interesting opportunity because it means that you can do something that you wouldn't normally put your name to
- M: mhm [do something offensive]
- N: [put on a different voice] not necessarily offensive but put on a different voice a voice that you wouldn't normally like if you were going to put a name to it you might want to
- M: like kind of reconsider um
- N: under nom nom de plume kind of thing
- M: um (3)
- N: just another thought
- M: you say a NOM de plume or nom the plume
- N: nom de plume
- M: nom the plume
- N: nom [nasal vowel] de plume depends on how French you're trying to be nom [FR pron] nom [FR pron] [nom [FR pron]]
- M: [nom [FR pron]]
- N: nom de plume
- M: and that means exactly what?
- N: my French accent is notoriously bad [clears throat]
- M: it's basically German accent
- N: no ...my German accent yeah whenever I'm in Paris I'm speaking what I really believe is really good French often (laughs) and the person I'm talking to can look at me really quizzically it's like

M: ...

N: is he speaking French

M laughs

N: what language is he speaking

M: what is this dialect of Scandinavian why not

N: yeah it's from a kind of very strange group of French Francophones from I don't know
from from Vancouver or something

(M laughs)

6. Performing Polishness: Doing a Polish artist in London

Identities entail the juxtapositions between the self and the other, an individual and society, stability and situated accomplishment, and product and process (Zhu Hua, forthcoming). We have noticed that although M occasionally uses the phrases 'Polish heritage' and 'Polish origin' inter-exchangeably in describing her Polish identity she was born with, Polishness is only one aspect of M's identities. For M, her identities are multiple and subjective. She employs a subversive yet playful, strategic yet practical approach to managing her multiple identities, to negotiating misalignment between identities she aligns to and identities assigned by others. She is adept at turning stereotypes into 'resources for accomplishing new social actions' (Reyes, 2004, p.174) and there are many instances of interactions and practices in which she actively reject stereotypes while at the same time consuming them.

6.1 *'The token Polish girl in the crowd' and subversiveness*

M reflects on her identity a lot. In the interview, M talks about having multiple identities: a thirty-year-old Polish-speaker, an actress, an artist, a voice coach, a daughter from a city in Northeastern Poland and a Londoner. She believes that the Polish identity she was born with and the identity that she says he would prefer - a Londoner - are 'equally valid states of being'.

M: (3) *I'm Polish because I was born in Poland and because that's what formed me during my formative years and London is something I chose so I think they're **both equally valid states of being*** (interview).

However, she is conscious that there might be a misalignment in her self-oriented identity and identity ascribed by others, a common concern for many transnationals, and that many people would see her as foreigner, an Eastern European, or the 'token Polish girl in the crowd'.

M: I see myself as a Londoner this whole thing about oh I'm not foreign I'm a Londoner I think I am a Londoner though um um yeah but to many people I'm a foreigner I'm **the token Polish girl in the crowd** (interview)

M's identity is closely related to language use and linguistic confidence. She labels herself as a non-native English speaker and seems to be keen not to expose the fact that she is a foreigner in her use of language. Although she is aware that no one is there to judge her English, she feels the pressure to use English well in on-stage performances and also in writing in her funding applications. Her comments reveal her sense of insecurity as a non-native English speaker ('there is a risk of looking stupid', 'I will trip up', 'people look down on us'). It is interesting that she used a plural form of first person pronouns 'us' when talking about being a 'foreigner' to depersonalise her proposition. With this plural form, she may like to stress that her experience is that of many non-native English speakers who have internalised the belief that native speaker English is the ideal and desirable model for language use and feel frustrated by their inability to express their ideas in the way 'native speakers' do (Seidlhofer 2001). The plural form may also be inclusive of the interviewer, who is in the same linguistic situation as her: a Polish speaker fluent in English, and hence serve as an act of solidarity.

M: *um there is this thing of if I don't do it in English then I'm doing it wrong or if my English is not good enough but who's then to say whether your English is good enough or isn't good enough but yeah if you're putting on a performance in a in a language that's just your second language there's a risk of looking stupid **there's a risk of looking stupid** but I mean it in like inverted commas that you make mistakes that a native speaker wouldn't make that may be telling of the fact that you are not from this country* (interview)

M: *writing the proposals or funding applications which I fucking hate and part of it is because I don't feel I don't feel confident in writing it in English even though my English is very good and I keep hearing this but when it comes to it I **will trip up** and I will the proposal will expose the fact that I'm not I'm a foreigner which like I said there is nothing wrong with that but (3) **people look down on us so** (interview)*

M took an opportunity to turn her reflections about identity into a performance when she came across a call for E-publication project with the theme of *Lie back and think of England*. The piece which she named as 'Untitled' portrays a pretentious artist who attempts to 'pass' as a Londoner. As a technical term in sociolinguistic studies on identity, *passing* refers to the 'ability to be taken for a member of a social category other than one's own' (Bucholtz, 1995, p.351). It differs from *crossing* in which speakers use the language varieties of social and ethnic groups to which they do not normally belong (Rampton, 1995, 1999). In the performance piece that M created, she wears a red dress with white polka dots and a scarf, answers questions from a friendly but inquisitive voice about what she is doing and who she is, while cooking a potato dish. Selected transcripts are provided below.

Selected transcripts from 'Untitled' by M



(M peeled potatoes in the garden and declared on the camera that she was doing an art project (picture on the left). She then moved to the kitchen and put the potatoes into a pot of boiling water (the picture at the centre).)

Q: *What is the deal with the potatoes?*

M: *It is a potato dish I found in the last week Guardian at the weekend. It is an Eastern European dish that people of that region have, maybe on Sundays when they are not toiling, you know, in the field and stuff. So, I think it is going to be nice.*

Q: *Can you just tell me something about yourself?*

M: *Yeh, of course. My name is X. I'm a Londoner. I've lived here since, you know, always, since...I ALWAYS ALWAYS lived here. I'm an artist. I do not know what else, what else would you like to know?*

Q: *Where were you born?*

M: *I mean my family are living, from what I know, from the reported history, somewhere in Eastern Europe or*

Russia, I do not know, actually. I'm local.

Q: Are you living in East London?

M: Yeah, yeah, This is where I made my home. It has been my home, since always.

Q: Why East London?

M: It is just a great place. People are really nice. There is a lot of artistic inspiration everywhere. There is a lot of culture and mixing all the time. There is lot of migrant influences. ... It is just a joy to watch that.

...

Q: Could you tell me more about your job?

M: Yeah, I am an artist.

Q: What are your inspirations?

M: Everything. Everything inspires me. Diversity, cultures really inspire me. (smells the potatoes) smells ready. Yeh... simple, simple food. Very simple (draining the potatoes). It is really delicious. It is really great. Mmm... You can really taste (a long pause) the earth, you know.

M went on eating the potatoes with enthusiasm. Towards the end of the piece, M could be seen through the door standing up with potatoes in her mouth, practicing a tongue twister 'sea shells on the seashore' in an attempt to speak posh English (picture on the right).

In the piece, M infused creativity with subversive playfulness. She made a mockery of pretentious artists, those people who, despite their upbringing in other parts of the world, try to pass off as local Londoners and play up to stereotypes about East European, Londoners and Englishness as well as artists. She achieved this through 'double voicing' or 'ventriloquation', borrowing the terms from Bakhtin (1953/1986; 1963/1984) who argues for the 'dialogic' and 'multivoiced' nature of discourse. Speakers can position themselves through speaking through others' voices and in doing so, multiple voices come into contact with each other (for a review, see Blackledge & Creese, 2014). In this piece, the conceptual artist and director M speaks through the character's voice. The character, named after M herself (but M made it clear that the piece is not about herself and pronounced the name differently – with stress on the final syllable, adding a more artistic touch to its sound), positioned herself as a local Londoner who 'ALWAYS ALWAYS lived here' and as an artist who claimed to be inspired by everything including diversity and cultures but also at the same time disconnected from diversity and cultures and enjoying 'watching that' from afar.

The stylisation, as an 'artistic representation of another's linguistic style, an artistic image of another's language' (Bakhtin, 1981, p.362), is achieved in this piece through a range of common features of dialogic speech such as indexicality whereby certain roles and social identities are pointed to or indexed (Ochs, 1992); parody whereby the style of characters are exaggerated for humorous effect; irony whereby different voices contradict each other; and pastiche whereby an artist imitates the style of another artist.. When asked about where she was born, she fudged about her family's East European roots and insisted that she is local. She referred to East Europeans as '*people of that region*' as if she was a complete outsider. Yet, there are so many things that could tell the audience about the

superficiality of the character, or the pretended identity underneath the assumed cosmopolitan identity. The potato dish is in effect just boiled potatoes, nothing more and nothing less, but M emphasised the source of the recipe (a very British newspaper, the *Guardian*), the cultural background of the recipe (an Eastern European dish), and how tasty the boiled potatoes are. Towards the end when the performed interview was finished, the audience got a glimpse of what the potatoes were really for: the stage character M put them in her mouth and practised her English pronunciation, reminiscent of the speech lessons of flower seller Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. The character also readily churns out clichés in everyday discourse: “*There is a lot of culture and mixing all the time*”; “*There is lot of migrant influences*”; “*Diversity, cultures really inspire me*”. The final part of the piece refers also to a famous scene from a classic Polish film ‘Mis’ in which an airport announcement at a Polish airport is made by an announcer who has stuffed their mouth with dumplings in order to improve their pronunciation in English (see video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_4blWBV7ao). The mockery, and indeed the ingenuity of the piece, is that these celebratory claims about cultural diversity and mixing are part of the character’s manoeuvres to assume a cosmopolitan identity. The piece also had a go at those artists who are superficial in the way they go about the art: declaring everything they do as art projects and putting on an air of being passionate about culture and diversity while pretending to be someone they are not.

The piece is clearly intended as a critique of what M has observed around her, the so-called transnationals and transnational artists in particular. It has a subversive undertone throughout, challenging, even deliberately offending those who have a superficial understanding of what transnationalism, transculturalism and cosmopolitanism are about. The piece played up to stereotypes about Eastern Europeans, Londoners and Englishness as well as artists and turn stereotypes into a performative resource, a strategy reported in Reyes, 2004, in understanding the re-appropriation of Asian American stereotypes by Asian American teens. It is also subversive in the sense that it is a self-criticism or self-mockery as the character M in the piece and the performer/director M could easily, but deliberately, be taken as one. This playful subversiveness is very creative and effective, as people may well be laughing at the character without realising that they are the very people that M is mocking. The German playwright Bertolt Brecht once said, ‘art is not a mirror with which to reflect reality but a hammer with which to shape it’ and M has truly achieved this in her piece.

The playfulness also adds another layer to M’s construction of her own identity, making her more mysterious and harder to read. The character is fictional, but it draws upon M’s personal experience of being an artist living in London. While in the art piece the character hedges about her Eastern European roots and tries to pass off as a Londoner, in real life M is very strategic about being a Polish artist. This will be discussed in the next section.

6.2. ‘I’m just a Polish actress’ and strategic essentialism

Often, M appears to feel typecast as ‘Eastern European’, ‘Polish actress’, or even once confusingly as a ‘Russian actress’. She is frustrated that she can only get cast as a Polish or Eastern/Central European character (she recently played a Polish nurse in two episodes of a popular TV soap opera). M fights with being typecast as a Polish migrant on stage. And as part of that process, she is reluctant to use Polish in her performances unless there is a very good reason to justify it. During one of her meetings with N and A, the trio engaged in a lengthy negotiation with M about potentially using Polish in their performance (See section 8.2 about more information about the play). N asked M to think whether she could introduce Polish into the piece, as ‘it would just add an extra (layer of linguistic complexity - our note)’. M was not keen. She said she did not feel comfortable and became

'very self-conscious' using Polish on stage and also found it hard to justify the use of Polish. N continued to urge her to think through her apparent reluctance to speak Polish. What follows is an extract of arguments and counter-arguments about why or why not use Polish on stage. M justified her views against using Polish in a predominantly English-speaking context, as - using her own words - 'stakes are not high enough' for her to speak Polish. For her, whether she could or could not speak Polish is not the point. Most of the audience would not understand Polish anyway. She was reluctant to play a 'stereotypical Polish person' who shouts abuse in Polish. This kind of stereotype was often 'being done in kind of English context'. Her arguments drew A's support, who joined in the discussion towards the end.

Extract 4 (LonHerAud_20150326, around 01:30:00)

N: can I ask that you think about whether you could bring a bit of Polish in I'm not saying it's important but I think if you could think of a way of bringing a bit of Polish in it would just add an extra

M: mm

N: thing

M: I just I just feel very self-conscious speaking Polish on stage I just

N: do you

M: not in the way like oh I'm I'm not shy to speak it but I find it hard to justify it

N: but if you're a Polish person

M: yeah paradoxically I find it hard to justify it because

N: why should you find it hard to justify it just out of just out of interest

M: because then bec- because to me it's like something different if the two of us agreed that we are speaking languages that neither one of us speaks very well or at all

N: yeah

M: then we're just toying with an idea but it's just easy if I'm just like now I'm gonna speak Polish (marked, mockingly proud:) because I can um

N: yeah but I speak English because I can

M: (3) yeah (2) but this is an English-speaking

N: maybe

M: audience and I think the stakes are not high enough for me for example if I speak Polish and then English look at me ain't I great whereas people they just speak one language I'm just generalising our audience

N: mm

M: they only speak hardly anyone from the audience are going to understand Polish and then

N: and couldn't you say for instance that ok we're the last two people in this space you insist on (2) badly speaking German or trying to speak German couldn't you at least have the consideration and politeness to try try to learn a bit of Polish which is what I would speak if if you could understand any of it

M: because in my in my head every time you this is this is awful but every time I think of Polish being used on stage the only the only the only times I heard that being that being done in kind of English context

N: mm

M: is when somebody is like playing stereotypical

N: oh Mxx

M: Polish person

N: that's not a reason for not doing it then

M: and then just shout out stuff like

N: if that's part of what's going on in your head then I think you should do some of time in Polish

M: if I can pass it as normal conversation

N: that's entirely valid

A:...character and like just cos he doesn't understand you you still feel the need to speak Polish so maybe so maybe when you get angry with him you maybe shout at him in Polish or something or

M: but that's exactly what I'm talking about I don't want to be doing that because to me it's like

A: it's a stereotype to you

M: yeah

N: why hang on what being angry is a stereotype

M: no shout in your own language

Later, AL asked M about that situation and her strong reaction in the interview. M explained that she did not want to draw attention to her being a 'token foreigner', as she would like to go about her work just as her collaborators do and in any case, in her view, there is already too many stereotypes about migrants in the media.

M: *I have to have a good reason and I didn't think that at that point in our piece the reason was strong enough if my character or anybody else's character had a reason to speak a different language sure but (3) I didn't want to make it about Polish language just (2) for the sake of it I didn't want it to be I didn't want to at any point have a conversation about migration or **be the token foreigner** I'm that in in like every other casting anyway I don't want to transfer it to my work that I do with N or and A because there is no need I think I don't know BBC is doing great job of stereotyping migrants anyway so I don't need to like fortify that (interview)*

When discussing issues that might be important for M that she might want to bring to our attention in general, she mentioned the question of prejudice against Polish artists. Extra effort is needed to bring in Polish art techniques and expertise into English theatres, as theatres here are Anglo-centric.

M: *... it's quite patronising I find because English always is the benchmark even though different languages have their own languages and their own way of carrying out performance and making art different techniques ... but still you have to justify it again and make it sound really good in English cause that's the language of communication not your little Polish you know you guys running around there in the field that's the perception of Polish theatre that lots of people have oh yeah intensely physical theatre and stuff well maybe yes but maybe not (interview)*

Although M has a particular relationship with her status as a 'Polish' artist, she recognises that this is most likely to be her niche as well, because 'it's convenient'. However, the problem, as she articulates in the interview, is that playing a stereotypical Polish person only reifies the stereotypes.

M: *and then again stereotypes like if I agree to because it's convenient for me to play a Polish nurse on [British soap opera] because that means good money and it's BBC and stuff but then they will what are they actually doing are they being patronising and actually they make me play a stereotype which then is being relayed to a wider audience and then audience's perception of foreigners is the stereotypical one or are they actually genuinely reflecting the society (interview)*

When talking about why Polish immigrants often end up as nurses or cleaners outside Poland (the problem of occupational downward mobility, i.e. 'deployment to positions lower than the migrants' educational attainment, training, or experience, owing to the non-recognition of their overseas qualifications and the bias for education acquired in the host country, local experience and cultural know-how', European network of migrant women, 2015), M believes that the language barriers are the key factor.

M: *Why do Polish nurses have to be the lowest of the low or for example why do they have to be cleaners is that because that's just how it is or is it because they are fully qualified in Poland or whatever but because of the language barrier this is the only job they can get and they can't get that you know their knowledge and experience across you know to others unless they speak in English which is relevant it doesn't matter if I I can be a super mastermind in Polish but if I can't relate it to English in an English-speaking country then it just becomes a bit like it doesn't mean I'm an idiot but it means that I can't communicate my knowledge but then I think the assumption is well if you can't talk properly then (.) then you're an idiot. (interview)*

M not only faces these stereotypes about Polish immigrants, but also has to deal with confusions between Polish and Russian among those who do not seem to care about the separate identities of these two nationalities. M talks about the disturbing treatment she was subjected to by a director, who did not seem to bother to differentiate between Polish and Russian. Although she was upset, she

did not correct the director, as she thought it would be ‘counterproductive’ and she wanted to remain in the director’s network as an easy-to-work-with actress.

M: *I try to not take it personally but I do take it personally because I ca- I can’t come up to you know somebody from of of of black skin I can’t be just like oh you black people whatever you’re from that’s offensive right? Because somehow I’m Eastern European I’m white I speak English maybe it’s ok to say like oh Polish yeah I can speak a bit of Polish o kurwa (a swear word in Polish, fuck, authors’ note) this kurwa that or Polish Russian whatever you know to me it is a big difference (...) for example the director when we were running through the first scene and I’ll be speaking something like ok and he has the script in front of him it’s like oh yeah and the Polish interpreter goes whatever but then later on he didn’t remember that I was Polish interpreter it’s like and the Russian woman says I’m like (banging on the table) I’m not Russian I didn’t say that because I thought it’s counterproductive I don’t I basically need to I want this relation to be as easy as possible for me to remember me that I’m easy to get on with and next time he needs Russian Polish [marked:] whatever [normal] actress that he’s gonna call me so I can’t be like actually shut up because that’s two different countries I can’t do that so inside I was like it’s hard to me it was evident that to him it didn’t matter that country if he could remember Russian he could easily remember Polish but what for it’s not really important so then (interview)*

Facing these challenges, M seems to know very well how to manoeuvre strategically and ‘play’ along with the identities ascribed to her. In her interview, she talked about introducing herself as “*I’m just I’m just a Polish actress*” half-jokingly when she meets other members of a cast. These acts constitute the employment of ‘strategic essentialism’, in Spivak’s term (1985/1996), in migrants’ attempt to temporarily ‘essentialise’ themselves in order to achieve certain goals. Elsewhere, Eide (2010) discusses the media experience of individuals with a minority background in Norway. Some of them have to emphasise their ethnicity in order to obtain media attention. One of her subjects, Hamid, reported that as an elected leader of an organisation, he has tried to contact the press to voice a certain political initiative which has nothing to do with ethnicity, minority or religion. His effort was ignored until he presented himself as the first such leader from an ethnic minority background.

M: *I thought ok so let’s do it like this then so when people introduce themselves (...) you make like little conversations so then it’s like oh hey what’s your name I’m I’m Amit or whatever this guy’s like **oh I’m just I’m just a Polish actress** and like oh it’s so funny (claps) Polish actress ha ha ha and then I’ll tell him my name but ok remember me as this fucking Polish actress that’s cool because that’s what I will ever only ever get cast as so I just need to make a point of it so it’s saddening but equally I need to use it wisely so (sound indicating frustration) sorry that really gets me d’you know what I mean I’m more than just Eastern European whatever and you can’t tell me that you can’t (.) anyway because if I was black you wouldn’t be like Africa or whatever Somalia or wherever you’re from I don’t care you’re black that’s what counts you can’t say that but to a white person you can say that I don’t get it I mean I get it but that should change (interview)*

While M seems to be prepared to essentialise herself as ‘just a Polish actress’ temporarily in order to get casting opportunities, there is certain playful subversiveness in the way she goes about it. ‘Just a Polish actress’ is a double-voiced discourse in Bakhtin’s terms (1963/1986) where a critical M speaks indirectly through a practical M’s voice. By modifying her self-identification with ‘just’ or, in other words, ‘only’ or ‘simply’, the critical M voices her dissatisfaction and frustration with the typecast roles of Polish actress, who often get to play nurses or cleaners, those from lower end of job markets.

7. Performance of language: Translanguaging practices

The central objective of the TLANG project is to investigate translanguaging practices which, as a ground-breaking new way of understanding language and communication, refer to the dynamic meaning-making process whereby multilingual speakers go beyond conventional divide between languages and modalities to act, to know and to be (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014). As our project website argues, translanguaging includes the full range of linguistic performances of multilingual speakers, beyond the simple alternation between languages, or 'code-switching'. Such a focus on translanguaging has been argued to have several advantages. First, it enables us to see 'how everyday practices and identities are rooted in the trajectories of the multiple communities to which individuals belong, and how they develop and transform' (The TLANG project website). Secondly, it foregrounds the creativity multilingual speakers employ to flout norms of practice and to push and break boundaries with their knowledge and usage of multiple languages and different kinds of semiotic signs, to the extent that creativity becomes an instinct and things to be expected among multilingual speakers.

7.1 *Language play*

Among bilingual and multilingual speakers, language play often takes the form of multilingual creativity, a practice whereby multilingual speakers invent new forms of expressions (e.g. bilingual puns) by following the rules of one language yet at the same time flouting the rules of another language. The purposes of language play can be a symbolic aggression or an index of solidarity (Cook, 2000, p.8) and M is adept at using language play to achieve her agenda for a variety of purposes.

Language play as a way of resisting stereotypes

M defines herself in a number of ways throughout the data. In meetings she often refers to her Polish background (often more precisely to the fact she comes from Northeast Poland) and the cultural associations it may have. The question of identity is pertinent in discussions about her theatre piece as M finds it difficult to accept the treatment she tends to get in her acting career. Her way of dealing with stereotyping and identities takes a range of forms. It can be creative and playful, as in the excerpt below, or very thoughtful and serious, when she engages in debates with her colleagues. In the following excerpt, M explicitly draws attention to an instance of language play concerning her relationship to languages and nationalities where she parses the word of 'polarising' into 'Pole-arising'.

Excerpt 5 (LonHerAud_20150326, 36mins)

N: I might just throw into it I might write down kind of normal ev- everyday language phrases that for instance W [*N's partner, researcher's note*] might use and I have to use those or attempt to

M: that's quite handy for you to have a German wife

N: I know that's how the whole German thing came into it for me

M: for me it was just ob- obviously polarising the Germans ...

N: yeah I know

M: *Pole-arising*

N: oh Pole, Oh

M: ah [clapping] just saying

Language play as acts of subversiveness

Language play in the form of verbal provocation is one of the ways in which M breaks taboos and enacts subversiveness, or in her words, does ‘something offensive’ and does something in order ‘to shock’. Throughout the observation period, M and N often played with the word ‘shuttlecock’, as the theatre piece they were developing involved playing badminton. M found the word amusing. It was a new word for her and she expressed disbelief that such a ‘ridiculously’ sounding word could be a real word in English. In the following extract, M and N were planning a badminton-playing scene as part of their play. Pleased with the dramatic turn of the play, N put on a ‘faux’ French accent when using a technical term of French origin, ‘coup theatre’. M was trying to recall the word for shuttlecock, but could only remember the first component and hence initiated ‘repairs’. N could not resist the double entendre that comes with the forgotten part, i.e., cock, and teases M by openly suggesting that M should not have a problem remembering the second part of the word in question. M picks up on this implied meaning and protests (‘who do you think I am?’). They then engage in a good-natured banter about the word, its wordiness and innuendo, in the rest of the excerpt. There were some metalinguistic commentaries from both sides as to whether the name is appropriate and why. In other extracts, M puts on an announcer’s voice or in other ways marks her use of the word ‘shuttlecock’.

Excerpt 6 (LonHerAud_20150310_MP_001, 34:46)

M: ok so there is one on one (2) playing badminton?

N: I think maybe (3) little [French pron:] coup theatre

M: because it will be just it will be just so good like a (.) an element of unexpected because it’s ...

N: I want a lot of it

M: th- th- hang on I remember that word um ss-shuttle feather no shuttle shut- um shuttle

N: you can remember that second half of this word you can remember

M: shuttlecock (laughs)

N: (laughs)

M: shut up who do you think I am (2) yeah so having it’s gotta be some different name for it surely

N: no that’s the official name for it

M: shuttlecock

N: shuttlecock

M: shuttlecock it just takes you two minutes to say it

N: they go back and forth like a [shuttlecock

M: [shuttlecock oh really? In Polish it's lotka

N: in case you haven't played the game it's not part of the rule that each time you hit it you have to actually say the name of the thing

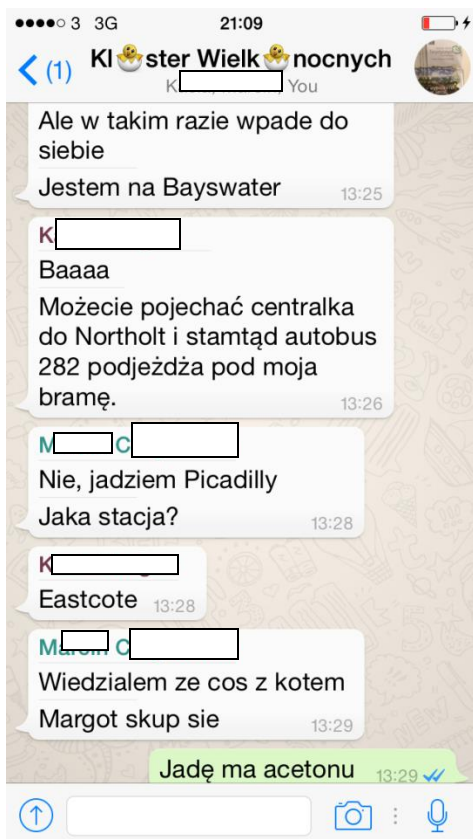
M: no but it's like oh have you got a shuttlecock let's let's play badminton have you got a shuttlecock

N: how much effort was that yes I do have a shuttlecock shall I show it to you

N: maybe that's why they called it but that's what it's called it has no other name in English

Language play as act of metropolitan cool

M is also adept at playing intersemiotically through the use of emojis on social media. The following images capture group chats between M and her friends in WhatsApp. In the exchange, M and MC play with the place name Eastcote by comparing the sound of the second part of the word 'cote' to the Polish word 'kot' (=cat). Early on in the conversation (Image 5), MC asks K about the name of the station where they are supposed to get off to reach her place and when K gives the name Eastcote, MC responds 'I knew it was something to do with a cat'. Further in the exchange (Image 6), M appropriates the language play by replacing 'cote' with an emoji.



But in that case I'll pop round to mine
I'm in Bayswater

Baaaa
You can take the Central Line¹ to Northolt and
from there bus 282 stops just outside my gate

No, we're taking Picadilly
What station?

Eastcote

I knew that something to do with a cat
Mxx concentrate

I'm going to Acton²
LonHerSM_20150405_WA_117

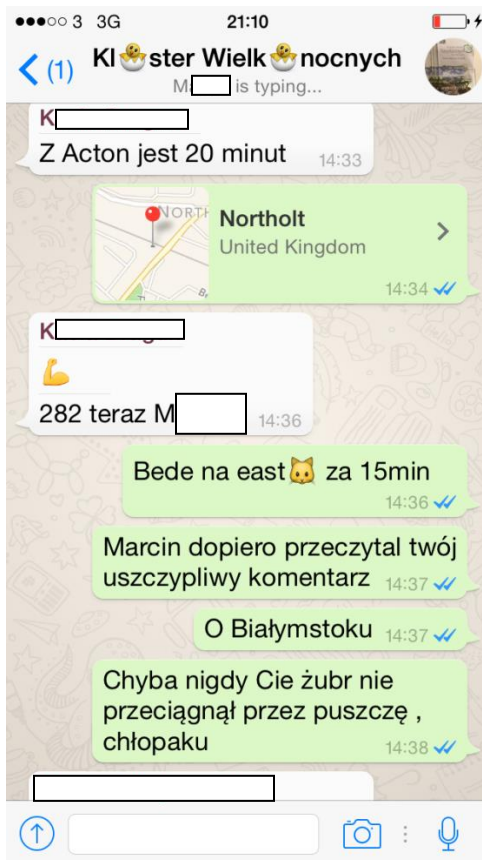
Image 5 An example of WhatsApp group chat: cote as kot (cat)

1

Slang version in Polish.

2

Misspelt to mean exactly 'I'm going has acetone'.



It's 20 minutes from Acton

(location sent)

[muscle]

282 now M__[dem]

I'll be on east[cat] in 15min

M__ only read your scathing comment

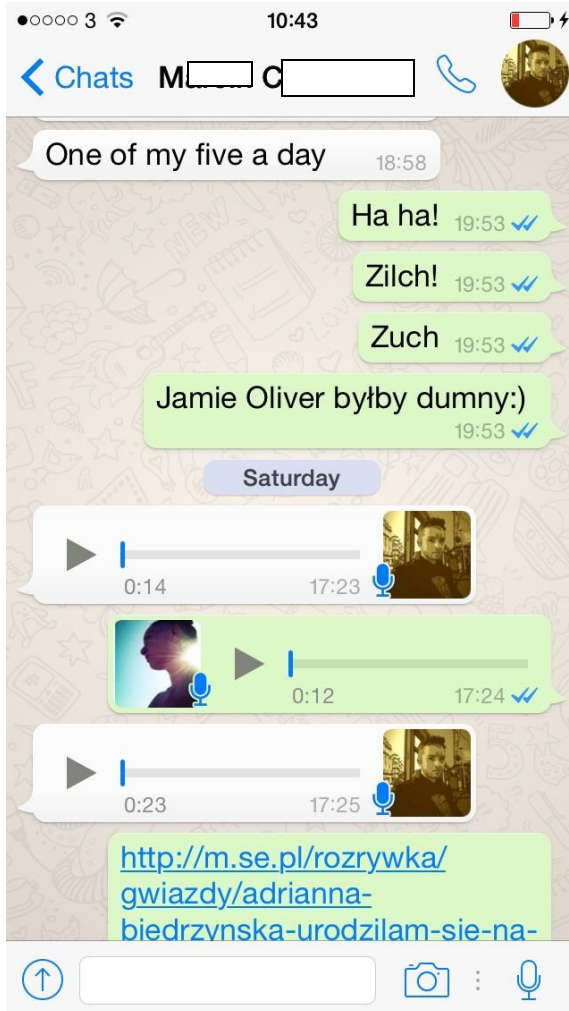
About Białystok

A bison must never have dragged you through the backwoods/wilderness, boy

LonHerSM_20150405_WA_082

Image 6 An example of WhatsApp group chat: cat and emoji.

In addition to these examples of emojis and emoticons, another way in which M translanguages intersemiotically is through mixing modes when she sends location, photos and voice messages via WhatsApp. Image 7 is an example where M communicates with her friends by sending audio files, which WhatsApp allows to send in the same way as a written message, as well as website links. In the previous example, Image 6, she sends a location alert to her friends.



M: *One of my five a day*³

F: Ha ha!

F: Zilch⁴!

F: Attaboy

F: Jamie Oliver would be proud:)

(Saturday)

F: (audio sent)

M: (audio sent)

F: (audio sent)

M: (link sent)

(LonHerSM_20150514_WA_053)

Image 8 An example of WhatsApp group chat using audio file and website link

Language play and multilingual creativity

Language play reflects M's heightened linguistic awareness as a multilingual speaker and artist who has a keen interest in language and communication, as well as her instinct to learn new words. In communication with AL, M (and AL) makes creative use of Polish/English calques. Both interactants are fluent and linguistically aware and their calques are playful and recognised as such.

Excerpt 7 (LonHerAud_20150402_AL_001)

N: we need to go about half eleven

3

Original in English.

4

Misspelling. M intended to write 'zuch'.

M: ah that's yours

AL: to jest Prince Regent Street to jest najbliższy um jakiś tam ten <it is Prince Regent Street it is the nearest um kind of that>

M: o proszę już obkukałaś ja to też <well well you've already checked⁵ it me too>

AL: znaczy nie wiem ten postcode wiem no wiem znam <I mean I don't know I have the knowledge of that *postcode* I know I know I'm familiar with>⁶

M: wiesz go po prostu <you simply have the knowledge of it>

AL: wiem go tam tam był ten sklep gdzie obserwowaliśmy <I have the knowledge of it there there was that shop where we used to observe>

M: no tra- tragiczny masz angielski po prostu (giggle) sorry polski <your English (giggle) *sorry* Polish is just tra- tragic>

AL: no ale jest tragiczny nie? <it is tragic isn't it>

M: nie bo ty to mówisz z *ironią* z *aronią* to mówisz po prostu <no, because you are saying that with irony with aronia (a name for a kind of berry) you're saying that simply>⁷

AL: tak? Dzięki fajnie że tak myślisz <am I? Thanks it's nice you think so>

M: mam taką nadzieję <I hope so>

AL: {nadzieja matka głupich} <{hope often blinks at a fool}>

In the above extract, AL is struggling with her Polish when the three interactants are figuring out the best way to get to the venue of M and N's meeting. AL recognises the postcode and contributes to the discussion. She directs her comment to M in Polish, but since the previous part of the interaction at the table was in English, she is phrasing her Polish sentences very badly from a grammatical and

5

M uses a playful word 'obkukać'. It is non-standard and used in writing solely in an informal context, e.g., online forums.

6

The verb 'znać' and 'wiedzieć' are both translated as 'to know'. 'Znać' refers to being acquainted or familiar with something or someone while 'wiedzieć' refers to having knowledge of something. AL consistently used the wrong verb in Polish, as a result of a direct translation from English.

7

M played on the similarity between the word 'ironia' (irony) and 'aronia' (aronia/chokeberry) in Polish.

lexical point of view. M acknowledges and uses a slang word 'obkukać' (=look up). AL then withdraws: she attempts to clarify that she does not know where exactly the venue is but that she is familiar with the postcode as it matches the postcode of the shop the team observed in the first phase of the project. AL is struggling to find the right Polish equivalent of the verb 'to know', which M picks up and turns into a joke. As she does, she plays with language herself, expressing a belief that AL's bad Polish is intentional and playing with the similarity of the words 'ironia' meaning irony and 'aronia' (name of berry) in Polish.

In Excerpt 8 which takes place straight after the last line of the previous excerpt, M switches her language and focus of conversation. She draws N back into the exchange as well. This shift is marked not only in the change of language back into English, but also in a marked pronunciation at the boundary.

Excerpt 8 (LonHerAud_20150402_AL_001)

M: ok listen up you guys (->change in register, marked pronunciation) um we can either go on Central Line you can either go to on Central Line

AL: that's good

M: to Mile End (.) that's so stupid

N: and District Line

M: and then District or Hammersmith to Plaistow or Play-stow

N: Plastow

AL: Plastow

M: exactly my point (.) and then bus two buses to choose from for eight minutes

N: ok so it's not very far from Plaistow (inaudible)

M: no

N: let's do that that seems sensible how long is it supposed to take

M: that's supposed to take thirty-three minutas (→ marked pron)

The pronunciation of the word 'Plaistow' is often seen as surprising for people who hear it for the first time. In this excerpt, M refers to this common uncertainty by saying 'Plaistow' in two ways: /plastou/ and /play-stow/. N immediately selects one of these options and corrects M. AL does the same thing. By doing that, both N and AL position M as less knowledgeable than they are. M responds by saying 'exactly my point', drawing attention to the fact her previous double pronunciation was intended as playful, rather than indicating uncertainty. Therefore, she repositions herself promptly before moving back to discussing the route.

At times, M's uncertainty about language use was genuine and M would ask N to correct her grammar or pronunciation, as was the case when N was asked to check M's blog post and helped her with the pronunciation of certain place names. Sometimes, M also mispronounced words and

immediately corrected herself. In Extract 9, language learning takes place in the form of language play. M selects the long /i:/ sound instead of the short /i/ in the pronunciation of 'twins'. The mispronounced word is then taken on and played with by both M and N. N plays down the fact that M mispronounced the word in the first place and turns the focus into the content. They both 'accept' the existence of the word 'tween' as a more desirable alternative to 'twin'.

Excerpt 9 (LonHerAud_20150304_MP_002, 11mins)

N: yeah yeah I know we're increasingly inseparable

M: Siamese twEEens. Tween's?

N: tweens?

M: who says tweens?

N: I'd love to be a tween

M laughs a small twin

N: I didn't yeah I didn't miss being a twin but tween tween

M: it's quite something isn't it

N: yes

(11:52)

7.2 *Voicing*

Earlier in Section 5.6, we discussed that 'putting on different voices' seems to be one of the approaches that M and her collaborator employ in their artistic work. M is also skilled in using this technique in her everyday interactions. There are frequent examples of voicing, i.e. imitating others' ways of speaking, either of characters from plays or real people. This is a good example of the Bakhtinian notions of 'voice' and '(double-)voicing' (e.g. Bakhtin, 1963/1984), where utterances (what has been articulated) carry with them 'tastes' of specific speakers and contexts, which can be re-articulated and recycled as well as being altered significantly and re-inscribed with new meanings. In Excerpt 10, M and N mock the way of speaking by a person (anonymised as P in the transcript) they had recently met. The person concerned speaks in a very soft way and focuses on keeping fit. M marks her voicing with the phrase 'he'll be like' twice in the excerpt. The double voicing is carried through a stylised and imagined reported speech of P, in M's attempt to critically evaluate the way of speaking of P who is absent. N follows M's lead and continues the double voicing in his turns by imitating P's manner of speaking, despite M's self-depreciation 'we're such bitches'.

Excerpt 10 (LonHerAud_20150304_MP_003, 03:03)

(M is looking for something on her laptop to show N)

M: one sec one sec one sec (quietly) where is it

N: what are you looking for

M: [singing]

N: ta dam yeah exactly

M: (laughs) yeah anyway so

N: I'll let that pass

M: so you need to write to P

N: yes

M: and tell him hey there's this thing d'you wanna come with us and then **he'll be like** yeah
sure whatever (quietly, aspirated voice, mocking P) yeah sure

N: (aspirated, mocking P) yes sure I think that will be quite nice

M: we're such bitches

N: yes

(M laughs)

N: it will be very interesting

M: (softly, imitating P) but that's gonna conflict with my pilates class

N: yes (laughs)

M: oh we're such bitches

(N laughs)

M: (checks prices for tickets to the event, exclaims:) it's 10 pounds oh my god (.) and then
he'll be like yeah yeah I'll come with you and then we'll then you'll email him the day
after that oh actually there's no tickets

N: oh sold out can you organise some tickets

M: can you organise some tickets I think this is how we

N: we'll try it we'll try it

Performing a persona may also refer to taking on roles and acting out these roles in everyday interactions. In the following recording from M's conversations with her flatmates on the day of the UK elections, M takes on a role of an educator. T was allowed to vote in the elections and although she has little interest and understanding of politics, she was encouraged by other flatmates to participate. According to the recordings, T went to vote but her vote was deemed invalid as she put a

tick rather than a cross on the ballot paper. In the evening, they were talking about the first predicted results that were coming in.

Excerpt 11 (LonHerAud_20150508_MP_HM_001, from around 10 mins)

T: oh ok if Labour have if Labour'd have lost that's really bad

M: let's find out shall we [checks news on her phone]

T: so again can you guys remind me (M screaming loudly) ...the Conservatives what do they want

(M and T giggle)

M: no let's go over the basic stuff (emphatic:) cross and a tick

(C laughs)

T (laughing:) ok no no no no

C: which one do you do on a ballot paper a cross or a tick

T: cro= now I know it's a crucifix don't I

C: it's not a crucifix (2) it's a cross

T: ok I know it's a cross

M ignores T's serious question and brings back the topic of T's wasted vote through double voicing and a parody. She speaks through the voice of an educator demonstrating something basic to a young student, clear, step-by-step, but patronising to audiences ('let's go over the basic stuff'). The difference between cross and tick is unduly exaggerated by emphatically highlighting the difference between a cross and a tick. By doing so, M makes her relationship to the utterance clear, i.e. she is making fun of T. All three participants recognise this interaction as playful. Another participant, C, goes along with M's double voicing and asks T a question with a multiple choice in the manner of classroom quiz. T accepts her mistake, but chooses to use language play to diffuse the attention from her mistake. Her deliberate use of language play is evident in her incomplete word, 'cro', followed by a self-initiated repair with an alternative word borrowed from religious context, crucifix. Later in the conversation (Excerpt 12), M checks her phone and reacts to a message that her friend R is not going to be available to meet her. As she's telling others about it, she puts on a voice imitating R and then switches to her normal way of speaking to express her opinion about the situation. In this way, M gives voice to the absent friend and brings her co-present flatmates to the exchange.

Excerpt 12 (LonHerAud_20150508_MP_HM_001, 16:40)

M: I was gonna check what R___ C___ (putting on a voice:) oh darling it's too late let's let's meet tomorrow (in her own voice:) fuck you R___ d'you want to hang out with your

friend A___ cause she's a better friend I'm going home now I'm too exhausted oh fuck
you ...who isn't I'm supposed to meet him tomorrow (2) {tut tut tut}

This excerpt is also an example of M interacting in a number of different contexts at the same time: the physical context of her kitchen in conversation with her flatmates, a conversation with a friend who updates her on the election results, and a conversation with R via her mobile phone. The co-present flatmates are experiencing her participation in all these contexts as they are only partially drawn into these exchanges.

7.3. *Singing and multimodality*

Pennycook & Otsuji (2015, p.76) observed that singing takes place in the workplace such as kitchens and restaurants and argued that it could potentially become part of spatial repertoires if it is taken up, responded to or talked about by others. The singing they have observed are seemingly non-interactive 'monological moments' when people sing to themselves while waiting or working. In our fieldwork, singing was observed frequently. M is at ease with adding a tune to whatever she is saying or thinking. But different from what is observed by Pennycook & Otsuji, M's singing is more interactive. Her use of singing, in particular, the change from one communicative mode to another and vice versa (e.g. from singing to speaking) is strategic. It was either adding a tune to whatever M was saying making interaction more playful (e.g. Excerpt 13), mitigating the degree of seriousness and business undertone and contributing to her easy-going persona (e.g. Excerpt 14). M also uses her performative way of speaking (including changes in pitch and tone of voice) to manage the topic change, as we shall see in Excerpt 16.

The singing that M does often happens to be well-known pop songs or tunes from TV series, etc. In the excerpt below, M is having problems uploading photos to from her phone to her laptop and can't figure out why. AL encourages M not to give up trying (making a connection to an earlier conversation in which M told AL that she doesn't like people just giving up and not going for what they want to achieve) and M reacts by singing a verse from a song with related lyrics.

Excerpt 13 (LonHerAud_20150502_AL_001)

M: ale to na Icloudzie chyba jest jakoś zasejwowane nie wiem właśnie trochę się poddaje
tutaj < but I think it's somehow *saved* on icloud I just don't know I'm slightly giving up
here>

AL: nie poddawaj się musisz walczyć < don't give up you have to fight>

M: [singing] nie poddaj się weź życie jakim jest [speaking:] Artur Reich taki artysta <[singing]
don't give up take life as it is [speaking:] Artur Reich the artist>

AL: znam to <I know it>

M: no właśnie nie poddaj się? Sorry ale to chyba nie po polsku jest < exactly 'nie poddaj się'?
Sorry but that's not in Polish I don't think>

(AL laughs)

M: (laughs) *sorry*

AL: może to 'wa' jest takie wiesz *silent reduced* < *maybe this 'wa' is you know silent reduced*>

M: [singing, AL joins in] nie podda(wa)j się <[singing, AL joins in] nie podda(wa)j się>

(both laugh)

M breaks into a tune also as she shifts out from her conversation with N in which they look at ways of arranging tickets to an event by involving a friend. The sung persona is more business-focused. This instance of translanguaging between communicative modes allows M to express her anxiety that they are not being as productive and efficient as she would have liked, but without initiating a serious conversation where she would have stepped out of her usual way of being as an easy-going, go-with-the-flow person.

Excerpt 14 (LonHerAud_20150304_MP_003)

M: [sings:] so this is us doing the um arts council application [singing:] not [normal voice:] but it's important

N: it's a planning session we'll get onto it in the last in the last half an hour probably

Other use of different communicative resources includes change in pitch and tone of voice. Aside from illustrating translanguaging practices in action, the excerpt also gives some insights into the creative process of the play, 'Untitled', discussed in Section 6.1 and the participants' perspectives on heritage. M and N were brainstorming about the scene of peeling potatoes when they started to play around with the notion of tradition: what the 'tradition' was and how to enact the traditional practices in front of the camera. Suggestions included peeling potatoes into water and sitting 'kind of peasant style' on a chair.

Excerpt 15 (LonHerAud_20150320_AL_001, 46:25)

N: good off to yours

M: [excited voice] let's peel some potatoes

N: let's peel some potatoes

M: [high singing voice] ya:y

N: what d'you want to peel them into do you want to peel them into water that's the tradition isn't it

M: yeah

N: newspaper and water so if we give you this what would you would you sit kind of peasant style on a chair

(M squeaks)

N: with your potatoes

In Excerpt 16, M and Ad (a friend) talk about being on strike in Switzerland. Both Ad and M use English at the turning point in their interaction. Ad speaks in Polish and then repeats the last phrase in English. M uses her performative way of speaking to close off the topic of being on strike and turns back to their ongoing card game.

Excerpt 16 (LonHerAud_20150522_MP_HM_001, around 10 mins)

Ad: rano do pracy a po poludniu na manifestacje <going to work in the morning and in the afternoon for a demonstration>

M: acha (giggles)

Ad: czy odwrotnie czy other way round nie wiem <or the other way around or *other way round* I don't know>

M: (performatively:) whatever (.) dobra no to um to kto teraz? Teraz ja? <*whatever* (.) ok so um who's turn is it? Me now?>

(they go back to playing cards)

M imitates certain sounds from time to time, instead of verbalising her thoughts. In Excerpt 17, instead of directly saying that everything just slotted into place, she mimics the sounds of things being slotted into place.

Excerpt 17(LonHerAud_20150304_MP_002m 05:18)

M: the reason why I said it is because everything just [non-verbal sounds indicating things slotting into place]

N: mm

7.4 Metacommentary on semiotic resources

While discussing their theatre piece, M and N often considered different ways of expressing meanings including a range of semiotic resources, from using multiple languages (including what they describe as 'made-up' languages), inaccurate translations, artefacts, background film, inter-titles, clothes, movement, gesture, song, silence, lighting, space, etc.

N initiates the topic of clothing and suggests including some use of it in the 10 min scratch that they are due to perform on 1st April. M makes a side comment on the 'nice, mellow music' in the cafe. N agrees very briefly and brings the topic of clothing back suggesting that a piece of clothing could have a word on it. M questions the reason for it and asks for justification. (LonHerFn_20150310_AL_004)

They are thinking of including moments of silence in the piece and N suggests lowering the light for that time as well. They are planning to communicate with numerous modalities here, showing awareness of the different meanings they could convey using them. They discuss the use of a screen (to display translations),

movement, clothes, space (dividing the stage into two parts which carry two individual stories), synchronisation of speech and images on the screen. M brings up the practicalities of having complex synchronising to do. (LonHerFn_20150310_AL_004)

M then suggests making an outline of the piece with timings but the moment they start doing it, N wants to talk about 'his song' in the piece. They agree that singing the song should be a requirement to get cake in their institutional lives (in the piece M and N's characters are the last two contestants in a reality show similar to Big Brother). M is making notes about this stage of their piece and N sings a short song. M says that her insides boil when she hears about his song and she laughs.
(LonHerFn_20150326_AL_007)

They both show great awareness of the different affordances and limitations that each of these semiotic resources offers them and of the potential complications of using them in a theatre piece.

They also explicitly refer to visual means of expression to convey meanings in other, non-performative, contexts. Here N refers to the meaning of punctuation: N's uncertainty of the idea is expressed through his command to put a number of question marks next to a note in M's notebook.

This leads to a conversation about including real people in the piece and M suggests having children playing the researchers. N isn't very keen on the idea and tells M to make a note of it in her notebook and put "quite a few question marks" next to it.
(LonHerFn_20150313_AL_005)

The team have noticed that M often wears a headscarf in the way that resembles those worn by village women. It is particularly unusual headwear for young women. She wears it in performances (e.g. her piece for *Lie back and think of England*). In a public performance, she started the piece with putting on the scarf. AL asked about the reason behind M's wearing her scarf and the meaning of it.

AL: we've seen you a lot um so far wearing a scarf

M: (excited voice) headscarf

AL: headscarf yes what's what's the meaning [what's the significance

M: [I'm reconnecting with my roots

Having been probed further, M explained that although the scarf potentially served as a provocation, her habit of wearing a scarf started as a joke, but had also practical reasons (protects her hairstyle and provides protection from the cold and wind) and potentially served as a provocation.

M: =I think it's more provocative I think it's it's it's a provocative thing I think it's a way of sort of making a statement I mean I'm not flattering myself and I've ...of yeah it's like a big statement and everybody like pays attention to what I do like probably

(AL laughs)

M: people just don't give a fuck quite frankly but I like to clock people's reactions when they see oh um a white woman wearing a scarf and it's obviously not not not a Muslim thing not

fully Muslim but it sort of rings a bit like Muslim so it's quite traditional but actually it's not so what is it it's just probably a hipster basically um that's me it's just like it's kind of being empowered of wearing a headscarf I don't know I've worn it first time as a joke and then now I just wear it because it's convenient because it actually keeps my hair intact so it's practical reasons as well but also I think it's like some sort of connection with

M seems to have been constructing her thoughts on the significance of the headscarf as a semiotic resource aloud as she went along during the interview. Her reflexive statement about the provocative meaning of the scarf seems to be triggered by the question. She is trying to give a meaningful response and possibly to make a big deal. The response she gave, however, is vague, clichés-like and self-contradictory. She hedged the symbolic and faith-related value of a white woman wearing a scarf several times: first she stated that 'it is obviously not not not a Muslim thing', and then she modified her proposition by saying 'not fully Muslim but it sort of rings a bit like Muslim. So it's quite traditional'. She then accepted that 'actually it's not so what is it, it's just probably a hipster actually', hence negating her previous offers of seemingly grand and sophisticated explanations. It is quite a way from her first response whereby she claims that she uses it to connect with her roots, i.e., with the village, eastern Poland style. Like some previous examples, here again, M is playing around with stereotypes and possibly recycling some circulating discourse such as 'reconnecting with one's roots', 'making a statement', and 'being empowered'.

8. Participatory performance

M's artistic work is often designed around or for audience participation whereby the role of audience is transformed into that of fellow performers and contributors, which coincides with the TLANG project's participatory research design. In M's work, the extent of audience participation is big and bold. For example, in one performance art piece, M invites the audience to join dots on her body. She gives her narrative and instructions as below:

“When I was 5 I asked my mother whether freckles on my body are something I should be worried about (suspecting they were brought on by my negligible washing manner). Mother explained that we are all born with our unique set of ‘family marks’ – as she called them – “No two people share the same pattern. This is our form of identification”. Although I was pleased to learn that the freckles are nothing abnormal – I also felt a sudden anxiety: my mother won't be able to recognize me if I covered all of my ‘family marks!’”

“Today I still feel like a fraud/ fake self from many years ago. I am an older version of the child I was back then. But my unique pattern of freckles I could be identified by changed & is changing still: new freckles, scares, blemishes and imperfections cover my skin.”

“Have a look at my skin. Inspect it closely. Take your time. Find the dots (freckles, scares⁸, blemishes). Join the dots using the paints and paint brushes available. Let's create a map. Have a look at your own freckles. What does your map look like? Look closely. Take your time.” (The manual for Joining Dots by M)

Her collaborator, N, when talking to ZH, commented that it was a brave thing to perform a piece like this, as she would put herself in a vulnerable position at the audience's mercy.

In the spirit of participatory performance, M invited the researchers to take part in her performance during the observation period. The ‘participation observation’, central to ethnography, has taken on a new meaning to the research team as we fieldworkers became performers. The cleverness of M's plot is that we did not need to be someone we were not. Rather, we remained in our researchers' capacity either as being an inquisitive interviewer (AL in *Lie Back and think of England*) or as observers of the last two people in the space (ZH & AL in D piece). While we played the roles of researchers in her performance, the boundaries between theatre performance and everyday activities became blurred. The following sections describe our participatory experience and rich perspectives it resulted in.

8.1 An inquisitive interviewer

AL took part in one of the sessions in which M and N recorded two videos for the e-publication with the theme “*Lie Back and Think of England*” (the details about the piece can be found in Section 6.1 & Section 7.2, Excerpt 15). M asked AL to bring a camera, to help out as a cameraman and also to bring interview questions with her. In the performance, AL was asked to actually take part in the video. Not much guidance was given to AL before the recording started.

M explains her idea: potatoes play a central part in her piece, which is more elaborate than N's and includes a few separate scenes. M asks me for the interview questions and I hand her over a piece of paper with questions printed out. She asks me to ask her a few of the questions on camera as part of the piece. Strictly speaking, it's only my voice that's supposed to be on camera. We decide to shoot the first part in N's tiny garden. M is wearing a red dress with white polka dots, has a scarf tied on her head and is sitting on a small stool. She has a pot with water in front of her, an old newspaper on the ground next to the pot and a small bag of potatoes on her knees. She's peeling potatoes. I'm supposed to walk in and start a short conversation with her. It all works out well. We then shoot the other few scenes – M boiling potatoes and answering my questions (her character comes across as ignorant and rejecting her own East European heritage), draining potatoes, eating...and then the final shot from outside the house through the window: M stuffs her face with potatoes to practice English pronunciation. (LonHerFn_20150320_AL_006)

8.2 Performing research

ZH and AL were invited to participate in the D piece, playing their own role as researchers. After an initial hesitation, the invitation was accepted and ZH and AL became part of the “theatre company” for a while. It does not mean that they participated in rehearsals or contributed much to the design of the performance. In fact, there was not much discussion about their role in the performance altogether. All that was said was that they would observe, with ZH sitting on a chair and taking notes and AL moving around the stage with a camera.

For ZH and AL being an artist did not quite come naturally. They both commented on feeling like outsiders, imposters, and ‘not real artists’.

After the break, we regrouped in the café, but we soon realised that A left the equipment upstairs in the backstage room. Three of them were back in their discussion about the piece. AL & I decided to go back to the backstage and waited there. While we were waiting, some artists popped in. They seem to be very friendly. ‘Hi, I’m Josh. I’m from Manchester. Which piece are you doing tonight?’ AL and I struggled to put up some convincing answers ‘we are with xx’s group. We are not the real artists’. They were sounding out each other. (LonHerFn_20150401_ZH_009)

We stayed in the room and waited for the performances to start. As we were sitting in the room, a young guy came up to us and introduced himself. His name was Josh. He seemed very friendly and was looking to strike a conversation with someone. I wondered whether he was nervous. Maybe it was just that I was projecting my own slight nervousness on him, as I imagine I’d chat to people trying to cover up that I’m not so confident about my performance. Neither ZH nor I had much to say to Josh (or anyone else) – I felt. I felt like an outsider. An imposter, in fact. Especially when, a moment later, the main organiser came in with another woman and started addressing the artists in the room. We were among them and I felt that the main organiser excluded ZH and me from this communication, but the other woman – who didn’t know who we were – was partly turning to us as well as she was talking to people. (LonHerFn_20150401_AL_010)

The participatory performance gave the research team, ZH, LW and AL, a chance to observe the same performance from very different perspectives. ZH and AL were part of the performance but observed it from different angles and with different levels of focus and details as the result of their different positions within the piece: ZH was sitting down in a corner with a notebook in her hands, while AL's brief on the day was to move with the flow of the performance. She was an observer with a camcorder on a tripod. LW, on the other hand, was an audience member, who, however, adopted a different role from other members of the audience as he was recording the performance on a video camera from a corner of the stage. Here are the descriptions of the same performance from these three perspectives.



So the show began. The audience went quiet and M and N took their position within the ropes held up by 4 volunteers. Here came the signal from M to A who was right at the back row in charge of the music and projector. Then A nodded to AL, who began to walk towards the stage front with a camcorder. I followed suit, taking up my observer's corner at the stage. AL pointed a remote control (which in fact was our audio recorder) at the screen and with that, the characters came into life. M went to the central position, faced the audience and began to put up her scarf. She wrapped up her scarf carefully around her hair. (She was wrapped up in scarf as well in a video recording on Facebook). I was wondering what the scarf was used here for. Was it to signal that she was stepping into the character or she was hiding her identity under another one?

The siren went and N began his line, 'feeding time' I noticed that the vowel in the word feeding was not long enough, but good enough. M looked up and then lighting went up too. She said 'I'm not hungry'. Her voice projected well and shows her training - I must say. N began to sing a song about raindrop in English. The lyric was funny 'on his red hair' and there was some giggle from the audience. At some point, AL left her camcorder and walked to the back corner of the stage. She squatted down and observed tentatively. I hope the audience could get the idea that AL and I were the observers of what was going inside the ropes, which symbolises a stage or space.

The focus was then moved to the cake box which was now placed in the middle of the stage. There is a dialogue going on. M: I'm so fucking hungry (strong language there!) ... N: I cannot stand this. This is going to rotten the teeth.' M made a long commentary about the cake. It was not just an ordinary cake. It was Battenburg cake. The cake was named after Battenburg but became popular in Britain. There were quite a lot of layers of meaning going on there.

At some point, the volunteers moved and changed the ropes from a square into a line with M and N stood on either side. A also took the opportunity to change her

observation spot to the other side of stage and moved the camcorder closer to the actors. I thought her movement timed well with the dynamics of the show. N got the racket out of a carbon box and there was some giggle from the audience. Were they surprised by the prop which N was keen to hide from the view of audience? M also got a racket out. One volunteer threw a shuttlecock to N and here began the match. While they were playing, they were counting and alternating in different languages (I could tell one is German with my rudimentary German, but not sure about other languages). They were shouting 'Experiment' and then 'fail' when the shuttlecock fell to the ground. When M said 'experiment', I could hear that a rhotic 'R' coming through. Was it deliberate? Or was it just her Polish accent with too much going on?

... They echoed each other's question 'who won then?' One of them said 'It is taking part that count. Practices makes perfect'. I was a bit lost at that time. So what does the match symbolise? It is quite clever to count in different languages, but the presence of different languages was not more than that. There was not any speech made in German or Polish as they discussed the other day.

The show ended with a big applause. M shouted out the volunteers' names as a way of saying thank you. We all helped with tidying up the stage and putting props back into the boxes.

LonHerFn_20150401_ZH_009

I don't remember much from the actual performance. I knew where everyone was and tried to do what I was told to – walk with the camera, show that I'm observing, not to worry that I'm disturbing the audience. I had the camera on the tripod and I shifted its position a few times during their 10-minute performance. I also left it at some point and crouched to observe from a different angle.

Both M and N are quite happy with their own performance, although they did get some negative feedback. Someone said that the piece they presented was self-indulgent and quite a few people didn't understand what they were trying to convey. M and N deflect these comments agreeing that they are on "a completely different level" and saying they are challenging the established ways and "doing something that hasn't been done before". N says that this kind of art comes with the peril that people won't always understand what you mean. One of the suggestions made by someone in the audience was that they should make the context more explicit. N disagrees and says that it's a good thing to leave things open to people's interpretation. M makes a strong point that these days everything is about big labels, like "diversity" and that makes people understand art in these categories.

LonHerFn_20150401_AL_010

Before the break, M asked for four volunteers for their act. They were needed to hold a long rope, which acted as boundaries.

After the break, M's act was on. I made a video of it. AL and ZH were part of the act and they walked onto the stage. ZH sat on the side and performed her observer's role. AL moved several times across the stage with a camcorder, placing it in different places.

There was the use of different languages, especially in the counting when M and N were performing the badminton sequence.

One thing I noticed is that there were different layers/circles of observation/observers. AL and ZH were observers IN the act. To us, they were part of the show. I was observing, but as I was recording it, my role was a little different from that of the audience, who were observing everything together, including my observing and AL's and ZH's observing.

LonHerFn_20150401_LW_011

9. Making sense of it all

On the stage he was natural, simple, affecting;

'Twas only that when he was off he was acting.

(Retaliation by Oliver Goldsmith, 1730–1774 in Braithwaite, 1909)

For M, life is a performance and the world is a stage. Her performance ‘in the world’ and performance ‘on stage’ feed into each other. Her life becomes the stage of her social and identity acts, embellished by her theatrical skills. M’s performance in life and work is highly original, replete with multiple voices, strategic stereotyping, acts of playful subversiveness, meta commentaries and reflection.

- Performance as a business. In learning the ropes of a performance artist, M relies on her business instincts and understands the need for, and in fact has devoted most of her energy to, collaboration, networking, sponsorship-seeking and self-promotion through social media.
- Performance as work in progress. For M and her team, art-making is work in progress and created in the state of flux. They thrive on ambiguity, spontaneity, and going with the flow, despite uncertainty, anxiety and chaos that come with it.
- Performing Polishness. Being often labelled as a Polish actress, or ‘a token Polish girl in the crowd’, M employs a subversive yet playful; strategic yet practical approach to manage the essentialised identities ascribed by others.
- Performance of language. M’s translanguaging practices are imbued with (performance) creativity, such as language play, double voicing, singing and mobilisation of semiotic resources. These practices foreground creativity employed by M, a multilingual speaker and trained artist, to subvert norms of behaviours that are imposed by social structures and to push and break linguistic and cultural boundaries.
- Participatory performance. The boundaries between theatre performance and everyday activities become further blurred and, participation observation, central to ethnography, takes on a new meaning, when the research team was invited to take part in M’s performances. This adds another layer of complexity to the notion of performativity and to interpreting what we have observed and experienced during the data collection.

M is fully aware of the opportunities and constraints she has in her professional and personal life, what other people and institutions expect of her, and what she can and cannot do. But more importantly, she knows how to make the best use of what she has and what the environment and institutional structures can provide, and she does so in a very strategic, creative, playful and subversive way. Although there are many challenges and obstacles in life, professionally, financially, linguistically, emotionally, and things can be rather difficult at times, M is very determined and is able to achieve a great deal. She does not mind ambiguity or complexity; in fact, she seems to cherish them and through her playfulness and creativity, she is able to subvert many of the impositions ranging on her and remains an overall optimistic character. She also deliberately constructs for herself a complex and multifaceted persona (such as easy-going, sophisticated, artistic, etc.), through

self-mockery, strategic essentialism, double-voicing, translanguaging and multimodality. To us and many people who come into contact with her, M is a mysterious character, one that appears to be close to easy-going yet never completely comprehensible, which adds to her attraction.

There is no doubt that she is trying to make sense of her own life. She wants to make friends with a variety of people, including us as researchers, partly to expand her horizons and create more opportunities for herself and partly reflect on her own identity. Getting involved in the research project is also part of her strategy of making sense of the world around her. But the way she goes about with her everyday life and the different persona she acts out present a real challenge to us in terms of trying to understand who she really is and her thinking process. One can never be certain what is real-life and what is performed for a special audience for a special effect. Perhaps that is the whole point of what M wants to achieve: life is a performance and the world is her stage. She is the star of the show and has the audience's attention. She can put on a fascinating show with the resources she manages to utilise, and the effect is that people who see her are intrigued about her and spend their lives trying to make sense of who she is.

10. References

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