The Handbook of **Language and Globalization**

Edited by

Nikolas Coupland

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Contents

List of Illustrations viii
Acknowledgments x
Introduction: Sociolinguistics in the Global Era 1
NIKOLAS COUPLAND

Part I Global Multilingualism, World Languages, and Language Systems 29

1 Globalization, Global English, and World English(es): Myths and Facts 31
SALIKOKO S. MUFWENE

2 Language Systems 56
ABRAM DE SWAAN

3 The Global Politics of Language: Markets, Maintenance, Marginalization, or Murder? 77
TOVE SKUTNABB-KANGAS AND ROBERT PHILLIPSON

4 World Languages: Trends and Futures 101
ULRICH AMMON

5 Language Policy and Globalization 123
THOMAS RICENTO

6 Panlingual Globalization 142
JONATHAN POOL

7 The Spread of Global Spanish: From Cervantes to *reggaetón* 162
CLARE MAR-MOLINERO

8 New National Languages in Eastern Europe 182
BRIGITTA BUSCH

Part II Global Discourse in Key Domains and Genres 201

9 Localizing the Global on the Participatory Web 203
JANNIS ANDROUTSOPOULOS

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

10 Globalizing the Local: The Case of an Egyptian Superhero Comic 232
THEO VAN LEEUWEN AND USAMA SULEIMAN
11 Language and the Globalizing Habitus of Tourism: Toward A Sociolinguistics of Fleeting Relationships 255
ADAM JAWORSKI AND CRISPIN THURLOW
12 Globalization and Language Teaching 287
DAVID BLOCK
13 Discursive Constructions of Global War and Terror 305
ADAM HODGES
14 Has God Gone Global? Religion, Language, and Globalization 323
ANNABELLE MOONEY

Part III Language, Values, and Markets under Globalization 347

15 Language as Resource in the Globalized New Economy 349
MONICA HELLER
16 Language and Movement in Space 366
JAN BLOMMAERT AND JIE DONG
17 Indexing the Local 386
BARBARA JOHNSTONE
18 Ecolinguistics and Globalization 406
ARRAN STIBBE
19 The Chinese Discourse of Human Rights and Glocalization 426
SHI-XU
20 Meanings of 'Globalization': East and West 447
PETER GARRETT
21 Languages and Global Marketing 475
HELEN KELLY-HOLMES

Part IV Language, Distance, and Identities 493

22 Shadows of Discourse: Intercultural Communication in Global Contexts 495
CLAIRE KRAMSCH AND ELIZABETH BONER
23 Unraveling Post-Colonial Identity through Language 520
RAKESH M. BHATT
24 At the Intersection of Gender, Language, and Transnationalism 540
INGRID PILLER AND KIMIE TAKAHASHI
25 Globalization and Gay Language 555
WILLIAM L. LEAP
26 Metroethnicities and Metrolanguages 575
JOHN C. MAHER
27 Popular Cultures, Popular Languages, and Global Identities 592
ALASTAIR PENNYCOOK

28 Global Representations of Distant Suffering 608
LILIE CHOULIARAKI
29 Global Media and the Regime of Lifestyle 625
DAVID MACHIN AND THEO VAN LEEUWEN

Index 644

Illustrations

4.1 Studies of German as a foreign language worldwide: Quartiles of density. Data from StADaF 2005: 8–15 107

4.2 Shares of languages in science publications, 1880–2005: overall average percentage for biology, chemistry, medicine, physics, and mathematics. Sources: Tsunoda 1983; Ammon 1998; the author's own analysis, with the help of Abdulkadir Topal and Vanessa Gawrisch, of *Biological Abstracts*, *Chemical Abstracts*, *Physics Abstracts* and *Mathematical Reviews* 115

4.3 Shares of languages in publications of the social sciences, years 1880–2006: overall average percentage for anthropology, political science, economics, and sociology. Shares of other languages are smaller than 1 percent during entire time span. Sources: *International Bibliography of the Social Sciences*, IBSS; the author's own analysis, with help of Vanessa Gawrisch 116

6.1 Globalization and unilingualization. Created by author 143

6.2 Low-density language dilemma. Created by author 144

6.3 Low-density language dilemma with diversity popular. Created by author 145

6.4 Simple lexical resource. Source: http://www.erlang.com.ru/euskara/?basque. Author: Kirill Panfilov. © Erlang. Data retrieved 26 January 2010. Used with permission 150

6.5 Complex lexical resource. Source: Digital South Asia Library. Author: Henry George Raverty, in *A Dictionary of the Puk'hto, Pus'hto, or Language of the Afghans: With Remarks on the Originality of the Language, and Its Affinity to Other Oriental Tongues* (Williams and Norgate, 1867, p. 146). Used with permission 151

6.6 Graphical interpretation of denotations. Created by author 152

6.7 Illustration of the need for translation inference. Created by author 154

9.1 Screenshot of "Schwappe Productions – An Preller." Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icmraBAN4ZE 213

10.1	Zein, the last pharaoh. From AK Comics (2005) *The Year of the Beast, Zein* 4, Cairo	236
10.2	Narrative box. From AK Comics (2005) *The Year of the Beast, Zein* 4, Cairo	244
10.3	Graphic prosody substitutes (English version). From AK Comics (2005) *The Year of the Beast, Zein* 4, Cairo	247
10.4	Graphic prosody substitutes (Arabic version). From AK Comics (2005) *The Year of the Beast, Zein* 4, Cairo	247
10.5	Temporal structure of exclamations in English. From AK Comics (2005) *The Year of the Beast, Zein* 4, Cairo	250
10.6	Temporal structure of exclamations in Arabic. From AK Comics (2005) *The Year of the Beast, Zein* 4, Cairo	250
10.7	Graphic representation of intonation and loudness in English. From AK Comics (2005) *The Year of the Beast, Zein* 4, Cairo	250
10.8	Graphic representation of intonation and loudness in Arabic. From AK Comics (2005) *The Year of the Beast, Zein* 4, Cairo	251
10.9	The graphic representation of agony in English. From AK Comics (2005) *The Year of the Beast, Zein* 4, Cairo	252
10.10	The graphic representation of agony in Arabic. From AK Comics (2005) *The Year of the Beast, Zein* 4, Cairo	252
11.1	'can you all say Whaka?' (= Extract 2, line 1); April 2003. Photo © A. Jaworski	263
11.2	'Te Whakarewarewa-tanga-o-te-ope-taua-a-Wahiao' (= Extract 2, lines 12–13); April 2003. Photo © A. Jaworski	263
11.3	Postcard from Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch. John Hinde (UK) Ltd. Photo © C. Underhill	265
11.4	Hongi photographic studio, Tamaki Maori Village; April 2003. Photo © A. Jaworski	270
16.1	Posters at an Evangelical church. © Jan Blommaert	371
16.2	Moroccan bakery. © Jan Blommaert	373
16.3	Albanian poster. © Jan Blommaert	373
16.4	Rates at a phone shop. © Jan Blommaert	374
16.5	Advertisements for money transfer services at a phone shop. © Jan Blommaert	375
16.6	'Liar Channel.' © Jan Blommaert	376

Introduction: Sociolinguistics in the Global Era

NIKOLAS COUPLAND

The End of Globalization?

The gestation period of this Handbook has been an interesting time for observers of globalization. The international 'credit crunch,' apparently triggered by irresponsible over-lending in the United States but in reality the result of financial laxness on a wider scale, has led to severe economic retrenchment in many parts of the world. Several nation-states have moved to restrict some of the more obvious excesses of global capitalism, initially in the banking and finance sectors. But there are indications of a more general global wariness about flows of money and people, which suggests that national authority and national political initiative are not, after all, in terminal decline. There has also been repeated visible political resistance to fast capitalist globalization: for example the estimated 35,000 people who marched in London in March 2009 in opposition to the agenda of the G20 summit – a meeting of the leaders of the twenty most economically powerful nations – under the slogans "Put people first" and "Jobs, justice, climate." Should we conclude that, after all, this is not such a "runaway world" (Giddens 2002) of rampant globalization?

Academic commentators, including several contributors to this Handbook, observe that, whatever globalization is, it isn't an altogether new phenomenon. Indeed, 'it's nothing new' proves to be one of the least new things to say about globalization, but it is an important observation. As, for example, Mufwene (this volume) points out, colonization in its various modes has been characteristic of more aggressive and more benign encounters between peoples throughout history. Colonization in different eras and contexts meant transnational expansion of economic, military, and cultural sorts. It certainly reshaped global arrangements, including linguistic ones. We are also historically familiar with 'empire,' old and new (Hardt and Negri 2000), in the British case from the mid-seventeenth century, and many have interpreted globalization as latter-day imperialist hegemony, often in the form of westernization or Americanization or McDonaldization (or

other, even more inventive, neologisms of this kind – see Mooney, this volume). So why all this fuss about globalization now?

As Kellner (1989) points out, large-scale shifts to more globally based economic arrangements were predicted and theorized well before our own time. Key voices on *both* sides of early ideological debates about capitalism predicted an increasing globalization of capitalist markets. Adam Smith, for example, anticipated the emergence of a (beneficial and liberalizing, in his view) world market system, while Karl Marx saw global emancipation for the proletariat in the demise of national interests and frameworks and in the onset of internationally grounded revolution. Transnational interdependencies and influences are, once again then, 'nothing new.'

So, as we embark on an exploration of language and globalization, do we in fact believe that globalization currently exists as a new social condition, or that it deserves extensive treatment across the disciplines? Is globalization an economic experiment in retreat, or perhaps a faddish academic concept of the 1990s that refers to historical social processes we were already pretty familiar with? In the rest of this section I would like to make a pitch for the social reality of globalization and for its contemporary importance – both as a social mode that we need to keep probing and as a focus for some new ways of understanding language in society. We have to concede that globalization is complex and multi-faceted, and difficult to delimit chronologically. The concept is often over-consolidated, over-hyped, and under-interpreted. But I want to argue (drawing on the views of many others) that it is an indispensable concept, particularly if we take it as shorthand reference to a cluster of changed and still fast changing social arrangements and priorities which are indeed distinctive and (despite opinions to the contrary) *indeed new*. Having done this, I will try to map out, in four sections that outline the four parts of this volume, how the forthcoming chapters inform our understanding of the many productive and necessary links between 'language' and 'globalization.'

What, then, might persuade us to take globalization seriously and to accept that social analysis needs to be framed in relation to an already globalized and increasingly globalizing world? We might start with a quasi-ethnographic appeal to lived experience and perceptions of social change, say, over the last forty or fifty years. What macro-level social changes have impacted on us (or, at least for the purposes of this initial sketch, on the 'us' defined by the privileged lives lived in the west or the north, and through British eyes)? Answers will be tropes of lifespan discourse: "Back then, things were different..."; "I remember the days when ..." But such autobiographical fragments would point to the sorts of social change that constitute globalization. I venture some of my own fragments below.[1] I would say that we have experienced:

- an increasing mediation of culture and greater cultural reflexivity
- the proliferation and speeding up of communication technologies
- a large shift to service-sector work, globally dispersed
- the decline of the (British) Establishment

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- failing trust in professional (medical, legal, political) authority
- the growth of the middle class but the accentuation of the rich/poor divide
- greater subservience to global market economics, in the face of its demerits
- an upsurge in consumer culture and many new forms of commodification
- more emphasis on individualism and on projects of the self
- an upsurge in ecological politics and sensibilities on a world-wide scale
- a reduction of the grosser inequalities through gender and sexual orientation
- developing ethnic pluralism, especially in urban settings
- increasingly familiar cultural landscapes, widely dispersed
- national boundaries becoming (perhaps until recently) more permeable
- massively increasing demographic mobility, often for economic reasons
- a shift towards more globally based risks, threats and conflicts.

If a list of this sort were supported by research evidence (and a substantial body of work does support many of these claims), then we could easily recognize three familiar dimensions or application domains of globalization within them: *economic*, *political* and *cultural* globalization (see the discussion of these dimensions in Garrett's chapter, this volume). There are financial motivations, motivations linked to production and consumption, behind many of the changes we might otherwise assume to be 'cultural,' for example in the commodification of history as heritage or in the shaping of globally familiar metropolises. The circulation of global capital is what has homogenized the cities we take to be "world cities" (Friedmann 1986). A sense of local culture often has to be worked up in opposition to, or even within the mechanisms of, globalized systems – for example when 'the local' is performed for mass audiences on TV or in tourism (Coupland 2009a).

When we observe that people are far more mobile today than in earlier decades (although of course there are severe social class and national restrictions on who actually *is* more mobile), we are reacting not only to technological developments but to how mass media have allowed us to visualize the world's 'distant places' as being within our reach. When we observe that ecological awareness is a development of recent decades, we are seeing how the risks and threats of global economic upscaling, and of course of mobility as part of that, have come to be resisted in newer oppositional discourses. If we see the British Establishment in decline, this is because of wholesale shifts in global political, economic, and cultural *systems*, which need to be seen as interwoven dimensions of how the world has come to be. If there has been some emancipation around gender and sexuality, this has been achieved through activity across transnational networks of various sorts, and so on. My point is simply that there are some general principles at work behind our individual perceptions of relatively recent social change, and that the concept of globalization invites us to reflect critically on changes which are significant, not least in their recency, reach, depth and systematicity.

As Lechner and Boli (2004) point out, there is the difficulty that the word 'globalization' has already become something of a global cliché (and, again, see Garrett's investigation, in this volume, into the variable inferred meanings and

associations of the word 'globalization'). To that extent it is difficult to avoid the objection that subjective generalizations about change may represent a sort of leakage from journalistic or political usage back into personal perceptions and accounts. In fact it is interesting to speculate that, under globalization, mass-mediation reaches deeper into individual psyches and everyday social practice than we might assume. All the same, it would take an impressive level of cynicism to conclude that there was 'nothing new' behind contemporary observations of recent social change and 'nothing new' in the contemporary wave of globalization. It is not part of my brief to review objective sociological evidence in support of the fact that the world has changed, although we live in an era when astounding statistics routinely surface, pointing at least to new *scales* of global interdependencies in contemporary life.[2] At some point too, we need to trust the preponderance of informed opinion in academic literatures. After two decades of claim and counter-claim, globalization theory has achieved a relatively stable consensus, agreeing to set aside several more radical and totalizing arguments but holding to a middle ground. The consensus (though probably not in the chapters of this volume) is that, while globalization is certainly not without precedent, its scale and scope *are* new and detectable in changes over recent decades – and most clearly so since the 1980s. Globalization has certainly has not run its course.

In relation to history and the periodization of globalization, Robertson (1992) noted that McLuhan's idea of 'the global village' (a phrase coined in 1960) and some general notion of global 'shrinkage' entered public as well as academic consciousness fairly soon after World War II. The war itself was an event which clearly encouraged new ways of conceptualizing world orders and systems. Robertson summarizes his own conception of globalization in exactly these terms: the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole. Some key historical events are most commonly associated with the consolidation of the global (or globalized) era. In the anglophone world, these include the beginning of sustained right-wing/conservative periods of political office (Margaret Thatcher in Britain from 1979 and Ronald Reagan in the USA from 1981) and aggressive shifts towards free market, neo-liberal ideologies and policies.[3] In many regions formerly dependent on manufacturing and heavy industry, this period was also associated with rapid and damaging deindustrialization and the outsourcing of manufacturing to cheaper markets in other countries. This shift is in turn linked to a rise in service-sector work and to more emphasis being placed on 'the knowledge economy' (see Heller, this volume, on the new economy), which are inherently more globally structured activities.

The ending of the Cold War (in the late 1980s) and the dissolution of the USSR (in 1991) provided even more self-evident shifts in 'world systems' (in the sense of Wallerstein 1974) and opened up global markets for western cultural and commercial initiatives. Global participation in the internet (from the mid 1990s: see n. 2) and the exponential development of new, globally networked, communication technologies in the same period added to the mix. Therefore, while there are of course historical precursors, over earlier centuries, to most of the general *sorts* of

social process we take to define globalization – demographic mobility, transnational interchange, colonial activity, and even the technologizing of communication, most obviously with the advent of printing – there are also compelling arguments that what we have seen, since 1980, has been of quantitatively and qualitatively different orders. It is in the phenomenal expansion of transnational, global mobility and in the massively increased intensity of commercial and cultural exchange and exploitation that we find a warrant for conceiving of globalization as 'something new,' and indeed (in the words of Appadurai 1996: 27) as something "strikingly new."

Globalization theory is, however, more convincing when it is more nuanced, more cautious, and more contextually refined. Appadurai and many others nowadays have resisted simple linear accounts of globalization, as encountered for example in the McLuhan type of claim to the effect that the world is becoming culturally smaller or more uniform. As Appadurai says:

> Most often the homogenization argument subspeciates into either an argument about Americanization or an argument about commoditization, and very often the two arguments are closely linked. What these arguments fail to consider is that at least as rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies they tend to become indigenized in one way or another: this is true of music and housing styles as much as it is true of science and terrorism, spectacles and constitutions. (Appadurai 1996: 29)

This is a persuasive argument that, under the rubric of globalization, we need to explore the *tensions* between sameness and difference, between centripetal and centrifugal tendencies, and between consensus and fragmentation. (This perspective is shared by many contributors to the Handbook, and these tensions are as important in relation to linguistic processes as in other domains.) Globalization is non-linear, just as it is *not* uniformly and (ironically enough) *not* universally and *not* globally experienced. It is better theorized as a complex of processes through which difference as well as uniformity is generated, but in relation to each other. Globalization often produces hybridity and multiplicity (Hall 1996, 1997; Kellner 1989), and the multi-directionality of change has been summarized in the awkward but widely used concept of glocalization (Bauman 1998a, 1998b; Robertson 1995; see Shi-xu, this volume) – which expresses the interaction of globalizing and localizing shifts. Importantly, however, it is in the appeal to hybridity and social complexity that we see how it is also necessary to approach globalization from the perspective of late modernity or post-modernity (Bauman 1982), and vice versa.

Different views are held about whether late modernity and globalization (or, more accurately, the social condition of globality) can be, or need to be, distinguished theoretically. But many of the key conditions associated with late modernity – heightened cultural reflexivity and social complexity, indeterminacy and hybridity in personal and social identities, changed thresholds of risk and trust, increased emphasis on individual life-projects and responsibilities, detraditionalization and the decline of institutions (see for instance Beck 1992,

1999; Giddens 1991, 1994; Harvey 1989) – are much easier to appreciate if we situate them in the dynamics of a more globally connected world. As I noted above, mass-mediation, for example, is a powerful factor in the dense representation of cultural difference, and people are more likely to construe alternatives to their inherited selves against this complex backdrop of images and social types. Individualization, in Beck's thesis, is a demonstrable consequence of heightened levels of global consumption, and so on. So globalization matters in the analysis of the transition from modern to late modern social arrangements, and (as many contributors to this book show), there are many specifically sociolinguistic elements to late modernity; late modernity places new emphases on language, meaning, and social semiotics.

Still following an historical track, it is often observed that the earliest tangible evidence of globalization was in economics, where the impact of transnational flows of money and influence became obvious from the 1980s onwards, to some extent challenging the autonomy and authority of states and national governments. Globalization theory has often posited 'the decline of the nation–state' (Evans 1997; Hardt and Negri 2000; Ohmae 1995) – again, with the risk of overgeneralization. National governments of course can – and do – continue to dictate swathes of policy within their own confines, and national boundaries and identities remain significant in many social dimensions. But there are increasingly troublesome domains where states have only limited opportunities to act conclusively on their own, for example in relation (as Beck has recently pointed out)[4] to transnational terrorism, global warming, or economic globalization itself. These are, once again, issues within our own realms of experience, and the concept of globalization provides a route into the critical assessment of several of the defining characteristics of our lives.

Appadurai's (1996) concept of "financescapes" (or financial landscapes) was an attempt to point to the new global architecture of financial systems – commodity speculation and rapidly shifting global currency markets – in the same way in which he encouraged us to be aware of new global "ethnoscapes," "mediascapes," "technoscapes," and "ideoscapes" (ideational and ideological landscapes: see Block's discussion of some of these concepts in the present volume). We find a compelling instance of how these 'scapes' work together under globalization in Hardt and Negri's account (2000: 253–4) of the demographic consequences of globalized macroeconomic arrangements: ghettos, favelas, and shantytowns appearing in 'First World' cities, and stock exchanges, banks, and large corporations emerging in 'Third World' localities.

Probably the key insight from the now voluminous literature on globalization is the need to understand socio-cultural arrangements in terms of different forms of *mobility* and *flow*. Hannerz (1992, 1996), for example, develops the view that we can no longer conceive of cultures as neatly bounded entities. Cultures diffuse and flow into each other, constructing, and responding to, complex hierarchical relationships that he calls "centres" and "peripheries" (Hannerz 1992: 218; see Blommaert and Dong, this volume). Cultural centers are sources of authority and taste that peripheries often revere and seek to emulate. In Hannerz's view,

globally powerful economic and political centers need not always be cultural centers, and vice versa, so that we need a multi-dimensional "world systems" model. France, for example, Hannerz claims, is an authoritative cultural center in many respects, more so than it is a political center. He argues that Japan has tended to keep a lower cultural profile despite its economic successes. Hannerz theorizes a constantly evolving pattern of cultural influence and change which is very *un*likely to lead simply to cultural homogenization, although it could include what he calls stable forms of "creolization" or cultural hybridity. Some peripheries develop to become centers, and cultural values and markets themselves evolve and change in the flow of "cultural traffic."

As we shall see, flow has been picked up as an orienting concept by sociolinguists too, and it will be useful to refine the term's application. Bartelson (2000) tries to distinguish three ways in which global flows have been conceptualized: namely in terms of *transference*, *transformation* and *transcendence*. Transference is the most material and most readily interpretable form of flow – the movement or exchange of things across pre-existing boundaries and between pre-constituted units. Demographic migration and the dissemination of cultural formats and products are straightforward examples of transference. Although transference is very much a characteristic of global social arrangements, it is not different in kind from processes that have been labelled 'internationalization' or 'political/economic/cultural interdependence.' The 'nothing new' comment on globalization seems mostly applicable to globalization seen as transference, notwithstanding the important objection that the scale and intensity of contemporary transference is unprecedented. Globalization as transformation implies a more radical change, whereby flows modify the character of the whole global systems in which they function. Boundaries and units are themselves refashioned, as well as things flowing across and between them. In the third scenario, transcendence, "globalisation is driven forward by a dynamic of its own and is *irreducible* to singular causes within particular sectors or dimensions" (Bartelson 2000: 189, original emphasis). This abstract, third condition is strongly echoed in Hardt and Negri's (2000) notion of "empire," but also (as Bartelson points out) in Lash and Urry's (1994) argument that contemporary information and communication structures are reconstituting the world as networks of flow rather than (as we might say) as "flows of things" and through signs rather than objects, which of course provides an entrée into linguistics and semiotics.

These, then, are some of the concepts and interpretive stances that have emerged from theoretical work on globalization. Many others are picked up and debated in the following chapters, several of which incorporate their own reviews of globalization theory. My intention in this section has been simply to illustrate the resourcefulness of globalization theory and to suggest that, *prima facie* at least, social changes associated with globalization are perceptually salient for most of us and pose significant contemporary personal and intellectual challenges. Academic disciplines across the social sciences and humanities do need to (continue to) engage with globalization, and of course to (continue to) contribute to its analysis in circumstances of rapid social change.

Globalization theory has reached a point where it is quite widely recognized that we need to distinguish different disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives, indeed different *discourses*, on globalization (Robertson and Khondker 2009). It is in response to this challenge that the contributors have offered their work to the Handbook. In introducing an earlier and much smaller collection of work on sociolinguistics and globalization (Coupland 2003b), I commented that linguists were, at that time, "late getting to the party," in the sense that commentaries and treatises on globalization were already in full spate across other disciplines,[5] but non-existent in sociolinguistics. The present volume is able to demonstrate the considerable distance that sociolinguistics has travelled in just a few years, to the extent that linguistic perspectives on globalization do now constitutes an independent discourse of globalization, albeit one that helps to synthesize and refine many others.

In the remainder of this Introduction I shall try to map out the different ways in which 'language' and 'globalization' are brought together in the four parts of the present volume and to anticipate some of the key insights that emerge from the wealth of new material that follows.

Global Multilingualism, World Languages and Language Systems

In Part I of the Handbook we find perspectives that have an impressive history within sociolinguistics. Proponents of 'nothing new' can legitimately point to rich traditions in the sociology of language that have dealt extensively with multilingual systems and with language contact processes and cases. These include classic studies by Michael Clyne, Ralph Fasold, Charles Ferguson, Joshua Fishman, Heinz Kloss, William Mackey, William Samarin, William Stewart and others (for a related review, see Ammon 1989; also Ammon, this volume). To pick out just one landmark study, Stewart (1970) reported a succinct but limited notational system designed to capture systemic relationships between languages and a taxonomy of language 'types': *vernacular, standard, classical, pidgin and Creole*. Original conceptualizations like Stewart's laid the ground for systematic descriptive accounts of languages in communities and languages in contact, and these early initiatives have been massively extended in recent scholarship; see for example Apel and Muysken (1987), Kachru (1992), Myers-Scotton (2002), Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004). The sociology of language has always been interested in the relative vitality of languages and communities, and in language death and attrition internationally. It might be tempting to argue that, even if globalization itself refers to a new and newly important social condition, we can account for 'language and globalization' simply by extending the remit of a traditional sociology of language. As we shall see, however, this is to understate significantly what is required.

In response to globalization, the most obvious requirement is for a sociology of language that can model relationships among languages on a global scale. In

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