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Authenticity: A view from inside and outside sociolinguistics[1]

What does it mean to be 'authentic'? Can authenticity ever be achieved? Is it a fundamental property of some entities or is it rather an element of attribution? How can sociolinguistics, which has tended to leave this issue out of its main considerations, best define what it means to be authentic in language production and perception? What properties can one assign to socio-linguistic authenticity and from whose perspective is it evaluated? Whether it is planned or not, it may be legitimate to present authenticity as an assumedly common enterprise which social functioning is a driving force of each individual's behaviour and is evaluated according to cultural contexts and mediated by and expressed in language. Conversely, 'inauthenticity' would manifest itself as a failure to display a person's true self in terms of their sociolinguistic individualities and/or reject conventionalised speech behaviours which are not *truly* their own. Originally from Greek *authentikós* (*autós*, self), this concept has been taken to mean something that is genuine, proven to be original (also, *authéntes*, author, originator, initiator). The semantic field of authenticity itself is rich and detailed and whose set of related words can be applied to various contexts. As semantically related words, one may find features associated with 'realness', 'genuineness', 'naturalness', 'originality', 'individuality', 'credibility', 'expressivity', 'immediacy', 'truthfulness', 'faithfulness' and so on. Authenticity may be argued to be a relational concept which accounts for the many ways in which a speaker or agent can be authentic in a given situation in relation to a particular aspect of his or her environment. Having this in mind, however, as Straub (2012: 10) has recently put it, authenticity "comes with a warning that one should not buy into it without some good insurance".

1 Authenticity: Some theoretical considerations

The concept of authenticity has received a lot of attention from numerous scientific perspectives. In the vast philosophical literature, the issue of authenticity is often treated from a binary and static viewpoint, usually by comparing 'the original' to 'the copy' in terms of mimetic features, that is, by asking whether an interpretation sticks to the author's intentions or whether or not it is true to the original historical, social or cultural context (Kant 1999 [1791]). This view of authenticity equates the latter with a property of things and/or people. For instance, an essential view exemplifies a static perspective on authenticity in being intrinsic to the object or the person, through an expressive quality of an artefact or the mode of being of a personality for instance (Heidegger 1927). A relational view as discussed by Sartre (1945) portrays authenticity as being constituted in relation to something or someone else, for example standards, values, groups, etc., but it remains relatively fixed in the ways in which it manifests itself. One could also argue that authenticity is a dynamic process and/or a result of authentication and validation. In this view, a methodical approach to authenticity regards the latter as being measurable with certain scientific tools especially considering the validation of a particular age or material, for instance a Ming vase. From an attributional point of view, authenticity is rather in the eye of the beholder, for instance whether a spectator feels emotionally affected or not. Finally, an interactional and thus dynamic view of authenticity is that which creates authenticity through the complex interplay of producer, product and recipient (Gadamer 1960). Both the static and dynamic views of authenticity may lead us to claim that authenticity is at least at some levels 'constructed'. We may distinguish between three different modes of authenticity construction: firstly the *canonical mode*, which relates to a construction via conventionalised power, that is when authenticity of a given object is determined by an authority; secondly, the *explanatory mode* by which authenticity is methodically investigated on the basis of knowledge about sources – here we refer to a reconstruction of authenticity via the plausibility of evidence; and thirdly, the *performative mode* where authenticity is staged by creating 'reality effects', that is an enactment via credibility of performance and content. These various views and modes of authenticity share common features to some extent insofar as authenticity can be seen as a state of adequation between at least some of the following elements (Table 1).

The rapport between these different elements, which pertain to a particular 'type' of authenticity, perhaps only makes sense if they are coherent over time, since, we would argue, authenticity is also a characteristic feature of certain types of diachronic processes, for instance regarding the *persistence* of a feature or set of features. As an example, take the famous German Leibniz Butterkeks, which

Element 1	Element 2	Authenticity type
object/person	its/her/his nature	ontological/essential
being	what should be	deontic
fact	description	descriptive
intention	action	intentional/behavioural
mind	world	epistemic
object	reproduction	medial

Table 1

is "nur echt mit 52 Zähnen", i. e. the Leibniz butter biscuit, which is "real only with 52 'teeth'", as it says in the advertisement slogan. Here, the viability of the authenticated feature is accepted by a particular group of language users, or the *consistency* of attitudes, patterns of behaviour and ideas according to established sets of codes, values and norms (e. g. 'never trust your neighbour'), is part of the uniformity principle. Still, what happens to more ephemeral authenticities, as in the question: 'What's happening in this moment'? How can one produce authenticity only temporarily? We will leave this question open at this stage.

Beside the temporal aspect of authenticity, Lévi-Strauss (1976) distinguishes *levels of authenticity* in anthropology which have a constitutive function for all forms of social life. Being authentic describes types of (inter-) personal contact that is direct and emergent in face-to-face interaction, but is not governed by social institutions or forms of media. Arguably, all individuals seek for some forms of authenticity at different points of their lives. The role of the 'context' in human interaction, whether it is social, cultural or stylistic in nature, is crucial in producing or failing to produce authenticity. Coupland makes a point about this quest of individuals for authenticity: "Authenticity matters. It remains a quality of experience that we actively seek out, in most domains of life, material and social. [...] We value authenticity and we tend to be critical of pseudo-authenticity" (2003: 417). Authenticity does matter, but more importantly the question may be "how and where authenticity matters most" (Coupland, this volume). Traditionally, anthropology was concerned with small-scale communities in local settings based on which Lévi-Strauss submitted his view on authenticity. From Lévi-Strauss onwards, an anthropology of globalisation has developed in which some sociolinguists such as Blommaert (2010) or Coupland (2001) have tried to define authenticity for speakers living in a globalised world. Clearly, the size of the communities investigated and the degree of mediation in human communication differ between Lévi-Strauss and sociolinguists interested in globalisation, but one may assume that there is a similar underlying structure that is function-

ing independently of the size or the type of speaker group. The quest for some aspects of authenticity seems to be a prominent (if not anthropologically universal) feature of people's social behaviour. If the individuals of a society were not 'authentic' in a minimal sense to the different domains and levels of the social system and the web of cultural meanings (Geertz 1973), various forms of cultural learning and mimetic practices, the conservation of traditional values and norms as well as the prediction of the behaviour of social agents would not be possible (Strathern 2004). For sociolinguists, an important question is how the social functioning of authenticity as a driving force of individuals' behaviour and its evaluation according to socio-cultural contexts is mediated by and expressed in language. But is authenticity an important explanatory factor for the analyst and for lay people themselves? A clarification for the latter question might be at present an eminent task for research in sociolinguistics, especially since, with few exceptions (Coupland 2010, 2003; Bucholtz 2003; Eckert 2003; Blommaert & Varis 2011; Gill 2012), the problem of authenticity has not been a thorough part of sociolinguistic theoretical discussions, although it was considered "ripe for critical consideration" some time ago (Eckert, at the 31st NWAV conference, 2002). However, it is well-known to philosophers, historians, scholars in the cultural sciences, and has recently been a concern within linguistic anthropology (Bucholtz & Hall 2004; Ochs 2004), language and communication (van Leeuwen 2001), research on mediated experience (Montgomery 2001), literary studies and the visual arts (Straub 2012; Scannell 2001). It should be noted that contributions in this volume treat the concept of authenticity not simply as an import for convenience definitions from the above fields into their sociolinguistic analyses but deal with the question in an effort to problematise the 'authentic speaker' as a reflection of a complex, dynamic, deployment of socio-linguistic and socio-pragmatic resources.

In light of this, this volume seeks to pose a number of questions such as the following: What are the local meanings of authenticity embedded in large cultural and social structures? What is the meaning of linguistic authenticity in delocalised and/or deterritorialised settings? How is authenticity indexed in other contexts of language expression (e. g. in writing or in political discourse)? The following concern formulated by Coupland echoes the issues that the present work raises about linguistic authenticity: "To what extent is it tenable to think of language use as being constrained by people's (authentic) membership of social groups (what Eckert called 'ingrained behavior'), as opposed to the social construction of personal, relation and social meanings in discourse?" (Coupland 2010: 1). Coupland also asks in this volume "how do discursive accounts stand as evidence of authentic experience"? Some sociolinguists recognise the importance of the many ways in which authenticity can be assigned to speakers or groups of

speakers. As Coupland states elsewhere: "To be authentic, a thing has to be original in some important social or cultural matrix" (2003: 419). We argue that the layers of such a matrix are addressed by speakers in various situationally embedded ways and on various *orders of indexicality*, as explained in the next section. The volume begins with Nikolas Coupland's examination of the place of authenticity in sociolinguistic work. In his chapter, "Language, society and authenticity: themes and perspectives", Nikolas Coupland offers a critical update of the issue of authenticity and the role it has played in the field of sociolinguistics, first by revising his own views on the matter and then by critically discussing the other contributions of this volume. His chapter provides a refreshing look at the various social meanings of authenticity expressed in language production, which, to a certain degree, are discussed in the context of the indexicality framework. The volume as a whole investigates the concept of authenticity from various sub-disciplines of linguistics, various social practices and different types of mediatisation. As we have shown in this section, there are many ways of approaching or defining authenticity outside the field of sociolinguistics (and within sociolinguistics). The reader will discover different approaches to authenticity as provided by the contributors that satisfy the aims of their respective analyses and thus diverge from each other to some extent. We take these different approaches to the intricate functions of sociolinguistic authenticity to be an exciting tension that we hope will enliven current debates on authenticity in sociolinguistics and beyond.

2 Indexicality and local meanings of authenticity

Indexicality, in linguistics, is the property of linguistic elements to index (to point to) certain non-linguistic entities. There is referential indexicality, which can best be illustrated with deixis (of person, time, place, etc.). Thus in the sentence *We'll meet again here in two hours* the words *we*, *here*, and *in two hours* are all dependent on actual situational context for their pragmatic meaning to be clear. More interesting from a sociolinguistic point of view, however, is non-referential indexicality, which links indexes with social meanings (stances, politeness, identities, etc.). In sociolinguistic terminology, these indexed entities are social meanings, indexed by sociolinguistic variables. The concept, initially proposed by Peirce (1932), has been extended notably by Silverstein (2003). Silverstein, taking an anthropological linguistic approach, conceptualises several orders of indexicality: a first-order pragmatic level, a second-order metapragmatic level, and even higher-order, conventionalised discourse levels. An example would be that of the so-called T/V distinction (the use of two separate second-person pronouns when addressing someone, as in French *tu* and *vous*, German *du* and *Sie*, Italian *tu* and

Lei, etc., see Silverstein 2003: 204–211). Here the traditional dimensions of solidarity and power (Brown & Gilman 1960) are simply first-order indexicals, in that reliance on these dimensions of deference indexicality alone are not enough to explain how such a binary choice is made. A second-order, metapragmatic indexicality is needed, titled by Silverstein "enregistered honourification", which, essentially, has T index 'informal' and V 'formal'. An example of higher-order indexicality in T/V-usage is seen in 17th century Quaker communities, who, in an attempt at levelling out social differences within the community, established a norm of V-avoidance, which became the "enregistered norm", a 'system of "counter-honourification" (Silverstein 2003: 211).

Extensions of the basic indexicality framework include Eckert (2008), who proposes an indexical field that covers the range of social meanings that a particular linguistic variable indexes. Her illustration is that of word-final /t/-aspiration in American English, which covers a range (a "field", in her term) of social meanings. These meanings can be momentary 'stances' taken by speakers (e. g. formal, polite, annoyed), 'permanent qualities', i. e. stances taken repeatedly by the same speaker (e. g. educated, articulate, prissy), and 'social types', enregistered categories of speakers seen to be marked by this particular index (e. g. British, nerdy girl, school teacher). This field shows how a single variant can index a wide range of social meanings, dependent on co-textual and contextual setting. Other approaches include Johnstone & Kiesling (2008), where local-dialect stereotypes are recast in the indexicality framework. Their example is that of the pronunciation of the diphthong in words like *house* as a monophthong [aː] by residents of Pittsburgh. This feature, often described as a distinctly local, is here shown to be perceived with a much wider array of attitudes than traditional sociolinguistic approaches would suggest: the disjunction between individual production and perception, coupled with speakers' own reflections on the variable, offer insights into the layered nature of indexical processes operating in spoken interaction, as well as into the multiplicity of social meanings indexed by a same variable. Elsewhere, Johnstone et al. (2006) recast Silverstein's orders of indexicality in Labovian terms, equating first-order indexicality with indicators, second-order indexicality with markers, and third-order indexicality with stereotypes.

Sociolinguistic research within the indexicality framework can be seen as being situated in the 'third wave' of sociolinguistics, in that it is interested in stylistic variation as a 'resource for the construction of social meaning' (Eckert 2005). This is certainly what Johnstone and Kiesling (2008) did for Pittsburghese, but it also happened much earlier, when Ochs (1992) similarly drew on the concept in her analysis of gender in American and Samoan society. Blommaert (2007) brought indexicality to discourse analysis, and Ewing et al. (2012) even to the field of advertising and its strategic use of language choice. If authenticity

has to be created in language production with reference to some extra-linguistic reality, one theoretically fruitful way to describe this may be in terms of indexicality. Here, Johnstone & Kiesling (2008) is particularly relevant to the indexing of authenticity with respect to locality. In traditional sociolinguistics, local-dialect stereotypes are typically taken for granted as universally recognised. This was shown, in the Pittsburgh study mentioned above, as being an oversimplification, with respondents assigning different meanings to /au/-monophtongisation. Thus while one Pittsburgher may indeed use the variable to index 'localness', another may use a different variable, and hearers (whether themselves 'authentic' Pittsburghers or not) may or may not recognise the social meaning 'localness' ostensibly indexed. Some papers in this volume combine the linguistic findings on such indexing with the 'shifting contexts' (Strathern 1995) thematised in anthropological accounts of the relationship between local, global and medial in specific socio-cultural settings in order to develop a better understanding of the concept of 'place' in the production of (linguistic) authenticity. For instance, in her chapter "The trouble with authenticity", Penelope Eckert provides a critical view of the authentic speaker as it has been discussed in the field of sociolinguistics and problematises the issue of authentication within a group of preadolescents, making particular reference to Silverstein's theory of indexical order. Lauren Hall-Lew's chapter "Chinese social practice and San Franciscan authenticity" explores the indexical complexity and the local authenticity of linguistic and social practices among Chinese people in San Francisco, paying particular attention to narratives of youth styles collected in schools in the 1990s. In the following chapter entitled "Being more alternative and less Brit-pop: the quest for originality in three urban styles in Athens", Lefteris Kailoglou compares different subcultures in Athens and their quest for authenticity. He shows that this quest can be analysed by looking at the linguistic practices, rather than at the conceptualisations of authenticity by the speakers themselves. In "'100 % authentic Pittsburgh': sociolinguistic authenticity and the linguistics of particularity", Barbara Johnstone explores the discursive construction of Pittsburgh identity (specifically as portrayed on a souvenir T-shirt), which also draws on linguistic stereotypes that are represented by respellings. The chapter entitled "'Oh boy, ¿hablas español?' – Salsa and the multiple value of authenticity in late capitalism" by Britta Schneider focuses on the construction of authenticity in relation to collective ideals in times of globalization. In communities of practice such as groups of salsa dancers, she investigates different levels of indexical meanings. In the last chapter of this section, "The commodification of authenticity", Monica Heller considers linguistic minority movements and their use of language in indexing 'authentic' ('indigenous') identities in targeting 'outsiders', thus using linguistic resources, among others, for marketing purposes.

3 Authenticity construction in delocalised contexts

Any form of authenticity, be it intra-speaker or inter-speaker, is subject to evaluation and implies a certain degree of approbation. Performed authenticity, for instance, involves the perspective of a speaker as the original author or performer of their communicative intentions, while an interpreted authenticity would represent an act of speech evaluated by an external source. The use of stylistic resources is closely connected to this issue of authenticity: whether performed or interpreted, speech is faithful to formal (or standard) vs. informal (or non-standard) contexts. Clearly, authenticity expresses itself in language use, similar to what Coupland calls "the discursive construction of authenticity and inauthenticity" (2010: 6). Authentication as the performative dimension of authenticity, then, is "a discursive process, rather than authenticity as a claimed or experienced quality of language or culture, [which] can then be taken up analytically as one dimension of a set of intersubjective 'tactics', [and] through which people can make claims about their own or others' statuses as authentic or inauthentic members of social groups" (Coupland 2010: 6). Surely, people must find strategies to construct and deconstruct their identities in communication as well as 'stage' them. They may own, inhabit or reject others' original, authentic sociolinguistic behaviours and identities. Authenticity thus is "negotiable" (Eira & Stebbins 2008: 24), though certainly not always purely discursive. It also resides in the physical representation, construction, experimentation and performance of personal and socio-cultural identity and style. As Jaspers put it, "all speech is constructed, styled to the occasion" (2010: 191). Taking the chav subculture as an example, Blommaert and Varis (2011) show that there exists a wide breadth of features which are solicited to display a certain authenticity, and which can be reflected in various semiotic representations. However, interestingly, they argue that not all features of a given identity are needed in order to "pass as 'authentic' to someone" (2011: 6), despite the rules that one needs to observe to be(come) an 'authentic chav' and be recognised as such by the other members of the chav group. According to the authors, a "homeopathic dose of resources" would suffice to exhibit at least some aspects of the expected distinctiveness of an authentic character (i. e. the "defining ones" as they call them), for instance, a Burberry cap for a 'chav'. They propose that "the dose can be small, but the only thing that is required is that it is *enough* – enough to produce a recognisable identity as an authentic someone" (2011: 8). From this argument, we understand that any given entity possesses a prototypical member which stands for the most credible member of the category, itself associated with a number of 'less authentic' members which are lightly dosed or enough to signal genuineness or fidelity to the intended identity. We also infer that all members of an entity may be

subject to constant update or change due to ever evolving experiences with that entity, implying that the prototypical member may also shift to being a non-core member and be replaced by a new one which, in turn, more authentically embodies the new experience.

Furthermore, as we argued earlier in this introduction, authenticity is often closely linked to the notion of 'place', which leads us to ask another question: What is the meaning of linguistic authenticity in delocalised and deterritorialised settings? Arguably, there is the traditional, 'natural', local environment, but also other non-geographical loci such as media communication, online chat forums, etc. One could claim that any geographical context in which languages were 'born' is the place where the most authentic languages are generated and conserved. This is reminiscent of a classic assumption within variationist sociolinguistics that vernacular speakers are the best representatives of linguistic authenticity. Blommaert states that sociolinguistics has tended to focus on "static variation, on local distribution of varieties" (2010: 1). In the Labovian sense, authenticity correlates with geographically and socially demarcated linguistic communities, in which authentic speech behaviour manifests itself along a stylistic continuum. However, linguistic authenticity can also emerge in non-territorialised loci, as in computer-mediated communication: "Language and discourses move around, but they do so between spaces that are full of rules, norms, customs and conventions" (Blommaert 2010: 80). With mobile languages, norms must be re-localised too and re-interpreted in relation to the required linguistic practices, communicative intentions and the speakers themselves. In both geographical and non-geographical contexts of language use, speakers belong to a community of practice inasmuch as they come together to fulfil the same communicative functions and language practices. What matters to both types of contexts are internal norms deployed (and shared) by the speakers, employing what Coupland calls "speech style as an anchor for solidarity and local affiliation" (2003: 420). Authenticity would be about deploying linguistic resources in many different (extra- or paralinguistic) contexts such as local, mobile, variable, and normative contexts, e. g. within the 'landscape' or the 'mediascape'. Linguistic authenticity then must be an adaptive and flexible concept relevant to any communicative constellation – oral vs. written, face-to-face/direct in tightly knit local communities vs. mediated/distant in loosely knit web forum communities for instance, all in search of "[local] meanings and categorisations" of linguistic resources (Jaspers 2010). It should be noted that a common view among the contributors of this volume is not to "track down authentic speakers" (Bucholtz 2003: 406) but to figure out how sociolinguistic features have become authentic in the sense of normalised and standardised by a relevant group of speakers and from whose perspective the speakers are evaluated as being authentic. Authenticity is not meant to be treated

as a static label as some philosophical accounts would have it, but generally the focus is placed upon the "authenticating practices of language users" (Bucholtz 2003: 403), that is, any authenticity construction, be it discursive in nature or not, is part of an authenticating process while deconstructing one's (own) authenticity participates in a de-authenticating process. Strategies for both processes are manifold and the second section of this volume offers a fresh perspective on the issue of authenticity construction in various types of media discourse found in deterritorialised settings. Looking at the relationship between locality, dialects, and accents, Michael Silverstein offers a critical analysis of authenticity within the framework of indexicality. His chapter "The race from place: dialect eradication vs. the linguistic 'authenticity' of *terroir*" questions the 'natural' link between language and place and pays special attention to the ways in which language users evaluate discourses with their personal models of coherence and what counts to them as authentic. Graham M. Jones's chapter "Reported speech as an authentication tactic in computer-mediated communication" challenges the popular assumption that computer-mediated communication somehow hampers young users' development of 'real' (i. e. verbal/spoken) communicative abilities. Andrea Moll, in her chapter "Authenticity in dialect performance? A case study of 'Cyber-Jamaican'", examines how authenticity can be created and maintained in online interaction on the Internet. With the example of Jamaican Creole she demonstrates the types of ethnolinguistic repertoire used in cyber communication. In Theresa Heyd and Christian Mair's contribution "From vernacular to digital ethnolinguistic repertoire: the case of Nigerian Pidgin", spoken, face-to-face interaction is shown to be not the only 'authentic' mode of communication, with online forums a place for active negotiation of the indexicalities associated with language. Lastly, in "Hybridity as authenticity in Nigerian hip-hop lyrics", Akinmade T. Akande looks into the authenticity of creativity of Nigerian hip-hop music. He demonstrates how Nigerian artists in the hip-hop scene exhibit authenticity in its uniqueness but also as part of a more global scale, through various channels such as their accent, their syntax or their commitment to local matters.

A final question that we wish to address in the third section of this volume is that of authenticity in other contexts of language expression, e. g. in writing and in institutional or political domains. In this vein, "Authentic writing" by Florian Coulmas shows how authenticity in more 'classical' types of mediatisation is manifested in writing material, as in textual authorship, handwriting or signing, paying special attention to the rapport between writing and national-cultural sense of belonging. He argues that writing is at least on a par with speech and has a lot to reveal about how authenticity is expressed and validated. Analysing the discussion on English or Danish language use in Denmark, gathered in newspapers and universities, Anna Kristina Hultgren's chapter "Lexical variation at the

internationalized university: are indexicality and authenticity always relevant?" takes a critical stance and aims to show how referential indexicality often trumps social meaning in such discussions. In his chapter "'Real communities', rhetorical borders: authenticating British identity in political discourse and on-line debate", Martin Gill investigates the issue of the nature of Britishness 'under threat' in a speech delivered on immigration to Britain by British Prime Minister David Cameron and also analyses English language requirements for immigrants in a corpus of posts stemming from the BBC online newspaper. Finally, in their chapter "What's in a *promesse authentique*? Doubting and confirming authenticity in 17th-century French diplomacy", Johanna Sprondel and Tilman Haug describe the development of the semantic field 'authentic/authenticity' from a historical perspective and trace back the notion of authenticity to French diplomacy in the 17th century and investigate the indexing and staging of authenticity in the political domain at that time.

To conclude, beside our faith in the highly welcomed discussions of the complex functions of linguistic authenticity offered by the contributors of this volume, we hope that this work stands as an invitation to continue research in the direction of a theoretically informed sociolinguistics which would actively participate in challenging the meanings of certain concepts, frameworks or theories that we use for our analyses, as well as questioning our own beliefs we may have for those concepts or frameworks which sometimes (not to say very often) have already been established in other scientific disciplines. We do not, however, suggest that the present work has exhausted the debate on linguistic authenticity although it might have generated some new thinking and ideas around the issue, which is, to say the least, not at all a primarily sociolinguistic matter but probably one which concerns us all to varying degrees.

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