

## DOSSIER LITERACIES, EVENTS AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

### Dossiê Letramentos Eventos e Práticas Sociais

#### From events to assemblages: transborder literacies in an embordered world

*De eventos a conjuntos: letramentos  
transfronteiriços em um mundo interligado*

*De eventos a clústeres: alfabetizaciones  
transfronterizas en un mundo interconectado*

#### RESUMO

Este artigo lembra a mudança, a partir da década de 1980, deixando de ver o letramento como um processo mental, compreendendo-o, em vez disso, como constitutivo do mundo social, que pode ser pesquisado, por meio de uma abordagem etnográfica, com enfoque em textos situados, nas práticas e nos eventos. Como tivemos que repensar o estudo do letramento desde então? Duas mudanças desafiam os pesquisadores do letramento: primeiro, a proliferação das mídias online e sociais e a consequente reorganização do trabalho e da vida cotidiana; segundo, o aumento da mobilidade global, agora coibida por uma segurança das fronteiras, particularmente contra os pobres, como consequência do nacionalismo paranoico. A mediação e a defesa do letramento transfronteiriço mostram como a atividade do letramento funciona como um conjunto no tempo-espço, envolvendo mediação.

Palavras-chave: letramentos transfronteiriços; redes; conjuntos; mediação; defesa.



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# CADERNOS de LINGUAGEM & SOCIEDADE

*Papers on Language and Society*

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## ARTIGO

## ABSTRACT

This paper recalls the shift, starting in the 1980s, from seeing literacy as a mental process to understanding it as constitutive of the social world, researchable through an ethnographic approach, focussed on situated texts, practices and events. How we had to re-think the study of literacy since then? Two changes have challenged literacy researchers: firstly the proliferation of on-line and social media and the consequent re-organization of work and daily life; secondly the increase in global mobility, now countered around the world by a securitization of borders, particularly against the poor, as a consequence of paranoid nationalism. Transborder literacy mediation and advocacy shows how literacy activity functions as an assemblage across time/space, involving mediation.

Keywords: transborder literacies; networks; assemblages; mediation; advocacy.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo recuerda el cambio, a partir de la década de 1980, dejando de ver la alfabetización como un proceso mental y concebirlo en cambio como constitutivo del mundo social, a investigar por un enfoque etnográfico, centrado en textos, prácticas y eventos. ¿Cómo hemos tenido que repensar el estudio de la alfabetización desde entonces? Dos cambios han desafiado a los investigadores de alfabetización: (i) la proliferación de los medios de comunicación en línea y sociales y la consiguiente reorganización del trabajo y la vida cotidiana; (ii) el aumento de la movilidad global, ahora contrarrestado por una securitización de las fronteras, particularmente contra los pobres, como consecuencia de un nacionalismo paranoico. Esta alfabetización transfronteriza muestra la actividad de alfabetización como un agenciamiento a través del tiempo/espacio, involucrando la mediación.

Palabras clave: alfabetizaciones transfronterizas; redes; clústeres; mediación; defensa.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will briefly review the shift that took place several decades ago now from seeing literacy as something that belonged in the mind to something that exists in and radically constitutes the social world (BAYNHAM; PRINSLOO, 2009). This shift involved taking a social or ethnographic approach to literacy with a focus on texts, practices and events in situated contexts. So what has changed in the intervening decades and how do we have to re-think the study of literacy as a consequence? I will point to two social change phenomena which have challenged literacy researchers, both much documented and written about: firstly the proliferation of on-line and social media and the consequent re-organization of work, which has led to a displacement from the situated here-and-now and the distribution of literacy activity across time and space, involving both human and non-human actors. This displacement of the settled time/space of literacy activity, described by KELL (2009, 2015) as “transcontextual” leads us to re-think the idea of the literacy event, with its implication of the Aristotelean unities of time and place. Here I argue that the notion of networks and assemblages helps to understand this bringing together of different actors and materialities from different time/spaces in literacy activity. The second challenge concerns the much documented increase in global mobility and flows, now countered in many parts of the world by a closing and securing of borders, particularly against the poor, as a consequence of paranoid nationalism. This leads to a focus on literacies *across* borders (the mobilities and flows dimension) and literacies *around* borders, negotiating and challenging the contemporary hardening of borders with and on the behalf of those marginalized and excluded by them, such as asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants as well of course as other excluded economically and socially precarious groups. It should be pointed out, as Mezzadra and Neilson do in their *Border as Method* (MEZZADRA; NEILSON, 2013) that borders do not just operate between nation states, but can also operate to regulate, fragment and divide within the state, for example in the relations between institutions (education, social security, law) and those who negotiate with them. The existence of such borders and the practices that constitute them leads to a proliferation of agencies and organizations as well as work roles (community interpreter, advocate) which spring up to negotiate and mediate cross border. I will illustrate this discussion with examples of transborder literacy mediation and advocacy, focussing on community interpreting, mediation and advocacy in housing and benefits advice with Roma people in Leeds, UK, and legal advice around immigration issues, showing how literacy activity can be understood as assemblage across time and space and how these assemblages involve mediation. Examples are drawn from the TLANG project (CREESE et al)<sup>1</sup>.

As I started to compose this paper I was reminded of the buzz that surrounded the publication of two books in 1983 and 1984: Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words* (BRICE HEATH, 1983) and

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<sup>1</sup> For the research this paper draws on I gratefully acknowledge funding for the TLANG Project from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

Brian Street's *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (STREET, 1984). Up till then literacy had been largely regarded as a psychological matter and a concern for teaching and learning. The "New" Literacy Studies (and I use the word New in inverted commas after some 35 years) using ethnographic methodologies took literacy out of the classroom and into the social world. It affirmed the importance of the situated and local (Street's ideological model) against universalizing claims for the efficacy of literacy in development, Street's autonomous model. The argument here was that, in order to understand how literacy might be taught and learnt in the classroom, it is necessary to go out into the everyday world and investigate its uses and purposes, which can then inform classroom practice. My book *Literacy Practices* (BAYNHAM, 1995) set out to do just that. If we avoid this move it was argued in a way that is even more relevant today, there is a danger that, in a rapidly changing world, what goes on in the classroom will become radically disconnected from the uses of literacy that learners will engage with when they leave school/college/university. An obvious case is something like "the business letter": teachers may be following a decades old curriculum which teaches the laying out and presentation of formal business letters in a world which has moved on and where communication is primarily done on the run by email. Given these current very rapid changes in the means of communication, it is more important than ever that teachers and curriculum writers are aware of the shifting terrain of communication media. But here I am jumping forward chronologically. In the mid 80s computers and mobile phones were just emerging and a relative rarity, literacy in the social world was conceptualised in face to face encounters. The fact that, with hindsight, we can see that there were frequently displaced elements even in the most highly placed interactions is in a sense neither here nor there. Theory gives us eyes to see, without the theory we miss things, they are invisible to us.

The initial groundbreaking work by Brice Heath and Street led to a number of empirical studies: for example Mastin Prinsloo's *Social Uses of Literacy* project in South Africa (PRINSLOO; BREIER, 1996), David Barton and Mary Hamilton's *Local Literacies* (BARTON; HAMILTON, 1998). The methodology was ethnographic, or to be more precise what we would call today linguistic ethnography, the core constructs being: *texts*, *events*, *practices*. The subtitle of Brice Heath's book is "language, life and work in communities and classrooms" so this approach took the reader out of the classroom and spawned work in homes, workplaces and communities. Brice Heath's work in the Piedmont Carolinas identified three communities with contrasting literacy practices: Trackton, black working class, Roadville, white working class and Main Town, black and white middle class, each with differing communicative practices, including literacy as well as of child-rearing etc. *Events* were the empirical, observable occasions where work around text could be identified and documented by researchers. For Brice Heath it could be a bedtime story, or a group of adults sitting on a veranda, listening and commenting while one of them read from the local newspaper. The event in this work almost exclusively focussed on work on text in face to face interaction. *Practices* were a more abstract construct which included both what participants did with text and also the ideologies and

values that informed what they did. Ron Scollon in a groundbreaking study of the communication practices of the native American Athabaskan, more or less contemporaneous with Brice Heath and Street (SCOLLON, 1981), identified for example values that made it difficult for Athabaskan writers to engage in the display expected in academic writing. The literacy event was the construct that empirically connected practices to the human lifeworld and as I have said it is typically construed in this early work a bounded face-to-face interaction around text, linked to an interactive here-and-now. Literacy in this context is often described as situated and as we have seen “local”. As Kell puts it: “In this framework the concept of events is placed firmly in the realm of everyday, observable, placed moments, study-able through ethnography.” (KELL, 2009, p. 77).

A literacy event is perhaps canonically seen as a bounded activity, with a beginning, middle and end, for example reading a bedtime story. Yet a moment’s reflection tells us that there are many kinds of literacy activity that do not have this bounded here-and-now quality. Imagine driving a car on a busy highway. As a driver you are simultaneously attending to other traffic, glancing in your rear view mirror, manipulating with your hands the steering wheel and gears, with your feet brake, clutch and accelerator. All the while with your peripheral vision you are attending to road signs, noticing road markings, possibly glancing at your SatNav or Googlemaps display and other displays on the dashboard. Is this an event? There seems something open-ended and relatively formless about the way you as a driver combine and bring together all these: perhaps better captured as *literate activity* rather than a literacy event and, recognizing this, in this paper I will talk frequently of literacy activity sometimes bounded and recognizably “an event” at other times unbounded, iterative. We live in a print and semiotically saturated world, so there are indefinitely many occasions and processes in which print plays a part, centrally or peripherally.

Another example: in her final year at school, while working for high stakes exams that would decide her future, I would put my head around the door of my daughter’s bedroom where she was doing homework or revising. On her desk would be open books and notes, her iPad on which she was writing an assignment would also be connected to the internet, in case she needed to research some point (or maybe for other social reasons). She would be listening to music on her headphones and texting or facetimeing her friends as she worked. As a parent I feared the worst and told her so, but she got top grades and got into a good university so I was forced to conclude that she knew better or perhaps that the communication landscape had changed in ways I was not following. She was engaged in literacy activity certainly, at the end of the evening she had something to show for it: a homework assignment to submit perhaps jointly constructed with the schoolmates with whom she had virtually spent the evening. When she was doing her modern languages work, French and Spanish, with which I would sometimes help her, I noticed at a certain point that she had started using on-line dictionaries and resources such as WordReference or Google Translate. For a while I tried to compete with her, looking up words in the paper dictionary to see if I could do it faster than she could on-line. Now I exclusively use Google as my line of approach to a word meaning, with my

dictionaries as a second order option. However since so many of the leading dictionaries are now on-line they largely sit on my book shelves, though I am not quite ready to get rid of them. Such examples have indicated some potential problems with the focus on situated and local literacies in this early work. They contain the seeds of the issues to be discussed shortly. But first I want to present some of the arguments that have destabilized or perhaps expanded this focus on the time/space dimensions of local and the here-and-now.

## 1. LIMITS OF THE LOCAL

Brandt and Clinton (2002) challenged the situated and local focus of literacy studies in an influential paper that advocates the linking up of local with global.

Context became associated with ethnographically-visible settings (the here-and-now), and the technology of literacy was demoted in relationship to the human agent who held power in assigning meaning to acts of literacy. But can we not recognize and theorize the transcontextual aspects of literacy without calling it decontextualized? Can we not approach literacy as a technology – and even as an agent – without falling back into the autonomous model? Can we not see the ways that literacy arises out of local, particular, situated human interactions, while also seeing how it also regularly arrives from other places – infiltrating, disjoining, and displacing local life? (BRANDT; CLINTON, 2013[2002], p. 40)

The theoretical framework they draw on to develop this argument is Actor Network Theory (ANT), an innovative way of theorizing both the social and natural world, both human and non human elements in a given situation are treated as actants, as having agency. So for example when my daughter is using an on-line rather than a paper dictionary in her homework, the on-line dictionary is an actant in the literacy activity, along with her lap top and the print resources that lie out on her table, not to mention the homework related and social chat she is sharing with her friends via social media.

## 2. COMMUNITY OR CONTACT ZONE? PRATT, MEZZADRA AND NEILSON

The literacy studies approach described above was also influenced by a concept that has been important in linguistics and sociolinguistics: that of the linguistic or speech community, understood as a community of speakers with shared language and interactional norms. This foundational idea in sociolinguistics was memorably critiqued by Mary Louise Pratt, who argued that communication is more typically not between members of a community with shared language and interactional norms, but in contact zones where communication is across borders/boundaries and based on difference as much as similarity:

The idea of the contact zone is intended in part to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication and culture that gets done in the academy. A couple of years ago, thinking about the linguistic

theories I knew, I tried to make sense of a Utopian quality that often seemed to characterize social analyses of language by the academy. Languages were seen as living in “speech communities”, and these tended to be theorized as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members. (PRATT, 2013[1991], p. 1-14)

This is an important argument which foregrounds social heterogeneity as well as homogeneity: communication across boundaries/borders, based on difference as much as similarity. The argument continues to resonate in a more recent book by Mezzadra and Neilson who start by discussing the role of border in the lives of New York taxi drivers, drawing on a study of their labour activism by Biju Mathew:

Anyone who has used the taxi system in New York City over the past decade will know the vast diversity that exists within the labor force that drives the city’s cabs.....Mathew’s book is in many ways a story about borders – not only the linguistic borders that separate these workers but the social borders they routinely cross as part of their working lives, the international borders they cross to reach New York City, and the social borders that divide them from their clients and the owners from whom they lease their cabs. (MEZZADRA; NEILSON, 2013, p. 1)

For Mezzadra & Neilson and certainly for Pratt, borders are not just what separate nations from each other but a crucial part of the social fabric, within and across national borders. Their arguments, while not specifically concerned with literacy (Mezzadra & Neilson are chiefly focussed on borders in relation to work and labour migration) enable us to think of the literacy event as portrayed, say in *Ways with Words*, as representing a case that may not be quite typical for example in superdiverse cities like New York. The New York cab driver’s day is typically spent negotiating difference, in the contact zone, talking across borders. Difference is highlighted and is part of what is negotiated at and across the border.

## 2.1 TRANSNATIONAL LITERACIES: WARRINER

While it is true that borders and boundaries as described by Mezzadra & Neilson and Pratt permeate social space, they do of course notably congeal along national/international boundaries. The study of migration and language, brought together in a recent handbook by Suresh Canagarajah (CANAGARAJAH, 2017) explores the range of sociolinguistic and social issues produced by global mobility and flows, of which literacy, construed broadly as we are doing here, is of course a pervasive aspect. More specifically on literacy, Doris Warriner has researched transnational literacies, explicitly linking her agenda to the arguments of Brandt & Clinton discussed above (WARRINER,2007). The study of transnational literacies has of course to take account of, indeed be informed by, global mobilities and flows but in the current phase of the world system needs also to take account of the hardening and closing of borders which can be seen around the world, not least in the countries that surround the Mediterranean. So if we are thinking of transborder, transnational literacies we need to

take into account both the dynamics of globalization and the embordering that resists it, or shall we say filters it. We live in a world characterized for millions of people by what I have called “stuckmobility” (BAYNHAM, 2013, p. 274). The virtually indentured labourer from the Indian sub-continent, the asylum seeker in a camp on a Greek island or on the North coast of France are both mobile and stuck. Unemployed youth in the North East of the UK for example are just stuck. The wealthy are mobile, with their mobility bought by their money and social/cultural capital. To focus on the UK for a moment, this instability in the context of BREXIT has threatened the security and stability of settled mobile citizens, those millions of people from European countries who made their lives in the UK only to find that a reconfigured political landscape, informed by exclusionary populism, makes them not as safe and settled in their new homes as they thought. The threats and consequences of border hardening and closing are palpable across populations.

KELL (2017) describes five dimensions or lenses for considering the access to and practice of literacy by migrants, asylum seekers and refugees:

- i) The travelling and circulating texts of migrants;
- ii) Day to day literacy and translanguaging practices in the lives of migrants and refugees;
- iii) The intricate ways in which the experiences and lives of migrants and refugees are bound up with formal education and the capital it represents;
- iv) The mediation through written texts of the experience of migration itself;
- v) The forms of surveillance by which the movements of migrants and refugees are tracked and traced.

To these one might add a further element:

- vi) The ways that language and literacy are used as gatekeeping devices through language and citizenship tests to identify and filter the “desirable” skilled and educated migrants from the “undesirable/unskilled”.

## 2.2 TRANSCONTEXTUAL LITERACIES: KELL

Transnational literacies invoke, of course, global mobilities and flows across national/international borders. However the arguments of Pratt and Mezzadra and Neilson also point to borders and contact zones which need to be taken into account, negotiated and inhabited within national borders. Here Kell’s idea of transcontextual or translocal literacies (KELL, 2009, 2017) is useful and indeed connects with the idea of transnational literacies but is broader in that it fleshes out both the idea of internal boundaries and borders and also the mobility of texts in time/space. As she points out: texts travel. This position is clearly expounded in KELL (2009). Starting from an



examination of literacy activity in an ethnography of house building a South African township of Khayaletu, identifying processes that started in Khayaletu but went further: these included:

- i) Ordering building materials;
- ii) Dealing with the consequences of building a house that was over-sized for the allocated plot, involving local meetings, meetings in the city centre;
- iii) Recording members “activeness” to be sure they qualified to be allocated a building site;
- iv) Writing a story that became an important element in “writing a wrong” for a disabled woman, Noma, who had been unjustly treated;
- v) Attempting to establish an office for the civic association which included the “occupation” of a building. (Interestingly Kell treats the occupation of the building performatively as a mode of communication, anticipating similar arguments in Butler [2015].)

All these activities involved people and texts travelling, for example from the township to the city centre. Noma’s story, written down as part of a writing project, circulated in the township but went on to be read and told at provincial level and at the meeting of a national organization. Kell thinks of these as “meaning making trajectories” which move in space and time, across the borders which delimit contexts: local/provincial/national. Again the theoretical framing for the study, like Brandt & Clinton, involves ANT and she writes in conclusion:

I started with the concepts of literacy events and practices and focusing on the joins between one local and another not-local, but questioned them. In following the threads of meaning making, I moved across space and time. (KELL, 2009. p. 95)

Thus, instead of the settled Aristotelean unities of time and place which shape the here and now of the literacy event, literacy activity becomes a travel story.

### **3. A LITTLE MORE ON ACTOR NETWORK THEORY.....**

ANT as a way of understanding the organization or perhaps coordination of social and indeed natural life, including literacy has already been touched upon. We have seen it involves the notion of actants both human and non-human. It is not the only approach which focuses dynamically on social activity: sociocultural theory and activity theory are others. So let’s illustrate the scope of ANT with a familiar example: the classroom. A suitable case for the Aristotelean drama you might think. So who are the dramatis personae in the classroom drama? Students of course and teachers. They are visibly present on stage. But what about those who are not present: the department heads, the school administration, the city administration, the Ministry of Education? They are not visibly present but surely shape in some ways what goes on in the classroom. Exam time is approaching. Who sets the exams? And here we have just the humans that can potentially have an influence in shaping the

classroom drama. Let's think of non-human actants. Think of the layout of the classroom. Are the chairs and desks bolted down in rows, or do the students sit grouped at tables? Are the tables and chairs and their arrangement also actants? What technology is available? White board, PowerPoint, Smart Board, computers. What shaping influence do these technologies have on classroom activity. How about the materials, text books, work sheets etc. What about their shaping influence? Curricula, syllabi? Who has more influence in shaping what goes on in the classroom? The teacher or the syllabus? A little further afield, we can identify the contribution of departmental and school policies, policies and practices of city administration, government ministries, as well as global trends in education. More abstract entities, technologies of classification and standardization, record keeping regimes, marking schemes also contribute. ANT is a way of accounting for all the connections between these actants, human and non-human, which work together in the production of the scenes, situations, events, processes, which one way or another inter-animate the classroom drama. Are students misbehaving? Activate the discipline network! Here Bowker and Star are talking about classification and standardization from an ANT perspective:

How do we “see” this densely saturated classified world? We are commonly used to black-boxing this behind-the-scenes machinery.....All classification and standardization schemes are a mixture of physical entities such as paper forms, plugs, or software instructions encoded in silicon and conventional arrangements such as speed and rhythm, dimension, and how specifications are implemented. Perhaps because of this mixture, the web of intertwined schemes can be difficult to “see”. In general, the trick is to question every apparently natural easiness in the world around us and look for the work involved in making it easy. (BOWKER; STAR, 2013[1997], p. 95)

Here we get a sense of the inter-animation, co-production of social life, with inanimate objects understood as actants with their own agency, to be sure not agency in the human sense, but an active engagement in shaping whatever is ongoing. One additional insight from this excerpt is that the network brings together and connects elements of a very different order: humans, physical entities, texts, spatial and temporal arrangements, classificatory systems. These networks in ANT tend to bring together not “sames” but “differents”. This will be a useful point to bear in mind when we come to look at a related construct, *assemblages*.

#### **4. AND SO.....ASSEMBLAGES**

Closely related to the concept of network in ANT, understood as the bringing together of heterogeneous elements connected in a network, is the idea of *assemblage*. There are some differences in the way that the terms are used (cf for example the discussion in MULLER, 2015), but for the sake of this presentation I will treat them as close near equivalents, siblings even, and talk about networks/assemblages. Originating in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 2013) the notion of assemblage has been taken up by a number of researchers on

language such as PENNYCOOK (2018) and CANAGARAJAH (2018) who both link to the concept of spatial repertoires. This emphasis on the spatial is in line with the thinking of Deleuze & Guattari who evoke space in their discussion of assemblage, writing in *Mille Plateaux* : “Tout agencement est d’abord territorial” [every assemblage is first and foremost territorial] (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 2013).

The word assemblage is a translation from French of the word “agencement” meaning bringing elements together into a whole. It can be used in the everyday world to mean for example the furnishing of a room. The concept is of bringing together disparate elements to make a whole. One of the problems with the English translation “assemblage” however is that it misses an important dimension of the French meaning”. “Agencement” in French can mean the end product, the whole created by assembling the parts, meaning ii) below but it also means the *dynamic process* of bringing the parts together:

Agencement i ) action d’agencer; ii) état de ce qui est agencé

This dynamic aspect of the term is crucial, not just in the thinking of philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari, but also in the thinking of those who are trying to develop more dynamic and processual accounts of language, literacy and communication, as mentioned above Pennycook and Canagarajah but also many others. Such perspectives talk about *linguaging* or *translinguaging* to characterize this dynamic process aspect (cf the work of Garcia & Li Wei ( GARCIA; LI, 2014) and myself and Tong King Lee (BAYNHAM; LEE, 2019).

So the argument is not so much for moving away from literacy events, but rather to see the literacy event not as an Aristotelean stage setting with a unity of time and place, but as a dynamic coming together of different elements: human and non human: bodies, texts, images, work/life practices, artefacts, space time configurations, all dynamically engaged in making something happen in the world. This dynamic coming together as we have seen doesn’t just involve what is present in the here and now, but also a bringing in of elements from elsewhere. Kell talks about texts travelling, but the travelling is also of the network/assemblage, indeed travelling or mobility may be one of its traits. So the metaphor may be more like a travelling circus involving all that constitutes the text. What is brought together or assembled involves embodied, visual, verbal, spatial elements, According to Canagarajah:

The notion of *assemblage* helps to consider how diverse semiotic resources play a collaborative role as a spatial repertoire in accounting for the success of this activity, when language is not predefined as the sole, superior, or separate medium of consideration. Assemblage corrects the orientation to non-verbal resources in scholars addressing ‘multimodality’. From the perspective of assemblage, semiotic resources are not organized into separate modes. (CANAGARAJAH, 2017, p. 39)

## 5. GOOD MIGRANT/BAD MIGRANT

In the summer of 2018, a particular event or rather sequence of events played out in Paris. An undocumented Malian migrant bravely scaled an apartment block and rescued a small child who was hanging from the railing of a balcony.

**Figure 1: Undocumented migrant rescues child from balcony in Paris, May 2018.**

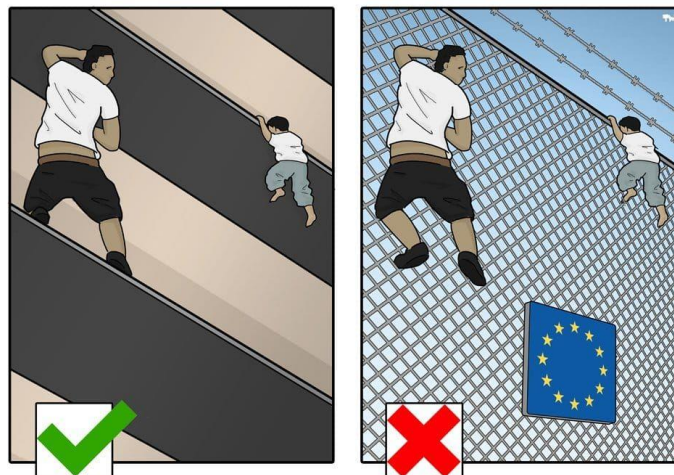


The event, and I am sure we would all agree that this IS an event, was captured on camera and went viral, not just on social media but also in the world press. The rescuer was invited to meet the President of the Republic, granted citizenship, found work. If we consider just for a moment the initial photograph, we can agree with Kell that texts travel. Here the photograph travelled. It was recontextualized, transmediatized (DE SOUZA JUNIOR, 2021). But with our network/assemblage lens we can see that the text travels as part a kind of circus of accompanying elements. (If humans are de-centred by the post human turn, so are texts.) For example it is the affordances of mobile photography that made capturing the rescue possible in the first place. The affordances of social media enable the image to go viral. Other more abstract, semiotic elements are triggered such as expectations around narrative and plot: the happy ending for example. All of these feed into the network/assemblage. In terms of narrative, there is the narrative of the original event. Following this is the narrative of what happened after. The anonymous rescuer acquires a name and a history, his circumstances lead to interventions from the powerful which dramatically change his life, a fairy story element that would have been appreciated by Propp.

However as we have seen from our discussion of the here-and-now of events we always need to take into account elements that are not present in our network/assemblage. It is a matter of some consequence in the unfolding of this event sequence that the rescuer is not just a brave and athletic young man and as such hero material, but also an undocumented migrant from Mali, an illegal and dark skinned at that. So mixed in to the actions observable in the image and how it is read is the network/assemblage around migration, race and Europe and all that this triggers. We can't read/make sense of what happens next for the protagonist without it. The text trajectory of this image

and its story takes another direction when it is picked up by a talented political cartoonist Tjeerd Royaards.

**Figure 2: Good Migrant/Bad Migrant Tjeerd Royaards**



His cartoon drawn from and simultaneously commenting on the story makes more explicit the non-visible elements which inform the image, the well-known discourses about migration into Europe. The title Good Migrant/Bad Migrant triggers this, as does the colour semiotics of **green TICK** and **red CROSS**. The balconies scaled in the apartment block, as the protagonist moves diagonally up towards the child. On the right hand side the protagonist scales a wire fence decorated with the EU Flag, moving diagonally upwards towards the child, ironically mirroring the first image.

So how does this work as a network/assemblage? First, we can take the product perspective, treating it as an assembled thing, composed of words, image, semiotic elements such as the red/green colour coding and the TICK/CROSS and compositional elements such as the parallelism of the visual and verbal stuff. These are the visible elements, but equally important are the non-visible elements, the discourses on migration and the closing of borders, the Fortress Europe trope. We might in fact think of this as a reader perspective, but, from a dynamic, process perspective it is worth bearing in mind that, in considering the network/assemblage we are not nor can be the disengaged reader confronted by the autonomous text, by engaging with the text we become part of the network/assemblage, plug ourselves in as it were. In consuming the text we act on and with it. In the last part of this paper I am going to apply the network/assemblage construct to an example of literacy activity in the TLANG project: Lucy, a monolingual migration lawyer, who does not have access to an interpreter, is giving advice to Momodou, using Google Translate.

## 6. AN ADVICE-GIVING EVENT IN THE CONTACT ZONE

To examine the next interaction we will also start from the event and see where the network/assemblage lens takes us. This event is drawn from the professional advice-giving practice of Lucy a migration lawyer, helping Momodou to clarify his residency situation. Momodou speaks a certain amount of English and fluent Italian and probably other languages not recorded. Lucy speaks only English and they make frequent use of Google Translate. In this interaction Momodou, is drawing on his Italian and English repertoire to try and communicate to Lucy that he needs a resident's card. He seems to be using a translanguaging strategy, to be understood as: "any language is good provided it helps me get my meaning across", for example:

### Extract One

(M= Momodou, L = Lucy, GT = GoogleTranslate; Black = English, Red = Italian, Blue = English translation)

L: you want (.) a **card**?

M: **l' ho fat** pa- passaport [I have done a passport]

L: ok let me just

(2.0)

M: **si** ((beep)) **fai la carta si** [do the card yes]

L: would you like a registration card for the UK

GT: **Vuoi una scheda di registrazione per il Regno Unito** ((beep)) [would you like to have a UK registration form ]

M: **si**, my (like) erm **residente**

L: ( ) resident

M: (uh-uh)

L: ok perfect ok I will write

M: **si si** hm hm

L: ok

[00:00:26] M (perfect-) **long** working **per.personato** (permit)

L: you jobseeker

M: job- jobseeker **si**

L: ah perfect

M: jobseeker

L: no problem lovely

M: job- jobseeker

M. draws on both English and Italian to get his meaning across to Lucy. **l' ho fat** pa- passaport [I have done a passport]. In contrast Lucy has no such option, so what does she do? One strategy is that of simplification: she used simplified grammar and identifiable language chunks: a) you want (.) a **card**?[question formed with rising intonation];b) "ok perfect ok I will write" [transitive verb without an object]. Interestingly she returns to the topic of the registration card a few turns later, when she adopts the Google Translate strategy, only here the wording has shifted to a more formal register: "Would you like....". The formality is not picked up by Google Translate, which translates this with informal "vuoi" and also with "scheda di registrazione" which is an apparent approximation, but

conforms more to the sense of registration card as used when registering at a hotel. So there is multilingual interaction going on. M. draws on English and Italian to get his meaning across. With regard to Lucy's contributions the multilingual dimension is supplied not by Lucy, but by a non-human actant: Google Translate. It is clear that Google Translate is a somewhat clumsy actant and it takes some human interpreting to fill in the gaps of the translation provided.

Alarm bells start ringing for Lucy when it appears that Momodou has been in the UK and job-seeking since 2013, a fact that would certainly prejudice his application for documentation and she again resorts to Google Translate to get this message across.

### Extract Two

L: ok so I will try and explain for you ok. You can ( ) (2.0) ((beep)) you can make an application for a residence card in the UK **but** you have been jobseeking here for a very long time and that can cause problems

GT: **é possibile presentare una domanda di carta di soggiorno nel Regno Unito ma se restate ricerca di (.) lavoro qui per un tempo molto lungo e che possono causare problemi**

[it is possible to make (present )an application for a residence card in the UK but if you keep jobseeking here for a very long time and that they can cause problems ]

((beep))

B: ok?

Here Google Translate reverses the formality, taking the relatively direct “You can make...” and impersonalizing it: “é possibile”. The clause that starts “but you have been jobseeking...” is rather disjointed with a number of grammatical errors, for example third person plural “possono” has no obvious antecedent plural subject. As a non-human actant Google Translate again shows up as a rather clumsy one, with difficulty both in handling the pragmatics of address and the syntax of moderately complex clauses.

Putting together a network/assemblage as we have seen involves not just the present elements, but also the not visible, not materially present. Another not visible, not materially present actant is the whole complex of rules and procedures governing residence in the UK and hence applications for residence. It is these that Lucy is attempting to mediate here as she starts by glossing her intentions: ok so I will try and explain for you ok. The next sequence arises when Momodou explains that, during the period in question he has been going back and forward repeatedly between Italy and the UK and is able to produce air tickets to prove it.

### Extract Three

M: no my my go back erm Italia

L: Ita- oh you go back?

M: yes you go back Italia I come back erm

L: aha:: ok a::h

M: I come here back ok I come here back erm **ventisette**

((papers rustling)) (2.0) one second [twenty-seven]

L: that's ok

M: one second one second  
 L: ah more tickets let's see  
 (10.0)  
 [00:03:31]  
 M: **questo** [this]  
 L: ok  
 M: I come back (Italia)  
 L: so you come back ah in so you went  
 M: **si** (fifteen day)  
 L: and then you come back in  
 M: **si**  
 L: and  
 M: come back in (you) go back Italia  
 L: and so and then when did you come back to UK  
 M: ( )fifteen fifteen day  
 L: fifteen day  
 M: **si**  
 L: ok now the problem is  
 M: I come back erm (3.0)  
 L: November (.) fifteen ok (so) let me just have a look  
 M: **si si**  
 (3.0)  
 L: so tha- that's from Manchester to Milan so that's  
 M: **si si**  
 L: yea and then you  
 M: **si**  
 L: come back  
 M: **si**  
 (3.0)  
 L: Bologna to Bristol and that was in April  
 M: I come (in) back erm **ventisette eccolo** [twenty seven here it is]  
 L: ah let's have a look  
 M: yes I come back in  
 L: let (we) let us just work this out so this is so this is Pisa to Leeds Bradford  
 M: **si si**  
 L: twenty-seventh of May twenty sixteen  
 M: **si**  
 L: ah so you ha- so a:h ok so you jobseeking from May  
 M: **si si** jobseeking **si**  
 L: easy  
 M: ok yeah  
 L: thank you very much  
 M: you're welcome  
 L: that makes it very easy

We see in this exchange something that was highly characteristic of all our data around rights and benefits, both in terms of employment, housing education but also immigration. Clients would bring with them plastic bags or folders full of their documentation and would periodically pause to fossick through them to find the relevant documentation. Here it is the airline tickets which prove his coming and going between Italy and the UK. Again Momodou moves easily between English and Italian, punctuating his talk with “si...si...si” and using Italian deictics when he hands or points to documents (“questo”, “eccolo”). Lucy on the other hand does not resort to Google Translate, perhaps



because there is nothing especially complex to explain and also because Momodou is in charge of the interaction here. She does however draw on the simplified English range in her repertoire: “ok so you jobseeking from May” [verbless sentence]. Although a somewhat clumsy actant, with difficulty handling pragmatics and the syntax of moderately complex sentences, Google Translate serves a purpose here in communicating the gist of a complex or important point. In Extract Two it conveys the point to Momodou sufficiently clearly so he can energetically refute the idea that he has been “jobseeking” since 2013. So in this interaction it has served its purpose. Momodou translanguages, drawing on the Italian and English he has in his repertoire, Lucy draws on another characteristic of hers, the ability to simplify her speech along lines that have long been described in the literature on pidginization and learner language.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I have reviewed developments in literacy studies, starting at the moment when universalist claims about the efficacy of literacy in personal and social development were challenged by approaches which emphasized context, the situated, the local and typically used an ethnographic methodology to investigate it. Understanding literacy in social life was foregrounded in this new approach. We have seen how this approach was progressively challenged and elaborated, by arguments such as Brandt and Clinton who wanted to take literacy beyond the limits of the local. The next critical element came with the argument of Mary Louise Pratt against the commonly accepted view that the social world was organized into speech communities with shared linguistic and interactional norms and values, arguing that we communicate in contact zones, typically negotiating difference. A similar argument is developed by Mezzadra and Neilson concerning borders, not just national borders but also fault-lines of difference within societies. Surely the question of borders and embordering is one of the key issues of our time, with a rhetoric of openness, globalization and mobility being countered by a paranoid populist rhetoric which I hardly need to rehearse to a Brazilian readership. People travel, texts travel, literacies travel. This brings us to think again of literacies of displacement from another angle as transnational literacies and at a more abstract level transcontextual literacies. We also noted that mobility is not equally distributed. In fact the kind of mobility associated with globalization finds its rationale in the politics of neo-liberalism. The right to be mobile depends on money, the type of passport you have, various forms of social/cultural/economic capital. For those not endowed with these benefits, the asylum seeker stuck in a camp, the indentured labourer, it is, as I suggested above, a stuckmobility. Not only that, it is countries on the periphery who are asked to and offer the most resources in welcoming strangers. So the twin tensions of mobility and border-closing define in many ways the shape of literacy activity on and around borders in the current turbulent period we are living through. The second shifter since literacy studies was initiated in the mid 1980s has of course been the transformative effect of on-line

communication and social media, as for example in the cameo of my daughter's homework practices. She is in effect spending the evening in her bedroom both working and socializing with her friends, on-line.

All of these factors have pointed us and the researchers reviewed to approaches such as ANT and Assemblage Theory in order to understand the dynamic complexity of literacy activity. I have chosen in this paper to ignore the differences between these approaches and focus on their many similarities, referring to network/assemblage. In discussing these we have come up against the well known problem of construing the social world dynamically rather than as a stringing together of objects. Both network and assemblage suffer from this semantic bias and this is why approaches that twist the language to emphasise dynamic process such as *linguaging* and *translanguaging* are so important. This is not however to underplay the importance of reification. If we were not able to talk about processes as things we would be severely limited in our capacity to talk up the world in language. Speaking of language an important shift over the decades we are considering has of course been the emergence of an awareness of word/ image combinations, pioneered in the work of the late Gunther Kress and of other such as Charles Goodwin. Networks/assemblages involve the spatial, the linguistic, the visual, the embodied the gestural. Concepts like spatial repertoire, adopted by Pennycook and Canagarajah embody this. We have looked at this aspect in the Good Migrant/Bad Migrant example. Both ANT and Assemblage Theory point to the fact that it is not just present elements which are enlisted to make up the network/assemblage, but also the non-present which lean into and take a role in constituting the ongoing activity, thus answering Brandt and Clinton's critique and indeed that of Kell. Another important element is the acknowledgement in both ANT and Assemblage Theory of the active role of non-human participants in the network/assemblage.

So as well as involving displaced communication, I want to argue, in line with Pratt and Mezzadra and Neilson that these advice sessions involve literacy on the border, between the every day life of the client and the discourses and practices of the benefit system. So this is an instance of the many deep social cleavages that run through UK society, indeed underpinning and shaping the turbulence we are living through at the moment. Lucy, the lawyer, can be seen in the contact zone, mediating at a border, here not the benefits system but the immigration system. So if we are to understand the face to face practices she engages in with her clients we need to factor in as an actant or maybe a cluster of actants which powerfully shape whatever is done and said by human agents in the putting together of the network/assemblage which is the application for a residency permit. The affordances of non human technologies are drawn on when Lucy and Momodou enlist Google Translate as an actant or element in the network/assemblage which is being put together. The focus of the paper is on the usefulness of the network/assemblage construct in constructing a dynamic account of literacy activity. However these arguments are paralleled if we look at this data through the lens of translanguaging. It is crucially important to recognize that translanguaging doesn't

involve the obvious multilingual dimension of repertoire, but also aspects of register, discourse and embodiment. The border/boundary across which Lucy and Momodou are talking and mediating is as much to do with discourses (of inclusion/exclusion for example), institutions (the relevant legislation, the ministry and its immigration procedures) and registers (legal/everyday/simplified mediating language use) as it is discrete languages (English/Italian).

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