Language and Materiality in Global Capitalism*

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Abstract

Language and materiality have long been considered separate phenomena, but an increasing interest in their convergence suggests the productive potential of considering the linguistic and the material within the same analytic frame. Linguistic anthropologists and scholars in allied disciplines have ethnographically investigated how the linguistic and the material are intertwined, focusing on various ways in which this occurs. In order to highlight what is shared across these endeavors, we discuss a range of scholarship, including how words and objects may cosignify meaning and value; practices of embodiment, aesthetics, and style; linguistic objectification and the circulatory possibilities of linguistic forms; and language commodification in global capitalism. We see these efforts as contributing to an emerging field of scholarship we call “language materiality” that captures both the materiality of language as well as how the linguistic and material may interact to create meaning and value. We illustrate how such an approach may address current exigencies of neoliberal projects, global capitalism, and new forms of circulation.
INTRODUCTION

Language and materiality have long been considered separate phenomena: the linguistic seen as inherently immaterial, the material as concrete and nondiscursive. Recent studies have featured an intriguing and productive convergence of the two that suggests the illustrative potential of considering language and materiality within the same analytic frame. In this review, we consider points of articulation, convergence, and divergence of language and materiality from a range of ethnographic and theoretical perspectives. Bodies of work on language and political economy and language ideology, as well as on semiotics, intertextuality, and interdiscursivity, for instance, have turned to consider the material alongside the linguistic to address broader questions varying from nationalism and class to religion and cultural production. Taking our cue from linguistic anthropologists and scholars in allied disciplines who have considered the material as mattering in different ways—as a property of language, in combination with language, as exhibiting materialized characteristics of form, or as evidencing commodified values that can circulate in ways previously unseen—our goal is to put scholarship from various academic lineages in conversation with one another. To bring these various, and as yet disparate, works together, we offer “language materiality” as a term to characterize an emerging field of inquiry. The representative but by no means exhaustive works we include overlap, differ, and potentially bridge gaps between conceptions of power, meaning, and value—for instance, between semiotic and political economic approaches in linguistic anthropology. By discussing how these works exemplify an emerging field of scholarship, we consider how a joint focus on language and materiality may address current exigencies of neoliberal projects, global capitalism, and new forms of circulation. Accordingly, we invite scholars of material culture to consider how language is involved in commodification, circulation, and value formation and also urge linguistic anthropologists to continue to consider systematically the material dimensions of language in use.

BRINGING LANGUAGE AND MATERIALITY TOGETHER

Since at least Herder and Marx, the state or quality of being material, physical, or object-like is claimed in western thought to be different from that of the ideational realm; objects, things, and bodies are opposed to ideas. A growing body of literature, however, overtly or otherwise suggests that this distinction may not be universal or useful and that the state of the material requires greater attention, especially with regard to language. Earlier inquiries in linguistic anthropology, such as the ethnohistory of speaking approach, attended to relevant contextual features that co-occurred with talk, such as the grog consumed during gossip (Brenneis 1984; see Goffman 1979, Gumperz 1982). Later studies of context focused on how it shapes and is shaped by dynamics of language use (Duranti & Goodwin 1992; see Agha 2007, Irvine 2001, Irvine & Gal 2000, Silverstein 2003), but here too the material dimensions of context were not theorized as such. Arguably, materiality may not have seemed as relevant as it has become in our current era, in which the material can entail facets of linguistic context, and linguistic forms may acquire material qualities when they are pressed into new modes of objectification, circulation, and recontextualization.

We build here from two distinct though often overlapping lines of inquiry: one concerned with the value of language, and the other more focused on meaning. The first emerges out of an interest in how material conditions shape ideologies and uses of language, including political economic approaches to language that understood it as a material form of social practice (Voloshinov 1973, Williams 1977). Work on language and political economy explores important connections to the material conditions

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1Although we refer to this emerging field of inquiry as “language materiality,” throughout the text we purposefully vary the terms by which we characterize the range of scholarly efforts that engage with the linguistic and the material.
that govern the choices speakers make about language (Gal 1989, Irvine 1989, Jaffe 1999a, Woolard 1985). Language as symbolic capital may be interchangeable with material forms of capital under market conditions, and linguistic forms may draw their value from both material and symbolic domains (Bourdieu 1977, 1991). Bringing to the fore how issues of language and power are linked in everyday talk, the paradigm of language ideologies, which act as “a mediating link between social forms and forms of talk” (Woolard 1998, p. 3; Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin et al. 1998), has been invaluable for linking quotidian language use to evaluative processes of display, judgment, and social category formation. By considering the material conditions of language use rather than materiality itself, studies of language ideology, as well as of language and political economy, have advanced conversations about formations of nationalism, processes of modernity, and inequalities of gender, class, race, and ethnicity, among other topics.

Semiotic approaches more explicitly concerned with meaning making have tended to consider materiality as a mediating property of social life. For instance, focusing on the medium has been offered as a counterpoint to mentalist approaches to language (Schneider 2006, Wittgenstein 1991), and linguistic signification has been seen as a material process inseparable from other social activity (Coward & Ellis 1977). Semiotic studies may identify ontological characteristics that material social practices exhibit, considering materiality as far as it is embodied and enacted by individuals or examining the lives and biographies of texts and other linguistic artifacts (Hull 2003). Recent work has developed Peircean semiotics to connect explicitly the material and verbal dimensions of signification (Kockelman 2006, Lee 1997, Manning & Meneley 2008), at times capitalizing on how such an analytic suggests a nonteleological relationship between language and materiality, one in which meaning is mutually constituted (e.g., Daniels 1984, Mertz & Parmentier 1985, Munn 1986, Myers 2001). Keane’s (2003, 2007) “semiotic ideology” extended language ideology to consider how meaning is signified through utterances, things, or both together. Keane’s work joins others focused on how linguistic form and meaning are reproduced and potentially transformed as they circulate across contexts through processes such as intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Briggs & Bauman 1995, Irvine 2005, Silverstein & Urban 1996). The focus on movement of linguistic forms and meanings also drives the emerging field of mediatization, which considers the circulation of signs through local and mass media (Agha 2011b).

Studies that highlight the political economic or semiotic are by no means mutually exclusive; indeed, some of the most dynamic areas emerge in the overlap of these approaches. Efforts to bring processes of meaning making and value formation within the same ethnographic and analytic frame, such as Kockelman’s (2006, p. 78) agenda to “bring together Marx’s dialectic and Peirce’s semiotic,” for instance, offer useful strategies for analyzing what Kockelman calls the modes of semiotic capital that characterize neoliberalism. Indeed, when inquiries into the linguistic and the material are put in conversation with critical studies of globalization and neoliberalism, scholarship emerges that attends to vital dimensions of materiality in language, as well as the role language plays in making materiality meaningful (e.g., Coupland 2010, Heller 2011). Recent scholarship on global capitalism has illustrated the heightened significance of materiality in an era in which domestic and foreign policy agendas are dominated by capital accumulation and the commodification of culture (Ho 2009; see Comaroff & Comaroff 2009). If, as Harvey (2005, p. 11) asserts, “the neoliberal project is to disembled capital from [state regulation and ownership] constraints,” then the role of language in national and global capitalistic agendas must be considered for how linguistic forms are involved in such deregulation and its effects. Related to this are debates to reconsider context in ways that take into account new and emerging forms of linguistic commodification and their circulation (Lee & LiPuma 2002).
In an era of global capitalism when language is subject to novel processes of commodification and circulation, several interconnected concerns emerge that characterize much of the work in this review. In the works we discuss below, language and materiality together play a role in the production of meaning and value at individual, community, society, national, and global levels, beginning with how words and objects work together within semiotic systems and how embodiment, aesthetics, and style illustrate the intersection of the linguistic and the material. We then turn to questions of linguistic objectification and the circulatory possibilities of linguistic forms, followed by a discussion of language commodification in global capitalism. Before concluding with how language and materiality interact to contribute to contemporary anticapitalist projects, we consider the complexity of global capitalist agendas of language commodification and circulation and suggest promising directions for this emerging field.

**COSIGNIFICATION OF MATERIAL WORDS AND SYMBOLIC OBJECTS**

Ethnographic contexts in which the linguistic and material cosignify foreground the synergy between words and objects in creating semiotic representations that either dimension alone may be unable to achieve. One illustrative example includes Basso (1996), in which the symbolic resources of language and land together teach moral values and serve as tools for historical memory, personal reflection, and the strengthening of community (see also Hoffman 2008, Keane 2007, Modan 2007). In Weiner’s (1984) account of the Trobriands, when nonkin individuals confront one another with “hard words,” such direct confrontation may be rectified only through material redress, in this case, yams, as participants “state the Negative with objects” (p. 174). Jones (2012) shows how magicians’ talk or “patter” is just as important as visual presentation in the efficacy of magic tricks in performance, whereas Coupland (2011) theorizes how particular numbers correlate with ways of measuring material and social phenomena. The performance of expertise, which is largely linguistic, “not only determines the value of cultural objects. [I]t also confers value on those who interact with these objects, including the experts so enacted” (Carr 2010, p. 18).

Seminal work on the social value of commodities (Appadurai 1986, Miller 1998, Myers 2001) has been enhanced by examining their interactions with language use. Agha (2011a) has laid out a schema for examining “commodity registers,” which considers how objects are represented through language as well as meaningfully grouped to reflect and activate social differences. Commodities that utilize language can demonstrate an uneasy balance between gift and commodity, as in Jaffe’s (1999b) examination of greeting cards, in which the language on cards is only part of what gives them value. Value is mediated through the words printed on the cards and personalized signs such as handwriting, which create and maintain relationships between sender and receiver and underscore the material significance of this communicative form (see Ahearn 2001, Danet 1997). Words and objects together shape meanings of ethnicity and class in the consumption practices of Silicon Valley Desis (South Asian Americans), such that value is indexed in ways that minimize class disparities within this ethnic community (Shankar 2008). As Bourdieus (1984, 1991) has argued, language and objects may be integrated into hierarchies of taste and distinction that contribute to social formations of ethnicity, race, and class. In Shandler’s (2006) investigation of the significance of Yiddish to contemporary Jews who may not speak it, objects bearing Yiddish, including mugs with humorous phrases, dreidels, and dictionaries, enable this language to be consumed, even fetishized. In a different context, Hill (2008) documents the appearance of a register she calls “mock Spanish” on such objects as greeting cards, coffee mugs, and outdoor advertisements such as billboards and bus.
shelters; these objects’ mass production and circulation create racialized representations of Spanish speakers.

Focusing on the linguistic and the material together offers insight into various processes of capitalist value formation. Message, vital to politics as well as advertising, pairs language with materialized forms of affect and emotion in ways that foster identification. Hill (2000, p. 264; see Silverstein 2011) builds on Jakobson’s notion of the poetic function to consider how the duality of message is composed of a complex interplay of signs—including words, comportment, gesture, lighting, bodily movements, etc.—brought together in performance. In advertising, message pairs select values with a commodity or service in ways that foster consumer identification (Goffman 1979, Manning 2010, Shankar 2012, Silverstein 2005). Brand names and trademarks are forms of intellectual property based on social alterity (Coombe 1998) and can come to stand for particular types of social authenticity (Manning 2010, Meneley 2007, Parmentier 1994). In some cases, the successful integration of the linguistic and the material into a brand identity ultimately contributes to its dilution and downfall, such as those that are defeated by their own success through “genericide,” which renders brands indistinguishable from their imitators (Moore 2003). These different, yet overlapping, instances of cosignification can be considered together to reveal processes of local meaning making, value formation, and the construction and maintenance of social hierarchy.

EMBODIMENT, AESTHETICS, AND STYLE

Some studies of language use identify the body, and the voice in particular, as especially significant. As a powerful analytic and ethnographic concept that has also been used to explore distribution of access to power (Gal 1991), “voice” refers to the linguistic and material assemblage of how someone sounds and the relative social value of that assemblage within a system of other voices (see Bakhtin 1981). Fox (2004) argues that the act of voicing is a material and symbolic process at the heart of Texas working-class culture. Voice as phonation originating in the mouth and vocal tract and taking the form of speech and song is “the central locus in the production of social and cultural being” (Feld et al. 2006, pp. 333–34). Indeed, how the voice sounds is part of what it means and does in particular social and cultural contexts; for instance, “for Ilongots, true verbal art has social force” (Rosaldo 1984, p. 140). As a material presence, voice is located in time and space, in what Bakhtin (1981) and others who have developed his idea might call a chronotope, and is expressed through various face-to-face and mediated forms of language (Taylor 2009, Weidman 2010), including saying place names (Basso 1996), telling stories connected to places or describing routes through meaningful landscapes (Feld 1990, Feld & Basso 1996), and singing with twang or without (Feld et al. 2006).

In these and other ways, embodiment links “the materiality of sound to the sociality of vocal practice” (Feld et al. 2006, p. 340; see also Jakobson 1960, Weiner 1991). In this view, talk is inseparable from the material speaking context, grounded in the mouths and bodies that produce it and otherwise experience it sensuously, shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs (Geurts 2002, Zimman & Hall 2010). Bourdieu (1977, p. 660; 1989) contends that “linguistic capital is embodied capital,” and embodied language and linguistic competence are dimensions of bodily “hexis” through which the speaking subject’s relation to the social world is expressed and achieved. Agha (2007) portrays enregisterment as similarly producing personae marked by embodied dispositions, comportment, and other nonlinguistic features that contribute to the formation of social stereotypes. Likewise, Fader (2009) presents “embodied signs” in analyses of Hasidic gendered socialization practices such as socially significant vowels or items of clothing to show how language use, material culture, and beliefs about the body intersect.
Inoue (2011) charts the creation of gendered subjects of modernity among nineteenth-century Japanese stenographers and how the decline of this profession shifted the mediation of meaning from the embodied materiality of the stenographer to “dematerialized signifiers encoded in the text” (p. 189). Embodiment of language, for instance during language shift, may join time and place with feeling and evaluation in ways that create meaning and value simultaneously (Cavanaugh 2009).

Looking at embodiment and aesthetics from a different perspective, “style” integrates linguistic and material elements with a focus on the meanings and values such performance engenders. Irvine (2001) contends that material and linguistic differentiation are crucial to style, especially insofar as they enable juxtaposition of social categories in a political economic system. Early studies from the Birmingham School’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies offered class-based analyses of how individuals and groups strive to create differentiation through their use of signs (Hebdige 1979), as well as gender-based critiques of accounts that marginalized the cultural practices of girls (McRobbie 1991). Styles are socially recognizable and typifiable, linking ways of speaking and material practices such as dressing to categories that position individuals and shape the reproduction of class status and social dispositions (Bourdieu 1984, Eckert 2000, Willis 1981). Along with bodily adornment and comportment, language variation including phonological features such as vowel elongation and shortening and lexical appropriation from other speech communities indexes style and forms the basis of social evaluation regarding race, ethnicity, and gender (Mendoza-Denton 2008, Rampton 2006, Reyes 2007, Woolard 2008). Such pairings of distinct linguistic features with commodities can extend beyond the local to consider the relevance of mass-produced, global material and linguistic forms in local productions of style and, thus, complicate dynamics of power and political economy in new and interesting ways (e.g., Alim et al. 2008, McElhinny 2007, Shankar 2011).

OBJECTIFICATION, CIRCULATION, AND COMMUNICATIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Since Malinowski’s (1984) study focusing on the Kula, anthropologists have illustrated how objects gain value as they circulate, whether they are involved in systems of exchange (Weiner 1992) or in other types of flows and scapes (Appadurai 1996). Numerous scholars have astutely complicated Bourdieu’s (1991) portrayal of the linguistic marketplace and characterization of language as symbolic capital (e.g., Irvine 1989, Swigart 2001, Woolard 1985), but his basic insight that language is embedded and circulates within systems of political, economic, social, and cultural distinction has been foundational to investigations of language’s role in the production of value. Whether the context of circulation is immediate and face-to-face or mediated in some way—as in reported speech and other intertextual and interdiscursive events—the material remains critical for the linguistic to make sense (see Hull 2012 and Faudree 2012, this volume). For example, in Bergamo, Italy, while everyday use of the local vernacular decreases, it is increasingly objectified through entextualization (into dictionaries, volumes of poetry, etc.) and via its performance in certain valued contexts, such as plays, which transform the vernacular from a communicative medium to one of acquisition and display (J. Cavanaugh & S. Shankar, manuscript in progress).

Aspects of the process of objectification, specifically, the externalization and materialization of meaning and value, are central to understanding meanings people make from material culture (Keane 2007, D. Miller 2005, Myers 2001). Because objectifications are in part products of speakers’ metapragmatic and meta-cultural rationalizations, they involve a degree of reflection, assessment, and critique. These reflexive dimensions doubly involve language in objectification: as part of the objectification process and as its object, often at the same time. Accents, lexical elements, registers, and styles of
language may undergo different objectification processes than nonlinguistic objects would in order to circulate, complex processes involving abstraction of local forms as they take on meanings and values that can move across contexts. In some instances, reflexivity and performativity allow “language to ‘objectify’ its own praxis” (Lee & LiPuma 2002, p. 193). For instance, “qualisigns”—those signs that represent a particular attribute of a thing—enable objects to circulate precisely because they do not have a “representative” value in a Saussurian sense but do have an indexical one shaped by context (Manning & Meneley 2008, pp. 287–88; see Keane 2003, Munn 1986). As objectifications circulate and are taken up in new contexts, they may transform social meanings, relationships, and values, as well as form connections between everyday contexts of talk and other types of circulation (see Shankar 2006).

Linguistic objectification can encompass entire languages but also single out particular linguistic features, such as the transformation of indexical signs into icons, or “rhematization” (Gal 2005, Irvine & Gal 2000; see Peirce 1955). As a mode of signification that depends on resemblance between signifier and signified, icons focus attention on form. Feld et al. (2006; see Porcello 1998) enumerate iconic words such as click, boom, and rumble, which music producers use to describe the sounds they produce on a continuum from onomatopoeic to arbitrary. This is a precise metalanguage for these speakers because not being able to line up a sound token with a particular sound puts one at a professional disadvantage. Indexes such as accents may also be transformed into icons (Cavanaugh 2005), but note that although both accents and sound tokens are indexes, accents become pragmatic icons and sound tokens become semantic icons; both rely on language ideologies that construct the indexical ground against which these sounds become meaningful and invoke the dynamics of power that underpin their semiotic transformation and enable their subsequent circulation.

The objectification of lexical elements, as well as register and genre, at the community level is often anchored within particular contexts of performance or display. For instance, Moore (1988) documents what he calls the objectualization of words—words taking on object-like qualities—among speakers of Wasco, an endangered language of the American northwest. He shows that the use of objectualized words occurs in very particular contexts of display and wealth distribution to establish their value as alienable objects suitable for bestowal. Similarly, Rosaldo (1984) shows how for the Ilongot, oratory, when it occurs in particular contexts, is “the reciprocal gift of words” (p. 144) that gives form to anger and leads eventually to an exchange of gifts for wrongs. Metapragmatic work that focuses on the form of words as much as on their meaning objectifies these linguistic forms in ways that iconize or rhematize them and allow them to gather value, articulate social relations, and potentially circulate more widely than originally intended.

Other scales of and contexts for circulation offer different possibilities for language objectification, such as the rise of print capitalism as part of nation building. Select forms of language were materialized into print form in ways that unified disparate contexts into imagined communities and gave fixity to the forms of the language being printed, thus delineating higher status forms as standards and others as nonstandards (Anderson 1991; see Cody 2009, Urban 2001). Although print—language materialized in text form—is often central to these processes, it is not the only type of language objectification that occurs. Silverstein (1996) argues that the creation of standard in the United States involved conditions under which “language acquires ‘thinginess’ such that the properties language takes on are continuous with those of other objects in the culture” (pp. 290–91). The circulation of this standard-language-as-thing—through print, but also via interactional activities such as, e.g., language training courses—in turn helps to demarcate the very boundaries of the nation-state.

Linguistic circulation that occurs through media has considered form in the examination of indexicality: context-based signification, specifically via contiguity or causality. Scholarship on indexicality focuses on the deployment of indexes and the formation of indexes and the indexical dimensions of meaning.
of intertextual and interdiscursive links and emphasized material properties specific to a medium (Bier 2008, Spitulnik 1996). Work on “mediatization” (Agha 2011b, Bucholtz 2011) links contexts of communication and draws attention to the materiality of mediated language, as in the relationship between medical funding and training and the production and circulation of mediatized public health discourse (Briggs 2011). Eisenlohr (2004, 2010) discusses mediatized identities and authorities that form through the circulation of Islamic cassette sermon recordings. Much like the way texts may be interpreted differently as their material forms circulate (Gal 2003), the material form of recordings as well as their aural qualities index various types of religious authority and meaning as they circulate (see F. Miller 2005). Likewise, digital technologies unite form and meaning in the platform they provide for communication and signification; for instance, Gershon’s (2010) “media switching” draws attention to how speakers see the choice of medium as contributing to the meaning of what is said within it.

The materialities of new media technologies have been shown to transform everyday talk. For instance, the digitized artifact introduces material communicative evidence into the structure of face-to-face conversations (Hall 2011). Moral panics about texting or the supposed loss of face-to-face sociality caused by the growth of computer-mediated social media (Thurlow 2006), such as contempt for or ridicule of sites such as Facebook, are in large part anxieties about the material forms that linguistic exchanges take, forms seen as inherently different from unmediated contexts. Innovative spellings in texting, for instance, may become icons of new types of identity and sociality among youth (Crystal 2009, Jones & Schieffelin 2009). In all these cases, processes of objectification complicate and may refashion the indexical embedding of a wide range of linguistic forms in face-to-face contexts, giving them novel meanings as they circulate into new contexts and their material forms—sounds, print tokens, and various media instantiations—become part of what these linguistic forms are and do interactionally.

**LANGUAGE COMMODIFICATION IN GLOBAL CAPITALISM**

Do aspects of language circulate in the same way that other commodities do? As the commodification of language takes various forms across ethnographic contexts, from Wolof nobles purchasing the verbal performances of griots in Senegal (Irvine 1989) to phone sex service operators in the Bay Area adopting particular gendered styles of speaking to please their customers (Hall 1995), this question is best addressed through ethnographic specifics. That language commodification is also always a process of transformation contributes to the construction of linguistic value and potentially transforms linguistic meaning. Whereas all commodified language is objectified, the reverse may not be true. In addition, objectified language need not circulate beyond its original context, but commodified language is always ready to move beyond local communities and societies into national and global contexts—levels at which language use can be difficult to analyze.

Differences emerge between language commoditization and circulation within national boundaries versus the ways these occur within globalized flows of capital and structures of power. Neoliberal deregulation and capitalist economic structures are characterized by increasing commodification of linguistic forms whose entry into global arenas of circulation is inflected with sociopolitical hierarchies of power (Cameron 2000; Duchêne & Heller 2012; Gal 2007; Heller 2003, 2011; Urciuoli 2008). Circuits of media, migration, consumer culture, and other vectors help form the distinctly neoliberal character of contemporary circulation, which Urban (2001) calls “meta-culture” in order to consider words in things, as well as culture passing through words. The commodification of language is indeed implicated in political economic transformations within nation-states (Heller 2003, Inoue 2006),
as language may be “made the object of a brisk commerce in goods-and-services for which experts make themselves available” (Silverstein 1996, p. 291). For example, through the commodification of Basque, which is achieved in large part due to the application of neoliberal Total Quality Management (TQM) schemes, Urla (2012) argues that “language tends increasingly to be thing-ified, treated as a discrete, measurable and bounded entity, on this grid of discrete countable units” (p. 89). The application of TQM has also meant a professionalization of Basque language activism in ways that transform it from a political activity into an economic one.

Focusing on these processes may illuminate local, national, and global scales of linguistic circulation and how intersections of capital, built environment, and performance of linguistic register create, for instance, nearly identical conversational exchanges in chain stores in disparate global locations. The neoliberal workplace in particular is marked by distinct styles and registers acquired, valued, and performed in commodified ways. These may include how particular ways of speaking gain economic value within a job market or other economically contingent contexts (Manning 2008), such as in Cameron’s (2000) research in call centers, which reports on the gendered ways in which workers are expected to perform and the evaluation of their success through customer feedback. Speakers involved in professions that entail the deployment of particular speech styles may develop complicated relationships to their own and other speech varieties via contradictory indexical linkages between self and speech, that is, between the perceived authentic self and the potentially inauthentic performance of job-related linguistic styles (Cowie 2007, Heller 2003).

Considering the material dimensions of connections across interactional contexts allows us to scrutinize the various ways in which talk may be linked to or part of economic processes. Power is implicated here, as in Holmes’s (2009) work on central banking, where bank officials create and publicly tell narratives that model economic processes with the goal of creating future expectations by iconically linking their talk to monetary value. Similarly conceptualizing interdiscursive links across spatially and temporally distant contexts, Gal (2007, p. 3) offers the concept of “clasp” as a way to highlight interdiscursive power dynamics between those who produce certain discourses and those who take them up or are subject to them (see Cavanaugh 2012).

Global capitalism is also characterized by contradictory, albeit intertwined, discourses that alternately value language according to “pride,” anchored in indexical fields of authenticity, heritage, and communalism, or “profit,” which depicts language’s economic potential within the new global economy (Duchêne & Heller 2012). The discourse of profit, in particular, results in linguistic Taylorization, i.e., the direct integration of ways of speaking or writing into economic forms and structures, as in the case of Japanese handwritten “girl-graphs,” which, after they fell out of fashion as a form of calligraphic resistance, continued to circulate in mass-produced versions (Miller 2011). In such contexts, “language as a marker of authenticity renders it particularly salient as a commodifiable resource” (Del Percio & Duchêne 2012, p. 49); this essential connection to authenticity can become problematic as speakers and interlocutors are reconfigured into linguistic producers and consumers in a global marketplace. The risk of problematic connections with speakers may be especially high for minority languages whose value is anchored in discourses of authenticity, as languages move into neoliberal realms of value that regard speakers as customers in language-planning efforts (Mac Giolla Chriosí 2005).

As a process of material transformation in which particular aspects and features of a language variety are metapragmatically vetted and objectified, language commodification augers a number of outcomes, both to speakers—as their relationships to what they speak become mediated by global capitalist economic forms and practices—as well as for languages themselves. In the case of Basque discussed above,
Urla maintains that the “thing-ification” of language may result in an increased focus on reported language choice as the preferred type of evidence to measure language use at the expense of more ethnographic investigations of syncretic and other mixed patterns of use. Likewise, McEwan-Fujita (2005) demonstrates how neoliberalism frames and impacts the ongoing language shift away from Gaelic toward English and shows how Gaelic language activists are involved in EU funding schemes that measure success in minority-language planning by quantifying the creation of enterprise rather than documenting Gaelic use.

What is shared across these cases is a focus on the form of language as key to its value and shifting location within economic structures and processes. The materiality of form, whether it is entextualized in authoritative texts, isaurally monitored by various types of listeners, or takes the shape of language varieties deemed authentic or inauthentic by experts, has a concrete presence in the world, distinct from the nondurable nature of most interactive language. This concrete presence, in turn, depends on the iconicity and increased fixity of linguistic form, such that only certain texts, accents, and speaking styles are transformed into commodities and become eligible to circulate.

**ANTICAPITALISM AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In outlining the emergent scholarly field of inquiry of language materiality through studies of material culture, capitalism, and linguistic anthropology and in demonstrating the myriad forms language objectifications take as they circulate across various contexts and scales, we have aimed to show the dynamic ways in which linguistic forms rely on and coproduce material contexts and how linguistic practices can involve processes of signification and valuation alongside objects. The significance of drawing attention to this “dynamic coexistence,” to use Peirce’s (1955) compelling phrase, can be found in the numerous ethnographic contexts discussed here, as well as in many that have created formative moments in our political present.

To conclude, we mention three cases that illustrate the academic purchase of a language materiality approach that integrates the linguistic and the material. First, the 2011 revolutions in the Middle East, especially the Egyptian revolution centered in Tahrir Square, relied heavily on numerous material communicative forms such as signs and banners, and burgeoned via social media sites, email, and mobile technologies, which provided running updates about locations and tactics. Second, the anticapitalist demonstrations encompassed in the Occupy Wall Street movement were marked by the materiality of microphones replaced by embodied communication in the form of the “human megaphone,” repeated waves of announcements from crowd centers to peripheries, later aided by a smartphone app. In both events, the notion of protest relied on the interaction between the vocalization of dissent and the materiality of bodies, tents, and signs, as well as on the physical manipulation of public space. Their retroactive branding also created objectifications that circulated to other parts of the world as the “Arab Spring” and the “Occupy” movement. In a third case exemplifying the crises unfolding in the European Union, Northern Italian and other small-scale heritage food producers may no longer be able to rely on national or EU-backed certifications such as DOP (Denomination of Protected Origin), which once ensured added value, and must find more global routes to lucrative markets. Their pursuits of value are linguistic as much as material, including the production of extensive documentation of quality standards as well as verbal performances of authenticity at food conferences and with consumers. In all these cases, global economic and political structures are mediated through local linguistic and material practices.

We believe that the 2011 Middle East revolutions, the Occupy movement, and the economic uncertainty in the European Union are best seen as processes built on a materiality that finds value within particular political
economies. Indeed, the “99%” rallying cry against income inequality, much like the citizenry of various Middle East countries protesting the lack of economic opportunity and leadership of their complacent rulers and those outside the halls of power in Europe voicing critiques of political compromises that threaten their livelihoods, tell a story of material and linguistic inequality that helps to make this disparity visible and thus more real. The language of anticapitalism, then, is as inherently steeped in materiality as it is in neoliberalism and global capitalism, and each requires the other for the successful performance of protest or revolution. Retaining analytical divisions between language and materiality may elide the identification of such interacting processes of value formation and the production of meaning. As our social media–saturated world proceeds amid neoliberal ideologies that commodify linguistic forms, which in turn circulate in political economies far from their originary contexts, analytic and ethnographic perspectives that encompass language and materiality within their purview are acutely situated to understand, track, and analyze the attendant dynamics and complexities of identity, subjectivity, and power in everyday life.

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