

## THE COMMUNICATIVE REPERTOIRE IN TIMES OF GLOBALIZATION

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Our current era of globalization is characterized above all by increased mobility, namely by the increasing mobility of people and the development of new communication technologies, including the mobility of linguistic signs and resources. This process raises new theoretical and methodological questions in linguistics, which results in the development of a new sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert 2010) in recent years. One of the most obvious ways to trace this new and dynamic development is to analyze individual language repertoires, especially those of migrants. In this essay, I examine aspects of the communicative repertoire of a refugee who fled to Germany in 2015 to escape the civil war in Syria. I draw on two interviews I conducted with him (in the following I refer to him by the pseudonym „Baran“). The first interview with Baran was recorded in 2016, a few months after his arrival in Germany. The second interview is from 2023, seven years later. In both recordings, German was the dominant language of interaction. I will analyze and show the characteristics of his German at the beginning of his immigration, how he resorts to practices of language mixing between German, Turkish and English (which has recently also been referred to as translanguaging) and how his German has developed over the course of the past seven years.

### 1. Sociolinguistics of globalization

The period from the 1990s to the present day is often called the era of globalization. A very significant development around this time was the end of the politically bipolar world due to the revolutions in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the years that followed, this process and the founding of the European Union in 1992 set off major migrations to and within Europe. One consequence of this development is the emergence of „super-diverse“ societies in some regions of the world, including Germany. According to Vertovec (2007), labor migration to Western countries after the Second World War initially led to a diversity of societies there. These migrations were characterized by relatively large groups of people emigrating from certain countries to certain other countries (for example, from India to Great Britain, from Turkey to Germany, from North Africa to France, etc.). In contrast, the increased mobility of people associated with globalization is now primarily bringing about migrations that are characterized by small groups of people from many different countries emigrating to many other countries. This has further diversified the already existing diversity, to which Vertovec refers with the descriptive term „super-diversity“. As a result, in Germany, for example, we sometimes find cities in which people from over 170 different countries of origin live together. In linguistic terms, such developments give rise to linguistic innovations, such as Kiezdeutsch (Wiese 2012), a multi-ethnolectal speech style characterized by the elimination of prepositions and articles („ich bin Schule“), borrowings of Turkish and Arabic expressions („wallah“, „lan“, etc.), new idioms, etc.

In addition to the increasing mobility of many people, not only in Europe, the other most important characteristics of globalization are the ever closer networking in business and trade on a global level and the emergence of new communication technologies. The new communication technologies in particular allow people to engage in completely new forms of communication, linguistic interaction and language acquisition. Traditional sociolinguistics, which was developed in the 1960s and 1970s and is associated with names such as Basil Bernstein, Joshua Fishman, Dell Hymes, John Gumperz and William Labov, analyses „large-scale regularities and generalizations about languages and social groups“ (Androutsopoulos 2017: 55, my translation). In the age of globalization, however, these relationships are softening, so that the connections between language, local/global/virtual spaces and affiliations to social groups appear fluid and flexible. According to Blommaert (2010: 5), the new sociolinguistics of globalization must therefore be able to capture this mobility in particular: „it focuses not on language-in-place but on language-in-motion, with various spatiotemporal frames interacting with one another. Such spatiotemporal frames can be described as 'scales', and the assumption is that in an age of globalization, language patterns must be understood as patterns that are organized on different, layered (i.e. vertical rather than horizontal) scale-levels“. In this sense the individual language repertoire of migrants in particular can be examined as an important object of investigation that illustrates the fluid and processual aspects between language use and social background in the globalized world.

### 2. The communicative repertoire

The conceptual of the linguistic repertoire as a concept was formulated in the 1960s by John Gumperz in the context of his linguistic field research in India and Norway. In contrast to Noam Chomsky's mostly theoretical paradigm in linguistics, which was prevalent at the time and attempted to describe the general mechanisms of human language(s) with his universal grammar, Gumperz was interested in analyzing the actual language use of people in communities. He thus related the concept of repertoire to the language or speech community as a whole: „We therefore introduce the concept of linguistic or verbal repertoire, defined as the totality of linguistic forms regularly employed within the community in the course of socially significant interaction“ (Gumperz 1965: 85). According to Gumperz, the verbal repertoire comprises all verbal practices accepted in a community for formulating messages. This can include individual varieties of a language, completely different languages, as well as switching between different registers, codes, styles, languages, etc. In his study of the repertoire of the Indian community of Khalapur, for example, Gumperz points out that in addition to Hindi as official standard language this also includes various sub-dialects spoken by the local untouchable groups, as well as Urdu (Gumperz 1964: 160-166).

In the years and decades that followed, this conceptualization of repertoire did not change much (Blommaert/Backus 2013: 12). Jan Blommaert has been one of the first sociolinguists to radically relate the concept to the individual since the 2000s as part of his studies on language and mobility (Blommaert/Backus 2013: 28). This creates a new perspective on people in times of globalization in relation to their linguistic resources and practices:

„Thus conceived, repertoires invite a new form of analysis. No longer seen as the static, synchronic property of a ‘speech community’, we can now approach it as an inroad into Late-Modern subjectivities – the subjectivities of people whose membership of social categories is dynamic, changeable and negotiable, and whose membership is at any time always a membership-by-degree. Repertoires enable us to document in great detail the trajectories followed by people throughout their lives: the opportunities, constraints and inequalities they were facing, the learning environments they had access to (and those they did not have access to), their movement across physical and social space, their potential for voice in particular social arenas. We can now do all of this in significant detail, because we are no longer trapped by a priori conceptions of language, knowledge and community.“ (Blommaert/Backus 2013: 30).

According to this conceptualization, repertoire is understood as a dynamic set of communicative resources and practices of individuals. At any given time, it reflects the life path of people, their affiliations with different social groups and categories, their movements through physical, social and digital spaces, their (partial) acquisition of new languages or varieties of languages, and whether they acquire them „in the wild“ or in controlled settings. As Jan Blommaert (2019), who sadly passed away far too early, published on his YouTube channel, it is finally possible to reflect and work theoretically on the concept of repertoire, which strangely enough "was never seriously theorised; it was mainly used in a very superficial, undertheorized almost impressionistic way".

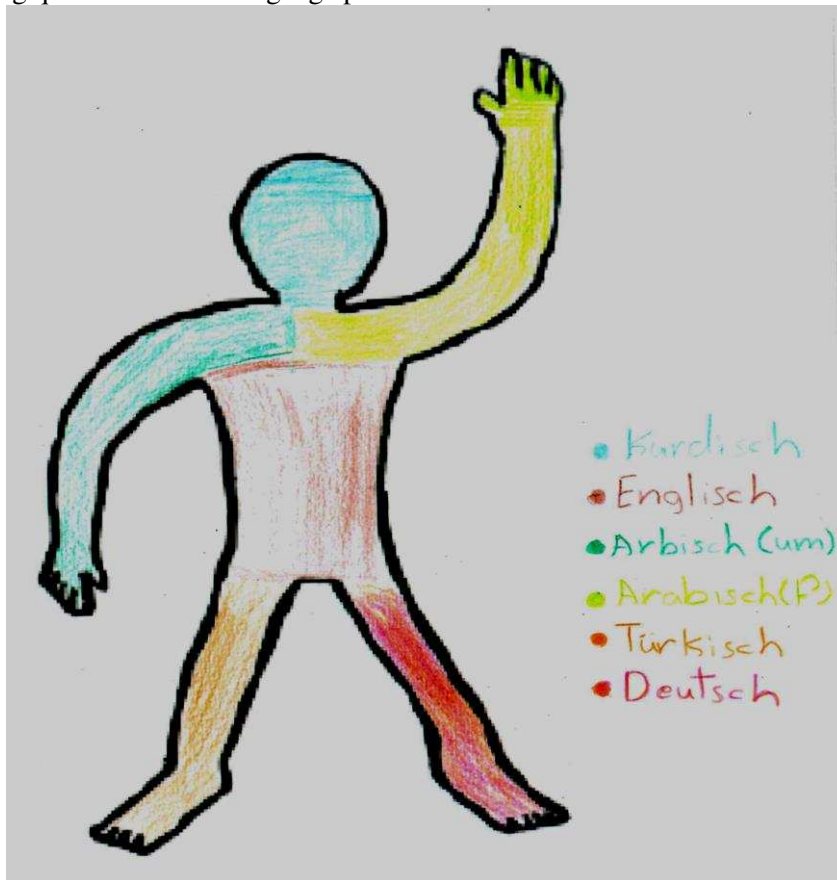
In recent years, Brigitta Busch has presented a slightly different approach to individual repertoires with her concept of „Spracherleben“ (experiencing language). She uses the term „Spracherleben“ to outline an approach that examines how multilingual people in particular perceive and evaluate their linguistic identity and what experiences, feelings or ideas they associate with it. She examines the relationship of „Spracherleben“ to individual life histories on the one hand and to historical and social configurations with their constraints, power structures, discourse formations and language ideologies on the other (Busch 2010: 58). She uses the method of language biographical interviews combined with language portraits. The interviewees get a sheet of paper with a stylized body silhouette (see the drawing of the refugee Baran on the next page) and asked to draw their language portrait on it with coloured pencils. The multimodal method offers the opportunity to reveal experiences and stories inscribed in the body and to reflect on language practices that often take place unconsciously. In the following, I will first present the language portrait of the refugee I interviewed, Baran, and then analyze aspects of his language repertoire.

### **3. Baran's language portrait and analysis of two interviews**

Baran was born in 1990 in the Syrian city of Aleppo, where he belongs to the Kurdish minority. His father was a worker and his mother a housewife. In 2008, Baran began his studies in geography, which he had to finance himself. He therefore went to Turkey twice during his studies and worked there as an unskilled laborer and salesman. He was enrolled at university for a total of four years, but was unable to complete his studies due to the civil war in Syria, which broke out in 2011. When the war reached his home town, Baran fled with his family to a Kurdish town in north-western Syria, where his family originally came from. But even here he was unable to escape the war because the local Kurdish army wanted to recruit him. However, he is a pacifist who prefers to help people and cannot pick up a weapon, which is why he was involved in the

humanitarian aid organization „Red Crescent“. However, as the Kurdish army still wanted to recruit him, Baran finally fled in 2015, first to Turkey and then, after a week, across the Mediterranean to Greece. His further escape route took him via North Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and Austria to Germany.

In our first interview in August 2016, I first asked Baran to draw his language portrait on a sheet of paper with a stylized body silhouette using colored pencils. This was followed by the biographical interview, including questions on his language portrait.



Baran locates his first language, Kurdish, in his head; he paints Arabic in both arms, everyday Arabic on the right and standard Arabic on the left; English is in the middle of his body; he has painted Turkish in orange in his right leg and German in red in his left leg.

**Figure: Baran’s language portrait**

As a member of the Kurdish minority in Syria, Baran grew up with Kurdish as his first language. According to his story, he consciously came into contact with Arabic for the first time at school. He learned standard Arabic in class and everyday Arabic in interactions with his peers. In secondary school, he then started learning English, which he says can not be taken seriously. He taught himself English mainly with the help of the internet. When Baran worked in Turkey for over two years to finance his studies, he learned Turkish without a language course and in contact with locals at work. Finally, Baran fled the civil war to Germany in 2015, where he was unable to attend a language course straight away due to the large number of refugees in this year. So he initially learned German with the help of YouTube videos by an Arabic German teacher. After two months in Germany, he started doing gardening work in the community and received support from volunteers once or twice a week to help him learn German. He only got a place on a German course after eight months at the Goethe-Institut, which he was attending in his third month at the time of the interview.

### 3.1 Analysis of the first recording from 2016

The first interview with Baran took place in August 2016, ten months after his arrival in Germany. The entire interview took around 130 minutes. In the following, I will first present an excerpt from the initial phase of the interview, which lasts a total of one minute. I will then discuss the linguistic deviations that can be observed in this passage. In the excerpt, English and Turkish passages are printed in bold and I present the English translation at the end.

1	„Ich komme aus <b>Syrien</b> , ich bin <b>Kurd</b> äh, ich hab äh schon äh <b>geography</b>
2	vier Jahren in <b>Syrien</b> gestudiert aber nicht abgeschlossen, weil wir haben

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3	eine große Krieg gehabt, und ich konnte nichts äh nach Aleppo gehen, weil
4	äh ich muss äh zum <b>army</b> gehen und ich äh weil ich bin Kurd, ich hab
5	Probleme mit alle andere Gruppen, nicht nur, mi/ äh ich habe Probleme mit
6	äh <b>government</b> äh Gruppen, ich habe Probleme mit äh ah mit op/ op/ äh
7	<b>opposition group</b> [IC: Opposition] Oppositionengruppen, und äh ich habe
8	auch Probleme mit meine kurdische <b>group</b> , weil ich bin nicht eine <b>army</b>
9	Person, ich bin eine politike Person, ich bin eine Helferperson, ich hab- ich
10	hab ein Jahre in äh <b>kırmızı hilal da çalıştım, äh ja, kırmızı hilal da</b>
11	<b>çalıştım, insanlara yardım ettim</b>
	<p><b>Translation:</b>            "I'm from Syria, I'm Kurdish, I've been studying in Syria for four years but I didn't finish because we had a big war and I couldn't uh go to Aleppo because uh, I have to uh go to the army and I uh because I'm Kurdish, I have problems with all other groups, not only, w/ uh I have problems with uh government uh groups, I have problems with uh ah with op/ op/ uh opposition group [IC: opposition] opposition groups, and uh I have also problems with my Kurdish group, because I'm not an army person, I am a political person, I am a helper person, I have worked at the red crescent for a year to help people.</p>

At the time of the interview, Baran had been in Germany for ten months and had been attending a German course at the Goethe-Institut for three months. Before that, he had learned the language self-taught through contact with Germans and with the help of YouTube videos. His German shows the typical characteristics of a language learner at the beginning of language acquisition. He has problems with singular-plural forms (vier Jahre (1-2), ein Jahre (10)), with tenses (gestudiert (2)), with articles (eine ... Krieg (2-3)), with negation (nichts nach Aleppo gehen (3)), with congruence (alle andere Gruppen (5)), with the linking element -s in compound nouns (Oppositionengruppen (7)) and with the verb position in subordinate clauses (weil ich bin Kurd (4)). It is also to be expected that he has gaps in his German vocabulary at this stage of acquisition. He sometimes closes these gaps with occasionalisms (Helferperson (9)). But more often he resorts to English and Turkish when faced with lexical problems in German. In some cases, he only has the English expressions at his disposal at this point, as with „geography“, „army“, „government“ and „opposition“. In other cases, such as „group“, he switches between the German („Gruppe“ (5 and 6)) and the English („group“ (8)) expression. According to Auer (1999: 316f.), these are cases of „insertional language mixing“, whereby single lexemes from another language are inserted into a matrix language (here German). At the end of the quoted passage, however, we see another form of mixing in which the speaker can deal with local problems when he encounters lexical gaps in the matrix language. He begins the utterance in German („ich hab ein Jahre“ (9-10)), and because he does not know the term for the aid organization „Red Crescent“ in German, he not only inserts the Turkish word in the following, but also changes the matrix language completely into Turkish: „kırmızı hilal da çalıştım, insanlara yardım ettim“ (I have worked at the red crescent for a year to help people (10-11)). Auer (1999: 314f.) refers to such cases of language alternation, in which speakers switch languages for longer passages, as „alternational language mixing“.

From an interactionalist perspective, Auer (1999) has presented a dynamic typology of bilingual speech which locates the diverse language alternation phenomena on a continuum and which includes three prototypical forms: „code-switching“, „language mixing“ and „fused lects“. Under code-switching, Auer subsumes the cases of alternation in which the juxtaposition of two codes (languages, dialects, varieties, etc.) is seen by participants as a sequentially meaningful event. Starting from an established code of interaction, a few individual cases of code-switching then signal „otherness“ (Auer 1999: 312) of the new contextual framing. According to Auer, this can be demonstrated by showing „that [juxtaposition] is used as contextualization cue (i.e., that it is 'functional')“ (ibid.). As a contextualization cue, these few alternations index individual aspects of the interaction such as change of topic, change of modality, etc. or of the speaker such as language preferences. In contrast, Auer defines language mixing as variation practices in which the frequent use of elements of two (or more) codes is no longer sequentially significant for the participants. Due to the „numerous and frequent cases of alternation“, the potential of code-switching as a contextualization strategy is lost, so that the individual cases of juxtaposition in code-mixing „do not carry meaning qua language choice for the bilingual participants“ (ibid.: 16).

This variation practice of language mixing can also be observed very well in Baran's first interview. Although he focuses on German as the language of interaction, because the matrix language of most utterances

is German and because he also switches to German after longer passages in Turkish, there are too many switches to Turkish and English to possibly say that German is the sole language of interaction. Throughout the interview, he inserts a total of 32 English words into his utterances, mainly to close lexical gaps in German: „army, before, Belgium, cashier, cheaper, democracy, dictatory, Egypt, English, freedom, garden, gardener, geography, government, group, Hungary, idea, lawyer, little bit, military, part, party, peace, peaceman, person, phobia, population, presentation, scientific, system, terrorism“. However, Baran's use of these expressions does not mean that he subsequently formulates his utterances with English as the matrix language.

In numerous other cases, Baran also uses Turkish, where both the use of individual Turkish expressions in a German matrix sentence and the complete switch to Turkish can be observed. Some of the isolated Turkish expressions he uses are, for example, „Atina“ (Athens), „çatışma“ (fight), „Çerkes“ (Circassian), „demirci“ (blacksmith), „hukuk“ (law, Justice), „kontrakt“ (contract), „rüşvet“ (bribe) oder „zeytin“ (olive). In one case, when he cannot think of the expression he is looking for in any language, he provides the Turkish paraphrase „yani kafalarına göre yazmışlar“ (so they wrote what came to mind). In other cases, as in the passage quoted, he switches entirely to Turkish. At this point, Baran's German bears the characteristics of a language learner. And since English and Turkish were his stronger foreign languages before he fled to Germany, these switches seem predictable. English, which he mainly taught himself, was his international lingua franca, and he spoke Turkish with people in Turkey (Turks, Kurds, etc.).

Recently, such variation practices, such as Baran's, have often been described with the term translanguaging (Garcia 2009). Originally, the concept was introduced for the analysis of classroom communication, according to which multilingual individuals (should) use all their linguistic resources fluently in the classroom to create and communicate meaning. In the present case, it can also be argued that Baran draws on all his linguistic resources to communicate linguistically. Without wishing to enter into a larger discussion about the two concepts of „language mixing“ vs. „translanguaging“ at this point (for a discussion of these two approaches, see Auer (2022)), I would like to point out that Baran clearly focuses on German as the matrix language in the interview. And based on this preference, he then occasionally either switches to Turkish for longer passages or inserts isolated English and Turkish expressions. The translanguaging approach does not explain, and does not intend to explain, the different variation practices that exist and the causes and functions of individual language alternations. With Auer's typology of language alternations and the distinction between code-switching and language mixing, however, this can be done very well, as shown.

### 3.2 Analysis of the second recording from 2023

I conducted the second interview with Baran seven years after the first interview. Here, too, I will first present an exemplary passage from the interview and then show my analysis.

1	„Ja, ich war kurz bei der Jobcenter, ich habe eine Maßnahme teilgenommen,
2	und dort haben die mir eine Job in äh, der Einzelhandelbereich in Altstadt
3	gefunden also in Supermarkt, hab ich dort angefangen und äh: und dann hab
4	ich dort also langsam hab ich dort alles gelernt, ich- ich konnte dort auch äh
5	eine kleine Umschulung machen, dann eine äh abgeschlossene Ausbildung
6	als Einzelhandelskaufmann nehmen aber, also Kontakt mit der Leute und, so
7	viele Stress nach der Coronazeit habe ich äh gesagt ne ich mache was an/,
8	solange ich lernen möchte dann mache ich was anderes dass ich vor Zukunft
9	besser also verdienen kann- weil bei Einzelhandelskaufmann, sowohl äh mit
10	äh Zertifikat als auch ohne äh also fast äh Gehalt ist fast gleich, deswegen
11	habe ich gedacht, wenn ich was lernen möchte, dann mache ich was anderes
12	einfach“
	<b>Translation:</b> Yes, I was briefly at the job centre, I took part in a measure, and there they found me a job in the retail sector in Altsadt, so in Supermarkt, I started there and uh: and then I slowly learnt everything there, I - I was able to do a little retraining there, then take a completed apprenticeship as a retail salesperson but, so contact with the people and, so much stress after the Corona time I said no I'll do something else as long as I want to learn then I'll do something else that I can earn better in the future - because with retail salesperson, both with uh certificate and without uh so almost uh salary is almost the same, so I thought, if I want to learn something, then I'll do something else

Overall, Baran's German is much more fluent after seven years in Germany and he uses less hesitation signals. In comparison to the first recording, he shows almost no deviations from standard German formulations in a number of cases such as singular-plural forms, tenses and negations. However, there are also areas in which he still has problems, such as prepositions (ich habe eine Maßnahme teilgenommen (1)), articles (eine Job (2)) and the linking element -s (Einzelhandelkaufmann (6)). But the most remarkable thing is that he never once inserts an English or Turkish word into his German utterances in the entire conversation. He manages to speak German without any problems. In the case of individual lexical insecurity, he has so much competence that he can paraphrase the problem or express it using semantically similar words. Only once, when I asked him a Turkish question during the interview for testing purposes solely, he answered in Turkish.

Nobody is monolingual. Even the communicative repertoire of monolingual people comprises different registers, varieties and styles. And for multilingual people, there are additional languages. Baran's repertoire includes Kurdish, Arabic, English, Turkish and German. And an analysis of the two recordings shows how his linguistic performance reflects his respective stage of life. While at the beginning of his immigration his language production is characterized by language mixing, after seven years his German is quite fluent, elaborate and he does not have to close lexical gaps by resorting to Turkish and English.

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