The material force of signs and
the reconfigurment of superdiverse identities

by

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates a value project to create and promote a commodity register to formulate a “diverse identity” as emblematic of the city of Jogjakarta, Central Java. It takes as its data the products of a popular souvenir company, Aseli Bikinan Dagadu Djokdja, which was launched by a group of architecture students from Gadjah Mada University in 1994. The company’s history spans the final years of Soeharto’s centralized government, the reformasi era of decentralization, and the present. The signs produced for sale on t-shirts, stickers, key chains, and other souvenirs provide rich data for advancing a materialist theory of signs that sees them “as material forces subject to and reflective of conditions of production and patterns of distribution, and as constructive of social reality…having real effects in social life” (Blommaert 2013: 38).

The analysis of these data reveal the ways that patterns of production and consumption contribute to the (re)creation of ethnolinguistic hubs and peripheries. Further, it clarifies our understanding of the complex dialogic and heteroglossic processes by which signs are emplaced in the linguistic landscape, select their audiences for uptake, and participate in the enskillment and knowledging of those who read and make use of them. Most importantly, the analysis helps us to make sense of the ways that the superdiversity of contemporary globalization contributes to formulations of identity categories that conflict with chronologically prior or geographically distant formulations and valuations of similar personae.

INTRODUCTION – Redefining diversity

The fight against racism cannot possibly succeed unless a true acceptance of diversity is taken as the starting point of any perspective on society. In fact, diversity has to be taken so seriously that its locus is no longer any type of group, but the individual—where any individual can belong to many different types of rarely coinciding groups at the same time. [Blommaert & Verschuereen 1998/2002: 192, emphases in original]

This is a paper about diversity, about how we might take diversity seriously, and about how we may rid ourselves of the notion that diversity can be located within groups. I want to begin with what I believe is our current working definition of diversity, both within the social sciences and in everyday discourse and suggest an alternative definition that more closely aligns with Blommaert and Verschueren’s insistence that we locate diversity in the individual – a definition that will also better represent the data to be presented below.

We typically work with a conception of diversity that looks something like this.

Diversity₂: The coming into contact of many different types of personae and/or semiotic registers within a particular context or semiotic field.

A visual example of the way this concept of diversity appears in social science discourse can be seen in Rampton, et al (2015: 2-3) where three different pie charts
show the increasing influx of national identities into Ostend over the span of two decades.

Figure 1

So as better to locate diversity within the individual, I draw heavily on Agha's theories of semiotic behaviour and propose this revised definition of diversity.

Diversity1: The performance and recognition of multiple contrary to stereotype diacritics by single individuals to index a previously un-stereotyped identity or a many-in-one persona.¹

¹ I have laid the groundwork for just this type of definition in previous work on the enregisterment of a “diverse Indonesian persona” in Indonesian poetry performances during the Reformasi era (Cole 2010). An abundance of other behaviours in a variety of Indonesian contexts confirming the need for such a revised definition have been well-studied and analysed by Zentz (2014) in Jogjakarta and Goebel in Java more broadly (2011; 2015).
Some visual examples might clarify how these two definitions differ. These examples come from the family card game “Set”.\(^2\) Sets are made by identifying features on three different cards. There are four feature categories – color, shading, number, shape – and each feature category as three possible specifications.

Figure 4 – Color: red, green purple

![Figure 4](image)

Figure 5 – Shading: solid, striped, empty

![Figure 5](image)

Figure 6 – Shape: oval, diamond, squiggle

![Figure 6](image)

\(^2\) A dealer turns over nine cards and the players look for sets in the cards, calling out “set” when they identify one. Having identified a set, the player takes the set and more cards are laid down. The player who identifies the most sets wins.
All of the images above are examples of *sets* in the game: A *set* is defined as three cards which have the *same* specification on all three cards for any feature category (in figure 7, the color feature is specified as red on all three cards, and the shape feature is specified as squiggle for all three cards) or which have *different* specifications on all three cards for any feature category (in figure 7, we have different specifications for number: one, two, and three). If we scan vertically in figure 8, we see three sets – similar to the one above – specified the same for shape and shade, but differently for number. There are also three horizontal sets, specified the same for number, but differently for color and shading. Let us call these six sets, stereotypical sets.

A *stereotypical set* contains at least one matching diacritic: There is at least one feature category for which the diacritic on all three cards is the same.

Figure 8 – Six stereotypical sets
There are four more sets in this image, none of which meet our criteria for a stereotypical set. Before reorganizing the cards to make them easy to see, I want to draw your attention to one you can identify by scanning diagonally from the lower left corner to the top right corner. In this set, the specifications for all three feature categories are different (purple, green, red; solid, shaded, empty; squiggle, diamond, oval; 1, 2, 3). Let us call this type of set a “diversity set”.

A diversity set contains no matching diacritics: For each feature category, all three diacritics are different.

In Figure 9 we see the same nine cards from the previous image, but arranged so that three of the diversity sets can be scanned vertically and one diversity set can be scanned from the lower left corner to the upper right corner.

Figure 9 – Four diversity sets
Now to make the connection to human identity categories: Let a “set” represent an identity persona composed of a particular constellation of diacritics performed/perceived at a particular moment in time. Figures 4 through 7 will thus represent four distinct personae. In figure 8, let’s identify three personae scanning vertically. What we have been calling group-level diversity is exemplified by these sets. Notice that in the arrangement of the personae in Figure 8, we can easily identify recognizable types of individuals together in the same semiotic field: The purple, solid, squiggle type, the green, shaded, diamond type, and the red, empty, oval type. Notice too how in scanning this way, each individual persona appears to represent a group – the diacritics are repeated, matching each other, easily constituting a recognizable category. If you were playing this game, you could easily say and understand the sentence, “Pass me the red ovals.”

Individual level diversity is exemplified by diversity sets in Figure 9. Notice here how no individual or persona is clearly representative of a group. And notice how you can’t easily name the set by calling out stereotyped diacritics. Note too that each “diversity set” persona is configured using all 12 of the available diacritics in a unique way. And that the co-presence of three “diversity set personae” in the observable semiotic field of the photograph resists our ability to stereotype, that is to see matching features across individuals on correlated cards. (In fact it is hard for many people first learning this game to even recognize diversity sets. Though sometimes after you get playing they’re the only ones you can see.) I have labeled our revised definition “diversity” to convey that it is our primary type of diversity – and it is in this sense that we will be viewing and talking about diversity below.

**EMERGENT EFFECTS & EMBEDDED EMBLEMS – Materialist semiosis**

Utterances are social, because signs function as connectors between senders and receivers and because utterances produce a model of the social occasion in which they occur. Put another way, utterances enable senders and receivers to interpret the social relations between them as an effect of the utterance itself. These effects can be stereotypical (as visualized in figure 8, above) or emergent (as in figure 9, above). Stereotypical effects result from previously emergent effects that have become enregistered over time, and they model (or sketch) previously enregistered relations between social personae. Stereotypical effects are produced by indexical congruence. Emergent effects, on the other hand, are produced by indexical non-congruence. The co-occurrence of signs that have not been previously enregistered suggests a new social persona and sketches an unfamiliar social relation between senders and receivers. The alignment between the sender and receiver of a non-congruent indexical is thus also emergent, negotiated in the process of sending and receiving signs. (Agha 2007, Chapter 1)

We can more easily talk about stereotypical effects and enregistered semiotic processes because of their durability in time and space, their ability to be recognized by senders and receivers, and by the fact that stereotypical effects can be identified metadiscursively by the set of senders and receivers that recognize them. Emergent effects happen just as regularly as stereotypical effects, but are more difficult to talk about because they happen quickly and fleetingly (what Agha calls *evanescence*), because they are produced and
perceived by senders and receivers that have no metadiscursive vocabulary or habitus with which to recognize them, and because emergent effects are inputs to a semiotic chain that may or may not lead to their eventual enregisterment. The properties of emergent effects make them perhaps more difficult to study, but we have two facts about them working in our favour: 1) They are highly palpable to interactants when they occur, i.e. we notice them and care about them when they are happening, and 2) They are organized in ways that we can describe and understand.

The difference, then, between stereotypical and emergent effects is not so much a matter of type, but a matter of when and where in the history of a social speech chain a particular utterance occurs. Because utterances that produce emergent effects are non-stereotypical, it is perhaps easy to assume that they are secondary, or exceptional to stereotypical ones. But in fact, utterances producing emergent effects are primary, because it is from emergent effects that all stereotypical (i.e. enregistered) effects, personae, emblems, and registers originate and solidify over time. Additionally, utterances producing emergent effects are primary because they always have the potential to reconfigure stereotypical ones to produce further emergent effects.

We need several more definitions to continue.

**EMBLEM**: “a thing to which a social persona is attached…involv[ing]… (1) a perceivable thing, or diacritic; (2) a social persona; (3)… someone who can read that persona from that thing” (Agha 2007: 234).

**TEXT LEVEL INDEXICALITY**: the co-textual organization of signs that together formulate effects that differ from any effects associated with text-segments that occur as its parts (Agha 2007: 24).

Since we will be working with object signs that have been formulated as commodities, we will also need the following definition.4

**CONFIGURATIVE OBJECT SIGN**: “the performance of otherwise familiar commodity tokens in contextually non-congruent styles” (Agha 2011: 47)

To work with our data, we also need the term *emplacement* from geosemiotics.

**EMPLACEMENT**: The placing of signs in space, creating a sign’s spatial scope and turning space into a non-human “*actor* in sociolinguistic processes” (Blommaert 2014: 32).

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3 Tropic utterances are by definition, then, contrary to stereotype and produce emergent effects. And though utterances are stereotypically spoken, they need not be as utterances are regularly configured of multi channel signs.

4 Emblems can also be emergent or stereotypical. And we can see from the definition of text level indexicality that this term refers in particular to emergent effects. All of these definitions and processes can be transferred to the discussion and analysis of the semiotics of commodities, as Agha has demonstrated (2011), because a commodity is simply an object sign that “we treat as commodity”. We treat any given object sign as a commodity when it comes under a commodity formulation that mediates “a relationship between perceivable signs that formulate them and those they formulate” (Agha 2011:25).
It will be important for us to keep at the forefront of our minds that signs are physical and that all semiotic processes are material. Signs are produced, perceived and enregistered by real people in interactions through time and in space, i.e. by human conduct. Further and contrary to our lay understanding, signs select their addressees – the particular modalities and diacritics of a sign giving it a *semiotic scope* that “reach(es) and select(s) different audiences” (Blommaert 2014: 43). Because signs appear in a physical space, they also have *spatial scope*, reaching audiences that can perceive them and not audiences that cannot. How and where signs are emplaced in a landscape defines *identities* (Blommaert 2014: 47). For example, Blommaert’s analysis of the visible signs in the city of Oud-Berchem (2014) invites and enables us to read the history of spaces and the histories of people in spaces from the signs emplaced therein: When an Albanian poster goes up in a neighbourhood, we can infer that Albanians now live there (2014: 77-78).

The data we examine below will stretch our understanding of the emplacement and selectivity of signs. With respect to emplacement, our configurative sign objects (CSO) typically appear on t-shirts, hats, and other wearable souvenirs. Unlike the signs in Oud-Berchem, these CSOs are not generally emplaced in fixed areas, and their producers have little to no ability to determine the particular, historically shaped landscape in which their messages will be conveyed. Rather the sign makers emplace their CSOs on the bodies of consumers and the bodies of those to whom their consumer’s give gifts. Though the process we will analyse is typical of the speech chain type “mass communication” in that a single sender communicates to multiple receivers, it is atypical in that message moves through the landscape on the sender’s body. Thus our understanding of emplacement will also have to account for mobility.

With respect to selectivity, our CSOs select their addressees, but not by selecting a stereotyped or enregistered category of readers/receivers, i.e. recognizable identities. Rather, these signs *generate* a category of addressees through tropic usages of multi-channel sign configurations that produce emergent effects through text level indexicality. These CSOs makes use of previously enregistered emblems of identities by combining diacritics from differing emblems of contrasting stereotyped social personae into new configurative object signs. As the CSOs move through time and across space, they formulate both an emergent social persona – the diverse *orang Jogia* – and a set of emergent receivers able to read this persona, which is to say they “formulate [their] indexical selectivity” (Agha 2011:44) on the fly. Thus, will see that selectivity can also be emergent. These data will help us to get a better handle on emergent effects more generally because these CSOs have a feature that is atypical of emergent emblems: Their evanescent character, rather than appearing and fading permanently (as in speech), appears, fades, then recurs repeatedly for different receivers.

**DATA – Dagadu’s commodity formulation**

An unintended outcome of processes of enregisterment that occurred between 1966 and 2009…is that Indonesians can now also index their Indonesian-ness by knowing about or even speaking fragments of the ethnic “voices” (Hill, 1995) of other Indonesians [Goebel 2015: 229].
Aseli Bikinan Dagadu Djokda\(^5\) is a souvenir company in Jogjakarta, a city located near the southern coast of central Java. The company was launched by a group of architecture students from Gadjah Mada University in 1994. It produces and sells mostly t-shirts, but also a variety of other items including hats, bags, stickers, key rings, mugs, and decks of playing cards. The target market is Indonesian tourists, who in a time honoured Indonesian tradition are socially required to bring back *oleh-oleh* (souvenirs) for their family, friends, neighbours and co-workers when they go on a trip. Every town, no matter how small, produces something, typically some kind of snack, for just this purpose. Dagadu takes advantage of these social conventions by producing non-edible commodities emblazoned with a dizzying array of configurative sign objects to represent the city of Jogja and its people. What is for sale at Dagadu is not so much the items themselves (the t-shirts, for example, are all made of the same high quality cotton, in only a couple of styles, in a series of standard sizes), but the configurative sign objects representing Jogja. When you shop for an item at Dagadu, you are quite literally shopping for signs.

The dizzying array of signs for sale is organized, however, into a clear set of categories, the CSOs conveying one or more of these themes.

*Themes conveyed by the CSOs sold by Dagadu*

Jogja is a great place to vacation: You can relax there.
People in Jogja are friendly: They will make you smile and laugh.
Jogja has a rich cultural history
People in Jogja are educated and care about social issues.
People in Jogja are technologically savvy.
Jogja is home to a diverse population: Diversity is celebrated in Jogja.

People who purchase Dagadu products align themselves with 1) People can afford such products, 2) People who have been to Jogja or know someone who has, 3) People who identify with the aesthetic and social commentary promoted by Dagadu, and 4) People who are interested in expanding their “visual repertoire” (Blommaert 2014) by decoding familiar diacritics in contextually non-congruent styles. On all of the items for sale at Dagadu, familiar diacritics are configured in contrary to stereotype organizations to do at least one, if not all, of the following: 1) Draw on readers’ recognition of diacritics belonging to other company’s well enregistered brands and logos, 2) Create a configuration of diacritics that conveys one or more of their themes, and 3) Create a *plesetan* (pun, riddle, wordplay) that the reader must solve.

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\(^5\) Dagadu’s registered trademark and company name is *Aseli Bikinan Dagadu Djokdja* (Genuine Dagadu Djokdja product). The company lost “Dagadu” as their company name when, shortly after it was founded, someone else trademarked the name and began selling Dagadu t-shirts at popular tourist shopping areas around the city at lower prices. You can still buy Dagadu products that are not made by the company I am describing here. The story of this process, the “fake” products, and the social inequalities that story would ask us to address merits a paper of its own.
The company name itself is a kind of riddle, referring to a language game (*Bahasa Walikan* or “reverse language”, also known as Jogja slang), which is based on the visual organization of the Javanese alphabet. The twenty consonants are typically arranged in four rows of five. Children learn the letters in this order, aided by the fact that the pronunciation of the letters in this order sounds like words that make a story. *Bahasa Walikan* works by exchanging sounds from the first row with the corresponding sound in the same column on the third row and doing the same for the second and fourth rows. (Dagadu produced a “Dagadu for beginners” shirt as part of their children’s line that demonstrated this process – second image in figure 10.) Da-ga-du is the reverse language version of ma-ta-mu, which means “your eye”, and the company’s logo is also an eye. Though the phrase “matamu!” is an expletive that can mean “Watch where you’re going!” or “What the fuck are you looking at!” the use of *Bahasa Walikan* has been found to signal adequation between speakers (artsonline). Figure 10 presents the orthographic symbols for the Javanese consonants in the order described so the reader can create *Bahasa Walikan* codes for himself. The third image has the Dagadu logo “hidden” in a kind of Rorschach.

Examples illustrating the characteristics of Dagadu CSOs described above are presented in the figures 11 through 16.

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6 Image source http://blog.dagadu.co.id/matalalu/
Figure 11 – Recontextualized brands
Pesinden are singers for Javanese wayang (puppet show) who sit on the floor with their legs tucked under them for between six and seven hours during the duration of the performance. Lesahan means to sit on the floor. Many restaurants and eateries offer lesahan seating.

Let us linger briefly on the examples that focus on Jogja’s diversity. The first image in figure 16 tropes on Indonesia’s national motto *Bhinneka tunggal ika* (Old Javanese, taken from Yahoo messenger. The second tropes on the commodity register of the Johnson & Johnson insecticide product “Baygon”, aka Raid – Insecticide: Joke: delightful: funniness guaranteed 10 KFC image source: [http://www.kfcugm.itego.com](http://www.kfcugm.itego.com). Jagonya Ayam is KFC’s marketing slogan in Indonesia. It means “Chicken Expert” or “Chicken Wizard”, “Jogja berhati nyaman” (Image Source: https://sejutatutorial.wordpress.com/2013/06/11/aku-ingin-jogja-berhati-nyaman/) is a slogan for the city Jogja that means “Jogja has a pleasant heart”. Dagadu puts a traditional Javanese hat (blangkon) on Colonel Sanders and combines the two iconic phrases into “Jogja is pleasant”.

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10 KFC image source: [http://www.kfcugm.itego.com](http://www.kfcugm.itego.com). Jagonya Ayam is KFC’s marketing slogan in Indonesia. It means “Chicken Expert” or “Chicken Wizard”. “Jogja berhati nyaman” (Image Source: https://sejutatutorial.wordpress.com/2013/06/11/aku-ingin-jogja-berhati-nyaman/) is a slogan for the city Jogja that means “Jogja has a pleasant heart”. Dagadu puts a traditional Javanese hat (blangkon) on Colonel Sanders and combines the two iconic phrases into “Jogja is pleasant”. 

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from an ancient poem urging tolerance between Buddhists and Hindus), which means “unity in diversity”. In the CSO, the replacement of ika with Djokdja (in the Dutch spelling) changes the meaning to “Jogja is unity in diversity”. (Note the visual representation of diversity in the image.) “Never ending Jogja” (in the second image) was the city of Yogyakarta’s official slogan during the Reformasi era. Djokdja rupa-rupa means “Jogja is varied”. In the third image, the fragment kost in Kostmopolitan means “board” as in a place to rent/let. The various speech bubbles represent Indonesian speech in non-standardized spellings – in the style people use to write texts or post in social media. They include comments about the electricity being out (lampune mati – Indonesian with a Javanese suffix) and a request to borrow a book “C’mon, lend me a book” (pinjam buku, dong, where “dong” is an emphatic marker in slang Indonesian).

Figure 16 – Celebrates Diversity (Bhinneka Toenggal Djokjia, Rupa-rupa, Kostmopolitan)

Having seen a sample of CSOs that formulate Dagadu’s commodity register, let us return to the definitional and theoretical issues of diversity and emergent selectivity that we introduced in previous sections. As we do, we will heed Blommaert’s advice about the importance of ethnography to the work of understanding semiotic activity. Dagadu CSOs select “diverse” consumers and readers in at least four senses. First, the wide variety of diacritics used in the configuration of Dagadu signs selects different people who have varied histories and experiences with diverse signs and diverse registers. This point should be obvious from the array of examples presented in figures 11-16 above. Second, the wide variety of diacritics selects for diverse individuals, i.e. those individuals who are familiar with multiple, varied semiotic and commodity registers. This point can be verified by examining figures 11-16 as well: Someone who knows Javanese, English, and Indonesian is more likely to be able to decode more of those examples. Someone who knows Dutch spelling conventions has an advantage too. Third, individual CSOs select a diverse array of consumers/readers, because consumers only need be familiar with a fraction of the diacritics arranged together in a particular CSO to be compelled to purchase, wear, and spread the CSO to a wider range of receivers. And finally, and perhaps following from the third, because Dagadu products select consumers/readers who need only be familiar with a fraction of the diacritics in any given CSO, they select for
multiple readers, or a team of readers who together bring the necessary experience and familiarity with stereotypes to the task of decoding the signs. Let’s turn to two more examples that illustrate the third and fourth points.

Figure 17 – Beware of Gombal Manning: Fractional familiarity

I purchased the t-shirt with the CSO pictured in figure 17 because of my familiarity with three diacritics: 1) The index to global warming accomplished through the graphic of the earth on fire and the similar arrangement of letters between the phrase “global warming” and “gombal manning”, 2) The phrase, “so what gitu loh?”, and 3) The fact that “conference” was part of the text. I deduced after having purchased the item that the overall reference was to the UN Bali Climate change conference in December 2007. I had no idea what “gombal manning” meant, but I started wearing the shirt anyway. And I started asking my friends about it: “Apa, sih, artinya gombal manning?”. I got some hemming and hawing, some “well…it kind of means…” and finally I got a straight answer: “Gombal manning is Javanese, and it basically means more bullshit.” (This was perfect for me as I’m hoping to become afflicted with Tourette syndrome in my old age!)

This CSO selected me. It selected for an English speaker who attends conferences, a person who claims to care about the issue of global warming, and an Indonesian speaker, who had not only used the phrase, “so what, gitu loh?” but had engaged in an extended conversation with my professional Indonesian language instructor on its usage, pronunciation, and popularity in contemporary public discourse. At the point that I purchased the shirt, I had not yet interpreted all of its diacritics: I hadn’t realized the connection to the UN climate change conference, nor did I understand the Javanese. From these latter facts, we can see that this CSO’s selectivity was in fact emergent. I didn’t throw away the shirt or stop wearing it once I understood all the diacritics. In fact, I was more motivated than ever to show it off. But even without the knowledge that I didn’t understand some of the diacritics, it should be clear from your own experience with the several Dagadu CSO’s presented in this text that Dagadu’s selectivity emerges: It takes a period of time to process the meaning of the various diacritics and decide whether or not a particular CSO is “for you”. (We should note that the CSO on this shirt must have also selected other buyers with different experiences and histories: There are certainly a limited number of English speaking linguists visiting Jogjakarta at any given time.)
One more example will solidify the point that Dagadu CSOs are emergently selective and select for collaborative diverse decoders. I had seen the CSO in Figure 18 in the card deck I own many times, but I had ignored it. It hadn’t selected me for uptake and I was baffled by it. The parts I understood were “Jogja” and “loecoe”\(^{11}\), the latter because I was familiar with Dagadus’s inclination to use the old Dutch spellings for the sounds /u/ and /dʒ/ (‘oe’ and ‘dj’, respectively). A couple months ago this image was on a screen in my office while I was talking with a graduate student, and I suddenly figured out the “Champoeng” part: “oh, it’s kampong!”\(^{12}\) I exclaimed. He responded with something like “Oh, yeah, the soccer logo”. “Soccer, really?” I replied. “I didn’t know what that was.” I had to do a quick online search to realize I had seen the image before, but it wasn’t a sign I was particularly familiar with. I now know, thanks to my collaborative decoder, that this CSO uses the images, type, and spatial configuration of the UEFA Champions league.

Summary

As we can see from the examples above, Dagadu uses text-level indexicality to create emergent semiotic effects. In the process, the makers of Dagadu work to enregister a “diverse Jogakartan” social persona. Much like in the “diversity sets” we saw above, the emblems of this persona involve ever-changing diacritics, with the only thing that all its emblems have in common being indexical non-congruence. Contrary to stereotype effects thus become the unifying aesthetic. And the person who would read, interpret, or recognize such emblems must continuously decode the shifting, varied diacritics that, regardless of their form, index the same diverse persona.

Dagadu’s commodity formulation, then, seeks not so much to constrain the form of its CSOs, as it does to organize the thinking of persons who see and read them on the bodies of its consumers (and bodies of the beneficiaries of its consumer’s generosity). As the CSOs travel on human bodies, reaching audiences well beyond the city of Jogja, they enregister a commodity formulation that is less about the consumer

\(^{11}\) lucu adj. funny, cute

\(^{12}\) kampung n. village, town
wearing them (who that person is, who he aligns with, how she should be perceived, etc.) and more about who the producers of Dagadu are, who they align with (the people of Jogja and its visitors), and how the reader should construe diverse conduct. The ownership phase of a Dagadu commodity thus contains an advertising phase within it, but not so much for Dagadu products, but for the personae and registers indexed by their products’ CSOs. And the owner of a Dagadu product does not just own “a prosthetic extension of [his] social self” (Agha 2011:33), he has expanded his visual repertoire and incorporated more diacritics for the performance of a diverse identity. Further, by wearing the product in public spaces, he carries the potential for repertoire expansion to others.

**Seeing through Dagadu – On doing togetherness in the era of superdiversity**

“It is the relationship of commodity formulations to their outcomes that matters…not the characteristics of extractable metonyms. [Agha 2011:49]

The configurative sign objects produced by Dagadu provide us with a visual, reflexive model of important elements of our semiotic theories. Having been exposed to Dagadu’s commodity register, we can now ask whether or not we will allow ourselves to be selected by these signs. Superdiversity is being enregistered in social science discourse to help us solve long-standing problems that are potentially intensifying under conditions of contemporary globalization. Our theories have responded well, with relevant, useful, tools to analyse complexity.

But many of the social problems we have hoped to address remain inadequately addressed. I suggest that this is not so much because we haven’t gotten it right theoretically – in fact I believe we have – but because we have certain tendencies in focus that cause us to preferentially articulate particular ends of conceptual spectra more clearly than others, and pay more attention to examples illustrating one side of particular sociolinguistic processes than to examples illustrating its balancing counterpart. And this despite the fact that we know these preferences exist, have pointed them out to ourselves repeatedly, and have stated our need to retune our theories (examples include Bucholtz and Hall (2004), Irvine and Gal (2001), and Arnaut and Spotti (2014)). A list of some of these well-known preferences are repeated below.

- monolingualism over multilingualism
- diverse groups over diverse individuals
- the referential function of language over all other functions
- complete competence over partial competence
- distinction over adequation (and by extension, difference over sameness)
- durable language forms over evanescent forms
- fixed languages and communities vs. mobile ones
language form over language function
production over construal
contextual invariance over contextual change

The reasons for our focal propensities are varied, but are often the result of our particular socio-historical trajectories (like our ideological predisposition towards monolingualism as the basic linguistic state, noted by Dorian (2010) and Silverstein (1998)). But in other cases, as in our preference for durable vs. evanescent forms and effects (noted by Agha 2011), our biases may be motivated by practical concerns. The Dagadu data presented here can help us to consider ways to retune several of these preferences, which is necessary for the continued accuracy of our understanding of semiotic processes.

One way to begin this retuning is to tweak our concepts that refer to the prototypical or basic state of language and semiotic behaviour more generally. For example, we now know very clearly that language is prototypically acquired and used in multilingual contexts by diverse individuals who have partial competence in many languages and styles, as Blommaert (2010) has clearly articulated (not by diverse “groups” with “complete” competence in a “single” language). Goebel has provided a key for this retuning by offering a definition of semiosis that takes the kinds of data presented here as basic.

SEMIOSIS: “the appropriation and reuse of a sign or set of signs from one context in another context” (Goebel 2015: 203).

I hope to have contributed to this retuning by working with a definition of diversity that focuses on the individual, by paying attention to indexical non-congruence rather than indexical congruence, and by examining emblems with emergent properties that nonetheless have a kind of durability, albeit a mobile one. In writing about the perception of signs, Agha has pointed out that advertisements are “effective if the reader can recover at least one” possible cohesive narrative indexed by it (Agha 2007: 31). Dagadu signs demonstrate how this is true of communicative acts more generally, helping to debunk our myth of perfect referentiality and complete understanding as the natural, typical results of semiotic behaviour. Further, these data bolster Blommaert’s recent observation (2014) that sign readers can be highly tolerant of inconsistencies and deviations from previously enregistered forms, standards, and stereotypes.13

Scholars working in Indonesia in the post-Soeharto era of decentralization have collectively noted and examined shifts in the valuation of previously marginalized languages and identities (e.g. Goebel 2002; 2008; Smith-Heffner 2009). The diacritics

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13 Referring to the reading of signs in Oud-Bercham, Blommaert notes: “Audiences display a quite remarkable elasticity and tolerance when it comes to understanding misspellings” (2014: 81).
that indexed local languages and ethnic identities, which had been previously kept separate from state enregistered emblems of Indonesian national identity, emerged and were re-arranged into new emblems of national identity that celebrated Indonesian diversity. The national motto, “unity in diversity”, was retuned to focus on diversity over unity, as citizens began “‘doing unity in diversity’ in a different way than authorized by the state” (Goebel 2015:9). The behaviours in which this shift has become enregistered has involved a focus on sameness despite highly salient, recognizable, stereotyped differences (Cole 2010). Goebel’s work on how this is done in the production and perception of popular television shows has required the retuning of the concept of *conviviality* to account for the fact that Indonesians are being convivial in a habitual way, habitually using “particular semiotic features that help in establishing common ground among strangers” (Goebel 2015: 10). He calls this “the doing of togetherness”.

And this insight, has led to his re-definition of superdiversity in a diverse Indonesian key.

SUPERDIVERSITY: “A setting constituted by strangers from multiple backgrounds who never share the same language but only some semiotic fragments. These fragments are used in interaction to build common ground as part of efforts to create convivial social relations.” (Goebel 2015: 8)

Dagadu may have just the visual representation we need to accompany this retuning.

Figure 19 – *Supel Power* (Sociable Power)

“Negara Adi Canda”: Super Power Jokes

“Ramah bersahabat kiat Jogja hebat”: Gracious friendliness – Jogja’s secret (to being) fabulous
REFERENCES


