

*Plurilingual reading practices in a global context:  
Circulation of books and linguistic inequalities*

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Abstract

Media consumption is commonly seen as a major way of appropriating languages and cultures. Availability and accessibility of material are essential conditions for developing plurilingual cultural practices. Transnational circulation of cultural goods has reached a particular intensity in today's world but is still marked by deep language inequalities. Combining sociolinguistic, language education, cultural sociology, and multiliteracy approaches, this study examines how plurilingual readers access books in their different languages. This qualitative analysis is based on 24 in-depth interviews with both migrant and non-migrant adults living in Western Europe. The findings indicate that printed and digital books in dominant languages circulate more easily, and through more visible and formal channels than books in dominated languages. In addition, the local and online book supply in dominant languages is generally cheaper and more varied, thus being more attractive. However, a wider range of means of access to books, and the active participation of the readers themselves in the circulation of cultural goods enable book-reading practices in less disseminated languages. Pedagogical recommendations for language teachers to encourage autonomous cultural practices among learners according to global evolutions and local specificities are provided.

*Keywords:* plurilingualism; reading practices; language appropriation; circulation of books; linguistic inequalities

## 1. Introduction

Media consumption is commonly seen as a major way of appropriating languages and cultures (Coste & Simon, 2009; Porcher, 1991). Cultural practices play a huge role in language appropriation and maintenance in many respects: by motivating, by improving communicative skills, by enhancing cultural knowledge, by participating in emotional relationships with languages and personal identity evolutions (Norton & Vanderheyden, 2004; Piller & Takahashi, 2006; Rivière, 2014). Therefore, accessibility to cultural goods in different languages is or should be an important educational concern (Cenoz & Gorter, 2014). There is a need to better understand how globalisation concretely affects day-to-day cultural consumption and to develop realistic and appropriate ways of linking school and out-of-school plurilingual practices. Focusing on plurilingual reading practices, this article aims to analyse how plurilingual readers get access to books in different languages through or despite language inequalities on both global and local scales.

## 2. Circulation of books in a global context

The circulation of books is not a new phenomenon. Scrolls and codices have travelled across kingdoms, seas and continents since very ancient times (Cavallo & Chartier, 1997), and plurilingual reading practices are as old as the invention of writing (Herrenschmidt, 2007). Nonetheless, until recently the ability to access and read books in several languages was generally reserved for the elite. The relative democratization of literacy education worldwide in the 19th and 20th centuries, along with the development of mass production and accelerated forms of transport—decreasing production and trade costs—have greatly intensified the circulation of books (Barker & Escarpit, 1973; Michon & Mollier, 2001).

In the second part of the 20th century, the growth of mobility and migrations, and the increasing economical value of some languages (Ammon, 2010; Duchêne & Heller, 2012) have also favoured the banalisation of plurilingual reading practices (Rivière, 2014). The development of online bookstores and online libraries in the last two decades, and the recent rise of e-books have further expanded the possibility to disseminate and access books that are not produced locally (Lane, 2007; Sapiro, 2009a; Steiner, 2005; Wischenbart, 2013). Thus, one could suppose that books in many languages are easily available anywhere in today's world. However, the circulation of books is not equal in all languages, and plurilingual readers have to find various ways to access books in less dominant languages, as we will see below.

### 3. Language inequalities in the globalised book market

Linguistic and cultural areas have never been hermetic or rigid, but they appear increasingly blurred and permeable in the contemporary globalized world. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, printed books represented one of the five “core cultural goods” in 2002 (UNESCO, 2005, p. 10). They ranked second, just like visual arts (photography, paintings, etc.), behind recorded media (music, etc.) and before audiovisual media (films, series, etc.). Imports and exports of books significantly increased at the turn of the 21st century, with an annual growth rate of 3.5%, which is particularly high (12.5%) in the low-income economies (UNESCO, 2005, p. 69). In addition to technological innovations, the deployment of multinational producers and book-traders, the rise of co-publishing and translation, the multiplication of book fairs, and the intensification of imports and exports have contributed to the denationalisation of the world book market (Sapiro, 2009a; Wischenbart, 2010).

However, depending on the language in which they are written, books are not exchanged and distributed evenly across the globe. At the beginning of the 21st century, 86.7% of the exports of books came from high-income economies. The United States of America was the first importer and exporter of books; and Europe marked 53.1% of the world’s exchanges of books (exports and imports; UNESCO, 2005, p. 38, 77).

As noted by Petrucci (1997) and Sapiro (2009b), dominance in the global book trade, economic power, linguistic imperialism, and historical cultural influence are generally closely tied. It is no coincidence that the official languages of the largest book producers and exporters are the languages that dominate on a global scale. Linguistic inequalities are both reinforcing and reinforced by cultural inequalities. Observing the international literary translation market, Heilbron and Sapiro (2008) have noted that the dominant or dominated statuses of languages are determined by their amount of symbolic capital, which is historically based on prestige, seniority, and (supposed) universality of their literary production.

Although the most dominant languages have attracted greater attention, the linguistic aspect of globalization does not only concern the “World languages” (Ammon, 2010): English, French, Chinese, German, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, and Russian. As noted by Blommaert (2010), “many (indeed, very many) smaller languages are effectively globalized” (p. 64), notably through the circulation of cultural goods within diasporas.

The weakening of states (Bauman, 1998), and of the model of linguistic and cultural homogeneous nation-states (Abéles, 2008; Appadurai, 1996), have opened new opportunities to dominated languages in education (Cenoz & Gorter, 2012) and media production (Androutsopoulos, 2007). In Western Europe, and

particularly in Spain since the end of Franco's regime, dominated languages such as Catalan and Basque have become editorial languages on their own right, with relatively important productions: About 10,000 titles in Catalan and 2,000 titles in Basque are published annually (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2012). This multilingual production also benefits Catalan and Basque readers in France, where the publication in minority languages is almost non-existent (BNF, 2013).

Indeed, languages' statuses vary according to time and place, and a dominant language in some contexts may be dominated in others (Coste, 2010). For instance, even if the Arabic language has a high status in many countries throughout the world, it can be considered as a dominated language in France. Catalan is a dominated language on the Spanish scale, but it is a dominant language in Catalonia in administrative and educational settings.

#### 4. Plurilingualism and multiliteracies

This study contributes to the European research on plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, which is located at the intersection of sociolinguistics and language education. From a plurilingual perspective, based on the concept of "plurilingual competence" as defined by Coste, Moore, and Zarate (2009) in 1997, plurilingualism is a matter of usage rather than mastery. In order to be plurilingual, there is no need to have been an early "bilingual," nor to have become an outstanding "polyglot." It suffices to have used or to have been exposed to more than one language (variety) in the course of one's life, like everyone else. All first and foreign languages and cultures of any individual are seen as part of a unique linguistic and cultural repertoire, which is subject to change over time and circumstances (Coste et al., 2009; Moore & Gajo, 2009).

Despite a common discourse valuing plurilingualism per se, linguistic repertoires are far from equal, and a small number of languages are worth more than others in the global language market (Lo Bianco, 2000; Pujolar, 2007). In line with the multilingual literacies and multiliteracies studies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000), this work considers language and literacy practices as "situated, contested, social practices" raising issues of "discourse, ideology and power" (Warriner, 2012, p. 512). Languages and language varieties are unequal since they are instruments of power through which inequalities between groups may be perpetuated and, sometimes, challenged (Bourdieu, 1977, 2001; Fishman, 1998; Heller, 2007; Romaine, 2000). That is why this article aims to analyse how sociolinguistic and cultural inequalities are reflected, and sometimes challenged, in the ways plurilingual readers get access to books in different languages.

## 5. Data gathering

This research is a part of a completed doctoral study about plurilingual book-reading practices in Western Europe—for pleasure as well as for professional, religious, learning, family and other purposes. The term *book* refers to any non-periodical publications, that is, all kinds of novels and scientific books as well as comics, children’s literature, cook books, travel guides, and so on.

The main corpus consists of 24 semi-structured interviews with plurilingual readers living in four different sociopolitical and sociolinguistic contexts: Spanish Catalonia, Ile-de-France (Paris Region), French Basque Country and Western (French-speaking) Switzerland. The first criterion used in choosing the participants was that they had read books in at least three languages during their life.<sup>1</sup> Then, I selected adults with different reading habits, in terms of kinds of books as well as reading frequency, and different book-reading languages (see Table 1). The people interviewed, whose socio-demographic details are presented in Table 1, were 12 women and 12 men of different ages and nationalities, working or studying in different fields. Most of them were migrants at the time of the interview. While not all participants were members of the middle or upper class, the majority of them had had acquired university education.

Table 1 Participants’ socio-demographic information

Pseudo-nym	Age	Gender	Professional activities	Nationalities	Countries of residence	1st languages (family and 1st schooling languages)	Books-reading languages	Other learned languages
Violeta	32	F	Lawyer	Catalan	Spain	Catalan, Spanish	Catalan, Spanish, French, English	Italian, Russian
Isaac	22	M	Medical student	French & Canadian	France, Canada, Spain	French	French, English, Spanish, Catalan	Italian
Sargon	55	M	Restaurateur, translator, writer	Iraqi	Iraq, UK, Spain	Aramaic, Kurdish, Arabic	Aramaic, Kurdish, Arabic, English, Catalan, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese	-
Akhil	39	M	Documentary filmmaker	Indian	France, India, Thailand, USA, Netherlands, Germany, Argentina, Spain	Marathi, English, Hindi, Thai, French	English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese	Catalan, Dutch
Montalbano	30	M	Doctor	Spanish	Spain, France, Argentina	Spanish, Catalan	Spanish, Catalan, English, French,	German

<sup>1</sup> This criterion is closely linked to some practical constraints of the current doctoral research and should not be generalized. According to the definition above, people who have read any kind of written material, whether published or not, in at least two languages that were perceived as different could be considered plurilingual readers.

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	Ento	44	M	Metalworker	Dutch	Curaçao, Netherlands, Spain	Papiamentu, Dutch	Portuguese, Italian Dutch, Papiamentu, Spanish	English, Catalan
	Milda	27	F	PhD student (sociology), employee in a consulting firm	Lithuanian	Lithuania, Syria, France	Lithuanian, Russian	Lithuanian, English, Arabic, French	Turkish
	Taiga	27	M	Waiter, visual artist	Japanese	Japan, France	Japanese	Japanese, French, English	-
Ile-de-France	Samar	28	F	Arabic teacher	Lebanese-French	Lebanon, France	French, Lebanese Arabic, Italian, Standard Arabic	French, Standard Arabic, Spanish, Italian, English, Syrian-Lebanese Arabic	German, Russian, Chinese, Hebrew
	Dani	30	F	PhD student (linguistics), Turkish and Bulgarian teacher	Bulgarian	Bulgaria, France	Bulgarian, Russian	Bulgarian, Russian, French, English, Turkish	Italian, Spanish, German, Bengali
	Giselle	58	F	Adult educator	Chilean-French	Chili, Pays-Bas, France	Spanish	Spanish, French, Portuguese	English
	Mi-Ying	39	F	Marketing executive	French & Taiwanese	Taiwan, USA, France	Chinese, Japanese	Chinese, English, French	Arabic
	Amelia	78	F	Musician, widow of a United Nations executive	French (former nationality: Colombian)	Colombia, USA, Canada, Italy, Mexico, Argentina, Switzerland, France, etc.	Spanish, French	Spanish, French, English, Italian	Basque
French Basque Country	Oihana	20	F	Medical student	French	Basque Country	French	French, English, Basque, Spanish	-
	Mikel	50	M	Adult educator, consultant	French	France, Peru	French, Basque	French, Spanish, Basque, English	-
	Elvis	44	M	Dentist	Spanish	Spain, France	Spanish, Basque, French	Spanish, French, Basque, English	Latin, Modern Greek
	Chloé	43	F	Farmer	French (former nationality: Ukrainian)	Ukraine, France	Russian, Ukrainian	Russian, Ukrainian, French	English, Italian
	Lou	28	F	Guide-interpreter, sport educator (swimming)	French & Basque	France, Suede + 8 months in Latin America	Basque, French	Basque, French, Spanish, English	Portuguese, Occitan, Swedish
	Stéphane	27	F	Bank clerk	French	France, Egypt, Spain, USA (6 months), Syria (6 months), Switzerland	French, Egyptian Arabic	French, Spanish, English, German	Standard Arabic, Portuguese
Western Switzerland	Gulo	32	M	Phd student (political sciences), research assistant	Kurdish	Turkey, Switzerland	Zazaki, Turkish	Turkish, Kurmanji French, English, Zazaki	Sorani, Spanish, Italian, German
	Anne	83	F	Retired interpreter & German/English teacher	Swiss (former nationality: German)	Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy + some months in the UK	German	German, English, French, Italian, Spanish	Latin
	Ush	53	M	Linguist, professor	American & Israeli	Israel, USA, Canada, Switzerland	Hebrew, English	Hebrew, English, French	Arabic, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese
	Franck	24	M	Consultant in corporate communication and lobbying	Norwegian	Norway, Switzerland	Albanese, Norwegian	Norwegian, English, Albanese, Serbian, French	German, Swedish

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Michael	34	M	Bank clerk	Swiss	Switzerland + 6 months in Germany	German, French	German, French, English
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*Note.* Most of the readers interviewed had appropriated other foreign languages that were never used to read books. These are not mentioned here because of space limitations. The nationalities reported by the participants may be more subjective than official. The definition of languages and varieties is a delicate question (Makoni & Pennycook, 2012; Moore, 2006). Therefore, definitions and distinctions reflected here are based on those of the interviewees. This explains why, for Sargon, Arabic is a unified language, while Samar distinguishes between Standard Arabic and Lebanese Arabic.

The interviews were conducted in informal settings at the beginning of 2010. To minimize the “symbolic violence” between interviewer and interviewees, I contacted participants by intermediaries in informal settings (see Bourdieu, 1998). This approach ascribed to the investigator the less intimidating status of a “friend of a friend” (Milroy & Gordon, 2003, pp. 32, 75). When we shared more than one language, the choice was left to the interviewees. Consequently, four interviews were conducted (mainly) in Spanish, one in English, and the others in French.

In addition, I conducted interviews with four cultural stakeholders: a sociologist coordinating national surveys on cultural practices; the director of a multilingual bookshop in Barcelona; an employee from a Parisian bookshop dedicated to American comics, imported in their original version or translated into French; and the head of an NGO library in Geneva, intended primarily for migrants and refugees.

The present paper is based on the statements regarding how the readers access the books they read, and how cultural stakeholders manage to obtain non-local books for their respective bookshop or library. Some of these statements were spontaneous, mingled with different kinds of information; others were prompted by specific questions. All transcripts were analysed by qualitative content analysis (Bardin, 1991) with the facilities of a word processing program. The analysis was conducted in the original version of the interviews (Pavlenko, 2007), but since it was the main language of the doctoral study, the common codes and sub-codes were for the most part in French. The coding for analysis considered the commercial and non-commercial, online and brick and mortar means of access to books, including informal exchanges within social networks. The participants themselves chose their pseudonyms.

## 6. Findings and discussion

### 6.1. A wide range of means to access books

One striking thing that emerges from the analysis of the readers’ interviews is the diversity of the ways they access books. Most of the readers find their books through different channels and networks, although many of them declare having a preference for buying the books they read when they can afford it.

Living in a rural area, the readers interviewed in the French-Basque Country have difficulties buying books in all their languages. They need to go to the town of Bayonne, about an hour drive away, to find bookshops. For those living in big cities (Barcelona, Geneva, Paris), books in the local languages (French in France and French-speaking Switzerland, Catalan and Castilian in Catalonia) seem much more available. To purchase books in dominated languages or non-local languages in their everyday environment, all interviewees resort to several means:

Oihana: . . . *souvent je les achète. À l'aéroport.*

Enquêtrice: *Les livres en...*

Oihana: *En anglais. Je les achète à l'aéroport, oui. [rire]*

Enquêtrice: *Et en espagnol?*

Oihana: *En espagnol je les emprunte à ma sœur. Et en basque je les achète à Bayonne – ou je les emprunte à des copines, mais plutôt je les achète à Bayonne. Et voilà.*

[Oihana: . . . I buy them often. At the airport.

Investigator: Books in...

Oihana: In English. I buy them at the airport, yes. (laughter)

Investigator: And in Spanish?

Oihana: In Spanish I borrow them from my sister. And in Basque I buy them in Bayonne—or I borrow them from friends, but most often I buy them in Bayonne. And that's it.]

## 6.2. Language inequalities in multilingual local supplies

In addition to a variety of means to access books, Oihana's statement above illustrates the fact that both books in dominant languages and books in dominated languages circulate through the same channels, though not identically.

Many of the participants in this study noted that the book supply is more multilingual than in the past in the countries they have lived in. This increasing presence of books in non-local languages in given places is especially notable for English books. Printed books in English are perceived to be much more available in Vilnius (Milda), Zurich (Stéphane), Geneva (Stéphane, Franck, Ush, Anne), Israel (Ush), Paris and Beirut (Samar) in bookstores chains, such as FNAC and Payot at the time of the survey,<sup>2</sup> as well as in independent shops. The director of a multilingual bookshop in Barcelona indicates that English bookstores "*muy buenas y muy grandes*" (very large and good) have opened their doors in the city. In addition, some readers indicate that English scientific books can be borrowed in university libraries. Printed books in English are easy to find nowadays in great cities of Europe and the Mediterranean area. These statements corroborate

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<sup>2</sup> After having been the property of multinational media groups (Edipress, Hachette) for twenty years, the bookshops chain Payot has become again an independent Swiss chain in 2014.



the observation of the researchers who noted that the growing transnational flows of books primarily benefit English (see Wischenbart, 2013, p. 82).

Intensified circulation of books is nonetheless a factor of linguistic diversification. The bookshop director mentions the suppression of customs duties between Spain and France, resulting from internal agreements within the European Union. Thanks to these conventions, along with reductions in transportation time, French books are delivered to Barcelona as fast as to any French city: "*Tres cuatro días y tenemos aquí cualquier libro en francés*" (in three four days we get any book in French here).

Anne reports that books in German were rather rare in Geneva a few decades ago, but that she can find some without difficulty today. She personally frequents an independent German-language bookshop. Three readers mention independent specialised bookshops selling books in Arabic (Samar) and Turkish (Dani and Gulo) in Paris. Three other readers (Mikel, Oihana, Chloe) buy books from a Basque language bookshop in Bayonne, which imports publications from the Comunidad Autónoma de Euskadi in Spain. Bookshop chains with multilingual departments sell foreign books in widely disseminated European languages: French in Barcelona (Montalbano, Violeta), and Spanish and Italian in Paris (Samar, Giselle). The same languages would be easy to find in second-hand bookshops and flea markets: English in Geneva (Gulo) and Barcelona (Akhil), and Spanish and Italian in Paris (Samar, Giselle). In a given place, second-hand circuits reflect with some time difference book consumption habits of residents, as well as of people passing by: Second-hand books have not necessarily been bought where they are sold again.

Books in non-dominant non-local languages appear to be more present in non-commercial and informal channels. Dani and Franck found books in Bulgarian and Serbian in university libraries in Paris and Geneva. Until the economic crisis, Catalan public libraries used to order books in Arabic and in Romanian from the Catalan multilingual bookshop. Gulo is delighted by the fact that there are books in Zazaki (a variety of Kurdish) at the NGO library. He also indicates that books in Turkish and Kurdish are sold at Kurdish celebrations in Geneva. Franck mentions "*a Norwegian church*" and some "*Albanian, Serbian clubs or associations*" selling or lending books in the same city. He notes the low visibility of these networks, which promote lesser-used languages:

Interviewer: *But that's... little circles.*

Franck: *Yeah. Very little circles and you need to know that they exist. If you don't know, you can't find them.*

The head of an NGO multilingual library in Geneva confirms that it is ten times easier to find books in Turkish than in Kurdish. She adds that books in Mongolian or Creole, among others, are "*really hard to find.*" She suggests that the more a language is read in the world, the easier it is to find books in this language.

### 6.3. Cost and choice

Accessibility is not only a matter of availability (Gambier, 2006); one of the main challenges for accessing books in non-dominant languages is their price. The head of the library, Dani, and Gulo mention the high cost of books in Turkish and Kurdish circulating in Western Europe. In general, foreign books are more expensive than local publications, even when they are published in the dominant language of the destination country or region such as French books in Western Switzerland or Latin American books imported into Spain. But, as signalled by the head of the NGO library, book prices are correlated to the number of readers both inside and outside of a traditional linguistic area. Books in English constitute a perfect example.

The employee of a Parisian bookshop specialized in American comics explains that, despite transport fees, American editions appear to be more profitable for the booksellers than their translations in French. Since foreign books are not subject to the French fixed book price agreement, booksellers may benefit from higher margins on English comics. Editorial traditions also impact prices: Publishers in the United States are more likely to produce cheap editions of comics, along with luxury editions for collectors. The low cost of American comics, as well as of paperbacks, is not only due to cultural differences. The importance of the United States internal market, and its low permeability to foreign productions, allows American publishers to leverage their products before exporting them. Consequently, they can sell them abroad at relatively low prices (Cohen & Verdier, 2008, p. 9), and they can therefore sell more. Language domination is both a cause and an effect of economic advantage.

Language status inequalities are also reflected in bookstores supplies. Samar believes that Arabic language bookshops in Paris "*ont très peu de choix*" (have very little supply). Turkish language bookshops in the same city do not satisfy Dani, who rarely finds books of her interest on their shelves. Such bookshops appear to be less well stocked than shops specialised in more dominant languages in Western Europe. The comments of these two readers echo Buch's (1996) observations, who noted considerable differences between foreign language bookshops in Paris in the 1990s, according to the purchasing power of the Diasporas, and the prestige of their respective cultures in France.

. . . les librairies de langues européennes (allemandes, espagnoles, anglaises, italiennes, polonaises, russes...) ont l'air plus prospères et plus intégrées que celles du Tiers-Monde (arabes, chinoises, vietnamiennes, colombiennes). Ces librairies européennes offrent des littératures plus traduites, plus éditées, plus vendues, plus légitimées, écrites dans des langues plus enseignées, plus apprises de manière institutionnelle, que ne le sont leurs semblables non occidentales. (p. 233)

[. . . European languages bookshops (German, Spanish, English, Italian, Polish, Russian...) seem to be more thriving and better integrated than those from the Third World (Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, Colombian). These European bookshops offer more translated, more published, better sold, and more legitimate literature, written in more taught languages, learned in more institutional settings, than their non-occidental counterparts.]

#### 6.4. Online supply

Although local multilingual book supplies are asymmetric, online book supply could compensate for linguistic inequalities. Yet, this is not so simple and clear cut.

A third of the interviewees regularly buy books from online bookstores.<sup>3</sup> For four of these readers,<sup>4</sup> it is a way to access printed books in non-local languages: Taiga in Japanese in Paris, Franck in English and Norwegian in Geneva, Lou in English and Spanish in the French Basque Country, Samar in Arabic and, to a lesser extent, into her other non-local languages (English, Italian, Spanish) in Paris. It was to meet this demand that the multilingual bookshop in Barcelona developed an online platform to sell books in Arabic that are difficult to reach, since they are published by foundations and small publishers. Nonetheless, except for Norwegian, this means of access is sparsely used by the interviewees to buy books in "small" languages.

The multilingualism of its catalogue is a major marketing argument of the Amazon Kindle. Getting access to books in various languages was one of the top ten reasons to prefer e-books in a survey conducted in France in 2012 (SGDL, SNE, & Sofia, 2012). Book digitalization is supposed to enable the purchase of books in languages little present in local contexts. Passionate for Anglo-Saxon science fiction, Elvis used to struggle to find such novels in their original version

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<sup>3</sup> Online bookselling services emerged in the 1990s and really entered the European market in the mid 2000s. In 2010, 13% of the printed books bought in France were purchased on the Internet, 40% of them through Amazon. Internet bookstores are particularly challenging foreign bookshops although sometimes higher shipping costs and delivery times roughly equal those of the brick and mortar shops (Hugué, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> For Mi-Ying (living in Paris) and Michael (living in the Geneva region), online bookstores are the favorite providers of books, in any language. Even though they would prefer brick and mortar bookshops, Mikel and Chloé have bought some books online to compensate for the generally low editorial supply in their rural area.

in the French Basque Country. That is no longer the case since he has a tablet computer and buys books on the iTunes bookstore.

*Elvis: . . . Maintenant que y'a les tablettes, enfin que tu peux les acheter sur Internet, les télécharger, t'as beaucoup plus de choix. Beaucoup plus de choix ! D'ailleurs, c'est total quoi, choix complet.*

[Elvis: . . . Now that tablets exist, or rather you can buy them online, download them, you have much larger choice. Much larger choice! It's actually a total, complete choice.]

However, this “complete” choice does not apply to all languages. From the time he started reading almost exclusively electronic books, Elvis stopped reading in his other regular reading languages, French and Spanish, even though he continues reading printed books in Basque with his children. Ush was the other interviewee reading principally e-books at the time of the survey. Delighted, he explains that he reads more than in the past since he has an e-reader, but only in English and French, because there are no e-books in Hebrew. As noted by Wischenbart (2013), “only some languages are supported—or even tolerated—in e-books on those ‘global’ platforms” (p. 71) that are Amazon, Google, Apple, Kobo, and Barnes & Noble. Arabic and Hebrew, notably, were scarcely represented in the e-book market at the time of the interview.

It is interesting to note that, for both readers, the digitalization of their reading practices led to a reduction of the number of their reading languages, in favour of the most dominant ones. As noted by Kelly-Holmes (2012), new technologies play an ambivalent role in the world's sociolinguistic imbalance. On the one hand, the Internet fosters English domination, in particular by increasing the dissemination of cultural goods in this language (Danet & Herring, 2007). On the other hand, the Web provides new opportunities for books in dominated languages to circulate. This last role is mentioned by Gulo and Dani, who managed to find digitalised scanned books in Turkish and in Bulgarian that they downloaded for free or consulted online.

Economist Françoise Benhamou has argued that the major issue in online commercialisation of printed books, digital libraries, and the emergence of the e-book are less the book content (texts, images) than the struggle for linguistic and cultural hegemony (Benhamou, 2008, p. 92). The global e-book market is still in its infancy: E-books really started to penetrate non-traditional English book markets in Europe and Asia in 2012 (Wischenbart, 2013). Its further growth will show us better how it may affect both dominant and dominated languages.

## 6.5. Informal exchanges and mobility

Books do not circulate only through commercial, associative, and institutional channels. They also spread within professional and private social networks. All

interviews contain at least one reference to books exchanged or given as presents. Informal sociability plays a critical role in multilingual reading practices since books in various languages circulate among couples, families, and friends.

As mentioned by Oihana in the quote above, and confirmed by Milda, Stéphane, Violeta, Oihana, Montalbano, and Ush, book exchanges between parents and children, and especially between brothers and sisters, do not only concern books in their family languages. The same goes within couples: The range of languages read is frequently wider than those spoken between partners and with the children. These book exchanges foster “la reconstitution de communautés affectives [the reconstitution of emotional communities]” (Collovald & Neveu, 2004, p. 279), notably among migrant readers living far away from their family and friends. Taiga receives books in Japanese from his parents. A friend of Chloé’s sends her books in Russian from Ukraine. Gulo and Dani ask friends living in Turkey to send them books in Turkish.

The data gathered do not enable the measurement of the mutual impact of language inequalities and informal books exchanges. Loans and presents seem to occur in both dominant and dominated languages. Isaac and Sargon would rather offer books in Catalan when it is possible; Lou and Oihana borrow books in Basque at times. However, dominant local languages and English have the advantage of being more widely read, and therefore more easily given or lent. Samar easily offers or recommends books in English since she assumes that most people in her surroundings read in English.

Like the stakeholders of the NGO multilingual library in Geneva, Gulo and Dani also ask friends to bring them books whenever they travel to Turkey. Mobility appears to be a key-factor in plurilingual book-reading practices. Many readers report stocking up on books while travelling. For example, Samar and Sargon buy books in Arabic during trips to Beirut. Ush goes whenever he can to the Israel Book Fair to buy recent novels in Hebrew. Each time she goes to Spain, Anne takes “*un sac special*” (a special bag) with her to carry books. Train stations and airports are also mentioned as frequent points of buying books. In the same manner as Oihana, Akhil gets English books at airports, whether in Italy or the Netherlands. Elvis has bought comics in Spanish at an airport in Spain. Lou evokes paperback books she bought in French at railway stations in the South West of France, where she never has seen books in Basque. “Non-lieux [non-places]” (Augé, 1994, p. 162-171) dedicated to human mobility seem to benefit primarily the most disseminated languages. However, local purchases while travelling provide a wider choice of books and cheaper prices. This may favour little-disseminated languages, whose publications rarely circulate through the main commercial channel. Informal exchanges and human mobility do not really challenge, but somewhat compensate, for the unequal circulation of cultural goods.

## 7. Summary and implications for language teaching

As in other cases, in the case of books globalisation is not only a process of homogenisation (Appadurai, 1996; Coupland, 2010). Adopting the point of view of plurilingual readers enabled us to consider the availability and accessibility of books from a different perspective than large-scale studies on the global book trade. The results are in agreement with Giddens' observation (1999) that globalisation affects individual lives, down to the smallest details. They also corroborate the view that "the global village is still stratified unequally according to differences in power and material resources" (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 135).

The increasing multilingualism of the local book supply in Western Europe does not benefit all languages equally. On the whole, books in dominant European languages tend to circulate within larger and mostly formal commercial channels, whereas books in dominated languages seem to travel by less visible and non-commercial channels. Books in dominant languages appear to be generally more abundant, more varied, and frequently cheaper than books in less dominant languages. They are also represented in online bookstores and e-book catalogues to a greater extent.

However, all the readers who have participated in this study resort to several means to access books. These means allow them to obtain books that are not easily available in their daily context. Diaspora networks, university and charity libraries, websites offering access to scanned books, informal books exchanges, sending by relatives and purchase while travelling are some of the means enabling access to books in little-disseminated languages. Even languages "that do not belong to the sociolinguistic top of the world" may benefit from globalisation (Blommaert, 2010, p. 77): "The spread of globalized cultural formats and the emergence of globalized communities of consumers thus create new, and positive, opportunities for languages to circulate . . ." (Blommaert, 2010, p. 78). This "globalization from below" (Mathews, Ribeiro, & Vega, 2012) is only possible because ordinary consumers are clients of the main formal offer but do not content themselves with it. By searching for more books in more varied languages, they play an active part in the circulation of cultural goods in less dominant languages. Just as "globalization can both promote and diminish linguistic diversity" (Pool, 2010, p. 142), plurilingual consumers of cultural goods both perpetuate and challenge language inequalities in their everyday lives.

Acquiring and borrowing books as well as other cultural goods are concrete ways in which languages are appropriated or re-appropriated. Cultural practices may constitute an affective investment and play an important part in the emotionality of languages (Rivière, 2016). The very act of searching for cultural goods may even affect one's relationship with a language, as explained by

Samar and Stéphane. These two regular readers in English used to hate this language until they started to read books in English in out-of-school contexts:

Stéphane: . . . *on avait toujours eu des profs qui essayaient de nous faire lire en anglais et moi... ben j'avais jamais réussi à lire quoi que ce soit en anglais avant finalement de débarquer à New York et puis... Et puis aller de moi-même chez le marchand de livres d'occasion, et puis de farfouiller!*

[Stéphane: . . . we always had teachers who were trying to make us read in English and I... well, I've never managed to read anything in English before I arrived to New York and then... And then went to the second-hand bookshop on my own, and started rummaging!]

Furthermore, according to the participants, reading practices play an important role in language re-appropriation and maintenance. Cultural consumption might be an essential practice to “*keep in touch with the language,*” as reported by Franck and many other readers. Consuming cultural products is a way to develop one’s skills in her or his different languages, but it is perhaps most important as a way of preventing language forgetting (see Rivière, 2014).

Since the goal of language learning and teaching is to foster social uses of languages in the long run, teachers should also teach the ways in which students can use these languages on a regular basis in out-of-school contexts. Yet, even in a global world, access to cultural goods “cannot be taken for granted” (Duff, 2002, p. 486), especially regarding in dominated and/or non-local languages in a given context.

For this reason, it is important for language teachers to be aware of commercial and non-commercial, online and offline, formal and informal ways of accessing cultural goods in their local context. Education professionals should also try to compensate for language inequalities through paying particular attention to multimedia centres and school library collections. In addition, they may find other ways of making cultural goods available and accessible, according to the means of the students: cultural clubs, inter-individual exchanges, second-hand sale, outing activities to acquire cultural goods, and so on.

Instead of doing that alone, they could involve the learners in the discovery of the different ways to access cultural content, some of which are evolving very quickly. They should not only inform their students about but also learn with them to use creative and personal means of accessing cultural goods and of compensating for language inequalities. By encouraging students to play an active part in the process, they would foster concrete and dynamic appropriation of the languages they teach. Thus, they would also teach them to play an active albeit modest part in (more equal) cultural exchanges on both global and local scales.

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