Multilingualism, diaspora, and the Internet: Codes and identities on German-based diaspora websites[1]

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The use of the Internet in diaspora has attracted considerable interest in media and cultural studies, but little attention has been paid to sociolinguistic issues. This paper is a study of linguistic diversity on websites maintained for and by members of diaspora groups in Germany. Based on online ethnography and an interpretive approach to code-switching, the paper explores the relationships between language choices and the complex architecture of these websites, which offer edited content as well as spaces for user interaction. Language choice in edited sections, patterns of code-switching in discussion forums, and language choice for user screen names and message signatures are examined. The findings demonstrate how code choices are tailored to the requirements of different modes within a website, and how various codes are creatively employed to display and negotiate identities that are related to the diaspora and its virtual discursive spaces.

KEYWORDS: Computer-mediated discourse, diasporic media, web discussion forums, language choice, code-switching, German

DIASPORIC PUBLIC SPHERES ON THE INTERNET

Originally referring to Jews living outside Palestine, the notion of diaspora has acquired the general meaning of 'a group of people dispersed from their original place' (Barnard and Spencer 2002: 601). Current definitions (e.g. Karim 2003a; Sinclair and Cunningham 2000) tend to emphasize: an ethnic minority's sense of difference and awareness of its marginal status within a host society; its desire to maintain links with the homeland, and to resist complete assimilation; and a constant negotiation between identities and cultures which is captured in the 'master metaphor' of hybridity (Sinclair and Cunningham 2000: 17).

Communication technologies have always been crucial to the maintenance of diasporic relationships with the homeland (Karim 2003a). In the late 20th century, the advance of electronic media fostered the formation of 'diasporic public spheres' around broadcast media from the homeland (Appadurai 1996). Video films, satellite TV and audio cassettes 'increasingly link producers and

audiences across national boundaries', and help diasporic audiences to sustain links 'to wider constituencies of religious or ethnic affiliation' (Appadurai 1996: 21–22). Taking early note of 'electronic billboard communities', Appadurai points out that 'diasporas are changing in light of new forms of electronic mediation' (1996: 196), and stresses the relationships between 'spatialized neighborhoods' and the new 'virtual neighborhoods of international electronic communication' (1996: 195). Since then, a growing body of research in sociology and ethnic, media and cultural studies has explored how 'the World Wide Web is changing the way diasporic or immigrant lives are experienced' (Mallapragada 2000: 179). This work has established that Internet uses in the diaspora involve different reception and production formats (cf. Hiller and Franz 2004; Karim 2003b; Lee and Wong 2003; Mallapragada 2000; Mandaville 2003; Miller and Slater 2000; Mitra 1998, 2001, 2003; Yang 2003). Online mass media allow consumers 'to stay in touch with news and popular culture from the homeland' (Sinclair and Cunningham 2000: 15); e-mail facilitates contact with relatives and friends (Freyermuth 2002; Miller and Slater 2000); newsgroups, mailing lists and chat channels enable geographically dispersed diasporics to establish transnational networks with active production of discourse (Mitra 1998; Tsaliki 2003); diasporic websites provide cultural resources such as directories, event listings and news (Mandaville 2003; Mitra 2001; Nakamura 2002; Qiu 2003; Yang 2003) as well as spaces for user interaction which 'offer a safe and comfortable place where people of particular ethnic groups can digitally "hang out" and share their stories' (Mitra 2003: 1019).

Diasporic websites differ from newsgroups in that they are owned by natural or legal persons, and that their maintenance requires continuous engagement. Their producers exploit the potential of the Internet 'in overcoming some of the hierarchical structures of traditional broadcast media' (Karim 2003a: 13). Launching a website is an affordable do-it-yourself enterprise, and can be used to promote viewpoints – for example, propagating political reform in the homeland – that might be blocked by institutional media gatekeeping (see papers in Lee and Wong 2003). The aim is to build a community of users that are audience both to the website's edited content *and* to their own discourse, so virtual interaction platforms such as discussion forums are provided, and community awareness is fostered (Qiu 2003).

It is argued that the Internet is a site for 'the productive construction of new hybrid identities and cultures through the active, simultaneous process of maintenance and negotiation between the poles of an original home and a newly acquired host culture' (Sinclair and Cunningham 2000: 15). It offers diasporas, or at least their computer-literate segments, new chances to articulate marginal voices and to 'negotiate their dual identity' (Mitra 1998: 64, 2001). For Mandaville (2003: 135) the Internet provides 'spaces of communication in which the identity, meaning and boundaries of a diasporic community are continually constructed, debated and reimagined'. This does not mean that the views expressed are always unanimous or unprejudiced. Mitra (1998) vividly

describes the verbal aggression and nationalistic conflicts that emerge in the *soc.culture.india* newsgroup, and the extent to which they depart from an idealistic view of liberal online discourse.

DIASPORAS AND BILINGUAL COMPUTER-MEDIATED DISCOURSE

With very few exceptions (e.g. Tsaliki 2003), this literature has paid little attention to linguistic diversity. Likewise, the growing research on the 'multilingual Internet' (Danet and Herring 2003; Wright 2004) has largely neglected migrant and diasporic contexts. The studies reviewed in this section examine a range of modes and sociolinguistic settings: mailing lists and discussion forums among the Assyrian-American, the Burundi and the Niuean diaspora (Kadende-Kaiser 2000; McClure 2001; Sperlich 2005); Indian and Punjabi newsgroups (Paolillo 1996, 1999, in press); message boards devoted to a Creole-speaking British comedian (Sebba 2003); English code-switching among Greeks in chat and e-mails (Georgakopoulou 1997, 2004); and German code-switching in Greek and Turkish chat channels (Androutsopoulos and Hinnenkamp 2001). Most of this research focuses on interaction-oriented research on code-switching, complemented by quantitative analysis of language choice (Androutsopoulos in press; Paolillo in press; Sperlich 2005).

In the first of these studies, Paolillo (1996) distinguishes between formulaic and creative uses of Punjabi in a dominantly English-speaking Punjabi newsgroup, and proposes four interrelated factors to explain the 'functional marginalization of Punjabi online': ongoing intergenerational language shift; avoidance of Punjabi due to linguistic insecurity and to the non-fluency of the bulk of the audience; the high status of English in South Asia; and the predominance of English on the Internet. While Paolillo's third factor is specific to this world region and his fourth factor now somewhat relativized (cf. the Introduction and Kelly-Holmes' paper in this issue), his first factor matches the diminishing use of Assyrian and Niuean in contact with English (McClure 2001; Sperlich 2005). However, studies of first generation Greek expatriates suggest a much wider use of home language (cf. Georgakopoulou 1997; Tsaliki 2003). An additional factor that discourages home language, an ethnically mixed audience, is evidenced in later work by Paolillo (in press), which reveals less code-switching in pan-Indian than specifically Punjabi environments, as well as by Kadende-Kaiser (2000) with respect to the limited use of Kirundi in the network she studied; although Burundians are in the majority, 'message senders take into consideration the linguistic diversity and demographics of the net as they attempt to reach as many net members as possible' (Kadende-Kaiser 2000: 142).

There is ample evidence across this work that computer-mediated discourse is a site for interactionally meaningful use of language alternation, even in the absence of established offline relationships. Besides a wide range of formulaic code-switching (Kadende-Kaiser 2000; McClure 2001; Paolillo 1996; Sperlich 2005), users creatively exploit bi- and multilingualism for various communicative

purposes: to attract the attention of other interlocutors, select addressees and delimit conversational topics (Androutsopoulos and Hinnenkamp 2001; Paolillo in press); to contextualize messages as non-serious and non-threatening (Androutsopoulos in press; Sebba 2003); to signal shifts between participant frameworks, mitigate requests and other dispreferred acts (Georgakopoulou 1997); to perform culturally specific genres such as singing and ethnic joke-telling (Paolillo 1996, in press; Sperlich 2005); and to restrict the audience and challenge other participants' language choices (Androutsopoulos in press; Androutsopoulos and Hinnenkamp 2001).

The relationship of code-switching to different modes of computer-mediated interaction and to participant roles is less clear. Paolillo (in press) is the only study to compare synchronous and asynchronous modes across the same communities. His findings suggest that Internet Relay Chat channels contain more code-switching than newsgroups, because they provide more interactional context. Paolillo also suggests that IRC operators code-switch less often than normal users do with other users or operators (Paolillo 2001, in press). However, this finding is tied to limited functions of code-switching in his data, for example as an attention seeker, and cannot be generalized to more creative bilingual talk. Other studies suggest that particular individuals stand out in terms of a conscious preference for home/indigenous language (McClure 2001; Sperlich 2005) and for playful switching and mixing (Androutsopoulos and Hinnenkamp 2001). The relationship between code-switching and ethnic identity has also been neglected. Paolillo and McClure suggest that formulaic uses of minority language are a means to signal ethnic identity in settings of language shift; thus greetings or nationalist slogans in Punjabi reflect its 'we code' value (cf. Gumperz 1982). However, ethnicity is not the only social identity at stake in these arenas. It may be just the backdrop for more local role relationships between participants, which are contextualized by code-switching and style-shifting (cf. Georgakopoulou 1997). An examination of the language–identity relationship with respect to creative bilingual interaction on the Internet is in its infancy. More generally, research has just started to examine relationships between sociolinguistic settings (e.g. types of migrant community and contact languages), contextual parameters (e.g. modes of digital communication, role relationships on- and offline), and the identity relevance of code choices in virtual bilingual talk.

THIS STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to extend the empirical arena of previous work from single sites of computer-mediated verbal interaction to multi-purpose web environments, and its analytical scope from code-switching to multilingual discourse. I consider diasporic websites to be a 'sociolinguistic ecology' (Coupland, Bishop and Garrett 2003), in which a variety of participation formats and modes of discourse coexist. My exploration of this ecology is based on the distinctions between edited and user sections on the one hand, and 'regular' and 'emblematic'

discourse on the other. Edited sections host diverse genres of media discourse, from news to entertainment. User sections are platforms for peer-to-peer interaction provided by the website editors. 'Regular' refers to text and talk that is routinely produced on a daily basis: the copy text produced by the editors and the user interactions that occur in discussion forums and chat rooms. 'Emblematic' is my cover term for items of individual and corporate self-presentation: user screen names and message signatures, website names, slogans and concomitant graphic elements. Multilingualism on a diasporic website, then, embraces all choices and juxtapositions of linguistic resources in user interaction, editorial practices, and corporate or personal emblems. On this basis, the study will shed light on the nature of multilingualism on a number of websites that are sustained by and for German-based diaspora populations. In particular, the findings attest striking differences between language choices in edited and user sections; moreover, emblematic language choices enhance the linguistic diversity of these spaces; finally, the linguistic practices of users and editors go beyond the 'essential' pair of home (minority) and host (majority) language, English being the commonest additional resource.

The second aim of this study is to discuss the relationship between linguistic diversity and ethnic identity on diaspora websites. Drawing inspiration from Rampton's discussion of the interface between sociolinguistics and cultural studies (Rampton 1997), I suggest that sociolinguistics can shed light on the relevance of multilingual practices to the 'productive construction of new hybrid identities and cultures' (Sinclair and Cunningham 2000: 15) in diasporic computer-mediated discourse. This examination is based on an interpretative approach to language choice and code alternation, and on an understanding of identity as a discursive construction, which is gaining currency in code-switching research and interactional sociolinguistics (see papers in Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou 2003; Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Auer 1998b; as well as Auer 2005; Georgakopoulou 2004; Pavlenko and Blackridge 2004). The 'identities in talk' approach views identity as the ascription or display of group membership in discourse, and maintains that identities cannot be assumed to be relevant to participants unless they orient themselves to them in their interactions (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998). With respect to code-switching, it forces us to rethink the influential distinction between 'we/they code' (Gumperz 1982), which does not adequately capture the complexity of bilingual interaction (cf. Auer 1995, 1998a; Jaffe 2000; Sebba and Wootton 1998). While in Gumperz' original conception the social identities at stake are the bilingual minority and the majority group, Sebba and Wootton (1998) convincingly argue that 'we' and 'they' in bilingual discourse may index an array of 'more local, and changeable, social identities which are made salient from time to time within a conversation' (1998: 284). Accordingly, participants may position different codes from their repertoire as 'we/they codes' at different stages of a bilingual episode. The function of the available codes 'may vary from situation to situation and cannot be treated as given' (Sebba and Wootton 1998: 275).

Rather than drawing on identity to explain observable patterns of code-switching, an 'identities in talk' approach focuses on the interplay of code choice and the ascription or display of group membership; in other words, the question is how situated language choices interrelate to claims and negotiations of identities in multilingual contexts (Pavlenko and Blackridge 2004: 21–22). This ties in well with the diaspora spaces examined here. Identity is a popular subject of debate in diasporic discussion forums, thus offering ample opportunities to determine how language choices are mobilized in these debates, what kinds of identity they make relevant, and how these relate to an 'essentialist' equation of home language with the diaspora, and German with the majority group. Moreover, it allows emblematic discourse to become part of the scrutiny. Screen names and message signatures have been hailed as 'the primal scene of cybernetic identity' (Nakamura 2002: 37) in CMC research, and they no doubt comply with an understanding of identity as a discursive construction (cf. Bechar-Israeli 1995; Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright and Rosenbaum-Tamari 1997; Donath 1999; Döring 2003: 86–88). To be sure, these are acts of self-presentation that are designed for and displayed to, rather than negotiated with, an audience; moreover, they may signify a variety of personal identity aspects, such as physical appearance, character traits or interests. But we may ask whether ethnicity is a relevant resource for member self-presentation in diaspora forums, how it is indexed (semantically and/or by language choice), and how it relates to other membership categories that participants might mobilize for purposes of self-presentation.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The diasporic websites considered here are based in Germany, and thus go beyond the English-speaking matrix that dominates the literature. The first website of this kind, *vaybee.de*, was launched in 1999 for the Turkish diaspora, Germany's largest migrant group. Currently, an increasing number of websites target German-based, mostly second-generation audiences with roots in Afghanistan, Greece, India, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, and Russia. The data analyzed are drawn from seven websites for ethnically different audiences.[2] Table 1 displays the approximate number of registered users, the dominant language in the edited sections and discussion forums, and the type of data obtained from each site. Data collection from discussion forums was restricted to dominantly German-language ones; the data from edited sections includes dominantly migrant language sites as well.

The number of *registered users* was selected as a yardstick (rather than unique visits, for example) because registration is required to post forum messages. It provides a rough indication of the size of the user communities, but does not reliably reflect the actual number of active participants. Registered users are generally second-generation German-based adolescents and young adults, with some first-generation migrants, a few non-ethnic members, and an occasional user from the homeland as well. Because of the large numbers of registered users,

Table 1: German-based diasporic websites considered in this study

	Name	Ethnic group	Registered users*	Dominant language**		Data	
				Edited	Forums	Edited	Forums
1	*theinder.net*	Indian	1,300	Ger/Eng	Ger	√	√
2	*iran-now.de*	Persian	3,000	Ger	Ger	√	√
3	*greex.net*	Greek	600	Ger	Ger		√
4	*asia-zone.de*	Asian	11,500	Ger	Ger		√
5	*dimadima.de*	Moroccan	10,000	Ger	Ger		√
6	*vaybee.de*	Turkish	370,000	Ger/Tur	Ger/Tur	√	
7	*germany.ru*	Russian	230,000	Rus	Rus	√	

* Figures based on producer information and web stats, December 2004
** Ger=German; Eng=English; Tur=Turkish; Rus=Russian

however, a detailed examination of socio-demographic data is beyond the scope of this paper. *Dominant language* refers to the language used for most copy texts in edited sections, and for most talk in the discussion forums. This is established by ethnographic observation, and supported by a quantitative analysis of language choice in the Persian forum, which revealed that only 19 percent of a random sample of N = 2084 posts is completely or mainly in Persian (cf. Androutsopoulos in press). I estimate this figure to be roughly the same in the Greek forum, and considerably lower in the Asian, Indian and Moroccan forums.

Whereas previous media and cultural studies literature has stressed the *transnational* character of diasporic online activities, the websites examined here are decidedly *local*: their producers are without exception based in Germany, and they assume that the overwhelming majority of their audiences are, too – an estimated 90 percent in the case of the Persian website, for example. The news items in the edited sections deal with the home country and/or the situation of the ethnic group in Germany, but seldom, if ever, its diaspora elsewhere. Transnational diaspora seems equally unimportant in user discussions, which revolve around the home country, life in Germany and other German-speaking countries, and inter-ethnic relationships. This local focus is no doubt fostered by language, that is German, which predominates in most edited content and user discussions, and thereby delimits potential participation from other parts of the world.

Data collection was based on procedures of online ethnography (cf. Döring 2003; Hine 2000; Yang 2003), the main one being the 'persistent observation' (Herring 2004) of selected sites of computer-mediated discourse, based on the assumption that continuous monitoring affords insights into discourse practices and patterns of language use on these websites. In addition, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the producers of the Indian, Persian, Russian and Turkish websites provide background information on production practices, language policies and user profiles. Edited sections were monitored over a period of several

weeks with respect to range of genres (e.g. news, event listings, link lists), amount of text items per genre, authors and sources, updating frequency, and references to Germany, the homeland or both. Advertising banners were examined separately with respect to number, placement, institutional origin, subject matter, and updating frequency.

Data collection from discussion forums resembles Yang's (2003: 471) 'guerrilla ethnography', which emphasizes attending to the openness and fluidity of online discourse. Rather than isolating a particular forum section, my procedure involved: browsing through each forum on a regular basis for several weeks; registering popular topics; identifying core participants; locating stretches of bilingual interaction and metalinguistic discourse; and using forum statistics and search options. I examined lists of posts by member (where available) to determine individual linguistic preferences, and used the search function to locate keywords such as 'language', 'language mixing' or fixed expressions in the home languages. A sample from the Persian forum was coded to examine language choice by discussion topic (cf. Androutsopoulos in press), and a non-random sample of some ten discussions from each forum was stored and printed out for detailed analysis of code-switching.

Analysis of code-switching is based on Auer's conversation-analytic framework (Auer 1995, 1998a, 1999, 2000). Auer argues for a restrictive understanding of code-switching as a locally meaningful process, in which one language of interaction is preferred at any time. He opposes this to language mixing, defined as a pattern of frequent alternations without obvious discourse function, which is meaningful as a whole. Auer distinguishes between alternation and insertion in terms of sequential structure, and between discourse- and preference- (or participant-)related code-switching in terms of function.[3] In applying these distinctions to web forums, I treat the discussion thread as the equivalent of a conversational episode, and therefore as the unit of analysis in determining the base language of discussion (Auer 2000), against which switches are examined. I used both Auer's categories and other code-switching classifications (cf. Clyne 2003; Gumperz 1982; McClure 2001) to identify functional patterns of code-switching in my data, such as formulaic and performance-related switching, contextualization of shifts in topic, perspective or key, code-switching for interpersonal alignment, addressee specification, and rhetorical contrast. The danger of a decontextualized listing of code-switching instances is reduced by detailed sequential analyses that take into account the direction of switch, 'the place *within* the interactional episode in which languages alternate' (Auer 1998a: 3), the way switches align to previous code choices of other speakers (cf. Georgakopoulou 1997), and the way they index participants' background knowledge and language norms.

The examination of screen names and message signatures focuses on language choice, and only secondarily considers their semantics and source domains, which are the main concern in relevant CMC research (cf. Bechar-Israeli 1995; Danet et al. 1997). A random sample of approximately 340 screen names from the Greek

and Persian forums was coded for language choice, and a smaller sample of 40 signatures from the Persian, Indian, Moroccan and Asian forums was examined in terms of the relationship between language choice, the screen name of the same user, and visual elements within the signature.

LANGUAGE CHOICES IN EDITED WEBSITE SECTIONS

As Table 1 suggests, the edited sections of the seven websites can be divided into three types of language preference: dominantly home language; dominantly German; and dual language preference. As for the first two types, the respective dominant language determines the kind of other-language content to be found. Thus German on the Russian site is restricted to an alternative front page and a few self-promotional texts, whereas the sparse home language content on the Persian and Moroccan sites provides home culture resources such as ethnic first names and religious verses. The Indian and Turkish sites represent two variants of dual language preference. The Indian site has a small English news section which draws on external sources, and a larger section in German, authored by regular editors and freelancers. The Turkish site has two 'mirror' sections in Turkish and German, with most news items present in both. The texts are first written in German and translated into Turkish. Regardless of language preference, all producers endorse a monolingual policy for 'regular' discourse. No bilingual copy text is attested in the data.

These language preferences reflect the producers' desire to reach multiple target groups. For instance, the English section of the Indian site targets 'IT Indians', that is Indian professionals who are in Germany on a short-term basis, while its German section targets second-generation teenagers and students of Indian descent. In general, the decision for German-edited content responds to assumed language preferences of the diasporic audience[4] as much as to the wish to be accessible to interested non-ethnics, and to position the website in the national media landscape. The Persian administrator chose German to occupy a market niche; as he points out in the interview, German-based Persians who would want to read Persian have access to other sites. Although native Germans are a tiny minority of registered users, the Persian, Turkish, and Indian producers explicitly include them in the audience of the edited sections; as the Turkish manager phrased it: 'We don't want to exclude anyone'. However, the language of names and slogans (as they appear in the header of the web browser window) is not entirely consistent with the above picture:

1. *theinder.net: Indien-Portal für Deutschland* (Germany's Indian online portal)
2. *iran-now.de: Nachrichten und Community Portal* (News and community portal)
3. *greex.net: Die griechische Online Community* (The ultimate Greek community)
4. *asia-zone.de: Die erste asiatische Community im deutschsprachigen Raum* (The first Asian community in the German-speaking world)
5. *dimadima.de: maroc chat Marokko Forum*

6.   *vaybee.de: Yeni neslin sitesi* (Site for the new generation)
7.   *germany.ru: Германия по-русски* (Germany in Russian)

Website names index their target diasporic audience by explicit reference to the ethnic group (*theinder.net; greex.net*), the homeland (*iran-now.de*) or a larger geographic region (*asia-zone.de*); some resort to a home language expression (Turkish *vaybee* 'wow!'; (Moroccan) Arabic *dima* 'always'); in *germany.ru* the domain suffix indexes ethnic affiliation. The descriptors in the slogans construct the discursive space in different ways. *Portal* is the most inclusive term, suggesting both edited content and a user section, as in the Persian slogan. *Community*, *chat* and *forum* foreground user activities. Indeed, the Asian, Greek and Moroccan sites have little news content, though featuring event listings and advertising.

In terms of language choice, most slogans are accurate indicators of the dominant language(s) of the respective website. The exceptions are the Greek site, where the English slogan is purely symbolic (i.e. does not correspond to English content), and the Turkish site, which selects a Turkish slogan although its equally large German section is displayed first on the browser. By contrast, four out of seven website names capitalize on English.[5] While the language of most slogans is indexical to the websites' content, language choice for names is primarily symbolic and only secondarily indexical, notably in the case of the mixed form *theinder.net* (English determiner + German *Inder* 'Indian'), which came about because the German name of choice was already reserved, but actually suits the site's bilingual content policy.

The websites in my sample vividly illustrate 'how diasporas become formed by their use of the media as global narrowcast markets' (Sinclair and Cunningham 2000: 15–16). They all feature advertising banners of German-based ethnic businesses or German companies; some offer their own merchandising, and a few include a fully-fledged online shop. The more professional Russian and Turkish websites tend to ethnicize mainstream entertainment genres such as e-cards, voting, horoscopes, and online games, adapting them to the cultural codes of their ethnic group. The language of these genres reflects the preferences of each site. However, advertising banners tend to be in German throughout, even on pages with exclusively Turkish or Russian content. Advertisers frame the audience by choice of language as Germany-based consumers rather than diasporics.

Diverging language choices for edited content, advertising and emblematic chunks result in multilingual surfaces, on which different discourses coexist, each in its 'own' language. A screenshot from the Indian portal, which offers alternative versions of its front page in German, English and Hindi, illustrates this. In the Hindi version (Figure 1), the use of Hindi is restricted to the navigation bars at the left and top of the screen, to superscripts of the website's own banners, and to a text box at the very bottom (not displayed here). A few headings on the horizontal navigation bar lead to Hindi texts, though this is general information rather than regularly updated news. All headings on the vertical bar lead to English and German content. The news items on the canvas are in English, most

Figure 1: Front page of *theinder.net*, Hindi version (21 August 2005)

advertising banners in German. Thus the Hindi version is essentially a surface feature, a 'rudiment' as the producers themselves call it. However, it addresses a much more exclusive audience than the other two languages do. The producers themselves assume that most of their second generation users speak no Hindi nor can read the Devanagari script. The decision to include a Hindi version despite the lack of regular content and the assumed lack of language skills of the principal target group makes sense in terms of *iconisation*, a strategic use of home language for the representation of a largely lost ethnic identity (Coupland et al. 2003). Hindi is turned into an icon of 'Indianness', taking precedence over other languages of India. It coexists on this surface with English, which is tailored to the partial target audience of 'IT Indians', and with German, which indexes the website's relationship to the German market.

CODE-SWITCHING IN DISCUSSION FORUMS

A web discussion forum is a mode of public, asynchronous computer-mediated communication, and in many ways is similar to a newsgroup (Döring 2003: 70–73; Marcoccia 2004). Forums differ from newsgroups in that they are organized in groups of topically related discussions, which are monitored by administrators for appropriate content and style. Moreover, forums allow the display of customized personal information with each post (such as an avatar, a signature and a user's total posts) as well as a wealth of multimodal features (e.g. different font styles and colors, graphic emoticons and images within posts and signatures). Forum discussion threads are multi-party conversations of varying length and duration, in which conversations between different dyads may intermingle (Marcoccia 2004). However, forum posts cannot be equated with conversational turns, because a single post may contain two or more moves, such as replies to two or more previous messages (Herring 2001). Users may shift within a post between different addressees or from a particular addressee to the general audience (i.e. addressing no one in particular). Discussion threads usually start with a series of responses to the initial post, and may gradually develop into stretches of interaction, as users start responding to previous posts. These interactions are an essential site for the management of interpersonal relationships, and their frequency is an indication of the liveliness of a forum.

   In the dominantly German-speaking forums examined here, home languages[6] rarely predominate throughout a discussion thread. They mainly occur in isolated, insertional switches, which are non-consequential for the thread's base language.[7] Language mixing is relatively rare and is confined to single messages; it is not used in longer stretches of talk (an instance of mixing will be discussed in the next section; cf. Example 6). Home languages are by no means limited to fixed uses in these forums. However, the use of greetings, closings, words of thanks, good wishes and other home language formulae within a predominantly German post is common throughout. For instance, opening a German post with

salam or *salam allaikum* (Moroccan forum), *salam* or *dorud* (Persian forum) is a conventionalized signal of common ethnic bonds, which is also common in second generation face-to-face interactions. Example 1 shows an aggregation of another type of formulaic utterance, a birthday greeting, at the beginning of a thread dedicated to the Persian website manager.

Example 1: Persian forum, 'S hat Geburtstag' ('S's birthday'), posts 1–6; Persian underlined[8]

1	A	*krass aber wahr... sogar der komische kauz S hat mal geburtstag.... an dieser Stelle ALLES GUTE lieber S !*
2	B	*HAPPY BIRTHDAY*
3	C	*was es nicht alles für eigenartige krebse gibt... ps.* <u>*tawalodesh mobarak!*</u>
4	D	<u>*Bah bah inschallah 100 sale beschi. Tawalodet Mobarak S jan.*</u> *Und jetzt sag wie alt?*
5	E	*S jan* <u>*TAVALODET MABARAK!*</u>
6	F	*Lieber S, von meiner seite auch: Alles gute zum Geburtstag... und ... vielen Dank für alles.*

1	A	strange, but true... even an oddball like S has to have a birthday... so, from me, ALL THE BEST, dear S !
2	B	HAPPY BIRTHDAY
3	C	what a lot of weird cancers there are... ps. <u>happy birthday!</u>
4	D	Bravo, hopefully you'll live to be a 100 years old. <u>Happy birthday dear S.</u> Now, tell us: how old?
5	E	<u>Dear S, happy birthday!</u>
6	F	Dear S, from me too: all the best for your birthday... and... many thanks for everything.

This extract is typical of language alternation in the initial phase of a discussion thread. What appears as code-switching in sequential order is the result of individual code choices. Three out of six users select Persian as the proper code for the birthday greeting, two German, and one selects English. The thread's initiator is a forum administrator who generally prefers German, but the English variant in post 2, a globally available chunk, rules out a competence-related choice. In the two subsequent bilingual posts, German is selected for metacommunication: it replicates the playful teasing of the initial post, and contextualizes the move from good wishes to mundane curiosity.

Performance (in the sense of Bauman 2000) is an activity that favors a sustained use of home language across the forums. An area of the Persian forum is dedicated to ethnic jokes, which are categorically narrated in Persian. Singing performances are not confined to dedicated forum areas, and the orientation of some forum singers towards popular culture models occasionally invites language crossing (Rampton 1995) into English. For instance, a member of the Indian forum spontaneously announces a love song in German and English, and performs

it in Punjabi. In a thread on the Moroccan forum, members perform versions of a 'forum anthem': one comes in Arabic, another consists of Arabic and formulaic 'hip-hop' English (e.g. *yo*, *check this out*), all announced in German.

The use of code-switching to contextualize a shift in topic, perspective or key is a common pattern in both traditional and computer-mediated code-switching studies. Given the overall language ratios in the forums, the most common direction is from German to home language. In the Greek forum, for instance, switches to Greek were found to contextualize contributions as non-threatening to recipients (e.g. teasing, bold disapproval), and non-committing to speakers (cf. Androutsopoulos in press). When a discussion thread is carried out in the home language, German does the contextualization work. In the joke-telling area of the Persian forum, users select German to comment on rather than to narrate jokes. In one case, a user posts five successive jokes in Persian, and the next post comments (in German): 'No one's laughing and he's still cracking jokes... or is it a robot?' Later on, another poster quotes a joke and comments (again in German): 'That was a good one!' In two other cases on the Persian forum, a discussion that starts off in German subsequently drifts off-topic in a verbal argument in Persian. German reappears several posts later to recall the proper topic and disparage quarreling. These instances are reminiscent of Sebba and Wootton's observation that in interactions in London Jamaican, a switch to London English corresponds 'to a difference between information-carrying parts' and 'comment' (1998: 269). These examples suggest that contextualization by switching to the locally minor code works in both directions in these forums, with each direction indexing the different status of the respective language in the larger context (cf. Auer 1998a). Switches away from the generally expected base language (i.e. German) typically cue playfulness, a jocular key. When home language is the locally prevailing code, German is activated for comment and critique.

Typical uses of code-switching for rhetorical contrast, such as emphatic reiteration and reported speech, are also attested in the data. A member of the Indian forum, for example, quotes a discussion with her parents in Hindi, and a member of the Greek forum switches from Greek to German to quote her correspondence with the webmaster. In these cases the language of the quote presumably corresponds to the language that was used in the reported event; this is supported by assumed intergenerational language preferences in the first case, and by the fact that all administrative functions of the Greek forum are in German in the second case. The repetition of an utterance in the other code to 'simply amplify or emphasize a message' (Gumperz 1982: 78) is the case when: a Persian user repeats her German expression of thanks in Persian (cf. post 2 in Example 2 below); a newcomer to the Greek forum expresses his enthusiasm in both German and Greek; and a call to members of Punjabi descent in the Indian forum is conveyed both in German and Punjabi.

In a study of language choice in web forums for the Niuean diaspora, Sperlich (2005: 75) claims that 'it is virtually impossible to say that any specific member of

the [forum] has any specific influence on the code-switching of a message'. This is clearly not the case on the diasporic forums, in which attending to interlocutors' code choices or selecting a particular addressee are important motivations for fixed and creative code-switching. Two examples from the Persian forum illustrate this. The first comes from a discussion on whether the forum members celebrate Christmas. This extract starts with A, a male poster, providing evidence in support of celebrating Christmas to B, a female poster:

Example 2: Persian forum, 'Feiert ihr Weihnachten?' ('Do you celebrate Christmas?'), posts 59–67; partly abridged; intervening posts omitted; Persian underlined

1   A   *B jân,*
        reg dich nicht auf, guck lieber, was ich hier gefunden habe: [lengthy quote from encyclopaedia] *Das heißt, du kannst ganz in Ruhe als Iranerin Weihnachten feiern, da es ursprünglich ein echtes iranisches Fest ist!*
2   B   *danke A!! <u>dastet dard nakone!</u> Und ich werde weiterhin weihnachten feiern und viel spaß haben!*
3   A   <u>*Khâhesh mikonam B!*</u> *Da bist du nicht die Einzige, wir lassen uns doch nicht den Spaß am Feiern verderben, nicht wahr? Schönes Wochenende und ciao.*
4   B   [Addressing A, entirely in German]
5   A   [Addressing B *jân*, then addressing the audience, in German]
6   B   *ich hatte auch ein schönes wochenende! <u>merci ke porsidi!</u>*
        wie gehts dir so??
        [Continues in German, addressing the audience]

1   A   <u>Dear</u> B,
        Don't get upset, look what I've found: [lengthy quote from encyclopaedia] That means you can quite happily celebrate Christmas as an Iranian, since it was originally a true Iranian festivity!
2   B   thanks A!! <u>Thanks a lot!</u> and I'll keep on celebrating Christmas and having a good time!
3   A   <u>You're welcome, B!</u> You're not the only one; we won't let them spoil our party, right? Have a nice weekend, ciao.
4   B   [Addressing A, entirely in German]
5   A   [Addressing B *jân*, then addressing the audience, in German]
6   B   I had a nice weekend too! *thanks for asking*! how are you doing?
        [Continues in German, addressing the audience]

Persian is limited to the address particle *jân* ('dear') by A (posts 1 and 5), expressions of thanks by B (posts 2, 6), and the reply by A (post 3). As a resource for politeness Persian is clearly separated from the main argument, yet reciprocally sustained over a number of posts. The exchange of Persian formulae in this particular thread, in which very little Persian is used overall, coincides with a shared stance in the argument, which is defending celebrating Christmas. Thus the main purpose of home language here seems to be local

relationship management rather than affirming ethnic identity (cf. McClure 2001). The second example exemplifies message-internal code-switching for addressee specification (cf. Gumperz 1982: 77). In order to provide necessary context, the sequential structure of the first web page of this thread is displayed adapting Auer's (1995) notation; G stands for German, P for Persian, S1–S8 for different speakers, and the superscript line displays the sequential number of posts.

Example 3: Persian forum, 'Lebt Ihr gerne in Europa bzw. in der BRD?' ('Do you like living in Europe and in Germany?'); sequential structure of posts 1–12

Post	1	2	3	4	5	6
Speaker : language	S1: G	S2: P	S3: G	S4: G	S5: G	S6: G
Post	7	8	9	10	11	12
Speaker : language	S7: P	S5 : PGP	S8: G	S7: PGP	S6: G	S8: G

Post 8, Persian underlined:
rast migi
ghafase talayi hamejas ham dar iran ham jaye dige
ich weiss dass ich nie in den Iran zurückgehen werde aus privaten Gründen
aber ehrlich gesagt mag ich BRD nicht so aber was muss das muss in ein
anderes Land will ich auch nicht
bayad ba alman besazam

You're right
A golden cage can be anywhere, in Iran or anywhere else
I know that I'll never return to Iran, for private reasons, and to be honest I don't like Germany but that's life and I don't want to go to another country either
I have to find my way in Germany

We focus on users S5 and S7, who contribute monolingual posts first (post 5 in German, 7 in Persian) and then bilingual ones (8 and 10). These message-internal switches respond to the language choice of the immediately preceding poster. In post (8), the author starts in Persian (even though he had previously been using German) to address the previous poster ('you're right') and to paraphrase his statement that living abroad is like a 'golden cage'. In the third clause he states his own point of view in German, and he returns to Persian for a sort of coda. While his motivation for Persian in the beginning is clearly the preceding poster's language choice, the last switch to Persian has a different discourse function in setting off the conclusion from the reasoning. In post (10), the direction of switch (with respect to the author's previous post) is the opposite. This author starts in Persian, as in his previous post, addressing the forum audience; he then switches to German to quote and respond to post (9); he continues in Persian, again addressing the forum audience.

ANDROUTSOPOULOS

CODE CHOICES AND DIASPORIC IDENTITIES

Despite the predominance of German, then, fixed and creative uses of home language are common practice in the diaspora forums under scrutiny. However, from an 'identities in talk' perspective, this code-switching is not by default assumed to affirm ethnic identity. As in face-to-face bilingual talk, 'language alternation can be void of identity-relevant meaning in some contexts, and yet in others extremely rich in the identity work it accomplishes' (Auer 2005: 409). In order to pinpoint such contexts, it seems reasonable to turn to the debates on diaspora identity that are regularly carried out in these forums. In his work on Indian diaspora on the Internet, Mitra suggests that what characterizes diasporic online communities is not a 'dominant narrative' of ethnic identity, but an 'ongoing heteroglossic discourse' (Mitra 1998: 73–74). This discourse is often shaped by a 'polarization of the community', in which different 'schools of thought' collide (Mitra 1998: 64). This ties in well with our previous Example 2, in which proponents of celebrating Christmas are opposed to those who reject this as a 'betrayal' of ethnic identity. Many identity debates across the forums develop in such a polarized way. The three examples below illustrate how code choice and language mixing are mobilized to index boundaries within the forum's audience, and to negotiate the relationship between language preference and ethnic identity.

Example 4: Persian forum, 'Feiert ihr Weihnachten?' ('Do you celebrate Christmas?'), post 33; Persian underlined

> *Wäre ich in Japan, würde ich alles mitfeiern. Und ich feiere auch Bayram (hoffe, dass ich es richtig geschrieben habe) mit meine türkischen Freunde. . . P.S: und vor 2000 Jahren hatten wir auch so einiges nicht. . . da sage ich "Na UND?!?!" Hey C . . . ich feire mit Dir mit. . . egal was es zum feiern gibt. . . die anderen können ja "<u>beran roze</u>"*

> If I were in Japan, I would celebrate everything. And I also celebrate Bayram (hope I spelled it correctly) with my Turkish friends. . .PS: and we didn't have some of these things 2000 years ago. . . so I say 'so what?' Hey, C . . . I'll celebrate with you, whatever there is to celebrate. . . let the others '<u>beran roze</u>' [i.e. 'go and fast']

Example 5: Greek forum, 'Wo kommt ihr eigentlich alle mal her???' ('Where do you all come from?'), post 39; German underlined

> *nai exoumai eipa ellinika kafe. Alla giati vgeneis mono se ellinika me liges eksereseis? ego pantos vgeno pantou. Den kleinomai mono se ellinika na vlepo ton idio kosmo kai tous idious tuxous. <u>Bin nun mal multikulti.</u>*

> yes, we have Greek cafés, as I just said. But why do you only go to Greek cafés apart from a few exceptions? I for my part go everywhere. I don't lock myself up in the Greek ones to always stare at the same people and the same walls. <u>I happen to be multicultural</u>.

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Example 4 again comes from the Persian discussion on Christmas. This user states her views on celebrating local customs, and concludes by addressing a like-minded fellow discussant. The final switch into Persian quotes the (fictitious) voice of her opponents in this debate. It is strongly reminiscent of Sebba and Wootton's example, in which a switch from English to London Jamaican reflects 'through code the progressive "Jamaicanising" of the person talked about' (1998: 274). Their comment, 'this switch somehow indexes a culture for which this goal stands as an ideal', precisely matches this Persian quote, which voices the traditionalists' ideal to 'abstain' from Christmas. Example 5 comes from a thread on homeland origin that has drifted into off-topic talk about ethnic hangouts. In this post a female user responds to a question about Greek cafés in her town. She challenges her interlocutor's preference for ethnic hangouts, asserts her own openness ('I go everywhere'), and concludes with a switch to German. One could argue that it is the lack of a Greek equivalent to this German buzzword, *multikulti*, which prompts the switch, but the item is also used as an integrated Greek loanword in the same forum (cf. Example 6). This speaker casts herself in a social category (i.e. 'multicultural') that aligns to her previous statements of 'going everywhere' and not 'locking herself up' in ethnic hangouts, and selects German as the code associated with that category. Thus German is not positioned as the code of a distant majority group (a 'they' code), but as the code of an ethnically non-restricted group the speaker claims to belong to, or at least to be at ease with.

   The predominance of German in the Greek forum is due both to its being preferred by ethnic-Greek members, and to the regular participation of a few native Germans who speak no Greek. However, German does not meet with general approval; some users, including the initiator of the discussion thread below, complain that too little Greek is used in the forum.

Example 6: Greek forum, 'Ksypniste reee' ('Wake up!'), posts 1–5; German in the original underlined in post 2; English in the original underlined in 4 and 5

1   A   *Re Mangkes kai Gorgones. . . Mipws ksexasate ta Ellinika i fritzopiithikate toso polli pou sta Ellinika ta Forum grafete germanika? Einai ntropi na anigei mia tetia Selida kai na min ekfrazeste stin Glwssa sas. Egw prosopika to blepw polli simantiko. . .*

2   B   *weil hier viel leute drin sind, mein lieber A, die kein griechisch verstehen, katalawes?*

3   A   *tote to Greex pou kolaei?*

4   C   *Ela bre A, min to blepeis etsi to prama! Edo eimaste oloi mas multikultouriarides! Opos sou katebainei milas! Min koitas kiolas oti polloi genithikan edo kai milane kalitera ta germanika. Ena omos den allazei, na einai ellines! Den leei loipon na tous katigorame. Ama laxei, milame kai Inglezika! *lööööööööö* You speakaren hellenic?*

5   D   *Dear A,*
        why do You so agrios? Den emathes na dexese tous alous pos ine.. <u>*with all*</u>
        <u>*their qualities?*</u> *Maybe ise enas apaftous pou kseri mono* <u>*to complain all time?*</u>
        If You don't goustareis na mas kanis parea kai na mas katalabis.. tote mi mas tin
        spas edo mesa.. giati mexri tora <u>*we had*</u> *ga..* <u>*moments!*</u> *kai xoris esena! Ama den*
        katalabenis omos ti grafoume.. tote kane liga <u>*lessons*</u> *agglika.. germanika.. galika*
        kai swahili.. giati opos ta ipe kiolas o C: Edo eimaste oloi mas multikultouriarides!

1   A   Hey Dudes and Mermaids, have you forgotten your Greek or are you so
        Fritzified that you write German in the Greek forums? It's a shame to
        have a page like this and not express yourselves in your own language. I
        personally consider this to be really important. . .
2   B   <u>because many people here, my dear A, don't understand any Greek,</u> you
        get it?
3   A   Then what does Greex mean?
4   C   Now come on A, don't make a fuss about it! We are all multiculturals here!
        You speak whatever comes naturally! Don't forget that many [users] were
        born here and are more fluent in German. But one thing never changes,
        being Greek! So we shouldn't point a finger at them. If need be, we can also
        speak English! *lol* <u>You speakaren hellenic?</u>
5   D   <u>Dear</u> A,
        why are you so angry? Haven't you learned to accept others as they are. . .
        <u>with all their qualities?</u> Maybe you are one of those who only know how
        <u>to complain all time?</u> <u>If you don't</u> want to join us and understand us, then
        stop bugging us . . . because up to now, <u>we had</u> some great <u>moments</u>!
        even without you! But if you don't understand what we're writing. . . take
        some <u>lessons</u> in English. . . German. . . French and Swahili. . . because as C
        already said: We are all multiculturals here!

In this excerpt, different speakers adopt different codes in speaking on behalf
of different parts of the audience. To the initiator (posts 1 and 3), Greek is
the essential 'we code' of the Greek forum. He criticizes the predominance of
German over 'your language', and calls its users *Fritzified* ('Germanized') – a nonce
formation that implies excessive assimilation. By contrast, the first response (post
2) positions German as the code of forum members who speak little or no Greek.
Although this user is a native German, she does not ethnicize language choice,
but rather foregrounds the collective preference for German ('many people here').
I interpret her concluding switch to Greek ('you get it?'), as a rhetorical device
that adds emphasis to her statement, and at the same time indicates that she
indeed understands Greek.

   The second respondent (post 4) aligns to the initiator's language choice, but
disassociates language and ethnic identity in his argument. He opposes 'Fritzified'
with a different label, 'multiculturals', which he associates with linguistic freedom
('you speak whatever comes naturally'), and concludes with a jocular illustration
of this freedom, which capitalizes on linguistic hybridity.[9] The third response

(post 5) takes up the 'multiculturals' label and elaborates on its 'trade mark' hybridity with a mix of Greek and English. The *ad hoc* character of this mixing is obvious from its absence from the same speaker's other contributions and from the forum as a whole. The direction of switch does not seem to have interactional meaning here, as English is used to convey both the addressee's and the speaker's perspective. The meaning is rather in mixing itself: this author replies to the initiator's monolingually phrased concern about German being a threat to Greek identity with a mixed-language statement that claims to speak on behalf of those members who do not complain about language choices in the forum.

Clearly, 'we' and 'they' codes in diaspora forums cannot be determined independently of the 'schools of thought' (Mitra 1998) that appear in the course of a forum's communicative history. In addition to the 'we code' value of home language in particular contexts (e.g. isolated formulaic uses), forum discussants draw on a variety of code choices to negotiate a multiplicity of identities that are contiguous to diaspora and its virtual space. In a similar vein, the concluding examination of language choices for screen names and signatures will suggest that user self-presentation is a site for both the affirmation and transcending of ethnicity.

Being marked off as a personal territory, screen names and signatures allow their bearers to engage in cultural *bricolage*, appropriating resources from various domains. Unsurprisingly, screen names are not confined to the choice between home language and German. Some draw on English (e.g. *MrCroft*, *caramelgirl*, from the Greek forum); others mix home language with English or German (e.g. Persian *Ramin4ever* or Turkish *Zeynepchen*, composed of first name *Zeynep* 'gem' and the German diminutive suffix); still others draw on other languages, notably Spanish (e.g. *Chica*, *Cubalita* from the Greek forum), or appropriate globally circulating brands and names, the linguistic origin of which seems less important than their cultural imagery (e.g. *Dolce e Gabanna*, *Kamasutra*, *Don Huan*). Quantification of approximately 340 screen names from the Greek and Persian forums by language choice suggests that roughly two-thirds of users in each forum choose a screen name in the home language. English is the second most popular option, and rather more attractive than German in both forums. Taken together, 22 percent of screen names in the Persian and 29 percent in the Greek sample go beyond the home/host language dichotomy.[10]

Bechar-Israeli (1995) suggests that screen names in Internet Relay Chat make very few references to nationality or ethnicity. This only partially accords with my findings. I read the strong preference for home language screen names as an index of ethnicity, especially in view of the dominance of German in the discussions themselves. Semantically, however, the emphasis is on personal traits rather than collective membership. Users rarely make ethnicity or regional origin explicit (e.g. *Ellinas* 'Greek', *Tehrani*), and somewhat more often index homeland culture by reference to domains such as cuisine, football, mythology and religion.

Remarkably, ethnicity is also expressed in English screen names, mostly in combination with gender, as in *Persian_Girly, PersianLady, prince of Persia*, and *sexy_greekgirl, GrEek_Chica, greekgod19*. Yet other English screen names, more expectedly, 'invoke their counterparts in the world of popular media' (Nakamura 2002: 38), such as *FightClub* (a Hollywood movie) or *G-Style* (a reference to gangsta rap).

Message signatures, which are optional but very popular in my data, increase the forums' linguistic diversity even further. The language of a user's signature need not coincide with the language of their screen name or their preferred language of discussion. It is quite common for users to have, for example, a home language screen name and an English signature, or a German screen name and a home language signature. Some users have bilingual signatures (e.g. German/Persian, English/Hindi, or German/Arabic), and in a few cases the signature is in a language not otherwise used in the forum.[11] Members of the Indian and Asian forum seem to use comparatively more English in their signatures, while Moroccan and Persian members favor home language and German. In the latter forums, the main purpose of the few English signatures I was able to collect is to index youth culture. For instance, a Persian female user called *Bita* draws on the semantics of hip-hop culture to rename herself *Miss Pimp Bita* in her signature, and provides a link to her personal homepage where she displays herself as a DJ with her *pimp crew* (the relevant meaning of *pimp* here is 'show off'). A Moroccan female user calls herself *NiCe_M_Girl* and appropriates what seems to be a pop song line for her signature: *Boys are Players that's a fact. Don't fall in love, just play them Back!* Thus ethnicity is blended with or superseded by other cultural affiliations in the kaleidoscope of self-presentations in signatures.

CONCLUSIONS

The point of departure for this paper was the suggestion that perpetuating the focus of previous studies on code-switching in a single newsgroup or chat channel does not do justice to the multilayered character of contemporary web environments. Besides reflecting the linguistic diversity that is experienced by those who discursively engage in these environments as editors and discussants, the inclusive approach outlined here aims at accounting for the ways in which linguistic repertoires are tailored to situated practices in different 'compartments' of a virtual discursive space. In particular, the analytic extension from 'regular' to 'emblematic' discourse advocated in this study reveals how participants themselves extend their linguistic resources beyond an essential, dichotomous choice. Focusing solely on forum discussions would yield a neater, more homogeneous picture, with German and home languages at the centre of bilingual activities. Looking at emblems, by contrast, makes the picture much more fluid, multivalent, and sometimes unexpected. This is to a remarkable extent due to English, which is generally not positioned as language of interaction in

the forums, with the partial exception of the Indian forum. It is, however, a popular resource for formulaic expressions and performance (e.g. singing) in the forums, and gains prominence in the styling of website emblems and user self-presentation. These uses of non-native English across website sections tie in well with its use in German advertising (Piller 2001) and youth-cultural discourse (Androutsopoulos 2004). Rather than drawing on undifferentiated 'global English', forum users selectively appropriate social styles of English from the global flow of media discourse. In this respect, they converge with wider youth-cultural practices in Germany (Androutsopoulos 2004) and elsewhere (e.g. Pennycook 2003).

Utilizing non-native English, in turn, is part of a wider tendency to exploit minimal amounts of multilingualism (or 'other-languagedness') for emblematic purposes on the websites under examination. This finding is concordant with studies of multilingual advertising, which point out the symbolic or even 'fetish' character of non-native language choices (Cheshire and Moser 1994; Kelly-Holmes 2005) as well as with the wider area of language crossing (Rampton 1995). The notion of iconization introduced by Coupland, Bishop and Garrett (2003) seems a useful bracket for various limited but salient occurrences of home language as a home culture icon. These include the design of web surfaces, the isolated choice of home language formulae within German discourse, and the strong presence of home language screen names and signatures, even when contributions are confined to German. These are sites in which, to paraphrase Coupland, Bishop and Garrett (2003: 174), the local values of minority languages are established in the sociolinguistic 'ecology' of a website. As these iconization processes often draw on juxtapositions of word, image and typography, further research would benefit from insights and procedures of multimodal discourse analysis.

The focus of this paper on predominantly German-language websites inevitably raises the question of whether, and how, they might contribute to the maintenance of minority languages in diaspora (cf. McClure 2001; Sperlich 2005). The preliminary answer varies according to section. There seems to be little space for home languages in the edited sections, which favour German due to the 'commercial imperative' (Coupland, Bishop and Garrett 2003: 161) of their producers and their attempt to attract an interethnic audience. On the other hand, discussion forums do provide an opportunity for home languages. Although ethnically mixed audiences seem to disfavor home languages, these regain dominance in particular forum niches (cf. Androutsopoulos in press), and are common in code-switching across all forums. At the same time, home languages undergo transformations, the most visible aspect of which is their Romanized transliteration. However, Germany's diasporic web landscape also includes predominantly migrant language websites (cf. Table 1), which remain to be studied.

The discourse functions of code-switching discussed in this paper emerge by comparison as characteristic of predominantly German-speaking diasporic

forums, and are generally consonant with previous research; however, they do not claim to be exhaustive or representative. As Mitra (1998: 76) reminds us, the steadily growing and shifting structure of spaces of online interaction is 'undermining any claims of authenticity that researchers can have of their readings of the network discourse'. The findings suggest that an interactional approach to code-switching is a suitable basis for the analysis of virtual written interaction. It will be the task of future research to determine where and how such an approach would need to be adapted to the specifics of the mediated environments at hand. For instance, the planning time and quoting facilities afforded by web forums are clearly relevant to the abundance of message-internal code-switching that is tailored to multiple addressees in my data. In any case, this is just the starting point for a detailed examination of differences in bilingual talk across as well as within forums, and of the links between virtual and face-to-face discourse in diaspora communities. Does the predominance of German in these forums reflect ongoing language shift or rather serve as the *lingua franca* of a non-homogeneous public space? Likewise, how is the overwhelming absence of language mixing in the forums to be explained? These questions can only be addressed if the detailed analysis of discourse textures afforded by persistent observation is supported by a more systematic ethnography of Internet use in diasporic communities (cf. Miller and Slater 2000).

NOTES

1. I am indebted to Alexandra Georgakopoulou, Urmila Goel, the Journals' editors as well as to audiences in Melbourne, Cardiff and Riva del Garda for feedback, and to Ann Kaiser, Oliver Koehler and Ruth Masuch for help with translations. Any shortcomings are, of course, my sole responsibility.
2. Fieldwork was done in 2004/05 by the author and a group of third- and fourth-year students of linguistics who participated in a seminar on 'New media and migration' at the University of Hannover.
3. Preference-related switching comprises language choices that reflect linguistic competence on the speaker's or the interlocutor's part, as well as instances of language negotiation. Discourse-related switching embraces, for example, reported speech, change of topic, emphasis, specification of addressee, and the internal organization of complex turns (cf. Auer 1999; Dirim and Auer 2004).
4. Metalinguistic discussions in dominantly German-language forums provide evidence that some second generation users are more comfortable with German than with the home language, probably due to ongoing language shift in these ethnic communities (cf. Androutsopoulos in press).
5. Judging from the interviews, the value of English to the producers is consonant with its main value in advertising, in Germany and elsewhere: to signify an 'international touch' (Kelly-Holmes 2005). The Persian manager explains that the name *Iran-Now* 'has an international touch, and is in English. You could even integrate an English-speaking dot.com website in it, as opposed to Iran-Nachrichten [i.e. 'Iran News'].' The Russian manager claimed to prefer *germany.ru* to *deutschland.ru* because the

latter would be 'too long and complicated', whereas 'English is a world language almost everyone understands'.

6. The 'home language' category is obviously problematic in the Indian and Asian forum, in which subgroups of members have different home languages (e.g. Hindi and Punjabi in the Indian forum). The majority language is a highly colloquial standard German, though a few Indian and Moroccan members are residents of Switzerland and use a Swiss German vernacular. In these forums we also encounter regional varieties of home language, home language with German interferences, regional and learner varieties of German; some of these are obvious in the examples, but will not be discussed due to space limitations. As the examples illustrate, Greek, Arabic, Persian and languages of India are almost exclusively used in Romanized spelling (cf. papers in Danet and Herring 2003 for discussion).

7. In the Persian forum, the frequency of dominantly Persian posts by topic group ranges from zero in computer talk to 35 percent in talk on Persian cuisine and to 89 percent in joke telling. Persian is the base language of discussion in specific niches of this forum, either by 'prescription' (e.g. in a dedicated 'Farsi talk' area), by virtue of genre (e.g. in the joke-telling area) or topic (e.g. in talk on Persian cuisine).

8. All excerpts are anonymized and followed by an English gloss; the headlines give the title of the thread and the serial number of the quoted posts; original spelling is kept throughout. Some posts are abridged, and original line breaks are not retained.

9. In particular, the word *Inglezika* mimics a sociolectal form of 'English'; *löl* is a Germanized version of *lol* ('laughing out loud'); *speakaren* is composed of English stem, the Greek suffix for loan verbs (*-ar-*) and the German infinitive morpheme (*-en*); *Hellenic* is unidiomatic in colloquial English with respect to the Greek language, and probably a calque of the Greek equivalent.

10. Of N = 103 nicknames from the Greek forum, 62 percent are in Greek, 9 percent in German, 15 percent in English, and 14 percent are mixed nicknames, other-language nicknames or global brands. The N = 240 nicknames from the Persian forums are divided into 68 percent Persian, 10 percent German, 15 percent English, and 7 percent for the remaining categories.

11. A Persian forum signature is in Spanish, another is composed of six different languages, including non-Roman scripts such as Arabic and Ancient Greek. Since it is unlikely that this user is a competent speaker of all these languages, he seems to be exploiting multilingualism as a symbol.

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