Exploring Online Diasporas: London's French and Latin American Communities in the UK Web Archive

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Abstract The aim of the UK Web Archive to collect and preserve the entire UK web domain ensures that it is able to reflect the diversity of voices and communities present on the open Web, including migrant communities who sustain a presence across digital and physical environments. At the same time, patterns of wider social and political exclusion, as well as the use of languages other than English, mean these communities' web presence is often overlooked in more generic and Anglophone web archiving and (re)searching practices.

1 Introduction

In light of the valuable, and potentially neglected, histories of migrant communities recorded in the open Web, this chapter focuses on the analysis of archived web materials included in two special collections developed by the researchers on French and Latin American communities in London. As well as addressing the relationship between these collections and the communities represented, we will draw on examples of archived web materials to illustrate the insights they offer into these communities, into local and national histories and into the wider history of the Web. We will highlight the different types of web objects available for analysis, from individual blogs to collective community sites. Paying specific attention to evolving language and translation strategies over time, we will also address the complex interweaving of different modes of communication and representation, including visual and other media.

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These examples demonstrate the specific skillsets researchers of languages and cultures can bring to web archives research, as well as what can be gained by broadening our traditional objects of analysis. Through the development and analysis of diasporic web collections, the chapter illustrates the vital histories we can excavate from the archived Web, ensuring against the threat of collective amnesia for communities often overlooked in national archives and collections.

The UK Web Archive is aimed at collecting and preserving the entire UK Web (the .uk country code top-level domain), primarily through automated web crawling which can capture the multiplicity of voices and communities present on the open Web. The scale of the Archive, however, means that the wider societal invisibility of specific groups risks being perpetuated by more generic or Anglophone (re)searching or curating practices. Thematic special collections do, however, allow curators and researchers to draw attention to web materials that risk being overlooked, such as those produced by migrant communities who have historically been marginalised from national archives and collections.

This chapter focuses on two such collections: the London French Special Collection (LFSC) curated by Saskia Huc-Hepher primarily between 2012 and 2014 and, following that model, the Latin Americans in London Collection begun in 2018 by Naomi Wells. After introducing the wider context of the "communities" represented in these collections, the researchers analyse specific archived web materials to illustrate what they reveal about these communities and the cultural and sociopolitical contexts in which they operate. At the same time, the analysis provides insight into the wider history of the Web by addressing how members of these communities make strategic and creative uses of the rapidly evolving affordances of the Web. Drawing primarily on qualitative and ethnographic approaches in the fields of applied and sociolinguistics, and with particular attention to multimodality and multilingualism, these examples illustrate ways of engaging with archived Web materials that pay close attention to the linguistic and cultural practices of their creators.

2 Archiving and Representing Communities

The inclusion of "diasporic" collections in a national web archive is an opportunity to disrupt homogenising, monolingual and territorially bounded national narratives and representations, responding also to the UK Web Archive's key mission to "reflect the diversity of lives" in the UK (10 October 2018). It is, however, important to highlight the heterogeneity of the collections themselves, both in terms of reflecting internal differences within these communities and differences between communities. In the case of Latin Americans in London, for example, there are evident differences between those originating from different areas of the continent, not only in terms of nationality but also in terms of class and race. At the same time, the collection is intended to reflect the undeniably powerful sense of collective Latin American identity in London, reflected most clearly by the successful efforts

of a coalition of Latin American organisations to have Latin Americans officially recognised as an "ethnic group" by a number of London councils since 2012 (Berg 2019, p. 191). Despite being a relatively recent community and initially lacking visibility in the city, it was in 2013 the fastest growing community in the capital (McIlwaine and Bunge 2016), and this is reflected in the growing attention to the social and political issues facing it in local and national media. Web archives allow us to trace how the community has become increasingly visible and consolidated its presence both online and offline, particularly as it has developed largely in conjunction with the mass uptake of digital technologies and media in recent decades.

The French diasporic presence in London is, in contrast, more fragmented in nature. As previously argued (Huc-Hepher 2015), the very concept of building a French community micro-archive (Brügger 2005) is something of a misnomer, for the "community" seems not to perceive itself as such. While research participants acknowledge that a French community exists, most feel it corresponds to a socio-economic elite with which they do not identify (Huc-Hepher and Drake 2013; Huc-Hepher 2016), based in and around affluent South Kensington (South West London) and home to prestigious French diplomatic, cultural and educational institutions. In this "expat" "community" construct, Frenchness is inextricably entangled with notions of Whiteness (Beaman 2018) and wealth and thus constitutes a homogenous imaginary that disregards the demographic and topological heterogeneity of the contemporary French presence in London, or more accurately *French-speaking* presence. There is consequently a paradox intrinsic to this "presence", being highly visible in the physical urban environment—particularly South Kensington—and representing considerable cultural capital (Kelly 2016) in the "host" imagination yet being invisible as a migrant community per se, both in top-down political conceptions and in bottom-up understandings of belonging to a diasporic collective, as Berthomière's reference to a "French what?" illustrates (2012, p. 2). The French "community" artifice is complicated further by negative associations with "communitarianism" imported in the migrant consciousness from France, where an "imperialism of the universal" reigns (Wolfreys 2018, p. 97), founded on the core values of *égalité* and *fraternité* and resulting in resistance to the community epithet.

It is these implicated collective-identity undercurrents that the curator of the London French Special Collection needed to navigate and which are challenged by the semiotic analysis below. And it is through both curators' cultural, linguistic and ethnographic knowledge of the French and Latin American communities alike that they have been able to contribute positively to the "making of presence" (Sassen 2013, p. 217) in a memory institution of international repute.

3 Researching and Analysing Diasporic Web Materials

3.1 Example 1: Blogs in the London French Special Collection

Alongside the role of the LFSC as a means of enhancing community identity, it constitutes a rich corpus for the purposes of ethnographic research. Taking "a micro-historical approach" (Winters 2017, p. 241) towards this multi-level "diasberspace" enables the researcher to gain immersive and observational knowledge of the community from the fundamentally institutional or corporate to the highly individualised. Indeed, the Bourdieusian model adopted for the original curation exercise (Huc-Hepher 2015) produced a multifaceted dataset comprising web objects of various genres and types, including macro-level London-French cultural, religious, educational and governmental websites, together with meso-level commercial, philanthropic and local media sites. Yet, at the most personal, micro-level of the collection were blogs, which are the focus of this subsection, given the first-person, diary-like insights they provide (Weber 2017).

While readers may question the validity of using web archives to study blogs, given their inbuilt archival affordances, external collections offer multiple advantages. The most obvious and crucial is their safeguarding against obsolescence, particularly important given the recent "cybermigration" of large numbers of blogs to social media platforms (Lobbé 2018b, p. 131) or, in the case of the French in London, "Brexit"-motivated return migration. Second, they preserve socio-culturally meaningful and motivated design choices (Kress 2010) which are lost to updates on the live Web as the technical affordances of the blog develop. Third, they provide evidence of self-editing that can be revealing of otherwise elusive transformations to the blogger's identity. Therefore, by monitoring blogs over time in web archives, as opposed to the integrated micro-archive and taking a fine-grained multimodal approach, changes providing semiotic insights into the migrant experience are made manifest. For instance, by examining modes such as layout, colour, typography and language in archived versions of the aperobloglondon.wordpress.blog.com site, multiple meanings relating to community networks, audience and positioning within the London habitat emerge. These are discussed in detail in Huc-Hepher (2016). However, it is useful to note that since writing that article and consulting additional archived versions, including a more recent incarnation of the URL (aperobloglondon.com), several significant transformations have taken place.

In the snapshot of the blog's landing-page banner archived in 2010 (Fig. 1), we find a rather stereotypical photographic image of London at the time, in which the world-renowned St Paul's Cathedral and the City of London dominate. However, unlike the version previously analysed (Huc-Hepher 2016), the iconic image is disrupted by the superimposition of incongruously large, "hand-drawn" images of alcoholic beverages. These are coherent with the title and purpose of the blog—namely, as a forum to bring together French bloggers living in London for regular "apéros" (aperitifs)—but also offer insights into belonging to a wider community of blogging practice (Wenger 2004) and, as in the later banner captured

Fig. 1 Banner captured on 15 October 2010 and retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20101015065548/http://aperobloglondon.wordpress.com/

Fig. 2 Banner included in LFSC and captured on 2 March 2013 and retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20130302094706/http://aperobloglondon.com/

in 2013 (Fig. 2), into the incorporation of typically British (according to research participants) eccentricity and humour.

In the 2013 version, the iconic photographic image is replaced by indexical signs which point to the London environment less literally, serving instead to reinforce the message written playfully in rhyming French at the bottom of the banner: "A pied, en vélo, en métro ou en tacot, pourvu qu'on arrive a l'apéro!" [On foot, by bike, by tube or car, as long as we make it to the bar]. The absurdly magnified pint of beer remains, however, in central position. This not only visually underlines the light-hearted tone communicated in the text through a process of intermodal semiosis but demonstrates habituation to London (drinking) customs and embodiment of local characteristics (perceived sense of humour) while serving as a constant in the affirmation of a collective London-French blogging identity through its reappearance in the various incarnations of the blog over time. So, despite the banner no longer featuring in the blog from 2013 onwards, continuity and oneness are maintained through a small logo (Fig. 3), whose semiotic orchestration acts as a nod to the blog's previous identity. In Figs. 2 and 3, the exclusively London-French particularity of the blog is further signalled through the use of the French language. This includes colloquial in-group markers like "tacot" (slang for car) and is more subtly signalled through the font-type itself, which is implicitly embedded in the bloggers' (rhetor and reader) originary culture, recalling the cursive handwriting found in childhood educational settings (Huc-Hepher 2016).

However, perhaps the most telling feature of the successive multimodal reinventions of the aperobloglondon site is its interpersonal function within the network of London-French blogs contained in the LFSC. The same semiotically loaded comic-strip-type imagery, (typically French) cursive writing, (typically English)

Fig. 3 Blog logo first captured as a replacement for the banner on 24 March 2013 and lastly on 12 October 2016, i.e. 4 months after the EU Membership Referendum, retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20130324162858/http://aperobloglondon.com/

Fig. 4 Images in the charlottedujour.com blog (captured only 15 times, between 28 June 2015 and 30 November 2016, i.e. 5 months after the EU Membership Referendum) retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20160307014101/http://www.charlottedujour.com/blog-charlotte-du-jour/

light-heartedness, French-English translanguaging (Li 2018) and preoccupation with comestible elements of the London habitat are found across multiple blogs. Compare, for instance, the London taxi from the second archived version of the Apéroblog banner with that of the Charlotte du Jour blog illustration in Fig. 4 and the cursive font, humorous wording and mixing of French and English (the speech bubble in French and the laptop text in English), together with the typically "English" large mug of tea/coffee depicted. The same "hand-drawn" and food-centred imagery is found in the Pauline à la Crème anglaise and Londres Calling blogs, as well as the translanguaging at sentence level: "Si si! C'est *British* et c'est délicieux" and "Londres Calling" itself. This blending of French and English language and of cultural referents, such as the allusion to "Pauline with custard" (literally *English* cream) in Fig. 5 or the Marmite, jam sandwiches and Victoria Sponge in Fig. 6, that is, artefactual (Pahl and Rowsell 2011) elements of the host culture expressed through the quintessentially French mode of the graphic novel, known as the "ninth art" in France, and epitomising the prominence of the

Fig. 5 Pauline à la crème anglaise—significantly, her most recent post on the live Web again dates back to 2016. Retrieved from http://paulinealacremefr.blogspot.com/ on 15 June 201**9**

Fig. 6 Londres Calling blog banner, retrieved from https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/en/archive/20160107232406/http://londrescalling.canalblog.com/

culinary in French—national and regional—culture, is testimony to the common ambivalence of the bloggers' diasporic experience.

As a corpus, therefore, the blogs function both intratextually, as indicators of the bloggers' transnational positioning, straddling French and London cultural and linguistic spaces, and intertextually as semiotic markers of a community of practice. They tap into childhood memories peculiar to this group of blog(ger)s and speak to "insider" community members through multimodal meaning-making that would elude Franco-French and English visitors alike. Significantly, the blogs bear witness to a *London-French* "common-unity" of practice that defies the South Kensington myth, as well as our research participants' rejection of the "community" designation. Equally importantly, their scrutiny within web archives, as opposed to the integrated blog archive, has enabled the monitoring of identity transformation and reproduction over time and defied the inescapable mortality of the blogs. That is, although the Pauline à la crème anglaise blog is available on the live Web, it has not been updated since 2016, and all the others are effectively "dead blogs" (Lobbé 2018a, p. 1), since none are accessible via their original URL. In the case of Apéroblog London, even in its updated aperobloglondon.com website form, it has ceased to exist as the London-French blogger meet-up site it had been since its 2010

Fig. 7 Aperobloglondon in its new Japanese incarnation, first captured on 6 June 2017, retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20170606214545/https://www.aperobloglondon.com/

launch and, at some point between October 2016 and June 2017, was reincarnated (Fig. 7) as a commercial food and fashion site in Japanese**.**

3.2 Example 2: Latin American Community Organisation Websites

One of the distinguishing features of diasporic web materials is the presence of content in multiple languages, reflecting the transnational trajectories of migrant communities and the consequent ability to draw from across a range of linguistic and cultural fields (Li and Zhu 2013, p. 532; Vertovec 2009, p. 7). The complex linguistic repertoires of these communities should not, however, be equated with a confused or chaotic use of language, but rather research in applied and sociolinguistics has illustrated how individuals draw strategically and creatively from their range of linguistic resources for the specific context(s) and task(s) at hand. The strategic nature of these choices is illustrated in the evolving language choices on the websites of cross-Latin American community organisations.

These organisations generally serve the dual function of providing a collective voice for the community, as in the campaign for recognition, and of offering vital Spanish, and to a lesser extent Portuguese, language services for community

members. This dual intra- and intercommunity role is reflected in the presence of English, Spanish and in some cases Portuguese on these organisations' websites. Beyond noticing or counting these languages, qualitative research emphasises what can be revealed by looking more closely at the relationships between languages on the page (Androutsopoulos 2006; Sebba 2013). This is illustrated on the website of one of the oldest Latin American organisations in the UK, the Indoamerican Refugee and Migrant Organisation (IRMO).

On the earliest capture of their website (IRMO 10 August 2004), while both Spanish and English are used on the homepage, Spanish is clearly dominant. The main heading, signalled by a larger and uppercase type, is written only in Spanish, as is the description of the organisation's purpose below. Further down the page, we find parallel texts first in Spanish and followed by English, and the website menu also appears with parallel texts, although with the order reversed and English first. Importantly though, we do not find any mixing of languages, but instead the different languages are marked visually as distinct, in the first case through a change in font colour and on the menu with the Spanish italicised. This clear separation of languages is common in written texts, in contrast to the mixing more common in speech, and illustrates the online continuation of the prescriptive language norms associated with writing (Weth and Juffermans 2018, p. 8). The use of italicised Spanish on the menu, despite being the more dominant language on the page, also indicates an awareness of its inescapable role as "other" in the UK context. These visual distinctions between languages illustrate the importance of attention to the visual and graphic elements of multilingual texts (Sebba 2013, p. 102).

While the use of English first in the menu appears to prioritise that language, on the subpages in the archive Spanish remains dominant, with some information provided only in Spanish. This signals that the primary function of the website is to communicate with the Spanish-speaking users of the organisation's services. At the same time, the inconsistent switches between just Spanish and providing parallel language content point to uncertainty concerning appropriate language choices, as is also signalled by shifts between informal and formal registers in both English and Spanish. These inconsistent register and translation choices indicate the emergent nature of this genre of text and the absence of established conventions in these still relatively early years of institutional websites, at least for smaller organisations.

Jumping forward a decade, however, we find in 2014 a more formal description of the organisation in English, as well as a flag icon seemingly linking through to a Spanish-language version of the site (IRMO 22 July 2014).[1] Providing parallel language versions is associated with the now-familiar commercial and institutional practice of "web localisation" (Jiménez-Crespo 2013), whereby companies translate and adapt the content of their websites for distinct audiences or markets. What is interesting though is that this strategy is relatively short-lived, and a year later the

[1]The flag used is the Spanish national flag, despite the target audience being those from Latin American. This highlights how the community's strong sense of collective identity is not connected to a single nation or associated national symbols.

link to a Spanish language version has disappeared (IRMO 1 November 2015). In the most recently archived capture of the website, the content on both the homepage and subpages is almost entirely in English (IRMO 17 May 2019).

This switch to content predominantly in English is a trend noticeable across the websites of the primary Latin American community organisations in London. A simplistic explanation might be that this is a community shifting to English over time as it becomes more "integrated". This is, however, to presume that online language practices merely reflect offline practices (Lee 2017, p. 5). In fact, as a rapidly growing community, there continue to be large numbers of new arrivals, and, most importantly, these organisations' main function continues to be to provide services in Spanish (and/or Portuguese) to recent arrivals.

This leaves us with the puzzling situation of organisations whose primary users speak predominantly Spanish and yet with websites almost entirely in English. To understand this strategy, it is vital to remember that online language choices respond to a multiplicity of factors, such as the target audience, the platform and the situated language ecology of the individual or community (Lee 2017, pp. 34–35). While it is not easy to pin down how each factor enters into play, in this case, it is important to consider this specific genre of online text, as well as the wider sociopolitical context of the community. To begin with the genre of public-facing websites of third sector organisations, it is important to note that the point in the archives when we see the shift to English at least partially coincides with the appearance of Twitter and Facebook links, signalling the arrival of Web 2.0. The more interactive affordances of social media undoubtedly provide more effective platforms for direct communications with service users in Spanish, illustrating how language choice intersects with platform and media choice.[2] This reveals how the genre and purpose of public websites have changed, as some of the functions they previously served have been rendered obsolete or shifted to other platforms and media.

At the same time, given technological developments in relation to translation, it remains surprising not to find multiple language versions of these websites. While there is a question of human and financial resource for largely voluntary organisations, it is also vital to think about the purpose of web localisation. In commercial settings, where research on this subject has focused, localisation may appear to be aimed at encouraging closer or more dialogical relationships with customers who speak other languages. However, as Cronin argues, there is an underlying paradox here:

> The dominant ideology of the dialogical implicit in multilingual provision ("speaking the language of the customer") is undercut by the cost imperative to minimize human interaction ("the most expensive resource in the service organization"). [. . .] You can have any language you want . . . so long as it is, preferably, not spoken by a human being. (Cronin 2013, pp. 95–96)

[2] As illustrated in research on language use in social media (Tagg 2015), we would also expect to find more examples of language mixing in these more informal and in some cases private communicative spaces.

This is important in relation to a choice not to provide translations for Spanish-speaking service users, particularly when we consider the only information consistently translated on this and similar websites, which are the opening hours and directions to the organisations' physical buildings. This indicates precisely the opposite motivations to those of commercial web localisation efforts, which is that they explicitly prioritise face-to-face communications with their users in a physical location.

This prioritisation of physical community co-presence points to the potential risks of digital substitution and that external funders may see providing Spanish-language information or services online as an inexpensive alternative to sustaining these organisations' physical buildings. This is connected also to the primary social and political issue facing the community in recent years, which is the increasing threat of closure to Latin American community spaces in London (Cock 2011). This illustrates the importance of contextualising online language strategies in relation to the wider sociopolitical context.

Rather than being aimed at service users, the purpose of these predominantly English-language websites is to present a more impersonal and professional image to funders, as signalled by the prominent links to "Donate" on this and similar websites. The use of English, and the absence of language mixing, is likely also connected to the organisation being required to prove its role as a legitimate actor in the public sphere where proficiency in English must be explicitly displayed. At the same time, the use of English signals the strategic deployment of language to establish the community's presence within a predominantly Anglophone public sphere. While there may remain a paradox in delimiting transnational communities within national archival boundaries, ensuring these materials remain visible within the UK Web Archive acknowledges this explicit desire to be recognised as legitimate actors in the UK's public sphere.

4 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated the multifarious value of community-specific collections within larger web archives. In particular, close analysis of these web objects reveals more complex motivations and choices than those initially apparent, whether regarding the negation of a collective identity or the strategic use of language in response to wider sociopolitical circumstances. Illustrating the value of working with a defined archival corpus, underlying cultural meanings have emerged through the analysis of the complex semiotic interplay within, between and beyond the different resources. The collections also make visible the multilingual, transnational presence of the communities in ways which blur the boundaries between the physical, the digital and the imagined, as well as disrupting nationally bounded narratives through the purposeful preservation of diasporic web materials within the UK Web Archive.

In relation to the wider applicability of this research, we have illustrated how close attention to multilingualism and multimodality in archived web materials offers web historians and archival researchers an alternative entry point to understanding the history of the Web, while web archives present contemporary (socio)linguists with a vital resource for overcoming an overly synchronic focus on "language in the moment". We have also revealed how diasporic web materials offer insights into distinct, bottom-up, multicultural histories of the Web, which constitute important counternarratives to those of larger, more commercial—often monolingual and Anglophone—entities that have traditionally dominated the literature. In this way, the community collections have given a multilingual voice to comparatively "quiet" communities and thereby ensured that their shared "city has speech" (Sassen 2013, p. 214).

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