Foreword

In a number of pioneering studies, Andrey Rosowsky has been exploring the relations between language and religion. This present volume, the result of two decades of ethnographic observation, focuses on the devotional practices of young British Muslims, who have blended a non-Western religion and its traditions with the modern life and language of an immigrant community. This is a significant addition to the study of diasporas, a term originally used for the Jewish communities outside Israel which flourished as early as Temple times, but which were the main location of continuing Jewish life for 2000 years. The term was later applied to non-Jewish ethnic and nation communities. Safran (1991) was among the first to propose a set of criteria for all diasporas. They were, he said, 'expatriate minority communities' characterized by: dispersion from a homeland to two or more foreign regions; maintenance of a common memory of the homeland; varying degrees of isolation from the host society; a continuing desire to return to the homeland when conditions are right; a belief that they should be committed to the maintenance of the homeland; and collective solidarity built on a personal or vicarious relationship to the homeland. Using this definition, he said, it would be appropriate to speak of the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek and 'perhaps Chinese diasporas at present', and the Polish diaspora of the past. And, as a result of the current chaotic state of Islamic countries, one would add the rapidly growing Arabic-speaking diasporas in much of Europe, which face a demographic and religious change of gigantic proportions.

An inevitable effect of diasporas is the development of what Grosjean (2015) labels 'bicultural bilinguals' – individuals with uneven proficiency in at least two language varieties and the related ability to function in two different cultures, forming the controversial mixture that is now labelled as 'hybridity' (Kalra *et al.*, 2005). Diaspora communities are made up of complex mixtures of plurilingual individuals who vary in their degree of proficiency and use of both their languages, the result being fuzzy and debatable patterns. And when more than two varieties and cultures are involved, as occurs with people who have a history of conquests and expulsions, the situation that emerges shows many influences.

The Muslim community in Britain constitutes an important example of this hybridity. Now seen as 'a dangerous, socio-cultural threat', 'a problematic outsider', 'the enemy within' and the target of growing Islamophobia, British Muslims have 'contested their "othering" through practices of assimilation, integration and hybridization' (Ansari, 2004). It is hybridization that Rosowsky investigates in this study, focusing not just on language but also on the added dimension of religious otherness. While the British public is increasingly marked by secularism, as witnessed by the large number of deconsecrated churches one notices when walking through the countryside, Muslims in Britain, many of them from non-Arabic speaking south Asia, are identifiable not just by trilingualism in their heritage languages, their learning of Arabic for religious purposes and their addition of environmental English, but also by their continuing acceptance of Islam and the resulting ties to mosque and madrasa.

Rosowsky in this book sets out to describe the religious practices and performances of young British Muslims. A number of studies in Omoniyi and Fishman (2006) have explored the way in which religion has contributed to language maintenance. For Islam, Rosowsky (2006a) reminds us of the distinction between liturgical literacy and the spoken varieties of Arabic. He notes that the Muslim communities of Britain, many of south Asian origin and speaking many different languages while maintaining Arabic as their liturgical language, continue to believe in the high status of Qur'anic Arabic. At the same time, these communities and especially the younger members are assimilating linguistically and culturally to their British environment, producing a multilingual and culturally diverse hybridity that Omoniyi (2006) identified and explored.

With the continuing and growing multilingual communities and plurilingual individuals produced in Europe by the growing number of migrants and asylum seekers from so many countries, studies such as this of the developing hybrid communities are of great significance. The issue of religious influence on sociolinguistic repertoires is not new: studies of classic Jewish diasporas showed the adoption and adaptation of languages other than Hebrew, and the maintenance of liturgical and literary Hebrew over the generations (Spolsky, 2014); and the way in which Persia and Turkey accepted Islam and Arabic liturgy while maintaining their own languages showed multilingualism resulting from religious conversion. South Asian nations like Pakistan and Bangladesh, when finally liberated from British colonial rule, also adopted liturgical Arabic alongside their own national languages. There have been many migrants from these countries. The UK is home to the largest Pakistani community in Europe, with the population of British Pakistanis exceeding 1.17 million based on the 2011 census; in the census, another 450,000 respondents reported Bangladeshi origin (ONS, 2012). Migrants from these countries to Britain added English to their individual and community repertoires, building the

linguistic, cultural and religious hybridity that Rosowsky has been studying.

The way the young members of this large immigrant population adapt to their mixed environment, drawn towards the new language while home and mosque offer two other significant languages, offers important clues as to the effects of the major demographic developments. The children of migrants regularly face the challenge of acquiring at least two languages – the heritage language favoured and still used by their parents, and the environmental language of the surrounding community, presented to them by peers and schools. In religious communities, Muslim or Jewish or Christian, there is a third language involved, as parental support for traditional liturgical languages is implemented by supplemental or community schools.

All of this produces a kind of linguistic and cultural hybridity, a concept developed by Bakhtin (1981) and now studied as a feature of post-colonialism. With the enormous increase in asylum seeking and economic migration from many countries in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, understanding the nature of these new arrivals is of increasing importance to the societies in which they are now living. Rosowsky's research is an important contribution to this urgent task.

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Ahmed ibn Hanbal (786-863 CE) recounted a dream that God bestowed upon him, saying: ‘I saw the Lord of Power (God) in my sleep and said, “O Lord, what is the best act through which those near to you draw ever nearer?” And He replied, “Through reciting My Word (The Qur’an), O Ahmed”. I asked “With understanding or without?” And He answered, “Both, with understanding *and without*” (author’s emphasis)