LINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHY

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Linguistic Ethnography

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic ethnography is an interpretive approach which studies the local and immediate actions of actors from their point of view and considers how these interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures. According to Erickson (1990: 92), interpretive approaches are necessary because of the 'invisibility of everyday life' which when held at arms-length can empirically serve 'to make the familiar strange'. This contrasts with the approach which anthropology traditionally adopted which was 'to make the strange familiar'. Whereas the former requires we examine the institutions and social practices surrounding us in contemporary life, the latter looked to describe the exotic, unknown other to make sense of the daily existences of people in distant places. To make the familiar strange, we need the interpretive approaches of linguistic ethnographers because the institutions we know best, the routines we practice most, and the interactions we repeatedly engage in are so familiar that we no longer pay attention to them. Yet these contexts, very close to hand, contain fundamental questions about communication in a rapidly changing world which can benefit from a combined examination of language and cultural practices. Put simply, a shared interest in social and linguistic processes means a commitment to answering the questions, 'What is it about the way we use language that has an impact on social processes? What is it about social processes that influences linguistic ones?' (Heller, 1984: 54).

The necessity of looking in 'our own backyard to understand shifting cultural meanings, practices and variations' (Rampton, 2007a: 598) has been well made in ethnography. Heller (2008: 250) points out:

> Ethnographies allow us to get at things we would otherwise never be able to discover. They allow us to see how language practices are connected to the very real conditions of people's lives, to discover how and why language matters to people in their own terms, and to watch processes unfold over time. They allow us to see complexity and connections, to understand the history and geography of language. They allow us to tell a story; not someone else's story exactly, but our own story of some slice of experience, a story which illuminates social processes and generates explanations for why people do and think the things they do.

The imperative of uncovering the mundane, routine and everyday was described by leading linguistic anthropologist Dell Hymes in the 1960s when he spoke about bringing anthropological research 'back home' (in Rampton, 2007a: 598). Hymes was keen to argue that the skills and knowledge of the ethnographer were needed to study 'ourselves' rather than the 'other'. In particular, Hymes brought his authority as a leading scholar in linguistic anthropology to the social sciences where he set about investigating linguistic inequality as both a practical and theoretical problem.

In this chapter, we explore linguistic ethnography's historical antecedents and its current theoretical and academic movements. First though, we suggest why linguistics and ethnography should be combined.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: A SINGLE UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Linguistic ethnography, a mainly European phenomenon, has been greatly influenced by North American scholarship in linguistic anthropology. Because of this we share many of the same antecedents and some of these are summarised in this chapter. We set the scene by returning to the beginning of the last century. In 1921, Sapir suggested, 'Language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the textures of our lives' (Sapir, 1921: 207). According to Sapir, language and culture are inseparable. If we want to study language we have to consider its relationship to culture. If we want to investigate culture we must research language. Hand-in-hand, they are both socially inherited. Culture is not a fixed set of practices essential to ethnic or otherwise defined groups. Language is not an unchanging social structure unresponsive to the communicative needs of people. Rather, languages and cultures are practices and processes in flux, up for negotiation, but contingent on specific histories and social environments. This view of language and culture as processes rather than products finds long-term support in anthropology and ethnography. Goodenough explains further:

> I have found it theoretically helpful to think of both culture and language as rooted in human activities (rather than in societies) and as pertaining to groups. The cultural make-up of a society

> is thus to be seen not as a monolithic entity determining the behaviour of its members, but as a melange of understanding and expectations regarding a variety of activities that serve as guides to their conduct and interpretation. (Goodenough, 1994: 266–7)

The interpretation of meaning is at the heart of Goodenough's definition here. We come to 'understand and expect' through the mundane routines we engage in regularly. We use language to practise and voice our communicative activities. According to Sapir (1921: 4), language is the 'product of long-continued social usage', a definition which points to the importance of shared conventions in inferring meaning. In other words, language can be understood as a socio-historical formation developed in particular cultural contexts of time and space.

A widely recognised definition of language is as a system of signs. In linguistics, the sign has attracted most attention through the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) who recognised two sides to the study of meaning, but emphasised that the relationship between the two is arbitrary. His labels for the two sides are 'signifier' (the thing that signifies, or sound image) and 'signified' (the object or concept referred to). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is known as the linguistic sign. The sign is the basic unit of communication.

Saussure provided two further key concepts to understand language and language use. The first, *langue*, is the system of language in the abstract. Saussure defined langue as a 'system of signs'. The second is *parole*, language as it is used in spoken or written form. Saussurean linguistics has typically focused on the study of linguistic signs within the grammatical system (*langue*). It has been less interested in the actual concrete act of speaking or using language – *parole* – which Crystal (1997: 411) summarises as 'dynamic, social activity in a particular time and place'.

Work in linguistic ethnography and anthropology has taken a different direction in its study of the sign. The scholarship of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) has been hugely influential in this regard. Peirce (1955) claimed that theory of signification consists of three not two inter-related parts: the signifier, the signified and an interpretant, or, in the more precise language of Peirce, the sign, the object and the interpretant.

To illustrate the process of signification, we can take the signifier /pi:k/ (peak). The signified of /pi:k/ is the object traditionally denoting 'summit' or 'pinnacle'.

However, the urban dictionary (http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=peak), a data source whose contemporariness and open-endedness can mean it is sometimes less than reliable, gives several other meanings, one of which describes it as an adjective used by teenagers to style something bad or not likeable, as in the following:

Alex: It seriously needs to stop raining.
Jess: I know, it's peak.

Clearly, there are two different dictionary definitions of 'peak' here. However, this isn't really the point; many words have a range of meanings. Rather it is the *process* of change and use in context which should attract our attention. Although peak has a range of referential meanings, it also indexes quite different social contexts, speakers and listeners. In the raining example above, we as readers start to make guesses about the kind of people who might say /pi:k/; we presuppose young rather than old, school kid rather than middle-aged rambler; hipster rather than fuddy-duddy. Within Peirce's theory of semiosis the 'interpretant' is the element which allows us to bring social and historical knowledge and experience into our interpretations. Interpretation, therefore, is a process of translation. Peirce understood the interpretant as providing a translation of the sign, allowing the development and construction of the object (Atkin, 2013). Interpretation is also a process of sedimentation as meanings settle and become conventionalised. In linguistic ethnography the role of interpretation is central to understanding the actions of people in their social contexts. The linguistic ethnographer attempts to describe and understand the relevance of signs in ongoing communicative activity and situated social action. Rather than the unitary object (signified) conceptualised by Saussure, Peirce also viewed the object as being of three types – the icon, the index and the symbol:

- The *iconic sign* reflects the qualitative features of its object. The object and sign are said to resemble one another. For example, paintings, portraits and onomatopoeia are all examples of iconic signs because they look like or sound like the objects they are representing.
- The *indexical sign* signposts its object and is contiguous with it. There is often said to be a physical or existential connection between the indexical sign and its object. Pronouns are examples of indexical signs. The personal pronoun 'I' does not mean much unless it is clear who 'I' is referring to. Other examples of indices include pointing fingers, proper names and regional accents.
- The *symbol* is a sign which is able to connect to its object through utilising convention. Symbols are words like table, cat and love. The sign and its object are connected through social practices in which people come to presuppose certain meanings because of conventions.

In the list above, it is the final sign type, the symbol, which has typically attracted the interest of linguists. Through examining how different linguistic constituents combine, linguists have long studied the functional ability of the symbol to create meaning beyond its context. It is the symbol which is closest to Saussure's signifier/signified type relationship. However, icons and indices are of increasing interest, particularly to linguistic ethnographers and anthropologists. This is because their research on interpretive processes has revealed how relatively small differences in icons and indices can function in large and consequential ways. For example, work on indexicality has shown how accents and linguistic styles become linked to social identities and institutionally recognised social standings, positions and statuses.

Recent work by US-based scholars Asif Agha and Michael Silverstein is relevant here. Agha (2003), for example, describes how British English became culturally valued through 'discursive chaining' as hearers of previous messages become the speakers of next messages. As part of this process, received pronunciation (RP) began to be held in high regard as it was associated with the circulation and transmission of social values, for example, respectability and economic security. Silverstein's (1976, 2003) 'indexical orders' show how the individual sign becomes linked to wider ideologies. He uses the example of wine talk to illustrate how a lexicon used regularly in the context of wine tasting comes to have wider institutionalised and ideological meaningfulness. In the case of wine consumption Silverstein shows how wine becomes an 'aesthetic object', consumed as an 'aesthetic experience' which manifests as a 'life-style emblematisation' (2003: 222). Silverstein presents evidence of wine being 'anthropomorphised' through reference to nature and breeding, connected to the 'prestige realms of traditional English gentlemanly horticulture and especially animal husbandry' (p. 225). Elites and would-be elites in contemporary society seek to use wine talk because it confers an aspect of elitism from which distinction emanates. Agha and Silverstein both argue that macrosocial processes always operate through microsociological encounters or interactions.

As this brief tour shows, the study of language has developed considerably in the last hundred years or so. In particular, the theoretical concept of signs has become central to the study of culture, context and meaning making and therefore to linguistic ethnography. In the next section, we shift our focus slightly to consider other key influences on our research approach.

ANTECEDENTS AND CURRENT RELEVANCE

In this section we move forward fifty years or so to the middle of the last century. We thread together four scholars who share an interest in language, culture, society and interaction:

- Dell Hymes
- John Gumperz
- Erving Goffman
- Frederick Erickson

Both Hymes and Gumperz have been described as 'metatheorists' by Bonny McElhinny et al. (2003: 316) in a paper about who gets referenced in linguistic anthropology. Their central role in establishing two major theoretical developments fundamental to the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology is the reason for this. We add Frederick Erickson and Erving Goffman to the list of metatheorists because of their profound influence on the work of scholars in linguistic ethnography (for overviews, see Rampton et al., 2004; Rampton, 2007a;

Tusting and Maybin, 2007; Creese, 2008; Maybin and Tusting, 2011; Rampton et al., in press).

Dell Hymes (1927–2009)

A theory of language and social life is Dell Hymes's major contribution to the field. He saw multiple relations between language and society, and between linguistic means and social meaning. Back in the 1960s and the heyday of Chomskian grammatical competence, Hymes criticised linguistics for making its focus the structure of language (*langue*), rather than the cultural actions of communities in context (*parole*). In 1974 he wrote, 'Linguistics, the discipline central to the study of speech, has been occupied almost wholly with developing analysis of the structure of language as a referential code' (p. 32). He felt that such a focus on the part of linguistics was deliberate, and the failure to provide an explicit place for sociocultural features was not accidental (Hymes, 1972: 272). He accused linguistics of taking a 'Garden of Eden' view of language which consisted of an ideal speaker who was grammatically competent – existing as an 'unmotivated cognitive mechanism ... not a person in the social world' (p. 273). Hymes called for an analysis of speech (parole) over language (langue) to articulate how social action and speech interact in 'a systematic, ruled and principled way' (Hymes, 1968: 101). He developed and advocated the 'ethnography of communication' because linguistics was not utilising the 'multiple relations between linguistic means and social meaning' (1974: 31). Furthermore, he argued that humankind 'cannot be understood apart from the evolution and maintenance of its ethnographic diversity' (p. 33). He therefore proposed studying 'speaking' and 'communication' over 'language'. For Hymes, and others committed to a sociolinguistic perspective, the analysis of speech over language shifted the direction away from code to use. This point is taken up by Blommaert and Jie (2010) who similarly argue 'Speech is language in which people have made investments – social, cultural, political, individual – emotional ones' (p. 8). Blommaert and Jie make a distinction between a linguistic notion of language and an ethnographic notion of discourse. This battle for a more social orientation to the study of language rumbles on to this day, with linguistic anthropologists arguing that a continued focus on langue or code is restrictive, extractionist and exclusionary (see Agha, 2005, for overview).

Hymes's influence has been major in the field of language education. His riposte to Chomsky contributed significantly to a pedagogy based not solely on grammar but on social appropriateness. His concept of 'communicative competence' (1972) redirected language education and its professionals to think about setting, people, register, function and style. He was greatly influenced by the work of Edward Sapir and Roman Jacobson (1960) whose work focused on the components and functions of the speech situation. Hymes was committed to understanding how

speech resources come to have uneven social value and saw the possibilities of applying a linguistic or discourse analysis across disciplines to 'build answers to new questions thrown up by social change' (Hymes,1974: 32). His orientation was interdisciplinary in nature.

Angela Creese (2005) used Hymes's framework to show how different teacher roles attracted varying degrees of institutional support and the implication of this support for emergent bilingual young people. Hymes's concept of the speech situation, event and act was used by Creese to record the diversity of speech, repertoires and ways of speaking in three linguistically diverse London secondary schools. Subject teachers and teachers of English as an additional language foregrounded different language functions in their interaction with emergent bilingual students, resulting in different relationships, identity constructions and learning opportunities for young people. Creese linked her micro recordings of classroom interactions to macro structures of educational power. Through an analysis of teacher pronouns, language functions and speech acts, she showed how classroom participants reproduced the transmission of subject content as more important and authoritative than processes of problem solving and facilitation. She found this had a significant negative affect on language learning opportunities and language enrichment possibilities in the secondary school classrooms.

John Gumperz (1922–2013)

A major contribution by John Gumperz was his development of a line of work usually referred to as 'interactional sociolingusitics' (IS) which focuses on everyday talk in social contexts (Gumperz, 1982). It considers how societal and interactive forces merge in the small and mundane conversations that people regularly have. The goal of interactional sociolinguistics is to analyse how people interpret and create meanings in interaction. An important concept is the 'contextualization cue', which Gumperz (1999) describes as the functioning of signs 'to construct the contextual ground for situated interpretation' (p. 461). Gumperz was interested in understanding how people read clues to construct meaning.

An interactional sociolinguistic approach focuses on meaning-in-action. It highlights the uniqueness of the moment and context while simultaneously acknowledging the social structures brought into play. That is, although the focus is on the here-and-now of the encounter at hand the 'there-and-then' of the world beyond is ever present. As Gumperz (1999) argues, even the most straightforward interaction depends on shared, tacit knowledge, both cultural and linguistic.

In the UK, Celia Roberts has pioneered an IS approach, usually combining the focus on interaction with social theory. For example, in '"Like you're living two lives in one go": negotiating different social conditions for classroom learning in a further education context in England' (with Srikant Sarangi, 2001) she shows how educational contexts create expectations about classroom interaction which can

be upheld or subverted by participants, leading to different educational outcomes. Acknowledging the classroom as a particular cultural space, and the participants as actors belonging to social and cultural groups, means that IS can be used to examine interactions between participants living in the same country, speaking the same language. Indeed, Roberts has consistently and effectively used IS to draw attention to inequality suffered by minority ethnic groups and to show how these inequalities are achieved through talk.

Erving Goffman (1922–82)

Erving Goffman was a Canadian-born sociologist and cultural theorist who trained at the famous Chicago school of Anthropology. He carried out fieldwork in a number of countries, and developed a range of theoretical perspectives for examining how people behave in different social settings. Reading his work in the twenty-first century, it can seem odd that the theories he presents are not illustrated with copious examples of fine-grained data analysis and that he presents a method that cannot be replicated (Lemert, 1997). Nevertheless, his ideas are clearly based on hours of detailed ethnographic looking and the resurgence in interest in his work is testament to the longevity of his theoretical constructs and their relevance for developing understanding of talk in context.

Goffman observed that the social situation is the basic unit or scene in which everyday life takes place (Erickson, 2004a). Through painstaking attention to the details of interaction in social situations he noted the rituals, routines and performances of daily life. From this study, Goffman developed a huge number of theoretical constructs which can be used to interpret and explain everyday talk. Many of these draw on dramaturgical metaphors and draw attention to his view on the performance aspects of identity and talk.

Perhaps Goffman's most important theoretical contribution was on face. He described face as, 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact' (Goffman, 1967: 5). His conceptualisation launched a whole new area of pragmatics research, with Brown and Levinson (1987) arguing that interlocutors are aware of each other's face needs, leading to engagement in complex linguistic gymnastics as they aim to protect, or not, these needs. Others such as Arundale (2010) developed the concept of face to focus on its joint-constructedness (see too Copland, 2011).

Ben Rampton has been instrumental in championing Goffman in his teaching of ethnography, language and communication and has drawn extensively on Goffman in his own work. For example, in *Language in Late Modernity: Interaction in an Urban School* (2006), Rampton shows how teenagers use German, a language taught in school but to which students seem to have little or no out-of-school affiliation, to perform a range of in-class functions (such as apologising and commanding). He draws on Goffman's concept of 'interpersonal verbal rituals' (Goffman, 1981: 21) to suggest that students use German to do face work

particularly when their independence, territory or good character is threatened (Rampton, 2006: 166). Using German in a ritualistic way allows the students to attend to both their own face needs and to those of their interlocutors.

Fredrick Erickson

Fredrick Erickson (1990, 2004b) describes his approach as a 'practical activity', using video recordings of 'naturally occurring interactions' to look 'closely and repeatedly at what people do in real time as they interact' (Erickson, 1996: 283). Erickson's approach is known as micro ethnography as he examines 'big social issues through careful examination of "small" communicative behaviours on the microlevel' (LeBaron, 2008: 763).

In the examination of 'small communicative behaviours', micro ethnography is concerned with the local ecology of speaker and listener relations and the micro politics of social relations between people rather than with the individual. The immediate ecology of relations between participants focuses on how people in interaction 'constitute environments for each other's activities' (McDermott, 1976: 36, cited in Erickson, 2004b: 5). This requires paying attention to the nonverbal, particularly gaze, gesture and posture, as well as the verbal. Speaking and listening have a mutual influence on one another and can be said to have a rhythmic organisation (Erickson, 1996: 288).

Regarding 'big social issues', Erickson uses micro ethnography in two ways. First, he identifies the relationships between interaction and societal processes. Second, he shows how interactions are situated in historical and societal contexts (Erickson, 2004b). For example, in 'Seventy-five dollars goes in a day' (2004b), Erickson's meticulous analysis of dinner table talk demonstrates that discussion focuses repeatedly on the spiralling cost of living for a lower-middle-class family in the USA in 1974. In terms of societal processes, the discussion is the opportunity for 'language and discourse socialisation' (p. 50) to take place as the family learns to talk not just about the economy in general but about the particular issue of their dwindling financial resources. The topic of cost and limited income has clear relevance for this family given their material circumstances, and Erickson argues that the discussion is class-based as those on higher incomes would not be discussing the issue with the same level of anxiety. In terms of situating interactions in 'historical and societal contexts', Erickson links the resentment talk at the dinner table to a growing dissatisfaction in similar families about rising costs, which leads in time to the formation of a discourse. He suggests that this kind of talk 'acted in synergy with large-scale social processes' to 'sweep Reagan into the White House' (2004b: 51), drawing on evidence that families such as this switched allegiance and voted in their millions for a Republican.

Erickson's work has been seminal in illustrating that people do not unthinkingly follow cultural rules but can also actively and non-deterministically construct what they do and who they are. This is not to say that cultural expectations play no part. Erickson uses the term 'wiggle room' to describe people 'finding just a

little bit of space for innovation within what's otherwise often experienced as the crushing weight of social expectation/social structure' (Rampton, 2011: 5). Indeed, Erickson (2004b: viii) suggests there is a paradox between local talk in social interaction being unique and locally constituted and the reality that this social talk is influenced by forces beyond the immediate context of the talk. He uses micro ethnography to illustrate this paradox.

THE LEGACY

These four scholars leave an important legacy which continues to have a major influence in the US and Europe on both linguistic anthropology and linguistic ethnography. Certainly the four case studies in this book can all be said to draw on this rich hinterland of theory. We can see traces of the ethnography of communication, interactional sociolinguistics, ethnographic micro-analysis and face in the linguistic ethnographies produced by Angela, Fiona, Frances and Sara. Angela draws across the four theorisits to consider voice and indexicality as theoretically and methodologically relevant for investigating multilingualism in multilingual teams. Fiona is interested in the dynamics of power as they play out in the micro interactions of trainers and trainees in feedback sessions and draws on Erickson and Goffman. The features of interactional sociolinguistics are relevant to Frances as she examines how communicating 'rights' to those in custody is accomplished by different police officers in different contexts. She scrutinises this event through the lens of different social and linguistic theory, making the interdisciplinary connections which Hymes suggested were not only possible but desired. Sara makes use of scholarship deriving from Goffman to describe how 'think tank' organisations shape the policy of a publicly funded body: the UK health service.

LINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHY TODAY

Given the illustrious past and vibrant scholarship of the present in linguistic anthropology, readers may well find themselves asking, why do we need linguistic ethnography? Shouldn't we accept that so much is shared and the line so thin between the two that introducing another term to the field is redundant and might be seen as empire building (Hammersley, 2007)? Rather than describe ourselves as linguistic ethnographers, what's wrong with linguistic anthropologists? Indeed, why have a label at all?

We have already established that linguistic ethnography has been greatly influenced by North American scholarship in linguistic anthropology and because of this we share many of the same influences. Indeed, as we have already suggested, a common bedrock of 'metatheorists' such as Gumperz and Hymes, Goffman and Erickson, Agha and Silverstein, highlights the theoretical and methodological

backgrounds we share. We are keen, therefore, to emphasise the continuities with linguistic anthropology rather than make claims of distinction. Nevertheless, the appearance of linguistic ethnography in Europe has not happened by accident. In this section we seek to explain its emergence. Our contribution highlights particular arguments in relation to the four case studies appearing in this book.

A moment in time

According to Rampton (2007a: 594), there isn't any 'properly institutionalized linguistic anthropology in Britain'. This is one of the reasons anthropology has not been able to provide a home for British scholars pursuing an interest in language, culture and society, in contrast to the situation in North America, where linguistic anthropology has flourished. Instead these scholars have turned to the annual meetings of the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL) to fine tune their analytical conversations. Over the last 10 years, BAAL meetings have created a context for contact and cross-fertilisation resulting in the coming together of scholars with a distinctive mix of traditions. Maybin and Tusting (2011) describe how linguistic ethnographers have been drawn to the disciplinary frameworks of linguistics and sociolinguistics through BAAL's remit. European scholars have also felt rudderless, as illustrated by a special issue of the journal *Text and Talk* (2010), which describes European perspectives on linguistic ethnography (see Flynn et al., 2010; Jacobs and Slembrouck, 2010).

A key moment for linguistic ethnography came in 2001 when the Linguistic Ethnography Forum (LEF: www.lingethnog.org) was established and a number of lines of enquiry were 'pushed together by circumstance, open to the recognition of new affinities, and sufficiently familiar with one another to treat differences with equanimity' (Rampton, 2007a: 585).

As indicated in the earlier case study vignettes, linguistic ethnography has clustered a community of scholars around its themes and heritages and brought together doctoral students, early and mid-career researchers and senior academics. Within these clusters of scholarship different conversations between academics have seen some traditions of discourse analysis become established, and robust and new kinds of conversation around language and ethnography develop. Although too early to speak of its legacy, linguistic ethnography has created a forum to develop researcher capacity at a key moment in time (for overviews, see Rampton et al., 2004; Rampton, 2007a; Tusting and Maybin, 2007; Creese, 2008, 2010b; Maybin and Tusting, 2011; Rampton et al., in press).

The interdisciplinary agenda

In UK higher education there has been a general shift away from the organisation of academic knowledge in terms of disciplines to one which is based

on interdisciplinarity (Rampton, 2007a; Creese, 2010a). Many universities in the UK are undergoing a reorganisation in search of 'effective structures and mechanisms to encourage and foster inter-disciplinary activity' (University of Birmingham website, 2009). This is mirrored in the research funding bodies in the UK and Europe. In the UK, there is a new emphasis on interdisciplinary research and funding is made available to achieve 'beneficial societal impact'. Teams of academics from the social sciences, environmental sciences and the humanities might find themselves working together on a project and debating methodologies which can best respond to the questions being asked.

Rampton et al. (in press) describe two modalities of doing interdisciplinary research. The first approach brings different academic disciplines together to work on a problem. Cross-referencing to different paradigms can be made to investigate the phenomena at hand and researchers commonly move out of their comfort zone in discussion with colleagues as they learn about different ways to research the phenomenon. The second approach to interdisciplinarity sees collaborations between academics and non-academic institutions in the private, public and third sectors. Such partnerships see joint planning, question setting and a commitment to bring different expertises, experiences and knowledge to the challenge. Rampton et al. (in press) describe 'the multi-dimensional complexity of the problem that motivates the mixing'.

An example of a project which combines both modes described by Rampton et al. above can be found in a recently funded project by the one of the UK's research councils. The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Translating Culture's theme has funded three large grants which are required to network across academic disciplines and with non-academic partners (http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funding-Opportunities/Research-funding/Themes/Translating-Cultures/Pages/Translating-Cultures.aspx). These partnerships have created mixes of people, both academic and professional, engaged in question setting, research design, data collection and analysis. Discussions of emergent themes and outcomes in such projects cannot make use of the strictly disciplinary and faculty driven research programmes of yesteryear. An openness to and curiosity about other ways of doing things is essential. Partnerships between universities and other organisations are also important in ensuring the visibility and impact of the research.

Ethnography with its democratic approach to participation and interpretation of local perspectives is often a good starting point around which interdisciplinary teams can cohere. Moreover, because language is at the heart of any exercise in social life, linguistic ethnographers have a key role to play. Agha (2005) speaks of the 'linguistic turn' in the humanities and social sciences which he defines as 'a vast number of intellectual projects that take up particular aspects of human affairs mediated by language, in a variety of modes of departmental, disciplinary, and inter-disciplinary organizations' (p. 228). Furthermore, he describes the dangers of staying too narrowly focused within the disciplinary boundaries of linguistics:

> Linguists of a certain type might well say, 'That's not linguistics.' But no one cares. For the reciprocal fact is this: the 'linguistic turn' is an orientation to the linguistic aspect of human affairs not toward what happens in departments of linguistics. (Agha, 2005: 228)

Discourse analysis presents a set of methodological tools which are attractive to many in the social sciences. Linguistic ethnography in particular is open to a wide variety of discourse analytic traditions in its combination with ethnography. Through its focus on discourse and detailed interactional analysis, linguistic ethnography is already adopted in a variety of disciplines (see Snell et al., in press). However, there are productive tensions in engaging in interdisciplinary scholarship. What constitutes data may radically differ across disciplines, and the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of each discipline may fundamentally conflict. Furthermore, disciplines differ in what they constitute as their object of study or unit of analysis and this shapes the organisation of research activity.

For example, while the linguistic ethnographer after sustained participant observation may come to be interested in how a sports teacher uses a particular phoneme to develop a shared identity position with a group of students, the sport and exercise academic might be interested in which activities motivate students to do most exercise. A cross-disciplinary perspective would require both academic parties to discuss their interests and underlying rationale, perhaps considering alternative research foci before commencing. The methodology of collecting ongoing audio recordings while observing might surprise the sport and exercise academic; the linguistic ethnographer, on the other hand, might view the setting up of controlled tests for measuring motivation as limiting naturally occurring interactional data. There would need to be a good deal of negotiation about different research methodologies. However, the two parties might also find common ground. The role of language in motivation could be of shared interest while the success of particular ways of using language for improving health could be highlighted in addressing public health and policy issues. They two parties might also find methodological agreement in their use of observation and interview. There is, therefore, the potential risk of a loss of focus and rigour but also for research gains.

Post-modernity

Modernist ideas about language seek order and purity and are troubled by 'hybridity' (Blommaert et al., 2012). In structuralist linguistics various techniques were and still are employed to identify and classify features of sentence structures and to categorise these into constituent parts. Modernist ideologies of language 'centered on denotational functions' and sought to count, bound and structure strings of signs, particularly at the sentence level (Blommaert, 2010: 10). Such a view of language is often put to work for 'higher-scale institutional hegemonies' like national language policies and educational policies, resulting in the 'national language' constructed as one of the purest icons of the nation state.

As Blommaert et al. point out, if you are viewed as speaking a pure language you are authenticated as a real member of a particular culture, a common modernist view.

Post-modernist approaches to the study of language deconstruct these 'entitlements' or social constructions. Deconstruction involves processes of scrutiny which pull apart dichotomies such as 'order versus disorder; purity versus impurity; normality versus abnormality' (Blommaert et al., 2012: 5). Linguistic ethnography investigates the construction and robustness of social categories and categorisation processes; taken-for-granted assumptions about groups, categories and peoples are the objects of their research, as are the processes of diversity and change. Indeed to date, linguistic ethnographers have played their part in the rapid debunking of reifications and essentialisations about languages, dialects, ethnicities and cultures in the economic and social processes of globalisation (see for example, Blackledge and Creese, 2010, 2014; Lefstein and Snell, 2013).

Post-modernism also makes clear that assumptions are dangerous. In linguistic ethnography, assumptions about communicative practices in particular are challenged and must be empirically investigated, as the earlier review of Erickson made clear. However, as Maybin and Tusting (2011) point out, this is a 'formidable' task. Heller (2011: 400) explains why: 'The challenge is to capture the ways in which things unfold in real time, and the ways in which they sediment into constraints that go far beyond the time and place of specific interactions.' Linguistic ethnographers see attention to the 'sign' in discourse as a means to linking to wider historical, social, political and cultural structures, and as one way forward to responding to this challenge.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this chapter, we have suggested that linguistic ethnography has developed at a particular moment in time in which the study of language, culture and identity resonate loudly. Its empirical nature and bottom-up orientation to data, require working from evidence towards theory. This means linguistic ethnography is well placed to produce critical, systematic and rigorous scholarship. Linguistic ethnography links the micro to the macro, the small to the large, the varied to the routine, the individual to the social, the creative to the constraining, and the historical to the present and to the future.

Hymes, Gumperz, Goffman and Erickson have been particularly influential in linguistic ethnography. Their theoretically informed ways of working provide springboards from which cultural practices and their links to wider social processes can be investigated. It is immediately obvious from the preceding discussion in this chapter that linguistic ethnography shares many connections to North American oriented research in linguistic anthropology. However, an argument has been put forward for its instantiation based on a particular set of European circumstances.

First, anthropology has developed in Europe without a strand in linguistics. With no local scholarship to turn to and American linguistic anthropology generally concerning itself with issues in and around its borders, researchers doing work combining linguistics and ethnography in the UK and Europe had no natural home. A new forum, linguistic ethnography, has provided one. Second, as interdisciplinary working gains momentum, scholars who can combine approaches to data collection and analysis and work collaboratively with differently-minded researchers are likely to be in demand. Linguistic ethnographers also have a tradition of working with professional groups (see Roberts, 2012; and Lefstein and Snell, 2013). Research 'with' rather than 'on' follows in the interdisciplinary orientation first advocated by Hymes. Third, linguistic ethnographers contribute to post-modernity and its deconstruction of social categories. This work has been particularly relevant in terms of new and emergent constructions of language, culture, ethnicity, race and diversity.

Linguistic ethnography views language as communicative action functioning in social contexts in ongoing routines of peoples' daily lives. It looks at how language is used by people and what this can tell us about wider social constraints, structures and ideologies. It achieves this by investigating the linguistic sign as a social phenomenon open to interpretation and translation but also predicated on convention, presupposition and previous patterns of social use. Because the sign is the basic unit of meaning, linguistic ethnographers are keen to understand how it is interpreted within its social context. Through rich description, the use of audio and video transcripts, a range of interview techniques and other textual documents, the researcher attempts to appreciate the relevance of signs in ongoing communicative activity and situated social action. In the next chapter we describe our orientation to collecting signs as data and describe the importance of discourse, fieldwork and interviewing in linguistic ethnography.

KEY READINGS

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