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Theory and Method in Linguistic Ethnography

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This chapter provides a sketch of the assumptions, values, frameworks and techniques that currently characterise linguistic ethnography. In keeping with the dynamic that makes it a productive and appealing perspective, we ground our account in a series of historical, institutional and/or methodological encounters, looking at the questions and possibilities that these interactions generate. So we consider the relationships between:

- linguistics and ethnography
- elements interacting in the communicative process
- linguistic ethnography and researchers from different disciplines
- linguistic ethnography and non-academic professionals

In the section titled 'Ethnography, linguistics and linguistic ethnography', we look at what is involved in the combination of linguistics with ethnography, and at some relatively recent historical changes that have influenced their relationship, strengthening the epistemological status of ethnography and sharpening the analytic relevance of linguistics. In the section titled 'Describing the elements interacting in communication', we turn to the communication process itself and describe key elements in the theory of language and society developed in linguistic anthropology. We emphasise the power of the contribution not just to linguistic ethnography but to practice theory more generally, with practice theory understood as a 'broad and capacious ... general theory of the production of social subjects through practice, and the production of the world itself through practice' (Ortner 2006: 16). In the section titled 'Linguistic ethnography in interdisciplinary training', we examine the interdisciplinary relevance of linguistic ethnography by reviewing a Linguistic Ethnography (LE) training programme for social scientists. This taught linguistic and discourse analytic tools embedded in an ethnographic epistemology, and we consider the pedagogy and its impact, positing heightened methodological reflexivity as the only way of responding to the inevitably very diverse ways in which LE gets appropriated. In the section titled 'Linguistic ethnography and non-academic professions', we explore more of this diversity, describing LE's encounter with the knowledge and experience of non-academic professionals in two ways. First, we discuss the challenges facing educators who take up LE research, and then we address the interaction between well-established linguistic ethnographers and health professionals in collaborative projects designed to improve institutional practice.

We begin with a discussion of the relations between ethnography and linguistics.

1. Ethnography, linguistics and linguistic ethnography

To examine the dynamic relationship between linguistics and ethnography, there are at least three questions: Exactly how do we define these two perspectives? What kinds of potential emerge when they are put together? And what is the recent history of their combination? We can take each of these questions in turn.

There has always been disagreement across the social sciences about what exactly counts as ethnography, but from our perspective, the constitutive features are:

(a) *Regard for local rationalities in an interplay between 'strangeness' and 'familiarity'*: Ethnography typically looks for the meaning and rationality in practices that seem strange from afar or at first. It tries to enter the informants' life-world and to abstract (some of) its structuring features, and this entails a process of continuing alternation between involvement in local activity on the one hand, and on the other, an orientation to external audiences and frameworks beyond (cf. Todorov 1988 on making the strange familiar and the familiar strange). Ethnography tries to comprehend both the tacit and articulated understandings of the participants in whatever processes and activities are being studied, and it tries to do justice to these understandings in its reports to outsiders.
(b) *Anti-ethnocentricity and relevance*: Ethnography normally questions the oversimplifications in influential discourse, and interrogates prevailing definitions.
(c) *Cultural ecologies*: Ethnography focuses on a number of different levels/dimensions of socio-cultural organisation/process at the

same time, and assumes that the meaning and significance of a form or practice involves an interaction between these (and other) levels/dimensions.

(d) *Systems and particularity:* Ethnography looks for patterns and systematicity in situated everyday practice, but it recognises that hasty comparison across cases can blind you to the contingent moments and the complex cultural and semiotic ecologies that give any phenomenon its meaning (see [c]). Ethnography seeks to produce theoretically 'telling' (rather than typical) cases, using 'the particular circumstances surrounding a case ... to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent' (Mitchell 1984: 239), and it demands our attention for the 'delicacy of its distinctions [rather than] the sweep of its abstractions' (Geertz 1973: 25).

(e) *Sensitising concepts, openness to data, and worries about idealisation*: Ethnographic analysis works with 'sensitising' concepts 'suggest[ing] directions along which to look' rather than with 'definitive' constructs 'provid[ing] prescriptions of what to see' (Blumer 1969: 148). Questions may change during the course of an enquiry, and the dialectic between theory, interpretation and data is sustained throughout (Hymes [1978] 1996: 10ff.). Although it recognises that selectivity and idealisation are intrinsic to data, ethnographic analysis tries to stay alert to the potential consequentiality of what gets left out.

(f) *Reflexivity and participation*: Ethnography recognises the ineradicable role that the researcher's personal subjectivity plays throughout the research process. It looks to systematic field strategies and to accountable analytic procedures to constrain self-indulgent idiosyncrasy, and expects researchers to face up to the partiality of their interpretations (Hymes [1978] 1996: 13). But the researcher's own cultural and interpretive capacities are crucial in making sense of the complex intricacies of situated everyday activity among the people being studied, and tuning into these takes time and close involvement.

(g) *The irreducibility of experience*: Ethnography's commitment to particularity and participation ([d] & [f]) combine with its concerns about idealisation ([e]) to produce a strong sense of what is unique and 'once-only' in situated acts and interactions (see Willis & Trondman 2001 on 'this-ness'). Ethnographic writing is often tempered by a sense of the limitations of available forms of representation, and it recognises that there is an important element in actions and events that eludes analysis and can only be intimated or aesthetically evoked (Hymes [1978] 1996: 12, 118).

Linguistics is also a highly contested field. There are a number of very robust linguistic sub-disciplines which treat language as an autonomous system, separating it from the social contexts in which it is used, and there are also varied, large and long traditions of research which have addressed language, culture and society together, using both linguistics and ethnography. But whatever their views on which aspects of language are worth studying, cursory inspection of any textbook or reference work (e.g. Crystal 2010) shows that among linguists, as well as among many linguistically oriented discourse analysts, it is widely accepted that:

- language is universal among humans, at the same time as changing over time and varying across social groups (of different sizes, durations and locations);
- it is possible to isolate and abstract structural patterns in the ways in which people communicate, and that many of these patterns are relatively stable, recurrent and socially shared (to different degrees);
- there is a wide range of quite well-established procedures for isolating and identifying these structures;
- the description and analysis of these patterns benefits from the use of technical vocabularies; and
- although there is certainly much more involved in human communication, these technical vocabularies can make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the highly intricate processes involved when people talk, sign, read, write or otherwise communicate.

When the tenets of linguistics and ethnography are set together like this, substantial differences stand out, both in method and aspiration. In linguistics, the empirical procedures – the elicitation techniques, the processes of idealisation and data preparation, and the rules of evidence – are relatively standardised and they are often taken more or less for granted, at least within particular schools and paradigms. The social and personal processes that have brought the researcher to the level of understanding where s/he could start to formulate linguistic rules are seen as relatively insignificant. In contrast in ethnography, participant-observation plays a major role, and the processes involved in learning and adjusting to different cultural practices are themselves regarded as potentially consequential for the analysis. The researcher's presence/prominence in the field defies standardisation and it introduces a range of contingencies and partialities that really need to be addressed and reported.

The differences also often extend to the goals of research. Linguistics usually seeks to generalise about language structure and use, and typically only looks beyond what is actually said/signed/written when implied meaning is highly conventionalised (as in, for example, 'presupposition' and 'implicature'). In contrast, ethnography dwells longer in situated particularities, and this difference between them shows up in their finished products. Ethnographies involve rhetorical forms, such as vignettes and narratives (Hymes 1996:12–13), that are designed to provide the reader with some apprehension of the fullness and irreducibility of the 'lived stuff' from which the analyst has abstracted structure. Grammars normally don't.

Plainly, this book is founded on the belief that the differences between linguistics and ethnography certainly do *not* amount to incompatibility, and among its contributors there is a broad consensus that:

(i) the contexts for communication should be investigated rather than assumed. Meaning takes shape within specific social relations, interactional histories and institutional regimes, produced and construed by agents with expectations and repertoires that have to be grasped ethnographically.

(ii) analysis of the internal organisation of verbal (and other kinds of semiotic) data is essential to understanding its significance and position in the world. Meaning is far more than just the 'expression of ideas', and biography, identifications, stance and nuance are extensively signalled in the linguistic and textual fine-grain.

In fact, this formulation can also cover a much larger and older body of scholarship on language and culture, and it also allows differences in emphasis, so that in some research,

- ethnography serves as a way of enriching a fundamentally linguistic project, as in, for example, Eckert's research on language change (2000), or Levinson's cultural model of cognition (1996);

while in other work,

- linguistics can be a way of helping researchers with a range of different backgrounds to reach deeper into the ethnographic description of social or institutional processes (cf. Sapir 1929/1949: 166; Hymes 1996: 8).

But whichever way the balance tilts, a number of processes have added impetus to the integration of linguistics and ethnography in recent years, and it is worth describing these in more detail.

Although the history of their relationship reaches back much further, Gumperz and Hymes' seminal 1972 edited collection, *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, provides a useful reference point from which to sketch these recent developments. The volume brought contributors together from very different backgrounds in linguistics, anthropology, sociology and psychology, and Hymes' first chapter explained that '[i]n order to develop models, or theories, of the interaction of language and social life, there must be ... an approach [to description] that partly links, but partly cuts across, partly builds between ... the disciplines' (1972: 41). Some of the chapters used socio-cultural methods to enhance the analysis of linguistic structure (e.g. Labov), and others drew linguistics into the examination of principally cultural questions (e.g. Bernstein). But since then, much has changed, both in the organisation of academic knowledge and in real-world experience, and there have been at least three major shifts which have affected the linguistics/ethnography relationship.

First, the development of post-structuralism has weakened the authority of formal structural linguistics as an epistemological reference point. During the post-war hey-day of structuralism, there was widespread anxiety that the humanities and social sciences were 'pre-scientific' (Hymes 1983:196), and linguistics was held up as a model for the scientific study of culture as an integrated system – indeed, suggests Hymes, the intensity of US anthropologists' interest in linguistics as a key to the organisation of culture was matched by linguists' lack of regard for ethnography. But since the 1970s, there has been a decline in the cross-disciplinary significance of formal linguistics as a model of knowledge production. With the emergence of post-structuralism, burgeoning interest in agency, fragmentation and contingency has weakened the linguist's traditional assumption that system and coherence were there in their data, just waiting to be discovered. Linguists' claims to the scientific status of their knowledge have also been relativised by growth in the belief that knowledges are situated and plural, and indeed it is now quite commonly felt that the natural sciences have themselves been worryingly 'pre-social', with ethnography and other forms of contextual study being invoked as necessary correctives (Gibbons et al. 1994:99).

Second, the critique associated with post-structuralism has of course entailed much more than just dislodging linguistics from its former pre-eminence. Received notions like 'society', 'nation', 'community', 'gender' and 'ethnicity' have also been the subject of extensive reassessment, so that now, rather than being seen as natural and unchangeable entities or identities, the default position in a great deal of social science is that these are social constructions, produced in discourse and ideology (see e.g. Foucault 1972; Anderson 1981). In addition, beyond the academy, established categories in social analysis and policy have been profoundly challenged by the material, real-world changes associated with globalisation, with massively increased population mobility and rapid developments in communication technology (Vertovec 2007; Platt 2008; Blommaert & Rampton 2011). The implications of these changes for empirical research are at least twofold:

(a) Ethnography becomes an invaluable resource. One of ethnography's key characteristics is its commitment to taking a long hard look at empirical processes that make no sense within established frameworks, and if right now we are experiencing a period where traditional frameworks are actually looking a lot less well-established than they used to, then ethnography is one important option to turn to. But, at the same time,
(b) if we relax the strictures of formalist theory and draw instead on its power as a resource for describing the patterns in communication, linguistics comes to the fore as a vital ingredient in the development of empirical analyses tuned to the contemporary material and philosophical environment. With post-structuralist critiques of essentialism firmly in place, it is conceptually now rather hard to justify any project that sets out to analyse particular peoples, groups and communities. Rather, the challenge is to understand how these group identities get constructed in culture, discourse and ideology, and how humans come to inhabit these social categories in ways that are both similar and different. So instead of, for example, setting out to study the Roma in Hungary, the aim should be to analyse how 'Roma' circulates as a representation in Hungarian discourse, how it settles on particular humans, how it comes to channel and constrain their activity and material position (cf. Tremlett 2008; see also Moerman 1974: 62). Once we make these commitments, linguistics becomes highly relevant. Categories and identities get circulated, taken up and reproduced in textual representations and communicative encounters, and so if we want to understand the social and cultural construction of identities, persons and groups, linguistics will help us take a serious look at the discursive processes.

Third, at least in the UK, the social sciences have seen a substantial shift in the dynamics of interdisciplinary knowledge production itself, moving from what researchers have termed 'Mode 1 interdisciplinarity' to 'Mode 2' (Gibbons et al. 1994). In Mode 1 interdisciplinarity, focal problems are identified within a particular (sub-)discipline, and there is cross-referencing to other paradigms or lines of research in order to get past a bottle-neck that researchers have reached using only the concepts and methods available within their own discipline. The rationales for cross-referencing, and the parameters of what to include and leave out, are set fairly clearly, and there is a well-defined sense of exactly what kinds of methodological borrowing and combination are in order. In contrast, in 'Mode 2' interdisciplinarity, 'real-world' issues of social, technical and/or policy relevance provide the starting point; there may be non-academic 'stake-holders' involved throughout; and it is the multi-dimensional complexity of the problem that motivates the mixing. Quite a high tolerance for ambiguity is required, and it is important not to commit too quickly to the specification of the key methods and dimensions of analysis. In the 1972 Gumperz and Hymes collection, there was a strong awareness of real-world issues (e.g. pp. 10, 13, 38, 53), but the interdisciplinary project was itself formulated in principally Mode 1 terms: linguistics was thought to have reached a cul-de-sac; there was a considerable discussion of methods for future work (e.g. pp. 23ff., 36); and the goal was to create 'a basic science that does not yet exist' (Hymes 1972: 38). In contrast, over the last 15 years in the UK (and elsewhere), the research and higher education funding councils have increased the emphasis on interdisciplinary work that takes real-world problems as a starting point, that involves collaboration with stakeholders and that reckons explicitly with impacts beyond the academy. The upshot is that in, for example, a recent study by Abreu et al. (2009), 60% of British social scientists were reported working with public sector partners, 45% with the third sector, 45% with both, and around 40% with the private sector (*Times Higher Education*, 25/6/09). This shift towards interdisciplinary research involving non-academic impacts and collaboration looks increasingly well-embedded (Gibbons et al. 1994; Bernstein 1996: 68; Strathern 2000), and if ethnography is characterised by a commitment to dialogue and to adaptive sensitivity to feedback from different audiences (e.g. Hymes 1996: 7), then Mode 2 interdisciplinarity may be especially compatible with an ethnographic sensibility.

These three shifts – the philosophical shifts associated with post-structuralism, the real-world changes effected by globalisation, and the emphasis on Mode 2 interdisciplinarity in research funding policy – impact on ethnography's status in the relationship with linguistics. Before, ethnography could simply be seen as an additional method of data-collection, supplementing the otherwise standard procedures of elicitation and analysis in linguistic science. But as we become more conscious of the social and historical particularity of knowledge, ethnography gains foundational weight as a way of seeing, building on dialogue and on a reflexive recognition of the researcher's own positioning. Instead, it is linguistics that becomes the operational resource, prized for its capacity to spotlight even the very smallest moves in the practical negotiation of social relations, but no longer revered as the path from interpretation to objective science. At the same time, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, this decline in the epistemological authority of linguistics opens the door to fuller interdisciplinary engagement, increasing the scope for combining its powerful techniques and findings on communication with the pursuit of issues and agendas formed elsewhere. This is something that Duranti reports in a historical survey of linguistic anthropology in the US:

> In contrast to earlier generations ... students today typically ask "What can the study of language contribute to the understanding of this particular social/cultural phenomenon (e.g. identity formation, globalisation, nationalism)?" ... for many young scholars today linguistic anthropology is a tool for studying what is *already* being studied by scholars in other fields, for instance, race and racism.
>
> (2003: 332–3)

Duranti's characterisation is compatible with a great deal of the work in linguistic ethnography in Britain and Europe, and this perspective also seems to be growing more influential in sociolinguistics more generally. In their Introduction to the 2nd edition of *The New Sociolinguistics Reader* (2009), Coupland and Jaworski see contemporary sociolinguistics as 'a broad and vibrant interdisciplinary project working *across* the different disciplines that were its origins [sociology, linguistics, social psychology, interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis]', and of the papers they include in the collection, 'a clear majority ... favour more open-ended, observational research methods and smaller-scale data ... This is the *ethnographic* research design that has considerable momentum in modern Sociolinguistics' (2009: 19; original emphasis).

So far, then, we have offered an outline of the fundamental characteristics of ethnography and linguistics, and described recent processes that have given momentum to their combination in linguistic ethnography. Gumperz and Hymes' (1972) volume featured as the starting point for our historical comments, and in fact it also serves as an excellent point of departure for the next section of this chapter, in which we review some key concepts for linguistic ethnography, focusing on the elements interacting in communication.

2. Describing the elements interacting in communication

In the preface to their 1972 collection, Gumperz and Hymes took the view that the 'ready currency of the term *sociolinguistics* ... does not reflect fundamental agreement on common problems, sources of data, or methods of analysis ... [R]ecent publications ... have, so far, not been integrated into any general theory of language and society' (pp. vi–vii). Since 1972, however, the study of language, culture and society has undergone a huge process of disciplinary consolidation and refinement, especially in linguistic anthropology in North America (cf. Duranti 2003), and these developments have provided invaluable theoretical resources for contemporary linguistic ethnography, certainly in the UK and Europe. Following in Gumperz and Hymes' path, scholars such as Ochs, Silverstein, Bauman, the Goodwins, Hanks, Briggs, Blommaert and Agha have produced a remarkably coherent vocabulary that is not only congruent with ethnography but is also capable of producing detailed descriptions of the processes that are of central concern to theories of social practice, with practice understood as the 'production and reproduction of society ... as a skilled [but by no means wholly conscious] performance on the part of its members' (Giddens 1976: 160; Bourdieu 1977; Ortner 2006).

Blommaert provides an encapsulation of the perspective, tracing it back once again to Gumperz and Hymes. In sociolinguistics, he says, there is 'a very long tradition in which language, along with other social and cultural features of people, was primarily imagined relatively fixed in time and space ... Gumperz and Hymes (1972: 15), however ... destabilized these assumptions ... they defined social and linguistic features not as separate-but-connected, but as *dialectic*, i.e. co-constructive and, hence, *dynamic*' (Blommaert 2012: 11–12). This emphasis on the dynamic co-construction of social order and linguistic meaning can be found in Gumperz's call for 'closer understanding of how linguistic signs *interact* with social knowledge in discourse' (Gumperz 1982: 29 [emphasis added]), and it also matches Silverstein's succinct formulation of the 'total linguistic fact': '[t]he total linguistic fact, the datum for a science of language is irreducibly dialectic in nature. It is an unstable mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms, contextualised to situations of interested human use and mediated by the fact of cultural ideology' (1985: 220; see also Hanks 1996: 230). This contrasts sharply with structuralist linguistics, in which the formal properties of language are treated independently of their use (as in Saussure's 'langue' and Chomsky's 'competence'). But there is no surrender in analytic precision, and a flourishing linguistic anthropological literature has done much to achieve another of the goals outlined in 1972: 'to explain the meaning of language in human life ... and not in the abstract, not in the superficial phrases one may encounter in essays and textbooks, but in the concrete, in actual human lives' (Hymes 1972: 41).

So what are the central concepts and perspectives in the 'general theory of language and society' that has now emerged? Fuller exposition of a much wider range of ideas can be found in textbooks such as Duranti (1997), Blommaert (2005), Agha (2007) or Ahearn (2012), but to give an indication of the scope and tenor of this apparatus, it is worth outlining three sets of concepts, which in turn illustrate or engage with:

- dynamic contingency, reckoning with human agency and interpretation – the concepts of inferencing, indexicality and reflexivity;
- convention, structure and the building blocks of institutions, pointing to patterns and expectations of regularity ingrained in our practical consciousness and everyday activity – the notions of genre and register; and
- histories, outcomes and material processes beyond, before and after specific communicative encounters, expanding the spatio-temporal horizons of empirical description – multimodality, textual trajectories and contextual processes of different scales.

'Inferencing' refers to the interpretive work that people perform in trying to reconcile the stuff that they encounter in any given situation with their prior understanding. It refers to the normally effortless sense-making that occurs when people work out the significance of a word, an utterance, an action or an object by matching it against their past experience, against their expectations of what's coming up, their perceptions of the material setting and so forth. The term 'indexicality' is complementary, though it shifts the focus from sense-making to the utterances, things and actions that are treated as signs, and it refers to the fact that these signs are always taken as pointing beyond themselves, to something else in the past, the future or the surrounding environment. So for example, when a word, phrase or sentence is used in communication, it is always taken as a lot more than just its dictionary definition or literal meaning, important though these are. In addition, it will be assessed for, for example, its fit to the visible location, its stylistic elegance, its consistency with the speaker's usual ways of talking etc.

This process of assessment, calibrating the words you hear with your sense of the (dynamically evolving) situation, is referred to as 'meta-pragmatic' reflexivity, and it is a feature of speaking as well as listening. When someone formulates an utterance, it is more than just the semantic proposition that they construct. They also produce a whole host of small vocal signs that evoke, for example, a certain level of formality (selecting 'request' rather than 'ask'), or that point to the presence of bystanders (talking quietly), and this non-stop process of contextualisation may either reassure their listener that they're operating with a broadly shared understanding of the situation, or it can nudge the recipient's inferences in another direction. A lot of this processing is relatively tacit, with participants constantly engaged in low-key monitoring of how all the details of verbal communication fit with their grasp of the propositions being expressed, with their sense of the speaker's intent, with their understanding of the activity they are in and how it should proceed etc. But it only takes a slight deviation from the habitual, a small move beyond expected patterns of variation in the way that somebody speaks or acts, to send recipients into inferential over-drive, wondering what's going on when a sound, a word, a grammatical pattern, a discourse move or bodily gesture doesn't quite match: should I ignore or respond to this? Is it a joke or serious? What ties these apparently unconnected ideas together? Does the speaker still have their institutional hat on or are they now suddenly claiming solidarity with a particular group? (cf. E.M. Forster: 'A pause in the wrong place, an intonation misunderstood, and a whole conversation went awry' [1924] 1973: 267).

There are two general points to draw out from this account. The first concerns the relationship between language and context. As we have seen, word denotation, the formal structures of grammar and the propositional meaning of sentences still count, but they lose their traditional supremacy in linguistic study, and instead become just one among a large array of semiotic resources available for the local production and interpretation of meaning (cf. Hanks 1996; Verschueren 1999). At the same time, the conceptualisation of 'context' also changes. Rather than being 'separate-but-connected' as the relatively static, external and determining reference point traditionally added to language analysis as something of an afterthought – what Drew and Heritage call the 'bucket' theory of context (1992: 19) – context is conceived as dynamic, interactively accomplished, and intrinsic to communication. Language is pervasively indexical, continuously pointing to persons, practices, settings, objects and ideas that never get explicitly expressed. As people try to make sense to each other, contexts are constantly invoked, ratified and shifted by semiotic signs.

Second, context here is an understanding of the social world activated in the midst of things, an understanding of the social world that is also interactionally ratified or undermined from one moment to the next as the participants in an encounter respond to one another. In fact, when people engage with one another, there is considerable scope for social difference in the norms and expectations that individuals orient to, as well as in the kinds of thing they notice as discrepant, and there can also be a great range in the indexical interpretations that they bring to bear ('good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong', 'art' or 'error', 'call it out' or 'let it pass', 'typical of this or that'). But the normative expectations and explanatory accounts activated like this in the interactional present seldom come from nowhere. Instead, they instantiate discourses that the participants have picked up through prior involvement in socio-communicative networks that can range in scale from intimate relationships and friendship groups to national education systems and global media. In this way, the notions of inferencing, indexicality and reflexive evaluation offer us a way of seeing how more widely circulating ideologies infuse the quick of activity in the here-and-now, even though this is integrated with an acute sensitivity of the participants' skilled agency.

With inference, indexicality and reflexivity, analytic attention leans towards agency in the ceaseless interplay of agency and structure, even though normative expectations and their social currency and origins follow very closely in the account. With **genre**, the balance tilts towards stability, structure and convention, though here too, there is an inextricable role for both agentive action and unpredictable contingency.

In the tradition associated with Bakhtin ([1953] 1986; Hanks 1987; Bauman 2001), a genre is a distinct set of conventionalised expectations about a recognisable type of activity that is also often named – for instance, an argument, a sales transaction, a committee meeting, a game of poker, reading the newspaper. These expectations include a sense of the goals and possible tasks on hand, the roles and relationships typically involved, the ways the activity is organised, and the kinds of resource suited to carrying it out. Genres help us construe what is happening in interaction and to work out the direction of activity from one moment to the next, and they channel the kind of inferences we make (e.g. laughing or being alarmed by some drastic report, depending on whether or not it's told in a joke): 'Genres guide us through the social world of communication: they allow us to distinguish between very different communicative events, create expectations for each of them, and adjust our communicative behaviour accordingly' (Blommaert nd; Gumperz 1972: 16–18).

In their potential for stability, genres are one of the building blocks of institutions – think of lessons, detentions, and assemblies in a school, or consultations and ward rounds in a hospital. While genres provide the larger bearings that orient our moment-to-moment micro-scale actions on the one hand, they also constitute some of the smallest units in the structural organisation of large-scale institutions on the other. Indeed Bakhtin saw genres as 'the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language' (1986:65). But the stability of genres is only ever temporary: '[a] genre ... [cannot] be viewed as a finished product unto itself, but remain[s] partial and transitional ... Because they are at least partly created in their enactment, ... genres are schematic and incomplete resources on which speakers necessarily improvise in practice' (Hanks 1987: 681,687). Genres have to be 'accomplished' or 'brought off' in interaction, and participants have to keep checking that they're all tuning to the same stage in the activity, giving and noting indexical signs that, for example, an event should now be moving to a close. There is plenty of scope for failures in generic coordination, and for the participants to be judged as socially insensitive, awkward or incompetent (or maybe just as the unlucky victims of disruptive intrusions from outside). Knowledge and expertise in different genres is of course very unevenly spread among individuals and across social groups, and properly genred performance is a central concern in socialisation throughout the lifespan, whether this involves learning to 'behave nicely at the dinner table' or to 'write a history essay'. As encapsulated visions of the social world tuned to practical action in recurrent situations, projecting particular kinds of conduct and relationship, promising the participants with particular types of personhood, genres are crucial to social reproduction, and they can become the focus of intense struggle as people and institutions try to fix or change their own and others' practice or potential (as can be seen, for example, in repeated UK government attempts to reformat classroom pedagogy and interaction [Rampton & Harris 2010]). But because there is no 'timeless closure' or 'unlimited replication' intrinsic to any genre (Bauman 2001: 81), a great deal of ideological work (for instance, training, publicity, penalties, consultant advice) is often needed if the preferred genres are to remain steadily in place.

With '**register**' (or 'style'), we move from the conventionalisation of situations and the arrangements for communicative interaction in genre to relatively stable patterning among the signs in speech and discourse (Gumperz & Hymes 1972: 21; Agha 2007; Auer 2007; Eckert 2008). Among other things, register covers accent and dialect, which are very commonly seen as reflections of social structure, marking differences in ethnicity, class, region, generation and/or gender. Conceptually, register is quite close to the well-established sociolinguistic notion of 'variety', but whereas sociolinguistics has traditionally treated the relationship between varieties and social structure as a 'separate-but-connected' correlation, the linguistic anthropological notion of register or style is once again aligned with the interaction of form, ideology and situated action identified in Silverstein's total linguistic fact.

Registers are distinctive sets of linguistic and other semiotic signs that get indexically associated with different types of person, group, activity or situation (they can also contribute to the differentiation of genres). The typification process that is crucial to the recognition of a register involves inferring e.g. that someone's from the north of England because of the way they pronounce 'bath' and 'one', that they've had an expensive private education when they say 'yaaa' rather than 'yeh' or 'yes', or that they've got a medical background because of the words they use to talk about bodies. Of course this linkage depends on our perceptions of stratified and segmented social space, which are themselves an aspect of ideology (Bourdieu 1991; Irvine 2001: 23–4). So whenever we make a spontaneous link between a speech sound and a social type, ideology is once again integral to locally situated sense-making, often with subsequent interactional effects (maybe increasing the participants' rapport, or alternatively undermining their self-confidence). The 'language ideological' practices that forge or reproduce these links between ways of speaking and social types can vary a great deal in their scale, explicitness and intensity, ranging from curriculum instruction and mass-mediated impersonations to fleeting self-corrections in conversations face-to-face. And register is often a resource for agentive action, as when, for example, pupils in a working-class urban school respond to being patronised by their teacher with a very exaggerated upper-class accent, even though they hardly ever refer to social class explicitly (Rampton 2006: Part III). More generally, though, register draws our attention to the fact that in the stream of linguistic expression that people produce together, they are continuously vulnerable to a reflexive process of low-key socio-ideological observation and coding, in ways that are far more enacted than declared (cf. G. B. Shaw's '[i]t is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him' [1916: Preface]).

When other social scientists read sociolinguistic accounts of interactional practice, they are sometimes struck by the agility and speed with which participants adjust or shift their stance, position or self-projection, and this sometimes leads to talk of identities being 'multiple, fluid and ambiguous'. There is at least some justification for this if these accounts of interactional positioning are compared with static demographic identity ascriptions of the kind often used in studies which treat language and society as separate-but-connected, and plainly, the production, interpretation and reflexive monitoring are all agentive processes. But communication entails close and continual attunement among the participants, calibrating what's produced with the range of patterns one has hitherto come to expect, and there is often considerable socio-ideological investment in these expectations. This was clear in the discussion of genre and register, referring to the patterns of expectation for, respectively, the arrangements of activity and the stream of signs, and the proprieties regimenting communicative conduct reach much further. Yes, the normative expectations orienting our interaction certainly do shift as we move from one scene to another in our daily routine, and the opportunities for individual innovation can certainly be greater in some than in others. But there are pressures and constraints all the same, reaching right down into the way we formulate the smallest pieces of language. Rather than exemplifying the inherent fluidity of identity production, creativity is more aptly seen as the fleeting exploitation of what Erickson (2001) calls 'wiggle-room' – just a little bit of space for innovation within what's otherwise experienced as the compelling weight of social expectation (see also Rampton 2009).

It should be clear by now that although the perspective we are outlining offers an exceptionally sharp view of activity 'on-line' in the present, it also implies longer temporalities. Nevertheless, Gumperz and Hymes' early research programme centred on the 'speech event', and expansion in the spatio-temporal horizons of theory and analysis has been one of the most important developments since Gumperz and Hymes (1972).

Following scholars like Goffman and the Goodwins, there has been systematic attention to non-linguistic sign systems and to the fact that communication is always 'multimodal' with bodies, places and visual perception playing a major part. As C. Goodwin explains, 'the [human] body [is] an unfolding locus for the display of meaning and action' (2000: 1517), and eye gaze, hand gestures, head movement and the posture, movement and positioning of bodies all contribute to this. Obviously, these are themselves affected by material objects and the natural and built environment – compare the scope for expression in a cinema and a dinner table or a park bench – and although the material substance and surround is often treated as irrelevant (as when e.g. the readers of this chapter take the font and paper quality for granted), there are innumerable occasions when our level of attention to it increases (referring to objects, changing location, getting dressed, cleaning, clearing away). In addition, even though we are often only dimly aware of them (if that!), much of our material environment bears the traces of past designs, efforts and resource expenditures (Blommaert 2013).

When the relative durability of physical matter is combined with our capacity to inscribe it with meaning, individual events are positioned within much longer spans of time. The production and interpretation of meaning in the here-and-now becomes just one stage in the mobility of signs and texts, and participants are seen as themselves actively orienting backwards and forwards to the 'trajectories' through which their semiotic products travel (Briggs 2005). Whereas event-centred sociolinguistics had earlier focused on the local use-value of a particular communicative sign or practice, studying its effect within a given encounter, the 'exchange value' of a sign, text or semiotic object now enters the reckoning, and '*en*textualisation' and '*re*contextualisation' become key terms, addressing (a) the (potentially multiple) people and processes involved in the design or selection of textual 'projectiles' which have some hope of travelling into subsequent settings, and (b) the alteration and revaluation of semiotic objects as they are subsequently taken up in different settings (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Silverstein and Urban 1996; Agha and Wortham 2005).

Interest in the projection and circulation of texts and signs across different events and settings invites comparative analysis of the scale of the networks, media, materials and processes in which these signs travel – their spatial scope, temporal durability and social reach (Scollon & Scollon 2004; Pennycook 2007, 2010; Blommaert 2008, 2010a). Earlier, we discussed the shift away from context-as-'bucket' to context-as-process, but this itself now needs to be conceptualised as layered and 'multi-scalar' (Hymes 1972: 53; Cicourel 1992; Blommaert 2010a). The contexts in which people communicate are partly local and emergent, continuously readjusted to the contingencies of action unfolding from one moment to the next, but they are also infused with information, resources, expectations and experiences that originate in, circulate through, and/or are destined for networks, media and processes that can be very different in their reach and duration. This is vividly illustrated in Tusting's account of a few minutes in the work of a nursery nurse in an nursery, attending to small children while also trying to fill in a form she has been given for recording her observations of individuals:

> The process of writing the observation integrates the immediate activities in the room into broader social systems, and to systems at longer timescales. These broader and longer-term systems include (among others) the interpersonal relationships in the room; the Early Years Centre and its planning procedures; Thea's lifespan, career and training; and government policy and inspection. Each of these is associated with different goals and plays out at different timescales. This is an example of a situated activity which locally produces and reproduces broader social orders.
>
> (Tusting 2010: 85)

Gumperz emphasised the importance of embedding interactional encounters within broader spatio-temporal processes when he called for a 'dynamic view of social environments where history, economic forces and interactive processes ... combine to create or to eliminate social distinctions' (1982: 29). Notions like multimodality, textual trajectory and multi-scalar context increase our capacity to provide this. Admittedly, the job of describing the processes at play in any layered notion of context is challenging, requiring engagement with, if not expertise in, not just linguistics but potentially also history, economics, sociology, cultural studies, international relations and so forth. But it is worth reflecting on the account of ideology that this apparatus can bring to interdisciplinary research. In a great deal of policy and interview discourse analysis, ideology gets treated only as sets of explicitly articulated statements, but compare this with our portrait of tacit power emerging from ideology's links to inference and indexicality, or of ideological investment and struggle over genres and registers, both of them potentially inscribed in practical consciousness. Equally, if we take up the notion of textual trajectories and study what actually gets entextualised and what subsequently succeeds in carrying forward – or even translates into higher scale processes – then we can bring considerable empirical precision to political notions of 'hearability' and 'voice' (Hymes 1996; Mehan 1996; Briggs 1997; Blommaert 2005). In short, the apparatus developed in linguistic anthropology allows us to trace the palpable mundane reality of wide-spread societal ideologies through close scrutiny of discursive and contextual processes, and there is a good case for saying that this layered, multi-scalar and empirically grounded understanding of ideology is one of the most sophisticated in current social science (Blommaert & Rampton 2011: 13).

So that is a glimpse of the *instrumentarium* of contemporary linguistic anthropology, and it immediately gives rise to a question about our own disciplinary positioning: if linguistic anthropology is such a rich resource for the theory and description of communication in contemporary conditions, how come this book and chapter refer to linguistic *ethnography*, not anthropology, in their titles? There are two reasons. First, because for the most part, we are not anthropologists ourselves (and there hasn't been a great deal of interest in the details of communication in British or European anthropology [cf. Rampton 2007: 586]). Second, like Hymes, Gumperz and many others, we are convinced that the concepts and methods we are describing have potential relevance that reaches much further than anthropology – relevance both for other disciplines such as sociology, psychology or management studies, and for engagement with professionals such as teachers, doctors and social workers.

We will address this relevance in the next two sections. The section titled 'Linguistic ethnography in interdisciplinary training' discusses linguistic ethnography's interdisciplinary relevance, using the example of an interdisciplinary training programme to show that this is much more than only a token claim. And then the section titled 'Linguistic ethnography and non-academic professions' reflects on the encounter between linguistic ethnography and non-academic professionals, considering processes of re-socialisation and collaborative research in educational and medical settings.

3. Linguistic ethnography in interdisciplinary training

In the previous section, we outlined some central concepts developed in linguistic anthropology, and argued for the distinctiveness of their contribution to contemporary debates about social process. Words like 'contingent', 'fluid' and 'unstable' are now frequently repeated in the social sciences, and there is widespread recognition that in order to grasp the new complexities of the contemporary period, the vocabularies of empirical analysis need to be extensively refurbished. We have claimed that through our alignment with linguistic anthropology, we have access to a set of very robust tools that can help repair this deficit in the resources for empirical analysis, and it is worth now showing that this claim to interdisciplinary relevance isn't just an empty boast.

To do so, we will describe a research training programme that we have been running for doctoral and post-doctoral researchers across the social sciences since 2007, originally funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (the tutors have been Jeff Bezemer, Jan Blommaert, Carey Jewitt, Adam Lefstein, Ben Rampton (director), Celia Roberts, and Julia Snell). The programme is entitled *Ethnography, Language & Communication* (ELC); it is targeted at researchers facing the challenge of analysing the data they have collected – it is advertised with the headlines *'Is "qualitative data analysis" too vague for you? Are you wondering how to do justice to your data?'*; it has consisted of intensive two- to five-day summer schools, master-classes (with distinguished US researchers such as Elinor Ochs and Ray McDermott), data sessions and day workshops variously thematising education, asylum, health and new media; and in the period 2007–10, there were 650–700 participants in the programme, coming from, *inter alia,* applied and sociolinguistics, health, education, management, psychology, sociology, anthropology. The participants generally responded to the programme very positively in their formal evaluations of it, and our belief in the cross-disciplinary resonance of concepts from linguistic anthropology has been considerably strengthened by our own first-hand experience of the teaching. Indeed within this general context of interdisciplinary interaction, it is worth dwelling longer on the programme (i) because it offers illumination of our approach to enriching ethnography with linguistics; (ii) because we have found a form of teaching that seems to avoid reification, even though pedagogic simplification often threatens to extinguish the kinds of interactive dynamism that we are identifying at the heart of linguistic ethnography; and (iii) because this will allow us to address some of the criticisms of linguistic ethnography as an interdisciplinary endeavour.

In the ELC programme curriculum, we capitalise on ethnography's wide dispersion across the social sciences by assuming that the participants already know about it, and our teaching focuses on the analytic resources offered by sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. There are no sessions on ethnographic interviewing or participant observation, and instead we get students to engage with authors or traditions like Goffman, Gumperz, conversation analysis, Goodwin and Goodwin, Briggs and Mehan. This points to a pattern of hybridisation that is likely to occur much more widely in linguistic ethnography. Although we see the LE enterprise as fundamentally ethnographic in character, bringing the priorities and perspectives sketched in the section titled 'Ethnography, linguistics and linguistic ethnography' (a)–(g) to bear on a range of different topics, it is the linguistics that makes our own contribution really distinctive. What our programme offers students are analytic tools from linguistics and discourse analysis embedded in an ethnographic epistemology (cf. the section titled 'Ethnography, linguistics and linguistic ethnography' above; Blommaert 2007). This means that the apparatus of linguistics and of discourse analysis are treated as a set of 'sensitising' concepts, and these have to be applied with reflexive understanding of the researcher's own participation in the circulation of power/knowledge. Once the linguistic apparatus is epistemologically repositioned like this – repositioned as just the extension of ethnography into intricate zones of culture and society that might otherwise be missed – then linguistics offers a very rich and empirically robust collection of frameworks and procedures for exploring the details of social life, also providing a very full range of highly suggestive – but not binding! – proposals about how they pattern together.

So how do we teach linguistics as a set of sensitising concepts? Indeed, how do we prevent students from forgetting the dialectical dynamism encapsulated in the 'total linguistic fact'? There are two steps.

First, focussing on what we have categorised as 'micro', 'genre', 'multimodal' and 'transcontextual' analysis, we provide an accessible distillation of key frameworks and methods, extracting ideas like 'adjacency' and 'entextualisation' from the intellectual traditions in which they gather so much (doctrinal) weight and authority. Of course we acknowledge that sub-disciplinary disputes between, say, Critical Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis, do matter, but we tell course participants that these are for later, once they have decided that these analytic perspectives are really worth pursuing. Instead, in regular stock-taking discussions, we push students to be realistic and reflexive in their appropriation of what we are offering, getting them to consider, for example, 'What are the limitations of Linguistic Ethnography?'; 'Could I successfully defend this approach in my viva examination or a job talk?'

Second – and this is also particularly important for students who already have some background in linguistics – we put the apparatus to use in data sessions, quite often working on data that the course participants have provided themselves. In each roughly two hour session, we immerse the students in a recording and its accompanying transcript, running with their interests and interpretations while at the same time pointing to the insights afforded by the new perspectives, and pushing them to make their claims accountable to evidence, with an eye on the perils of under- and over-interpretation (cf. Erickson 1985). The format partly resembles the traditional data-session in conversation analysis – there is emphasis on the aesthetic of 'slowness' and 'smallness' (Silverman 1998), and there are the insistent questions like 'why this now?', 'what next?' etc. (ten Have 1999). But instead of prioritising a drilling down into the sequential machinery of interaction, we also work outwards to larger scale processes, reflecting for example on the data's implications for the next steps in ethnographic fieldwork (see also Scollon & Scollon 2007: 615, 619). In some ways, the data in these sessions functions in a similar way to the vignette in anthropology, where there is always more going on than the analysis discloses. The sessions generate a huge surplus to what any researcher can actually use in their argument, but there is also a much clearer sense of what is going on, and what you can and really can't say about the episode in focus. By the end, participants' initial ideas often look either crude or just plain wrong, and there is a much sharper idea of which aspects of the interaction are amenable to plausible interpretation, as well as a much stronger sense of the dimensions that remain opaque, even though intriguing.

These sessions are highly accessible to people with different disciplinary backgrounds, involving interpretative processes that draw both on their ordinary sense-making capacities as language users, and on their biographical experience, including their knowledge of the sites where the data comes from and their sense of the relevant life worlds. But beyond the enjoyment of the sessions themselves, what can they get out of them?

For many participants, the process of slow, intensive analysis is itself a revelation, disclosing vivid empirical details in the processes of social construction that they had hitherto had little or no conception of. As this ontological re-gearing takes effect, students become clearer about the potential relevance to their own projects of the apparatus we are offering. Of course there are sure to be some people who decide not to make any further use of these tools, but our hope is that their intensive exposure to the tangible, on-line moment-to-moment co-production of social relations has at least put them in a different position intellectually. Even if they revert to the content analysis of field-notes or interview transcripts as their main analytic strategy, we still hope that they retain some residual sense of what they are glossing over. To encourage a degree of more active adoption, we do tell the participants that if there is a small stretch of interaction that forms the crux of an argument that they want to develop, then it is worth double-checking with the concepts and procedures learnt in the data sessions, using them as a safety measure to ensure that they haven't jumped the gun in their first interpretations. More than that, data-session procedures can help to work up a thesis chapter with data they'd initially viewed as poor, insufficient and destined for the bin. And then at the highest level of interdisciplinary engagement, our aim is to provide the participants with the resources for varying the magnification in their analyses, moving flexibly across processes of different scales in line with the development of their arguments and questions. There is no retreat from larger generalisations about contemporary society in linguistic ethnography, and plainly, participants with non-linguistic backgrounds bring a range of sophisticated vocabularies that are very well tuned to the description of historical, political, institutional and other processes. But our overall commitment is to making both academic and political generalisations about social life accountable to the kinds of small-scale everyday activity which we can observe, record and transcribe, and data sessions represent a first arena in which to explore the analytic practices that this entails.

As we have said, when one alters the magnification and shifts from one process to another in a layered and multiscalar view of context, it is necessary to draw on different sets of analytic resources, reading different literatures. This is very well accepted in ethnography (cf. e.g. Burawoy 1998; Hammersley 2007: 694; Scollon & Scollon 2007: 617; Rampton 2006: 390), but the mixing of perspectives is obviously not straightforward, and it can often give rise to some discomfort. Bricolage and eclecticism can sometimes amount to 'factitious amalgamation of dissimilar ideas or theses that look compatible only insofar as they are not clearly conceived' (Angenot 1984: 159, cited in Hammersley 1999: 577). Indeed, we ourselves have been scolded for failing to realise that, for example, 'post-structuralist theory ... sociolinguistic quantitative empirical studies, [and] qualitative conversation analytical work ... are not of the same epistemological status, and therefore they cannot be added up to a single argument' (Koole 2007, reviewing Rampton 2006). But the point is that paradigms don't have to be swallowed whole. Sociolinguistic quantitative studies and conversation analysis can be mixed if one is careful and willing to separate findings and methods from the explanations and interpretations with which they are conventionally packaged. So it is, for example, perfectly possible to work with the fact that there are systematic quantitative differences in the extent to which speakers use particular sounds in particular settings *without* having to buy into the idea that these are produced by variations in 'attention to speech' (cf. Labov 1972). Similarly, it is easy to make very productive use of CA findings on the sequential organisation of talk *without* refusing to consider the participants' ideological interpretations (Wetherell 1998; Schegloff 1999).

In fact this denaturalisation of paradigms is hard to avoid in interdisciplinary dialogues of the kind instantiated in our training programme, and it generates a methodological reflexivity that has to be embraced. In the interdisciplinary regions oriented to real-world problems – 'Mode 2' discussed in the section titled the section titled 'Ethnography, linguistics and linguistic ethnography' – definitions and assumptions are repeatedly relativised and there is 'a continuous process of negotiating authority and relevance' (Roberts and Sarangi 1999:475). There is incessant pressure to account for the particularity of the angles and occlusions that different methods and approaches entail, and one is forced back to fundamentals to try to work out how different things fit together. In the ELC programme, there has been no question of trying to establish the kind of orthodoxies one might expect in a singular discipline like anthropology. As a programme team based outside the institutions and disciplines where individual participants are doing their research, we have had no control over what our short course graduates eventually do with the training we provide; we haven't been able to impose any uniformity in the theoretical questions driving them; and since there are no assessed assignments and they soon return home to the diverse disciplinary departments where their PhDs are examined, we have made no attempt to standardise criteria and monitor the adequacy of their data analyses (Rampton 2007: 594–5; contrast Hymes 1972: 52). Indeed, the training itself could be characterized, albeit a little flippantly, as (a) 'coming together' (b) 'getting down to basics' in the sessions, and then afterwards (c) 'anything goes'. Heightened methodological reflexivity is the only option here, tuned to the task with encouragement from Hymes: '[p]roductive scholars know that problems lead where they will and that relevance commonly leads across disciplinary boundaries' (1969: 44–45).

We turn now to linguistic ethnography's encounter with non-academic professions, where some similar issues emerge but where LE is also likely to face a range of doubts and resistances that are firmly grounded in specific institutions.

4. Linguistic ethnography and non-academic professions

Interest in the potential links between research and practical intervention runs deep in linguistic ethnography. Carrying across the Atlantic, US linguistic anthropology was welcomed within a very active tradition of applied linguistics in Britain (cf. Rampton 2007: 586–90), and this commitment to practical intervention in real-world processes has gathered momentum with development of Mode 2 interdisciplinarity. So in this section, we look at LE's encounter with non-academic professionals from two perspectives. First, we consider the shifts in orientation involved when, in an experience of re-socialisation, people with backgrounds in education become LE researchers. Second, we discuss what linguistic ethnography looks like when, in contexts of collaborative research, it encounters the very well-established perspectives of professionals in health.

In **research in educational settings**, the stimulus for engaging with linguistic ethnography often starts from an educator's professional experience and practice. But the theoretical questions which they subsequently explore as linguistic ethnographers are shaped at least in part by ideas and insights from a rather different body of knowledge, of the kind outlined in the sections titled 'Ethnography, linguistics and linguistic ethnography' and 'Describing the elements interacting in communication'. This involves some substantial shifts – from a teaching, advisory or educational management role to that of researcher, from a professional school gaze to the ethnographic scrutiny of phenomena and their meaning between, around and cross-cutting official activity (e.g. Maybin 2006) – and these entail radical changes in the perception of what's happening in the classroom and how it is significant. Educationalists can face quite formidable ontological and epistemological challenges achieving this: 'it takes a tremendous effort of will and imagination to stop seeing only the things that are conventionally "there" to be seen ... [I]t is like pulling teeth to get [researchers] to see or write anything beyond what "everyone" knows' (Becker 1971: 10). The authoritative, knowledge-full professional who is responsible for guiding students through a particular curriculum has to become a novice researcher, striving to immerse her/himself in 'the moment to moment interactional implementation of locally instantiated social organisation' (Cicourel 1993: 89). While the educational focus has to incorporate national targets, pre-determined curriculum goals and the measurement of individual competencies, the researcher's gaze needs to open to a more holistic understanding of what is going on within the local constructions of meaning on the one hand, and the configuring of the school environment by broader linguistic and sociopolitical processes on the other. To the educator, the school may serve primarily as a site for inculcating particular skills and bodies of knowledge, currently specified in England and Wales as a National Curriculum. The linguistic ethnographer, however, has to set aside these institutional lenses, and there can be a very uncomfortable disjuncture between, on the one hand, the individual psychological model of students and learning in school (which may also have structured the educational researcher's own professional training), and on the other, the social constructionist, poststructuralist perspectives underpinning contemporary research in linguistic ethnography.

This contrast between educational and ethnographic perspectives stands out especially clearly when language and literacy are in focus.

In schools in England, for instance, English language in the National Curriculum is largely codified through rather formal descriptions of grammar and genre. Terms like 'context', 'speaker', 'listener', 'meaning', and 'function' are relatively fixed concepts in the analysis and evaluation of speech and writing. Students' individual progress is measured against specified language targets, and their results are treated as the indicators of the success of teaching and learning, on which teacher careers and school survival depend. This is in stark contrast to linguistic ethnography, which emphasises the complexity of contextualisation, the dynamics of dialogue, the multi-scalar implications of language functions and the contingency and ideological saturation of meaning. Thus, researchers moving from language education to linguistic ethnography have to engage with at least three kinds of epistemological shift. First, they need to move from an educational view of language and literacy as skills and competencies to a more anthropological focus on how language is used as part of social practice, deeply connected with relationships, identity, power and cultural values. Second, there is a shift from seeing language as produced by individuals, reflecting their knowledge and competence, to focussing on language as produced between people, providing a site for their exploration and negotiation of knowledge and positioning. And third, there is a shift from treating language as a coherent product, a system which needs to be learnt, to studying it as part of a dynamic ideological communicative process emerging in everyday life and experience. In terms of fieldwork practice, these moves often entail a shift of empirical gaze, looking beyond students' spoken language and literacy in official classroom activities, to collecting data from different sites across the school, investigating the meaning and significance of their different language practices for the individuals themselves. And data is no longer analysed in terms of how it speaks to an educational framework of skills, competencies and improvement – instead it is examined in terms of emergent meanings and significance for participants' (different) perspectives, generating a far richer understanding of context and contingency.

But although they are often very disconcerting initially, these shifts are worth making. The move beyond a lens disciplined by education policy and priorities leads to fresh perspectives on, for example, the potential of students' different language resources for learning, or on the disjunctions and connections between students' literacy practices in and out of class. Combined within fine-grained analysis of specific interactions, linguistic anthropological concepts re-orient the researcher to the dynamic intersection of language with activity, with cultural ideology and with other semiotic resources. There is scope for repairing the under-theorisation of context and the neglect of cultural/historical process that have characterised the psychologically based approaches dominating educational research. For instance, the analysis of processes of contextualisation and indexicality can highlight how a classroom's local institutional imperatives, its affordances for particular kinds of learning, and its recurrent sites of cultural struggle, are configured by larger scale structures and processes and by social categories grounded in ideology. In this way, linguistic ethnography can complement and extend neo-Vygotskian and dialogic research in schools, offering more ideologically sensitive insights about the situated dialogues between teachers and students that constitute key mediating communicative patterns of learning. It can map out the social, cultural and historical dimensions of students' zones of proximal development, and bring out their implications for students' engagement in school language and literacy practices. Or alternatively, in the context of multilingual education, linguistic ethnography can show how struggles over authority and legitimation reveal fault-lines and fractures in the wider society, often related to past colonial histories that are played out through educational processes in class (Heller and Martin-Jones 2001).

In reality of course, there is a good deal of variation in how far people travel along the route from education into linguistic ethnography (see Green and Bloome 1997), and hybridisation also occurs when well-established and experienced LE researchers work with professionals side-by-side (see e.g. Hymes 1980). But collaboration is itself by no means simple, and we can illustrate this by now turning to LE work on **health communication** (for an educational case, see Lefstein and Snell 2011).

In research on health communication, there are some people with medical training who develop expertise in linguistic ethnography in order to address issues that concern them professionally (cf. Swinglehurst et al. 2011, chapter in this book), but most of the LE research has been driven by academic social scientists without health backgrounds. Instead of involving the process of de-familiarisation described in the educational case above, the initial challenge bears closer resemblance to the classic anthropological task of becoming familiar with the strange. But the work doesn't end there: when researchers take on advisory and consultancy roles, they also have to show the professionals that their own perspective has practical relevance in a process that involves problematising the issues rather than attempting easy solutions (Roberts et al. 2000).

This requires perspectival shifts – and can generate resistances – that can be quite considerable.

First, language is not generally an object of gaze within the health professions, except in its narrowest, deficit formulation as 'poor language'. When communication is addressed as 'communication skills', this is done normatively, using social psychological terms or prescriptive nostrums like 'use open questions'. So there is a substantial distance between this position, where language is treated as a transparent medium for referring and for achieving actions, and the linguistic ethnographic view of situated language practices playing a major role constructing healthcare and shaping the medical (Freeman and Heller 1987; Candlin and Candlin 2003; Swinglehurst et al. 2011; Chapter 5). There are also substantial differences in approaches to research, and the move to joint problematisation requires the professionals to abandon the stance of a research consumer, shifting into a more collaborative relationship (Roberts and Sarangi 2003). Alongside the positivist and statistical perspectives rated most highly within medicine, medical professionals need to make space for findings that derive from long periods in the field and from the slow and protracted examination of what initially looks small and banal, eventually coming to integrate these with wider ideologies and processes.

We can illustrate the kinds of process involved by referring to Roberts' work with the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP). In an involvement that has proved long-term, Roberts was first approached in the 1990s and then invited in again 15 years later, with a request to investigate the selection processes that the RCGP used to license family doctors in the UK, in order to see whether they involved practices that might account for a persistent gap in the success rates of white British candidates and candidates from migrant or ethnic minority backgrounds (Roberts et al. 2014). The mix of health, 'race' and exclusion is a potent one, and made more complex and political by (sometimes productive) tensions around credibility and authority. During the project, there were debates around what counted as language, about the extent to which language and cultural processes were wired together, and about where indeed 'language' actually was in the simulated consultations which were the centre-piece of the licensing exam. Much of this debate focused on the way that candidates were rated for 'data gathering', 'clinical management' and 'interpersonal skills'. While the professionals treated these as unproblematic categories, Roberts and Atkins sought to analyse the encounters more holistically and to draw out the taken-for-granted assumptions about language use and linguistic competence which permeated the exam.

Another central debate focused on the ways of thinking that governed the design and implementation of the examination. The RCGP evaluated the exam within a definition of reliability and validity, which among other things, excluded consideration of the effect of simulated consultations on candidate behaviour, and of the degree of linguistic and cultural diversity within the population of patients that they would be serving as GPs. RCGP colleagues could recognise and approve of the science in the linguistic analysis, the detailed transcripts and the effort to seek patterns across relatively large amounts of data, but there were some tensions when (i) researchers tried to link the linguistic detail to the wider issues of exam validity; when (ii) they used small and highly detailed examples to make telling points rather than persuade through numbers (see also Bezemer Chapter 11); and when (iii) they introduced new classificatory systems which focussed on how local inferencing processes combined broad normative judgements (e.g. 'the candidate was clunky') with the evaluation of micro-linguistic features that operated below the level of conscious awareness. Within the RCGP's regime of thought, it was generally very hard to understand the perspective of linguistic ethnography, and if the researchers weren't actually regarded as mad or bad, it was easy to see them as just sad, spending so much time on what looked irrelevant to the professionals, either all too obvious or really rather meaningless (Foucault 1971: 12–16). With the researcher acting both as ethnographer and critical consultant, there was also considerable scope for suspicion. In the examination centre, the associate researcher on the project initially referred to the spaces where she wasn't permitted as 'sacred places' – as areas where she needed to go as a researcher working in partnership with the RCGP, but wasn't seen as 'one of us'.

The researchers also found that the interpretations, findings and conclusions produced in reports and papers often seem overly tentative and open when compared with the styles of research communication that medical professionals are used to. Over the course of Roberts' relationship with the RCGP, which has now involved a good deal of data collection and analysis working across several scales, there has been a lot of productive discussion about how categorical a particular stance or interpretation ought to be, and whether it is possible to acknowledge multiple interpretations. What may seem to be a healthy and realistic interpretive plurality in linguistic ethnography may look like 'dormouse valour' to professionals, and in the end, a consensus on new ways of looking at institutional and professional problems – in this case, a new analytic language for talking about the oral examination – can itself require both professionals *and* researchers to embrace impurity, seeking productive compromises. So although it is important to acknowledge the complexity of interaction and its relationship to broader themes such as assessment, standards and fairness, there are limits to how far one could expect any professional institution to embrace the dynamic contingency involved in something like the 'total linguistic fact' (see Section 2). In purely academic terms, correlational approaches to communication which treat the ingredients as only separate-but-connected clearly lead to an impoverished understanding of meaning-making in human interaction, but if language is to be used in any kind of institutional measurement or assessment, a stabilised system has to be established in which some dimensions of communication are given priority over others. For linguistic ethnographers who seek to engage with these institutional regimes practically, there is no question of standing outside the ideological processes that this fixing entails. Instead, the task is to try to understand them as fully as possible, to appreciate reflexively the strengths and limits of their own position, and to nudge the standardisation process in directions that seem more defensible.

This health communication case also throws light on joint data-sessions and the different kinds of understanding they make possible among professionals and LE researchers. Engaging professionals in data-sessions focused on interactions relevant to their work interests can either serve as part of the ethnographic data-collection process itself (Lefstein and Snell 2011), or as a post-research activity, providing opportunities to examine and debate professional policies and practices with research informants and their colleagues (Bloor 1997: 320–321; Bezemer chapter in this book). Responses to these data may be anywhere on the spectrum from *ad hoc* and immediate reactions to a specific incident, to feedback in formal group sessions where data illustrate the researcher's likely findings, and there are traps and affordances in the process of joint analysis that relate to stance, to values and to purposes.

The encounter between the ethnographer, professionals and the data can spark the renegotiation of subject positions around authority, credibility, trust, status and expertise. Exposing professionals to video recordings of their own practice can have quite wide organisational ramifications, independent of the researcher's perspective (Iedema and Carroll 2011), while in Mey's disturbing metaphor (Mey 1987), the researcher may him/herself be seen as 'the poet' handing out knowledge to 'the peasants', since the researcher's justification for these joint sessions resides in claims to expertise which prioritise their own ways of looking and knowing over the practical knowledge of the professional group. There can be tensions around what counts as analysable and whether and how that matters, and data sessions are also places where learner/teacher relationships can be renegotiated, with institutional and professional knowledge trumping the researcher's interpretations, producing new and more ecologically valid analysis (Cicourel 2007). In the discussion of the interdisciplinary training courses in the section titled 'Linguistic ethnography in interdisciplinary training', the data sessions had a principally pedagogic function, but in the interaction with professionals, they can serve a much wider range of purposes. Some of these relate to knowledge and understanding: using data sessions to persuade, to discover about the insiders' perspective, to demonstrate new ways of seeing, to see language as a topic in itself (and not just take it for granted), to move through the micro to more macro processes. But data sessions also play an important part in the management of field relations: gaining trust and access to opportunities for more 'lurking and soaking', satisfying curiosity, justifying the time that informants have had to give to the project and appeasing their concerns. On matters such as these can depend the outcomes of research, their authority, credibility and usefulness.

Judged by the textual standards expected in purely academic work, the written products of collaborative linguistic ethnography undertaken with professionals in fields such as education, health or law often look relatively low-key, conceptually and/or methodologically. But the work and experience that underpins this can in fact seriously enhance linguistic ethnography if we can guarantee that, within LE, there is always open movement between theoretical, descriptive and interventionist work, and that there is ongoing dialogue or indeed active teamwork between people with these different but complementary leanings.

5. Conclusion

The collective consolidation of linguistic ethnography in the UK started in 2000, but in a review of developments in 2007, Rampton denied that LE was a paradigm or cohesive school, and instead described it as a 'discursive space' and a 'site of encounter', bringing people with fairly mixed interests and backgrounds together in broad alignment with the two tenets cited on page 18 above – contexts for communication should be investigated rather than assumed, and to grasp the significance of semiotic data, its internal organisation has to be addressed (2007: 585). Since then, this trajectory has gathered momentum, and in recent years, the collective energies in LE have been dedicated rather more to outreach and new recruitment than to methodological standardisation among core affiliates, as intimated in the section titled 'Linguistic ethnography in interdisciplinary training'. In line with this, membership of the Linguistic Ethnography Forum has grown from around 200 in 2007 to over 600 in 2014.

But whatever its organisational success, any approach claiming space in the academy needs to show that it produces good research. Of course, academic discourse communities differ a great deal in what they mean by 'good research', and as sites of knowledge production, universities now also accommodate a range of missions – pure, mixed and applied. But bearing these caveats in mind, we can suggest that:

(a) good research should be careful, logical, accountable, explicit, sceptical, well-informed, comparative and original, leading to the production of interesting claims that people (in some determinate discourse community) can trust, and
(b) that the present collection allows us to take stock of the character and quality of work that self-identifies as linguistic ethnography.

Working as individuals or in small teams, all of the authors in this volume get published outside an LE framing, and there is also a steady stream of research that is well-received in linguistic anthropology. But what does linguistic ethnography look like when these authors are gathered together in a collection like this? When LE participates in interdisciplinary interaction, what kinds of position does it occupy – partnership, challenge or ancillary support? Is it really true that LE uncovers hitherto hidden dimensions of social process, or throws new light on old topics? Just how coherent as a way of seeing does LE seem to be, and does it matter if it's not? As the editors explain, it is questions like these that motivate this collection, and in the pages that follow, there is an opportunity to look for some answers.

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