UK LINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHY: A DISCUSSION PAPER

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0. PREFACE

In recent years in the UK, a number of researchers have started to identify their work as 'linguistic ethnography', and 4 ½ years ago, a UK Linguistic Ethnography Forum (LEF) was established.. This work has strong links to Hymes' 'ethnography of communication' (1972), but 'the ethnography of communication' isn't really adequate as an umbrella characterisation because of substantial developments both in linguistic anthropology and elsewhere that have impacted on British work since the 1980s. More than that, the phrase 'ethnography of communication' blurs an important tension between linguistics and ethnography that contributes much to the methodological identity of linguistic ethnographic work. So what does the construct 'linguistic ethnography' actually imply, and what kind of cultural construction is the UK LEF? What are the links to other kinds of work, and what principles, practices, alignments and differentiations are involved UK LE's self-constitution?

These are very much genuine questions, and not just the rhetorical prelude to a proclamation of sub-disciplinary autonomy, and this paper tries to start formulating some of the answers. It begins by considering the epistemological issues emerging at the conjuncture of ethnography and linguistics (Section 1). Next, it offers a characterisation of UK work, reviewing connections, influences and antecedents, the profiles of researchers aligning with linguistic ethnography, and links with linguistic anthropology in North America (Section 2). And lastly, the paper looks to the future, emphasising among other things the importance of drawing in younger researchers (Section 3).

Overall, the paper seeks to articulate an interpretation of grounded practice over a number years in Britain, trying to capture some of the commonalities sensed among the researchers participating in UK LEF, trying to do so in ways that enable them to develop and consolidate this work in the future. Given this focus, the paper inevitably risks parochialism, focusing on North America as an important reference point but neglecting other work outside the UK. Equally, there may well be significant omissions in its considerations of work inside this country. We hope that the reader will forgive these mistakes, accept the spirit in which this

[1] This position paper was collaboratively drafted by Ben Rampton, Karin Tusting, Janet Maybin, Richard Barwell, Angela Creese and Vally Lytra, and as is inevitable in this kind of process, not all of us agree with every point made in the text. It has also benefited from a sharp reading by Brian Street, though here again, there are significant points of disagreement.

paper has been drafted, and join us in discussion of whether and how it seems reasonable to speak of 'linguistic ethnography' in the ways we suggest.

1. LINGUISTICS & ETHNOGRAPHY

Although LE research differs in how far it seeks to make claims about either language, communication or the social world, linguistic ethnography generally holds that to a considerable degree, language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity. But exactly what kind of methodology is this?

It is worth first trying to sketch some of the central features of ethnography and linguistics separately, turning after that to the methodological effects of combining them.

1.1 Ethnography

As a method of social research, ethnography seeks to capture and understand the meanings and dynamics in particular cultural settings. Ethnographers spend time observing and participating in the environments they seek to describe, and use a range of more and less systematic data-collection techniques to record what goes on. Although there is a lot of disagreement about the nature of ethnography (cf eg Hymes 1996:3; Bloome & Greene 1997), it can generally be attributed the following (connected) characteristics:

a) *Regard for local rationalities in an interplay between 'strangeness' and 'familiarity'*: Ethnography typically looks for the meaning and rationality in practices that may seem strange at first/from the outside, and it tries both to enter the informants' life-world and to abstract (some of) its structuring features in a process that entails continuing alternation between involvement in local activity and orientation to exogenous audiences and frameworks (Todorov 1988). Ethnography tries to comprehend 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 (contrast e.g. policy research which measures processes in terms that are already given). It often seeks to produce 'telling' (rather than typical) cases (Mitchell 1984:237-240), which demand our attention for the "delicacy of [their] distinctions [rather than] the sweep of [their] abstractions" (Geertz 1973:25). In ethnography, "small facts... get in the way of large issues" (Hannerz 1987:556).

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 recognises that hasty comparison across cases can blind one to the contingent moments and the complex cultural and semiotic ecologies that give any phenomenon its meaning (see [c]).

e) *Sensitising concepts, openness to data, & 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, analysis tries to stay alert to the potential consequentiality of what gets left out.

f) *Attention to the role of the researcher*: 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 (Blommaert 2001b:2) (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 (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).

1.2 Linguistics

Linguistics is a massively contested field. There are a number of very robust linguistic sub-disciplines which treat language as an autonomous system (separating it from the contexts in which it is used), but there are also varied, large and long traditions of research which have addressed language and culture together, using both linguistics and ethnography, and some of these are discussed in greater detail in Sections 2.1 and 2.3. But whatever their views on what aspects of language are worth studying how, most people affiliating with linguistics would accept:

- that language is almost universal among humans, at the same time as changing over time and varying across social groups (of different sizes, durations and sitings)
- that 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)
- that there is a wide range of quite well-established procedures for isolating and identifying these structures
- that the description and analysis of these patterns benefits from the use of relatively technical vocabularies, and
- that 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.

Ideas like these are basic to linguistics in all or most of its guises, and they exist in an interesting tension with the defining features of ethnography.

1.3 Ethnography in tension with linguistics

Ethnography and linguistics generally differ in their sense of the extent to which their objects of study can be codified, and the formulation of rules is normally regarded as more problematic in ethnography than in linguistics:

a) Ethnography's traditional object of study, 'culture', is a more encompassing concept than 'language' (Hymes 1996:6; Duranti 1997:97), and for all sorts of reasons, [2] 'culture' appears to be generally less determinate as a focal entity.[3]

[2] Including the representation of language in writing, and the success of linguists (from ancient times) in isolating structural elements from the communicative flow, modelling them in formal systems and testing these models empirically.

[3] Admittedly, a sense of the 'codifiability' of culture has varied at different times and with different topics in anthropology, but as its name indicates – and for reasons outlined in detail in 2.1 below - UK LE is much more committed to the assumptions and practices which constitute ethnography as a methodology than to the theories and models of culture in anthropology. Anthropological codifications of culture have not impressed themselves with any great force on UK linguistic ethnography.

b) In linguistics, empirical procedures - elicitation techniques, data-regularisation, and rules of evidence - are relatively standardised and can often be taken more or less for granted, at least within particular schools/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 regarded as themselves instructive and potentially consequential for the analysis. The researcher's presence/prominence in the field setting defies standardisation and introduces a range of contingencies and partialities that need to be addressed/reported.

c) Linguistics 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 e.g. presupposition & implicature). 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 (cultural) structures. Grammars don't.

Admittedly, the differences between linguistics and ethnography are often more a matter of degree than of kind, but the overall effect of their combination can be characterised as:

i. *'tying ethnography down'*: pushing ethnography towards the analysis of clearly delimitable processes, increasing the amount of reported data that is open to falsification, looking to impregnate local description with analytical frameworks drawn from outside. "The subject matter of ethnography", says Hymes, "[should not be reduced to meaning], but accurate knowledge of meaning is a *sine qua non*" (1996:8), and for this, the empirical heuristics developed in linguistics are an important resource.[4]

ii. *'Opening linguistics up'*: inviting reflexive sensitivity to the processes involved in the production of linguistic claims and to the potential importance of what gets left out, encouraging a willingness to accept (and run with) the fact that beyond the reach of standardised falsification procedures, "[e]xperience… has ways of *boiling over*, and making us correct our present formulas" (W. James 1978:106, cited in Willis & Trondman 2001:2).

There is a great deal of variation in the manner and extent to which research programmes working at the interface of language & culture respond to the contradictory pulls of linguistics and ethnography, carrying linguistic frameworks into the description of culture and ethnographic sensibilities into the analysis of language. [5] Even so, this tension is consistent with the broader philosophical shift characterised as the 'linguistic' or 'discursive' turn in the humanities and social sciences.[6] This shift has been enormously influential in the latter part

[4] e.g. commutation tests as with 'minimal pairs'.

[5] Conversation analysis responds to the tension by allocating ethnographic and linguistic modalities to different stages in the analysis, leaning towards the former in the initial phases of data-exploration (cf Schegloff 1999:577-8; ten Have 1999:102-4), and towards the latter in the formulation of publishable claims. Systemic Functional Grammar, on the other hand, sometimes overlooks the tension, and draws a linguistics sensibility into the modelling of non-language processes (as, arguably, do some articulations of Critical Discourse Analysis [see 2.1 below]).

[6] There is counterpart to this in the 'social' or 'functional' turn in linguistics, though the break with structuralism is often less clear-cut. In fact, Gee 2000 identifies a 14 specific shifts of this nature, ranging from ethnomethodology, discursive psychology and the ethnography of speaking, through situated cognition and cognitive linguistics, to sociology and social theory.

of the 20th century, and it is also often identified as 'post-structuralism' and associated with scholars such as Bakhtin/Volosinov, Bourdieu and Foucault (among others).[7] Among other things, post-structuralism entails a critique of 'totalising' description and the kind of (positivist) 'objectivism' found in e.g. structuralist linguistics,[8] and it insists that researchers should be reflexive about their own intellectual assumptions and socio-historical positioning. For linguistic ethnography in the UK, the inflection that Hymes' gave to this reflexivity in his programmatic work during the 1960s and 1970s has been particularly consequential. When Hymes started theorising the relationship between linguistics and ethnography, he inserted it into the larger endeavour of bringing anthropology 'back home', turning away from the 'study of people not ourselves', 'of coloured people by whites', back to the analysis of educational and other institutional processes in the US (Hymes 1969; [1972]1996:4; [1973]1996:59; see also Street 2004). Much of UK linguistic ethnography falls in line with this injunction, focusing its research inside Britain, and this has given the post-structuralist critiques of 'totalisation' and 'objectivism' a particular edge.

1.4 The limits of ethnographic description

At a time when anthropologists were working with distant or exotic groups that westerners had very little knowledge of, the idea of a relatively all-embracing, 'total' account might have had intuitive appeal (Hymes 1996:5), but as Clifford notes, anthropologists themselves are now routinely critical of claims/aspirations to completeness:

> "Arjun Appadurai (1988) has challenged anthropological strategies for localising non-Western people as 'natives'. He writes of their 'confinement', even 'imprisonment', through a process of representational essentialising… in which one part or aspect of peoples' lives comes to epitomise them as a whole" (1992:100; also eg Varenne & McDermott 1998)

Part of this essentialism was achieved by identifying the people being studied with a particular location, and these 'localisations' "tended to… elide… the wider global world of intercultural import-export in which the ethnographic encounter is always already enmeshed" (ibid 99-100). Clifford and Appadurai were referring to fieldwork abroad, but their criticism has a fairly immediate, everyday resonance if you are researching people and institutions in the area where you are based, where it is quite likely that the kind of people you are studying will turn up in your classes and/or read-&-reply to what you've written, and where there is often already quite a strong feeling that (as Erickson noted in 1975), 'generalisations about groups are embarrassing' (or much worse). In such contexts, it may still be possible to do a "broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group" (what Bloome & Green call 'an ethnography' [1997:183]), but rather than being taken for granted or 'naturalised' as the encompassing unit or outer frame within which all the descriptions of a way of life apply, the informants' 'groupness' is itself likely to be treated as a problematic issue, as a category that exists in a much larger ideological field among a range of other claimed, attributed and contested identities, differing in their availability, salience, authority and material consequences for individual lives.[9] These (more and less closely inter-related) identities are themselves produced and maintained in a very complex array of systems and institutions, and

[7] Bakhtin (1981,1984,1986), Volosinov (1986), Bourdieu (1977, 1991), Foucault (1970,1971,1977).
[8] Volosinov 1986:57 attributes the following principles to objectivist linguistics: "1. Language is a stable, immutable system of normatively identical linguistic forms which the individual consciousness finds ready-made and which is incontestable for that consciousness. 2. The laws of language are the specifically linguistic laws of connection between linguistic signs within a given, closed linguistic system. These laws are objective with respect to any subjective consciousness. 3. Specifically linguistic connections have nothing in common with ideological values. Language phenomena are not grounded in ideological motives… 4. Individual acts of speaking are.. merely fortuitous refractions and variations or plain and simple distortions of normatively identical forms… There is no connection, no sharing of motives, between the system of language and its history. They are alien to one another." For a brief overview of post-structuralism, see e.g. Eagleton 1983:Ch 4.
[9] See Moerman 1974

the effort to produce a 'comprehensive' account of these leads the researcher beyond ethnographic data and fieldwork deep into history, economics, politics and the social sciences generally (Willis & Trondman 2000). In sum, if you live in a city like Manchester, Birmingham or London, the classical, early 20th century anthropological idea of 'comprehensive' ethnography seems implausible, something that you could only try produce if you accepted dominant ideological constructions uncritically, or were happy to close your eyes to the rest of social science.

This visceral scepticism of the possibility of comprehensive ethnography obviously finds wider legitimation in late modern and post-structuralist social theory, where there is a view that "the reality to be modelled is… much more fluid, heterogeneous and under-patterned than anything sociologists have tried to grasp intellectually in the past" (Z. Bauman 1992:65), and where instead of seeking to define the core features of any social group or institution, sociological attention has turned to the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and there is much more ontological acceptance of fragmentation, contingency, indeterminacy, ambivalence and hybridity. Beyond that, scepticism of comprehensive ethnography can also be found in feminist research and in cultural studies where researchers often write about processes and traditions that they themselves have been immersed in since childhood. When lived personal experience serves as a point of departure and as a constant reference throughout the research process, the idea of ethnography as a general process of trying to get close to what's strange seems patronising/ ponderous/ pointless, and in fact in cultural studies, there is often a conspicuous rejection of the idea that cultural theory should take an empirical base in ethnographic description as its starting point.

Not that this invalidates ethnography *per se.* Indeed, it lends impetus to the linguistic connection.

1.5 Ethnographies of discourse

Social categories (like 'male', 'Londoner', 'doctor' etc) obviously aren't all lived in the same way, and their relation to experience is always problematic. In addition, it is very common for 'communities of practice'[10] to develop activities and conventions that are unintelligible within dominant ideologies, and so as a broad characterisation of researcher's overall journey, the process of trying to become familiar with what initially seems strange remains a major concern.[11] Even so, 'belonging' to the institution or group that you're studying, living next door to your informants, and/or teaching their kids, alerts you to the risks of simply trading in old stereotypes for new with claims to comprehensiveness, and this in turn gives impetus to language, discourse and communication as foci for ethnographic analysis.

Language, discourse and communication are appealing for at least three reasons. First, when relatively micro-phenomena – texts and recordings of interaction – are taken as the point of entry into cultural analysis, crucial data are made quite "easily accessible for counter-arguments and independent testing" (Duranti 2001:7; Trueba & Wright 1981). The testimony of fieldnotes may sound quite authoritative in reports on exotic locations which few westerners have ever visited, but evidentiary standards tend to be more demanding in social scientific accounts of social processes close to home. Second, since social identities are themselves extensively (re)produced in language, the analysis of interactional and institutional discourse can reveal a great deal about them, not just denaturalising stereotypes but also describing their emergence, embedding and effectivity. Third, discourse analysis is

[10] As groups of individuals coming together for specifiable periods to engage in particular tasks and activities, 'communities of practice' is a notion of collectivity that seeks to avoid totalising essentialisms (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger & Lave 1998; O'Connor 2003)

[11] Of course when it comes to the analysis of particular events or practices, the investigative process involves continual oscillation between 'getting close' and 'stepping back', and at this level of operation, they may be hard to disentangle (see Section 1.1.a). But this doesn't invalidate the more macroscopic distinction between on the one hand, researchers working on situations and groups they know quite well (but where analytic distance is needed), and on the other, researchers trying to get to know a group they're unfamiliar with (where the challenge is to get close).

often centrally involved in stepping back from easy flow of communicative practice, interrogating its components, underpinnings and effects. In spite of some striking differences (Billig & Schegloff 1999; Wetherell 1998), both critical discourse analysis and conversation analysis provide ways of stepping back from the taken-for-granted in order to uncover the ideological (CDA) or interactional (CA) processes that constitute commonsense and everyday practice (c.f. discursive psychology as well), and this commitment to de-familiarisation can be very well-suited to researchers whose first ethnographic priority is to achieve greater analytic distance on realities that they themselves have lived for a long time.

At the same time – and this is where the wider post-structuralist critique of objectivism becomes relevant - in a specifically linguistic ethnographic perspective, the analysis of language and discourse seeks more than the description of systems and conventions characteristic of linguistics in its dominant forms (see 1.2 above). Ethnography's emphasis on close knowledge through first-hand participation allows the researcher to attend to aspects of lived experience that are hard to articulate, merely incipient, or erased within the systems of representation that are most regular and reliably described. In Comaroff & Comaroff's account of it,

> "[c]ulture always contains within it polyvalent, potentially contestable messages, images and actions. It is, in short, a historically situated, historically unfolding ensemble of signifiers-in-action, signifiers at once material and symbolic, social and aesthetic. Some of these, at any moment in time, will be woven into more or less tightly integrated, relatively explicit world views; others may be heavily contested, the stuff of counter-ideologies and 'subcultures'; yet others may become more or less unfixed, relatively free-floating, and indeterminate in their value and meaning." (1992:7)

For linguistics, the "more or less unfixed, relatively free-floating and indeterminate" are highly intractable, but because it can draw on an ethnographic recognition of the irreducibility of experience ([1.1.g] above), linguistic ethnography can address, for example, the tension between what is felt or meant and what is most readily sayable, [12] exploring what Bauman & Sherzer characterise more generally as "the dynamic interplay between [on the one hand] the social, conventional, ready-made in social life and [on the other] the individual, creative and emergent qualities of human existence" (1989:xix). Indeed, if they're working in an environment where they have extensive experience, having turned to research from a sense of unease about the cultural *status quo* (see 2.2 below), researchers doing linguistic ethnography are particularly likely to scrutinise discourse data for signs of "creative practice", in which "tensions at the very edge of semantic availability… active, pressing but not yet fully articulated" find "specific articulations – new semantic figures - … in material practice" (Williams 1977:130,134; Volosinov 1986; McDermott 1988; Varenne & McDermott 1998:177).[13]

This kind of interest in the complications that people experience expressing themselves through language [14] produces quite an acute sensitivity to the limitations of the ethnography

[12] In Varenne & McDermott formulation, "[i]t is not easy to capture people in the real time of their practice. When we perform practical research tasks…, apparently paradoxical things happen as we notice how actors are both continually sensitive to [convention], and also slightly 'off' the most conventional version of what they could have been expected to do…. [W]hat subjects construct in the real time of their activity can never be said to be what it would be easiest to say it is. What subjects construct may never be any particular thing that any audience may label it to be. We, as analysts, must always take the position that it is something more, something other…" (1998:177).

[13] In this regard, LE analysis requires an epistemological demeanour that is roughly parallel to the one found in certain kinds of literary-linguistic stylistics, even though linguistic ethnography has a much greater commitment to the immediate contexts of production and reception that constrain the interpretation of communicative actions – see Leech 1969:215. A comparable sensitivity to these issues can be found in the 'modern philology' articulated in Becker 1995; Johnstone 1997.

[14] In Ortega Y Gasset's words: '[t]wo apparently contradictory laws are involved in all uttering. One says 'Every utterance is deficient' - it says less than it wishes to say. The other law, the opposite declares, 'Every utterance is exuberant' - it conveys more than it plans and includes not a few things we would wish left silent' (Ortega y Gasset, cited in Becker 1995:5)

of communication in exotic/distant locations. If you are a foreigner researching a cultural group that you have little or no direct experience of, starting out with only a rather a rudimentary knowledge of the vernacular, it is seems unlikely that you will be able to produce much more than a description of conventional systems, even after a year or two of fieldwork (see Borchgrevinck 2003, Tonkin 1984).[15] This can itself be a very worthwhile and demanding task. At a subjective level, the intense introspective/personal confrontation with cultural 'Otherness' is often formative for ethnographers themselves, and the description of different cultural patterns is highly instructive for readers back home, revealing how much of what we unquestioningly assume to be natural and universal is in fact localised cultural convention. But it is likely to take the ethnographer far longer to reach the levels of understanding and familiarity where one can reliably tune into the expressive nuances that generally animate communication, and that intimate contexts of experience, presupposition and value quite often at a tangent to the articulated propositions (cf Gumperz 1982).[16] Without that apprehension of the play of dissonant perspectives on convention, the ethnographic description of unknown ways can still be very informative, but if it was a lived tension between experience and dominant forms of representation that drew you to research in the first place, accounts of this kind may also feel reductive, inclining one to sympathise with the view of Varenne & McDermott that "[t]hick brushstokes of … Balinese may give some hints as to what… Balinese must deal with in their daily lives, but they can greatly distort the complexity of… Balinese as people" (1998:137; Sapir 2002:191-2).

So far, then, it has been suggested that an interest in doing ethnography in sites and processes close-at-hand opens the researcher to three things: a suspicion of claims to comprehensive description, an enhanced sense of the strategic value of discourse analysis, and a concern with agency that is sensitive but very far from identical to structure. These suggestions have already made certain assumptions about the kinds of people that do linguistic ethnography in the UK, and so it is worth now turning to a fuller discussion of linguistic ethnography in a specifically British context.

2. LINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE UK

2.1 Academic connections, influences and antecedents in the UK

Although British anthropologists have shown a strong interest in language from time to time [17], the institutional links between anthropology and linguistics are generally much weaker in the UK than they are in the US. There are relatively few linguistic anthropologists based in anthropology departments in British universities, and British anthropology conferences have not served as sites for any of the debates about language, culture and society that have been most internationally influential in recent years. Instead, there is a good case for saying that from the late 1980s onwards, the conferences and seminars organised by the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL) have been one of the principal UK venues for such discussions, [18] and it has been here that a number of researchers have come to (re-

[15] In fact, it could be argued that if one is travelling on the outside-inwards trajectory, structure looms large, whereas if you're on the inside-outwards route, it is harder to see beyond agency.

[16] Becker gives a vivid account of how hard it is, and how long it takes, to get 'beyond translation' to the individual voice: "The hardest thing for me to do in Southeast Asia is to hear, authentically, the individual voice. The differences of culture, in their freshness and strangeness, cannot at first be - as they are to the insider - part of the background. Across distant languages, the hardest thing to hear is the individual voice, i.e. the deviation from stereotypes[, the only place where self-correction, that is, change, happens - where the living organism interacts with the environment]. …. Everything I observed about Javanese puppet theatre - which made me aware of new possibilities for drama - was heard by Javanese friends with an ultrapolite version of 'So what else is new?' My esthetic enjoyment in coming to terms with Javanese theater was at the level of the genre itself. I never heard the individual voices until I was able to background the newness of the whole tradition." (1995:299, 300)

[17] See e.g. Malinowski 1923, Ardener 1971, Parkin 1984, Grillo 1989, Bloch 1975, 1998, Finnegan 2002

[18] The Sociolinguistics Symposia have also played a significant role, but these only take place once every two years. They are also free-standing events, unsupported by the ongoing administrative infra-structure provided by a learned society like BAAL, and so between the major biennial conferences, there is nothing officially linked to

)describe all or parts of their work as 'linguistic ethnography', tuning this to sustained and continuing involvement/dialogue with a range of the traditions regularly represented at applied linguistics meetings. Indeed, the links to applied-linguistics-as-a-meeting-point-for-different-traditions have been institutionalised by establishing the 'UK Linguistic Ethnography Forum' as a BAAL special interest group. So what are these traditions, how have they influenced UK linguistic ethnography, and in ways is linguistic ethnographic research connected but distinctive from other lines of work?

Although different researchers are likely to emphasise different traditions as their most significant antecedents, there are probably at least half a dozen that have been historically important in shaping analytic sensibilities in linguistic ethnography. By no means all of these have actually emphasised ethnography, but at least two of them have, and these two 'schools'/traditions continue to contribute much to the mainlines of contemporary UK linguistic ethnographic practice.

The first of these has come to be known as the '**New Literacy Studies'** (NLS), and in Britain, it was originally associated with the work Brian Street, subsequently becoming firmly rooted at Lancaster (e.g. Barton 1984; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic 2000), as well as a number of other British venues (e.g Gregory & Williams 2000). Street argued for the importance of ethnography in understanding how people's uses of literacy derive meaning and power through their embeddedness within social practice, and he critiqued the dominant western model of literacy as a neutral set of skills and competencies (1984, 1994), exposing the way in which this taken-for-granted 'autonomous' model promoted particular ideological agendas when applied in education at home and in development projects overseas. Replacing decontextualised and individualistic psychological conceptions of reading and writing with ethnographic accounts of literacy in social and cultural encounters, and rooting these in an 'ideological mode' that highlighted power and not just culture, Street and the NLS played a major part introducing the post-structuralist 'turn' to applied linguistics more generally, and they influenced a wider shift of interest beyond texts-as-products to texts-in-culture-as-a-process (Street 1993). During the 1990s, the NLS also began to include more processual views of language and social action, more constructionist views of text and context, more distributed notions of identity, together with growing interest in ways of analysing the relationship between local literacy practices & events and broader socio-political structures and forces (see e.g. Martin-Jones & Jones 2000).

The second emphatically ethnographic tradition was **Interactional Sociolinguistics**, which began in the US but took root in the UK with John Gumperz's collaboration with Roberts and Jupp at the Industrial Language Training Centre in London, focusing on ethnicity, language & inequality in the workplace (Gumperz, Jupp & Roberts 1979). Cross-cultural communication was one major issue (Roberts et al 1992), culturally (& politically) embedded second language development was another (Roberts & Simonot 1987), and subsequently, code-switching and language crossing joined the repertoire of British IS research on dynamics of ethnicity in speech (Martin-Jones 1995; Rampton 1995). Throughout the 1990s (and indeed often earlier [e.g. Sapir [1931]1949:104; Halliday 1978]), the social constructionist view that human reality is extensively reproduced and created anew in the socially and historical specific activities of everyday life provided socio-linguists of different persuasions with an invigorating sense of the wider social scientific value of their analytic skills. Gumperz provided a particularly sharp empirical view of this, describing communication as an intricate on-line process of imposition, collusion and struggle in which people invoke, avoid or reconfigure the cultural and symbolic capital attendant on identities with different degrees of purchase and accessibility in different situations. He achieved this through a pioneering synthesis of dialectology, pragmatics, conversation analysis, ethnography and Goffmanian interaction analysis, and in the space he created, conversation analysis also made important contributions (e.g. Drew & Heritage 1994). CA wasn't particularly well represented at British applied linguistics meetings during the 1990s, but

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them. In contrast, BAAL runs a programme of 3 or 4 specialist seminars a year (co-sponsored with CUP - for more details, see www.baal.org.uk).

recontextualised within the kind of framework that Gumperz provided, it is another important reference point for linguistic ethnography. Indeed, Gumperz's interpretive sociolinguistics can perhaps also provide an umbrella capable of including the more recent work on interactional discourse that has developed out of Speech Accommodation Theory (Coupland, Coupland & Giles 1991; Coupland 1997; Coupland 2001).

Both interactional sociolinguistics and the new literacy studies stress ethnography, but they are not the only traditions shaping UK LE, and at least three others come to mind.

Working with clearly stated marxian assumptions, **Critical Discourse Analysis** was very strongly represented at BAAL meetings, particularly during the 1990s (e.g. Fairclough 1990, 1993, 1996; Kress 1993*)*, and this itself grew out of systemic-functional linguistics (SFL), a very significant influence in British applied linguistics since the 1970s. In Halliday & Hasan's relationship with Bernstein, SFL had always had an active interest in sociology, and as well as looking towards practical interventions in education (e.g. Fairclough (ed) 1992), CDA's major contribution was to open linguistics to a wider range of sociologists and social theorists, encouraging language researchers to explore the relevance of thinkers such as Habermas, Foucault, Hall, etc, making ideology and the cultural dynamics of globalisation and free-market capitalism legitimate topics for critical language study. Indeed, CDA's political commitments chimed well with Hymes' when he envisaged a reflexive, critical and 'socially constituted linguistics', and proposed that

> "[if] linguistic research is to help as it could in transcending the many inequalities in language and competence in the world today, it must be able to analyse these inequalities. In particular, a practical linguistics so motivated [should] go beyond means of speech and types of speech community to a concern with [both] persons and social structure" (1977:204-5)

But for anyone with an ethnographic sensibility, there have been at least two *difficulties* with leading CDA work: first, detailed and sustained empirical work on non-textual processes and relationships has often been lacking,[19] and second, the movement from (media) textual forms to grand theory frequently seems too rapid, speeding past contingent indeterminacies and missing out the inductive mid-level theory to which ethnography is particularly inclined, working one step at a time from the data bottom-up (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995; Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000; Blommaert et al 2001).

The last two traditions influencing UK LE both address the language learning agenda that has always been salient in British applied linguistics, though while one tends to focus on development processes in the first language, the other has been prototypically concerned with second and foreign language education abroad.

In **neo-Vygotskian research on language and cognitive development**, researchers such Wells, Wood and Mercer have used Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978) -as well as the neo-Vygotskian notion of scaffolding (Bruner 1985) - to investigate teaching and learning interactions between adults and children. For example, Mercer's research (1985, 1995, 2000) focuses on teachers' use of particular kinds of questions to direct students' attention, on other linguistic strategies which serve to extend understanding and conceptual development, and on dialogue in task-focused peer group talk, especially around computers. Overall, Vygotskian research on language and education in Britain has provided important insights into the intricate processes of knowledge construction within particular kinds of classroom exchanges. But it is less concerned with the significance and potential for knowledge construction of other kinds of classroom language practice. It privileges the cognitive dimensions of dialogue and tends to define context in terms of the

[19] In this respect, leading CDA proponents have quite often been criticised for failing to engage empirically with the unpredictabilities of text reception and appropriation, and of producing rather intuitive accounts of social and institutional power relations. Even so, much of the theory behind critical discourse analysis implies the need for ethnographic study of social practices to complement text-focused work – cf Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999:61-2.

task in hand. Relatively little attention is given to the classroom as a cultural context with its own sites of struggle and its own local institutional imperatives and affordances for particular kinds of learning, and the multilayered and contested nature of aims within the classroom is often neglected (cf Maybin 2003).

Finally, one of the earliest and most radical critiques of autonomous, 'objectivist' linguistics in Britain was articulated in the **interpretive applied linguistics for language teaching** (AL for LT) associated with scholars such as Widdowson (1984), Brumfit (1984) and Strevens (1977). Both the study of literature and the experience of teaching and teacher education were important as sources and motives for the development of an alternative epistemology, and this epistemology emphasised relevance to professional cultures, the positionality of knowledge, the naïvety of the traditional linguistic injunction to separate the descriptive from the prescriptive, and the significance of intellectual dialogue outside the fraternity of academic linguists (c.f. Rampton 1997:5,6,11, 2000:108). It also, of course, embraced Hymes 1972 notion of 'communicative competence' (e.g. Brumfit & Johnson (eds) 1979). In the end, however, there was no accompanying 'ethnography of communication'. Rather than being committed to empirical description, Widdowson and others described their research as 'conceptual', and because they tended to work with students who taught in other countries, the scope for ongoing involvement in educational ethnography was limited. In addition, as intellectual leaders in English language teaching world-wide,[20] many in this tradition were caught up in an economy of knowledge that preferred transportable technologies to articulations of local experience, and that also continuously sought to convert metropolitan questions and arguments into polished products for consumption at the periphery (Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 1994). Overall, interpretive applied linguistics was well tuned to Hymes' critique of autonomous linguistics, but it did not use this as a base for developing any identifiably Hymesian programme of empirical research.

Contemporary UK linguistic ethnography, then, draws on a number of traditions. As the discussion has made clear, the ethnography is more pronounced in some than in others, and a number of points have been identified where linguistic ethnography diverges from applied linguistics for English language teaching, neo-Vygotskyan work and CDA. Nevertheless, all five of these traditions look towards practical relevance; there is a very robust and ongoing tradition of dialogue between them;[21] and the boundaries around each tend to be very permeable, with a lot of cross-fertilisation, synthesis and for the most part, not much policing. In their development of a 'practical linguistics' in which the analysis extends beyond "means of speech and types of speech community to… persons and social structure" (Hymes (1977:204-5), these traditions may have prioritised different issues - literacy practices, ethnicities in discourse, power and ideology, cognitive development, English language teaching – but plenty of links can and have been made between these, and the perspectives they offer have also been applied to a wide range of other issues too.[22]

At the same time, it is noticeable that all of these formative influences take language rather than culture as their principal point of analytic entry into the problems they seek to address. The umbrella organisation in the UK where many of these traditions met during the 1990s was an association for applied linguistics, NOT anthropology, and only a few of the participants in these discussions had a thorough knowledge of classic anthropological ethnographies or models of culture (theories of ritual, gift-exchange, kinship etc). So in fact, even if they had wanted to produce 'comprehensive ethnography… documenting a wide range of a way of life" (Hymes 1996:4), they didn't really have the accredited expertise to do so. Instead, UK researchers tended to develop their commitment to ethnography in the process of working from language, literacy and discourse outwards, and so even though they

[20] Brumfit's initial focus was on English teaching in Africa, but language education in Britain soon became a major concern in his work.

[21] Since the number of individuals claiming principal allegiance to any particular school is sometimes rather small, this is perhaps inevitable.

[22] It is noticeable that at different times (and in different ways), a number of these traditions have taken a very active interest in the work of Basil Bernstein (e.g. Wells 1981, 1984; Street 1984; Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999?), and this has continued within LEF (see Section 3.2 below).

have varied in just how far 'outwards' they reached, for the most part the ethnography has taken the narrower focus that Hymes calls "topic-oriented" (Hymes 1996:5).

Beyond the issue of intellectual affiliations, there is also a case for saying that linguistic ethnography in the UK has also been influenced the general biographical trajectories of its practitioners.

2.2 Research trajectories and academic & political demeanours

The principle arena for the development of UK linguistic ethnography has been applied linguistics (cf 2.1 above), and in applied linguistics, people often embark on research a little later in life than students in disciplines like maths, psychology, sociology or indeed formal syntax, phonetics etc (Brumfit 1985:72,76). As 'mature' students in their late 20s/early-mid 30s (or later), the move from work- or family commitments into research is often more motivated by interests generated in practical activity than by a fascination with academic theory *per se*. Indeed, in many cases this shift into linguistics and/or ethnography is an attempt to find a way of adequately rendering quite extensive personal experience, and the initial spur involves not just the kind of 'contrastive insight' that Hymes describes (1996:6), but often quite an intense frustration with the institutional processes in which people have found themselves living.[23] In Julian Edge's formulation at the 2002 LEF Colloquium, this process involves an overall shift from the inside moving outwards, *trying to get analytic distance* on what's close-at-hand, rather than a move from the outside inwards, *trying to get familiar* with the strange.[24] Indeed, one of the assumptions underpinning the discussion in previous sections is that this broad, from-inside-outwards directionality is more characteristic of researchers doing linguistic ethnography than the outside => inwards trajectory associated with anthropology in its early/mid 20th century attempts to comprehend the exotic.

This directionality has implications for the academic and political demeanour of a UK LE. If you're working in the country where you're a citizen, if you're studying an institution where you have spent a substantial part of your life, and if you're maybe also actually credentialed and paid to draw research into professional practice, then you are also likely to be a lot less vulnerable to the kind of ontological uncertainty about political intervention that anthropologists feel when they are working on distant cultures abroad. Similarly, if you start your working life as an interpreter, a health worker or a classroom teacher, [25] you often feel empowered as you become more fluent and at ease with academic knowledge. You probably recognise that traditionally, practical relevance has been stigmatised in the academy, but up to a point at least, you made your own peace with that when you first signed up for your professional training. Rather than having marginality to disciplinary knowledge as your principal anxiety, the worry is that you're being seduced into irrelevance to activity in the real

[23] We were looking (a) for an analytic idiom to make sense of what actually seemed to be going on, and (b) for some kind of public language to make our perspective on this more hearable, to enable us to speak more authoritatively about what really seemed to be going on in the institutions where we worked. This is often features as a reason why people start to do educational research, though it may be the particular balance between (a) and (b) which determines whether one turns to ethnography or to other modes of enquiry.

[24] See footnote 11 above.

[25] In fact, among researchers affiliating with LE in the UK, education seems to be a particular significant as both a focus and launching platform for research. In a show of 40 hands at the "Second Research Seminar on Linguistic Ethnography" in 2002, two-thirds to three quarters of the participants indicated that they had close links with schooling and education. As topics and sites for research, schooling and education have proved to be a major interest at other meetings, and a substantial proportion of the researchers on the mailing list are based in university departments of education.

Beyond that, experience suggests that it is much more common for people to move to the ethnography of education from teaching than to come to the study of education from linguistics, sociology or anthropology. Bloome & Green 1997 capture something of this difference when they distinguish the 'ethography of education (e.g. anthropologists or sociologists studying education)' from 'ethnography in education' (e.g. educational researchers, teacher educators, teachers, and students employing ethnographic research to study education). At the same time, Bloome & Green insist the dividing line is far from clear cut, and in the UK, individuals often move from the latter (ethnog in ed) to reposition themselves closer to the former (ethnog of ed).

world,[26] and this ambivalence about 'merely academic' work makes it easier to follow in pursuit when "problems lead where they will and…relevance commonly leads across disciplinary boundaries" (Hymes 1969:44). It was this kind of 'habitus' that helped to sustain (and was supported by) the dialogues conducted under the umbrella of applied linguistics, and an orientation like this has also been assisted by the fact that the old boundaries between paradigms and between theory-and-practical-relevance are now less insistent than they were 20 years ago.

Twenty five years ago, Hymes outlined the vision of a democratic society where there was one pole with people who'd been professionally trained in ethnography and at the other pole, there was the general population, respected for their intricate and subtle knowledge of the worlds they lived in. In between, there were people who could "combine some disciplined understanding of ethnographic inquiry with the pursuit of their vocation" (1980:99). Hymes wanted to make the middle group as extensive as possible, but in his view at the time, it was the professional ethnographers who would provide the launching pad. This vision carried across the Atlantic, but in doing so, it took root in terrain where professional ethnographers interested in language were rather thin on the ground.[27] Instead, ethnography was appropriated and 'boot-strapped' by a combination of Hymes' middle group and people doing research in applied linguistics, and it is histories like these that have fostered the interests and dispositions outlined in Sections 2.1 & 2.2.

How does all of this compare with research in North America?

2.3 Comparison with North American linguistic anthropology (LA)

Academic life in the UK is generally more fragmented than in North America, institutional mechanisms for the reproduction of particular paradigms are less highly developed, and so it is probably easier in Britain for scholars to follow "problems… across disciplinary boundaries". It has also been suggested that contemporary linguistic anthropology in the US gives "[t]he impression that scholarship is somehow its own reward, or that social criticism is at best an ad hoc and occasional concern" (Collins 2003:36), and so this too may at least partially differentiate linguistic ethnography in the UK from LA in the US. Nevertheless, North American linguistic anthropology is still a very important reference point.

As indicated in the citations above and below, Dell Hymes' early articulations of the relationship between linguistics and ethnography remain an inspiration for linguistic ethnography in the UK,[28] and beginning in the 1970s and early 1980s, intellectual collaborations and exchanges between North American and British researchers were formative influences in the UK (e.g. Gumperz & Roberts, Heath & Street, Hymes & Bernstein, and more recently, Heller & Martin-Jones). Indeed, scholars working in education departments in North America have also quite often articulated views that resonate with the kinds of stance expressed in this paper, Erickson, McDermott, Collins and Heller being conspicuous examples.[29] More generally, with its emphasis on protracted immersion in the particularities of situated practice (e.g. Sacks 1992), American empiricism provides an important model for British work, and the ongoing production of rich and sophisticated conceptual frameworks in North American linguistic anthropology continues to be an invaluable analytic resource (c.f. Duranti (ed) 2001).

At the same time, though, with a strong base in classical anthropology and quite an entrenched tendency to make population groups like 'the Balinese' the subject of its

[26] In this respect, the teaching-to-ethnography trajectory often encourages a kind of low-church Protestantism that puts conscience above faith, prefers mission to pedigree, and gets suspicious with any whiff of popery.

[27] In Britain, Brian Street stood out almost alone as a credentialed professional ethnographer providing the 'middle group' with guidance.

[28] Cf the LEF Colloquium at the 2001 BAAL Annual Meeting entitled 'Rethinking the Ethnography of Communication'.

[29] See, for example, the micro-ethnography of Erickson and McDermott (e.g. Erickson & Shultz 1982, Erickson 2004; McDermot & Tylbor 1984, McDermott 1988, Varenne & McDermott 1998), as well as the work of Heller (e.g. Heller 2001; Heller & Martin-Jones (eds) 2001), Collins (e.g. Collins 1986, 2003, Collins & Michaels 1986) and the authors drawn together in Wortham & Rymes (eds) 2003.

descriptive predicates, one may tentatively venture that it has been harder for US work to relinquish ethnic generalisation and retune to the view that "[t]he landscapes of group identity… are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer territorialised, spatially bounded, historically unself-conscious, or culturally homogeneous" (Appadurai 1991:191; cited by Kroskrity in the last two pages of Duranti's *Companion to Linguistic Anthropology* 2004:511).[30] Arguably at least, the shift from 'cultures' to 'ideologies' has moved slower in North America – compare, for example, Heath 1983 with Street 1984 and Rosen 1985 – and this has been partly because North American work has tended to privilege ethnicity and race as the primary categories of social difference, in contrast to the British emphasis on class.[31] 'Class' brings Marxian perspectives into play more rapidly than ethnicity and race, and in addition, in education - one of the principal sites for socio-linguistic analysis - sociology has been much more influential in the UK than anthropology, whereas in the USA, the situation is reversed. As a result,

> "[f]or the (American) anthropologist the classroom is the site of cultural differences, often ethnic in origin, and the teacher an agent of cultural imposition. For the (British) sociologist the frame of reference is a class-based social structure, in which teachers and pupils alike are subject to the everyday disciplines of work" (Delamont & Atkinson 1995:34)

In this context, British research has tended to see discrimination and inequality as <u>intrinsic</u> to the disciplines of the institution, placing less faith in the possibilities of cultural bridge-building between home and school, and in line with this perception of where the roots of inequality reside, there has been a great deal <u>less</u> work in Britain on young children's socialisation within 'non-standard communities'.[32] Ethnicity certainly has figured as a major interest in British linguistic ethnography, but there have been only a few empirical studies of domestic cultural practices (Gregory & Williams 2000), and instead, the imbrication of ethnicity/race with ideology has been repeatedly emphasised (eg Hewitt 1986; Roberts & Ellis 1987:21-23; Rampton 1995; Martin-Jones & Saxena 1996).

Even so, it is important not to exaggerate these differences, and in a compelling overview of linguistic anthropology in the US, Duranti discerns a strong recent desire

> "to use language studies to reach out to other disciplines [and to deal] with theoretical concerns that came from elsewhere… The interest in capturing the elusive connection between larger institutional structures and processes and the 'textual' details of everyday encounters (the so-called macro-micro connection) has produced a new wave of projects that start from a concern for situating one's work in the context of larger theoretical issues and an abandonment of the assumption that language should be one's only or main preoccupation. In contrast to earlier generations of students who started from a fascination with linguistic forms and languages… or from their use in concrete and culturally significant social encounters…, students today typically ask questions such as 'What can the study of language contribute to the understanding of this particular social/cultural phenomenon (e.g. identity formation, globalisation, nationalism)?'. The formulation of this type of question conceives of language no longer as the primary object of inquiry but as an instrument for gaining access to complex social processes… for many young scholars today linguistic anthropology is a tool for studying what is *already* being studied by scholars in other fields" (2003:332-3)

[30] Similarly, British work on cultural hybridisation only gets substantively discussed on the final page of Duranti's *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader* (Hill 2001:460).
[31] C.f. e.g. Hymes 1996:187-8; Ortner 1991:164; Urcioli 1996, Bradley 1996:75; Milroy 1999:192ff
[32] If class is taken as the central frame, it is hard to extricate the study of home socialisation from a 'deficit' framework, which makes it a much harder topic to justify. Bernstein's early work focused on home socialisation, but it met with a great deal of hostility, and he subsequently made schools the arena for his analyses of class reproduction, producing analyses of pedagogic discourses and practices that were much more easily recognised as ideology critique.

There is much here to connect with contemporary LE in the UK, although at least in terms of Duranti's representation, there are two important differences. In Britain, these scholars are often not so young, and they don't typically start from a particularly theoretical interest in social/cultural phenomena like identity formation, globalisation etc. Instead, the initial impetus to undertake research is often grounded in personal experience (see 2.2 above), and instead of asking, 'top-down', "what can linguistic analysis contribute to issues already identified by other social researchers?", the driving question tends to be a 'bottom-up': "what more general issues can the description & analysis of my experience help to clarify?". Second, this interest in building links to other fields isn't new for British researchers. Instead, it has been a constitutive concern for 10-20 years. The umbrella provided by BAAL is distinctly inter-disciplinary; there are obviously very long-standing links with education as a field of study; and throughout the 1990s, cross-fertilisation with social theory was central to the mission of Critical Discourse Analysis.

So much, then, for the contemporary identity of a UK linguistic ethnography, sharpened with some tentative suggestions about the differences in the US. What of UK LE's future?

3. ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

3.1 Generalisation and theory development

Ethnography's general emphasis on participant-observation and the description of local worlds encourages two criticisms. First, it is accused of failing to provide a basis for generalising beyond the limited number of situations that the researcher has been involved with. Second, it is often said to be over-committed to the relatively micro, neglecting the larger-scale social and historical processes and systems (c.f. e.g. Hammersley 1992:85-95; Burawoy et al 1991:271ff). In both respects, ethnography is often regarded as inadequate in its theory, and to the extent that this is or has been true of linguistic ethnography in the UK, it is problematic in at least two ways:

- *Analytically*, concentration on the domain of face-to-face interaction may incline researchers to exaggerate the power of human agency and to neglect less visible processes of social reproduction (Burawoy 1991:284-5). Specifically in an educational context, this can bias their research towards 'learning' and 'success' in educational processes, obscuring the logic and rationality of failure, which is just as much as the systemic product of school social practices.[33]
- *Institutionally*, a neglect of theory perhaps restricts linguistic ethnography's appeal for younger people who are a very important constituency for its future development. Hitherto, practical issues experienced in working life may have motivated a substantial proportion of the people aligning with linguistic ethnography, but such concerns may be much less likely to draw graduates coming out of BA programmes. Instead, they are likely to be attracted to research by a more "theoretical interest in social/cultural phenomena" (Duranti, cited above), and if linguistic ethnography doesn't address this, they won't engage with it.

In US linguistic anthropology, one response to the lack-of-theory criticisms [34] has been to embrace the micro, to turn up the linguistics, and to aim for generalisations about communicative practice. Researchers may only have data on a limited number of institutional situations, but they encounter huge quantities of language, and if they narrow their units of analysis from situations to particular language practices, the scope for generalisation is substantially increased. In line with this, linguistic anthropology in North America has elaborated a substantial body of theoretical concepts – 'performance', 'indexicality',

[33] See Varenne & McDermott 1998 & O'Connor 2003.

[34] Commenting on the US ethnography of communication in the 1970s, for example, Duranti notes: "generalisations were rare; scholars did very little comparison, and even when comparisons were made… it was to show that a commonly accepted analytic concept (e.g. formality) was problematic across speech communities and contexts" (2003:329)

'entextualisation' – and linguistic ethnographic work in Britain has also produced relatively general theories about different types and dimensions of language practice (e.g. Martin-Jones 1995 on classroom code-switching; Rampton 1995 on 'crossing').

But the articulation of language practice with slower and wider social processes is still problematic. Writing of linguistic anthropology in the US, Collins suggests that

> "although the concepts discussed [in this tradition] - indexicality, creativity, poetic structure, [entextualisation] and metadiscursive framing - contribute to a viable social-cum-linguistic constructivism, they do not, in and of themselves, provide a clear image of what society is like: how it is organised, what its primary institutions are, or whether it is changing or static…. [T]here is an agnosticism about macro-sociological structure, or, what is effectively the same, an assumption that such structure need not be analyzed unless directly evident in language use." (Collins 2003:36-37)

If you have either worked in schools or your research is animated by a frustration with state policy or prevailing institutional discourses, this seems unduly limited, and to bring out the importance of inserting the ethnography of particular sites with a more broadly focused process of cumulative, comparative generalisation, Hymes invokes the notion of 'ethnology':

> "[e]thnography, as we know, is in fact an interface between specific inquiry and comparative generalisation. It will serve us well, I think, to make prominent the term 'ethnology', that explicitly invokes comparative generalisation… An emphasis on the ethnological dimension takes one away from immediate problems and from attempt to offer immediate remedies, but it serves constructive change better in the long run. Emphasis on the ethnological dimension links [educational ethnography] with social history, through the ways in which larger forces for socialisation, institutionalisation, reproduction of an existing order, are expressed and interpreted in specific settings." (Hymes 1996:19).

Linguistic ethnography's current constitution in the UK does not provide ideal conditions for processes of cumulative, comparative generalisation, and the applied linguistics/from-practical-experience-to-research trajectory described in 2.2 isn't a particularly easy starting point.[35] Interested students generally only get a one-year conversion MA before they are thrown on their own for a PhD,[36] and then if they're lucky enough to get an academic job afterwards, it may well be in a university education department where the teaching loads are excessive (c.f. Brumfit 1985:72). Once in post, it may also be tempting to put rapport and relevance before theory development. One of the complications facing linguistic ethnographers working in educational sites is that yesterday's theoretical conceptions – e.g. 'communicative competence', 'language community'[37] – often still have a lot of currency in official educational discourses. It can be a difficult task translating back and forward between an established discourse and a new one that one is still struggling to enunciate oneself, and the

[35] In educational contexts, a school-teaching habitus can also often skew the way in which one engages with fundamental texts, feeding a confusion between the ontological and the empirical. Very often, in source texts themselves - in Halliday and in Bakhtin for example - notions like 'the negotiation of meaning' or 'dialogicality' are seen as basic aspects of all human communication, even the most monological. But reading them as an ex-practitioner, driven by a commitment to making things better, there is a tendency (a) to construe ontological concepts as properties that one can find to different degrees in different situations, and then (b) to assume that if there's more of it, it's better. That can be problematic for ethnography, ideologically blinding the researcher, for example, to the empirical processes involved in 'masked pedagogies'.

[36] One year language-oriented MAs are generally much too short for any kind of decent exposure to different theoretical traditions (in my MA, for example, we did Halliday and Chomsky in about 4 sessions). Even though they're often much more motivated, MA students seldom get to cover the ground in the depth and detail that undergraduates experience.

[37] 'Language community' itself may not figure very prominently, but the idea that people can be readily associated with one ethno-linguistic group rather than another still has a lot of currency in official thinking. See the discussion in Rampton, Roberts, Leung and Harris 2002:376-379.

simplest path may be to stick with the old formulations, slightly adjusting them here and there with new data, or maybe defending them against technocratic misappropriation. In principle, institutional sites like these can be rich in both grounded and theoretical opportunities, not just inviting researchers to study the complex paths and historical developments of language ideology, [38] but also pushing them to reflect personally on where they used to be and where they are today. But using ethnography for this kind of theorisation requires a good deal of labour, time, reading and experience, and in reality, it is often very hard to extend one's analytic gaze beyond the most obvious elements of institutional policy and practice.

3.2 Building community and extending dialogue

UK LE's constitutive conviction is that the combination of ethnography with linguistics and linguistically sensitive discourse analysis produces methodological sensibilities and analytic frameworks and procedures that are ideally suited to understanding the intersection of communicative practice with social and cultural process (Section 1). The UK LE Forum was established in 2001 in order to:

- bring together UK-based researchers conducting linguistic ethnography here and abroad, and
- to explore a range of past and current work, to identify key issues, and to engage in methologically and theoretically well-tuned debate.

It runs a website (www.ling-ethnog.org.uk), has an email list of c. 120 researchers, and in the period March 2001- September 2004, it has held 8 meetings, discussing:

- the relationship between linguistic ethnography and (a) the ethnography of communication in the 1960s-80s, (b) the treatment of language in British social anthropology, (c) education, (d) post-structuralist, feminist ethnography
- current research projects and collaborations; multilingualism & multilingual spaces; translation, interpreting, and auto-ethnography
- methodological issues arising from/associated with: fieldnotes and transcripts; reflexivity; team vs individual research; time, the global and the local; 'systematic reviews' of research; genre; Bernstein's 'languages of description'; the launch manifesto of the journal *Ethnography*
- pre-circulated articles by Bakhtin, Cronin, D. Foley, Fairclough, Halliday & Hasan, Hanks, Mehrez, Pratt, Willis & Trondman.

These meetings have been attended by a significant number of researchers based outside the UK,[39] as well as a number of British-based scholars who are not members of BAAL.[40]

The Forum seeks to consolidate bilateral and collective discussions that are both encouraging and self-critical, and UK linguistic ethnography is still very much in the process of developing ways of working with data. At Forum meetings, discussions about data analysis and interpretation have wrestled with reflexivity and subjectivity, looking for ways of reckoning with researchers' dispositions and positioning without losing the ability to say anything about the data at all, falling into relativism. And these discussions have also problematised the data we actually work with, recognising that because LE deals with communicative practices in a general sense, rather than simply spoken language or even spoken and written language, analysis needs engage with a variety of different artefacts.

Looking to the future, a list of potential areas of development would include:

- the involvement of younger researchers
- the identification of areas where there might be collaborative theory building across projects

[38] See eg Foley 1990, Heller 1999, Jaffe 1999, 2003.

[39] Jan Blommaert (Gent), Gabriella Budach (Frankfurt), Jim Collins (SUNY), Monica Heller (Toronto), Don Kulick (NYU), Marco Jacquemet (San Francisco), Alexandra Jaffe (Long Beach California), Margaret Obondo (Stockholm), Joan Pujolar (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya), Stef Slembrouck (Gent)

[40] Shereen Benjamin (Birmingham), Lindsey Crickmay (St Andrews), Valerie Hey (Brunel), Rosaleen Howard (Liverpool), Piotr Kuhiwczah (Warwick), Gemma Moss (Institute of Education), Margaret Wetherell (Open University), Helen Woods (Birmingham).

- the development of cross-institutional training workshops
- the development and consolidation of cross-national links
- theoretical and programmatic elaboration of ways of tying research into institutional policy and everyday practice.

But given its origins and current profile, it seems highly unlikely that UK linguistic ethnography could or would want to become self-sufficient as a sub-field.[41] As a methodological construct, UK LE has emerged from interaction with a range of research programmes brought together under the umbrella of BAAL, and there can be no doubt that conversations in BAAL will continue to provide important input to the agendas of linguistic ethnographic research. Outside applied linguistics, LE research has obviously been extensively involved in education, but there is a good case for trying to make the methodological resources it offers more widely available, both across different institutional sites and across the social sciences more generally. In spite of a lot of shared interests and ongoing dialogues, 'linguistic ethnography' identifies a position that is methodologically fairly distinct when compared with applied linguistics, education studies and a good deal of linguistic anthropology. As a perspective and method of working, UK linguistic ethnography opens lines of analysis and debate that are well worth developing.

13th December 2004

[41] Collins raising the same issue of self-sufficiency in relation to the 'New Literacy Studies': "It remains to be seen whether the diverse work under the New Literacy banner will consolidate into a shared research program or whether it will continue to be channelled by the numerous disciplines and professions – anthropology, linguistics, psychology, education – that train and employ its practitioners" (1995:80-81)

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