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**Language & the Construction of Identities in  
Contemporary Europe: Notes towards a  
research programme**

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**LANGUAGE & THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE:  
NOTES TOWARDS A RESEARCH PROGRAMME**  
King's - Gent Workshop <sup>1</sup>  
2003

These notes are designed as a 'data-theory' dialogue, and they consist of

1. a series of short vignettes and empirical research scenarios that have been produced by different hands, but that have been brought together to evoke something of the range of situations that any programme of research on language and identity in contemporary Europe needs to address
2. suggestions about the kind of theoretical and methodological orientation that would need to underpin such a research programme, doing justice to the complexity of the issues intimated in the empirical scenarios.

The result is inevitably rather messy/inelegant/heteroglossic. But the overarching proposition is that the research perspectives specified in Section 2 can provide valuable purchase on the range of situations outlined in Section 1, and that conversely, a research programme that fell short of these methodological requirements could risk superficiality, failure - or worse.

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## **1. CONTEMPORARY EUROPE: FOUR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH SCENARIOS**

The empirical scenarios that follow cover four 'levels of analysis': individual experience; the nation-state; a transnational diaspora; transnational economies.

### **1.1 The experience of individuals: Two school-kids in England** (Roxy Harris, Constant Leung & Ben Rampton)<sup>2</sup>

*Case One: T.*

T. is 15 years old and born in the UK. His mother, a Sikh, was born in India but has spent most of her life in Britain. 'When I was born my father left me and my mum', and now his father, a Muslim, lives in the United States, though he often stays with the family in the UK. T. has relatives in India and he has visited there twice.

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Rampton drafted these eclectic notes, incorporating written contributions from Jim Collins, Roxy Harris, Constant Leung, Annabel Tremlett, Vally Lytra and Adam Lefstein, and drawing on discussions that also included Jan Blommaert, Roxy Harris, Stef Slembrouck, Brian Street, Celia Roberts, Shirley Heath, Peter Medway, Jenny Jenkins and Paul Shrubshall. This is very much a text-in-process, and at present it can make only very muted claims to representing any kind of consensual position.

T. has strong Sikh affiliations, but doesn't display any visible signs of this. He is, however, a leading member of a Punjabi dhol drumming band, and often performs in school. Three of the seven band members wear Sikh turbans, but when asked if they ever wear traditional Punjabi dress, he is emphatic that for them this denotes the practices of an older generation:

'... [the] older time ones, yeh, they wear their Indian clothes, yeh? the proper bhangra so like ... we're the Dholis of the new generation yeh? so we wear Ralph Lauren clothes and all that we like we got our Ralph Lauren suits ... stripey trousers with blue shirts ... we wear um black Kickers [shoes].'

T. and the band have played alongside well known bhangra artists and film stars from India at major shows in London.

T. takes great pride in the Punjabi language - 'my language is very important to me' - and insists that before he first attended school, he mainly spoke Punjabi, with little exposure to English. To develop his Punjabi and to teach him more about Sikh religion, history, culture and traditions, his family sent him to a voluntary community school on Saturdays between the ages of 7 to 9, but he didn't continue with this because

'I didn't like the writing part ... I thought my mum can't write it, so my grandparents can't write it. My grandad can but my grandmother can't so I thought it isn't really important.'

He also finds it difficult to read Punjabi in the Gurmukhi script at the Gurdwara, though he can improvise written representations of Punjabi speech in the Roman alphabet. At Blackhill School, he has been learning to speak, read and write German for almost four years, and so now, although his written standard English is modest to weak, his literacy competence is strongest in English, with German next and Punjabi third.

In terms of spoken language, T. is very aware of variation in Punjabi:

'When I am with my friends I speak slang Punjabi. When I am with my family I speak standard casual Punjabi. But when I go to India I get very weird Punjabi. In India they pronounce words differently.'

He also affiliates to Jamaican language ('rasta talk') - 'we don't say hello ... we say "wha gwan" and all that, we say it like that ... we don't talk English' - although not as strongly as some of his peers:

'they've got into the rasta man talk and all that - they can't come back to Punjabi, like I know V\_\_\_\_. in our year, he's Punjabi but he speaks rasta and all that ... I don't think he knows a lot about his religion'.

Beyond its general currency, T. also picks up Jamaican language from inter-ethnic friendships outside school, and he also loves Reggae music:

'white mans ain't composed it ... it's the black people they composed it ... we like their music ... I'm not interested in anything the songs that English people sing, the ones I like Bob Marley and all that, we used to listen to that ...'

#### *Case Two: Mrs Roberts, Meryem and the National Literacy Hour*

'South Town' is a small inner London primary school with 200 pupils, a quarter of whom have a home language other than English. The teacher, Mrs Roberts, is a peripatetic ESL teacher who comes to the school for 1 \_ days a week. Together with the class teacher for 10 year olds ('Year 5'), she was concerned that Meryem wasn't in a position to benefit from next week's scheduled work in the 'Literacy Hour.' Meryem was literate in Turkish, but she was a non-speaker of English when she had arrived at the school just two months ago. For the class as a whole, next week's Literacy Hour objectives were:

- to identify the point of view from which a story is told and how this affects a reader's response
- to change the point of view, e.g .tell an incident or describe a situation from the point of view of another character or perspective
- to write from another character's point of view

- to investigate clauses by identifying the main clause in a long sentence, by investigating sentences which contain more than one clause, and by understanding how clauses are connected<sup>3</sup>

The text chosen for the week by the class teacher included the following:

‘Amanda said bye from both of us and we went back to class. I felt a bit guilty not telling her what Dad had said about her dad, but at that time I still thought she was my friend and I wanted to protect her feelings.

I did have a few doubts about Amanda’s dad during the rest of the afternoon.

What if he flew into a rage when I walked through the door and said something hurtful about Dad?

Or mum?

And my head erupted again?

And he was cleaning out a goldfish bowl ...

I told myself to stop being silly.’ (Gleitzman, 1992: 40)

There was no ESL support available during the Literacy Hour, and so both teachers decided that Meryem should have some focused language tuition in a one-to-one withdrawal session the week before.

Mrs Roberts decided to teach Meryem to use point-of-view constructions such as ‘*I think Salil is nice,*’ leading into constructions such as ‘*I think Salil is nice because...*’. In their session together, they used a bilingual dictionary to read some of the ‘Happy Families’ books, written by Allan Ahlberg for 6 to 8 year old monolingual English speakers, and Mrs Roberts introduced character drawings and speech bubbles. During the daily literacy hour the following week, Meryem used these when the class wrote about the different viewpoints, and they also helped her to make an oral contribution to one of the whole class feedback sessions at the end.

Mrs Roberts’ written reflections on this episode included the following:

“It was very obvious that M would have no understanding of a text as dense and lacking in supporting visuals...I was aware that I wouldn’t necessarily have targeted these [sentence] structures pre-literacy hour days. Then it tended to be more child’s needs led, married with the demands of the lessons. I think probably the balance has now swung to literacy hour demands, adjusted where possible to meet needs of child”.

*Some educational observations:* Although the language learning needs of T. and Meryem are obviously very different, they are neither exceptional, nor do they exhaust the considerable diversity of ESL learning needs in English schools today. According to DfEE 1997:34<sup>4</sup>, ‘children from ethnic minority backgrounds now form a tenth of the pupil population’, and within this, there are at least three very broad types of bilingual student (Harris 1999; Mohan, Leung and Davison 2001:200-1). First, there are ‘new’ arrivals like Meryem, then there are ‘low key’ British bilinguals, such as T., and last, there are high-achieving multilinguals. But none of these categories are straightforward, and even within the apparently simple ‘newcomer’ category, there is enormous variation in the previous educational experience, as well as major differences in wealth and income (with some belonging to cosmopolitan elites). At the same time, students in both the newcomer and the low-key bilingual categories are likely to be short-changed by current language education policy. Meryem needs much more sustained language teaching and a more flexible curriculum than the system allows her, and in spite of Mrs Roberts’ valiant and resourceful efforts on her behalf, the conditions for language learning experienced by Meryem can be politely described as sub-optimal. T. needs assistance with standard English academic writing, though this needs to be set within a rather more subtle understanding of his sociolinguistic situation than is allowed in the description of students like him as ‘EAL learners’ (eg QCA 2000:23<sup>5</sup>). Like a very great many young people in England and elsewhere, T.’s vernacular speech reflects his participation in the complex

<sup>3</sup> See Department for Education and Employment 1998. *The National Literacy Strategy: Framework for Teaching*. London: DfEE. p48

<sup>4</sup> Department for Education and Employment 1997 *Excellence in Schools*. London: HMSO.

<sup>5</sup> Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) 2000. *A Language in Common: Assessing English as an*

urban dynamics of class, ethnicity and gender, and as his profile implies, language for him, as for others, is suffused by issues of politics and identity (cf Hewitt 1986; Rampton 1995, 2001; Back 1996:123; Brah 1996:209; Harris 1997:25).

Education policy also offers relatively little in support of other languages in Meryem and T.'s repertoire. If Meryem's lucky enough to go to a secondary school which offers GCSE-exam track courses for 13 year olds in a range of languages, or where there are a lot of Turkish speaking children, in three or so years' time she might be able to study Turkish at school for several hours a week. It's more likely, though, that if she wants to develop her first language, she'll have to look for support in community classes outside the state school sector. As for T., Blackhill School recently introduced a two-year GCSE Punjabi programme for a younger year group, although even if T. had been eligible, it's not certain that he would have opted for this, given the problems that he now had with the script due to his lack of sustained Punjabi literacy instruction.

### **1.2 A nation-state: Contemporary Greece (Vally Lytra)**

Large-scale migration from abroad and the continual movement of people belonging to linguistic minority groups from the periphery to urban centres has rapidly changed Greece's demographic and cultural picture.

Two significant parameters have shaped how Greeks perceive their national selves and their national 'others': (1) the legacy of ancient Greece and (2) the role of Greek Orthodoxy (Soysal & Antoniou 2001; Troubeta 2001). These parameters have influenced the ways modern Greek historiography situates the national self vis-à-vis Western European and non-Western European nations respectively. On the one hand, modern Greeks are seen as sharing with Western European nations a common Greco-Roman heritage, while simultaneously being at a distance, due to their Greek-Orthodox faith and Ottoman past. On the other hand, for modern Greeks, the 'Turk' emerges as the significant non-European 'other' (ibid). These parameters have played an important role in shaping both national and local discourses (e.g. in print and other media) as well as state policies, especially in education (e.g. first language curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, standardization, second/foreign language policy and planning), through out the 20<sup>th</sup> century and still have a strong resonance (cf. Fragkoudaki & Dragona 1997).

*Indigenous linguistic minorities:* According to Trudgill 1992, with the exception of Turkish <sup>6</sup> spoken by the majority of the members of the Greek Muslim minority of Western Thrace <sup>7</sup>, all other linguistic minorities investigated <sup>8</sup> exhibited low ethnolinguistic vitality which clearly indicated that a rapid language shift to Greek has been well under way (Trudgill 1992: 230). As Trudgill notes, 'most members of minority communities [with the exception of turcophone speakers I would add] show little concern about the fate of their languages and have a low opinion of their worth' (ibid; see also

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<sup>6</sup> In Western Thrace (a region in the north east of Greece) turcophone speakers speak West Thracian Turkish ('ç'ÛÈÏÔıÚ.ÎÈÛÈÏ') [Dutikothrakiotika] or 'Bat > Trakya Türçeği'). This is a Turkish variety characterized by morphological simplification and phonological differences vis-à-vis Standard Modern Turkish (Sella-Mazi 1993). Standard Modern Turkish is one of the two languages (along with Greek) taught in the Greek-Turkish bilingual schools to which members of this minority send their children.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek Muslim minority of Western Thrace is characterized as an indigenous religious minority whose linguistic, religious and cultural rights are determined by the Lausanne Treaty (an international treaty signed by Greece and Turkey in 1923). This minority is comprised of three linguistic groups: (1) Turkish speakers; (2) Pomak speakers –Pomak is a Slavic variety- and (3) Romany speakers. Over the past 20 years, however, Turkish has developed as the lingua franca of the minority resulting in various degrees of bilingualism among the Pomak and Romany speakers (Embeirikos et al., 2001).

<sup>8</sup> The following minority languages were investigated: Turkish, Arvanitika (has linguistic similarities with Tosk dialects in Albania, but also a considerable amount of Greek lexis and Greek features), Armenian, Vlachika/Arumanian (a variety that has some common roots with Standard Rumanian, but is linguistically considerably different), South Slavic language varieties (including Macedonian, Bulgarian and Pomak), Romany, Ladino (a romance language that used to be spoken by the Greek Jews in the port city of

Embeirikos et al. 2001 for similar findings). Not surprisingly, besides Turkish, all other indigenous minority languages are not taught at state-run schools<sup>9</sup>.

*Immigrant populations:* Although immigrants from Asia and Africa as well as Greek expatriates (who immigrated to the US, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Western Europe in the 50s and 60s) have started moving back to Greece since the early 70s, from the mid-80s early 90s onwards this movement took significant impetus. Due to socio-political and economic changes around the globe, Greece, which had traditionally been the country of origin of scores of immigrants, has become the host country of large numbers of immigrants and refugees from Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Koilaris 1997). Although there have been a few private initiatives (e.g. the establishment of a Polish school in Athens), all instruction in state-schools is in Greek and there is no provision - as yet - for teaching the home languages of immigrant children at school (Katsikas & Politou 1999).

*Research:* Indigenous linguistic minorities in Greece have received very limited attention from a linguistic and sociolinguistic perspective. Some exceptions include studies of language shift and language death of Arvanitika (Trudgill & Tsavaras 1977; Tsitsipis 1991, 1995, 1998) and studies on Turkish in Western Thrace (Sella-Mazi 1992, 1995, 1999) and on Greek-Turkish contact encounters in Athens (Lytra 2003).<sup>10</sup> From the mid-90s onwards, a number of researchers working in the fields of education, sociology of education, social anthropology and social psychology in Greece have shifted their attention to (bi-)multilingual schools and classrooms (e.g. Kanakidou 1997; Katsikas & Politou; Mitis 1998). Sociolinguistically and linguistically minded work, however, has primarily focused on monolingual classrooms (e.g. Altani 1992, Pavlidou 1999, 2001).

On a final note, it is worth noting that in response to a growing interest in indigenous linguistic minorities and immigrant populations in Greece, in 1997, three EU-funded educational programmes ran by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with Universities in Greece were initiated. The target groups of these programmes were: (1) immigrants and Greek expatriates; (2) Greek citizens of Roma origin and (3) Greek citizens members of the indigenous Greek Muslim minority of Western Thrace. Although each programme was designed for the needs of different target groups, all three programmes converged in the following main educational aims: (a) to provide in-service training to teachers instructing these target groups and (b) to produce, test and amend new teaching materials for teaching Greek as a Second Language, by making use of new technologies<sup>11</sup>.

### **1.3 Diaspora: The European Roma (Annabel Tremlett)**

The Roma (Gypsies) are one of the oldest trans-European diaspora, with plural dialects, experiences and identities. The Roma remain to date the most deprived ethnic group in Europe. The prospective enlargement of the European Union has awoken European institutions to the plight of the Roma, and improving their position has been a fundamental criterion for candidate countries such as Hungary since 1993 (Kovats 2001b). This rise in interest in the situation of the Roma (often termed in popular discourse as ‘the Gypsy problem’ or in institutional discourses as ‘the Romani issue’ or ‘question’) can be attributed to:

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<sup>9</sup> In the private school sector, to my knowledge, only Armenian is taught in an Armenian primary school in Athens. A major drawback for teaching these languages at school is that they are mostly spoken varieties, which have not been standardized and codified, as well as the fact that younger generations no longer speak these languages.

<sup>10</sup> Unlike the case of indigenous linguistic minorities, Greek immigrant communities abroad have been extensively investigated from a linguistic and sociolinguistic standpoint (e.g. Greeks in Australia, Papademetre 1994; Tamis 1990; Tsokalidou 1992; Greeks in France, Androulakis 1999, to mention but a few).

<sup>11</sup> For the mission statements of these programmes see (1) National Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in collaboration with the University of Athens 1998a; (2) National Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in collaboration with the University of Ioannina 1998b; (3) National Ministry of

- (a) the post communist transition, which has seen a rise in the concept of a ‘nation-state’, calling into question the ‘statelessness’ of the Roma (Gheorghe and Acton 2001)
- (b) the influx of Roma migrants claiming asylum in EU member states, which has caused Western governments to place huge pressure on the EU to solve the ‘Roma issue’ along with their own drastic measures (for example British immigration officials at Prague airport refusing anyone who ‘looks Roma’ onto UK-bound flights<sup>12</sup>).

The majority (approx. two-thirds) of the Romani population in Europe lives in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Historically, the Roma have been viewed as a deviant group who reject the very norms and values of society. This has led to numerous attempts to eradicate them, both through violence (e.g. Holocaust/enslavement/sterilisation) and forced assimilation (e.g. denying Gypsies exist/taking away their children) (Hancock 2002).

European Commission Annual Reports from 1997 have strongly recommended the integration of Roma, and from these discourses the following areas have been highlighted:

- (1) *Terms*: ‘Gypsy’ has been generally ruled out as a stigmatised term by activists, who have lobbied media and governments to use the preferred term Roma. ‘Rom’ refers to a member of the group; ‘Roma’ refers to plurality of members and to the group as a whole; ‘Romani’ refers to the languages spoken by the Roma. It is also used as an adjective; ‘Sinti’ refers to long-established Roma in Germany; ‘Gadje’ is the term used by some Roma when referring to a non-Rom. However, some people feel ostracised by the term ‘Roma’ which is widely understood as a person who speaks a Romani language and many people refer to themselves as ‘Gypsies’ in the local language, or in the UK, ‘travellers’ is also used.
- (2) *Language*: there are numerous Romani languages, elements of which have been traced to Sanskrit. The Romani languages have taken on very different forms in different areas and different groups. Some attempts have been made to write dictionaries and to formalise some of the languages, but many remain oral, and boundaries are fuzzy (see Matras (1999) and Matras et al. (1997)). A lot of the Roma are accused of having “severe deficiencies” (Doncsév 2000) in the languages they speak; whilst others are described as speaking “hotch potch patois” (Miller 2003). Language is seen as a major issue in social integration, particularly in education.
- (3) *Identity*: Roma people come from a variety of cultural backgrounds with contrasting histories and experiences. The rise of interest in the Roma has caused people to attempt to pin down the Roma identity. This has resulted in (mis)representations by governments that have outraged Romani activists who in turn have put forward a representation sometimes based on essentialist terms of language and bloodlines (Willems 1998).
- (4) *Migration*: The words ‘Roma’ and ‘nomadism’ sometimes seem inextricable in popular discourse. However, a lot of Roma live in settled communities, sometimes in a majority Roma community, sometimes not. Some groups may only travel in the summer months (e.g. some groups in the UK); other groups may face migration as a last resort to human rights abuses or housing eviction (e.g. in Slovakia). This situation can cause confusion, for example the ambivalence of who is actually targeted by funding applications for ‘Traveller Education’ in the UK. Roma as nomadic is a strong representation from popular mythology, and needs reinvestigation.

#### **1.4 Globalisation: Language, gender and generation in the new economies (Jim Collins)**

Researchers in diverse fields have emphasized the importance of language in work processes in the emerging globalized economy. This has been argued by sociologists analyzing the economic and institutional underpinnings of the global economy (Castells, 1996), by discourse analysts examining the communicative ideologies articulated in the

<sup>12</sup> See BBC news story ‘UK drops Prague asylum checks’ August 2001, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>



management literatures of the international business community (Gee et al. 1995), by sociolinguistic ethnographers investigating the uses of multiple languages in contemporary worksites (Roy, 2003), and by literacy researchers exploring how reading and writing practices connect local communicative practices with global information imperatives (Brandt, 2001, Hull, 1997). Salient findings include:

- Discourse, symbolic representation, and semiotic production appear to be growing in importance in the production of economic value (Cameron, D. 2000; Castells, 1996; Heller, 2001)
- The explicit design of discourse is now a prominent transnational corporate strategy for articulating ‘local’ shopfloor practices and ‘global’ coordinate-and-control information needs (e.g. the QWL movement) (Farrell, 1998; Gee et al., 1995; New London Group, 1996).
- The new emphasis on communicative practice as part of work process both reflects existing and creates new relations between language use and identity, especially in multilingual worksites (Heller, 2001; Hull, 1997; and Roy, 2003).
- Literacy practices – which like communicative practice more generally must be theoretically framed and ethnographically explored – are central to the new economy, given its needs for system control across spatially decentralized production-and-distribution processes (Brandt, 2001; Hull et al., 1997; New London Group, 1996).

In thinking about immigration and the new economies, it is necessary to be aware of both gender and generation as features of social process.

*Gender* In order to move beyond outdated images of immigrant families exclusively built around a man who works for pay and a woman who works “for the family,” it is necessary to recognize that immigrant women are increasingly participating in paid work. They are an ever larger portion of the manufacturing workforce (Bose, 199x, Hull, 1997), and increasing numbers of immigrant women are employed, as waged workers, in “domestic services.” In this capacity they work as housecleaners and for nannies middle and professional class families in which the wife/mother is employed in some professional capacity. The implications of this are several:

- Immigrant women are more likely to be involved in workplace and ‘public sphere’ concerns, such as labor organizing (Hennessey 2002) or education struggles (Rockhill, 1993).
- Children raised in “the diaspora” are likely to be socialized into distinct, evolving, and often contentious new gender roles.
- Most generally, immigrant families are caught up in the undermining of patriarchy that is a basic – strongly contested -- feature of “Late Modernity” or the “informational society” (Castells, 1996; Giddens, 1991).

*Generation* The question of intergenerational continuities and discontinuities are a common feature of discourses about immigrant and ethnic minorities. Traditional accounts of “second” generation immigrants assimilating to the “host” society have been widely shown to be inadequate, especially as regards language use (Gal, 1987; Gumperz; ed, 1982). Instead, it is necessary to recognize that “host-immigrant” relations involve distinct generational as well as economic, political, and cultural dimensions.

- There is, for example, in Europe as well as the U.S., the “demographic question”: that the majority of the middle-aged and elderly are “native born,” while an increasing proportion, if not a majority, of the “young” are immigrant or non-native. This becomes politically-charged if not politically addressed in the context of thinking about retirement and pension and social service maintenance, supported by a smaller, increasingly “non-native” workforce (Bourdieu et al., 2001; Gee, 1996; Males, 1995; NCEE 1983).
- In addition, there is considerable evidence that as part of the new economy, family structures are changing, among immigrant and non-immigrant populations. One significant result is that children are more likely to (a) live in poverty and (b) suffer

- With more explicit focus on questions of language and generation, adolescents are more likely than adults to confront and build upon multiplicity in communicative repertoires. On the one hand, they are more likely to belong to multigenerational peer groups in which some variety of language switching, mixing, or crossing is prominent (Gal, 1987; Rampton, 1995). On the other hand, they are more likely than adults to practice “multiple literacies,” especially those semiotically rich mixtures of the verbal and visual offered by digital technologies (Alvermann, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; New London Group, 1996).
- Finally, the increasing reliance of the new economy on educated workers means that education and work are increasing interwoven over the life course. There are increasing calls to make schooling “vocationally relevant,” while there are also ongoing pressures to widen access to higher education and increase provision for jobs-relevant “adult education,” and training in communicative practices becomes a part of shopfloor factory life as well as the professional’s “professional development.”

### 1.5 Linking to language study?

A very wide range of both established and emerging fields of language study are relevant to these scenarios (although their value to research on language and identity in contemporary Europe may be limited unless they are reconfigured along the lines discussed in 2 below):

#### 1.5.1 Established areas

*Discourse:*

- public, media and institutional discourse (e.g. Kress & Hodge 1979, Fairclough 1989, reconfigured along the lines of (=>) Blommaert et al 2001, 2003)

*Multilingualism:*

- bilingualism and language shift (Fishman 1972 => Hill & Hill 1986; Auer (ed) 1998; Rampton 1995)
- English as an international language (Quirk 1990, Kachru 1986 => Pennycook 1994)
- pidgins & creoles (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985, Sebba 1993)
- translation and interpreting studies (eg. Pratt 1994; Venuti (ed) 2000; Hermans 2002)
- language policy and planning (Cooper 1988; May 2001)
- literacies

*Identifying/developing proficiencies:*

- standardisation and the ideological prioritisation of certain kinds of competence
- second/foreign language curricula, pedagogy and assessment (Kramsch 1993)
- second language acquisition (Bremer, Roberts et al 1996; Lantolf (ed) 2001)
- intercultural communication (Scollon & Scollon 1995)

#### 1.5.2 Emerging areas

- linguistic competence across languages, modalities and contexts (Scollon 2001; Jaffe 2003)
- technologisation of discourse (Fairclough 1992, Cameron 2000)
- multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001, Goodwin & Goodwin 2001; R. Scollon 1998; New London Group 1996)
- language, discourse and popular culture and consumption (Cutler 1999, Spitulnik 1997; Rampton, Harris & Dover 2002)
- digital communications

Plainly, there is a great deal of language research that is potentially relevant to ‘immigration and the construction of identities in contemporary Europe’. But the globalisation processes changing contemporary Europe have been accompanied by major

epistemic shifts in social science, and if language study is to engage productively with the former, it will also need reckon with the latter.

## 2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS FOR A RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON IMMIGRATION, LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE.

### 2.1 A socially-constituted linguistics (Hymes 1977:196-209)

'Identity' is a complex, polysemic term, but in the phrase 'language and identity', it carries one major methodological implication for the conduct of language research:

- language issues (and a linguistics training) may well provide the initial point of entry for the analysis of empirical situations, but to achieve any level of descriptive or explanatory adequacy, research needs as full an apprehension as possible of the historical, social, cultural, semiotic and interactional dynamics in which language and communication are (to a greater or less degree) constitutive elements - and in which 'identity' gains meaning. One might start out, for example, intending to study 'multilingualism in its social context', but instead finish with an account of 'socio-cultural process in situations where multilingualism is a significant component'.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.2 Reconfiguring the ontological assumptions of language study.

As elsewhere in the social sciences, many foundational concepts in modern linguistics have been deeply influenced by the C19<sup>th</sup> emergence of the nation-state.<sup>14</sup> But over the last 10-20 years, language research has been reformulating its view of the object of enquiry,<sup>15</sup> and expanded its horizons

- beyond meaning-in-system => meaning as a process of contingent, situated, multi-semiotic inferencing and improvisation<sup>16</sup>
- beyond habit, regularity and system => reflexivity, contingency, ambivalence and spectacle<sup>17</sup>
- beyond shared knowledge, competence & negotiation => problems of recognition,<sup>18</sup> artful performance, and the management of ignorance<sup>19</sup>
- beyond 'use-value' and the production of text within context => 'exchange value' and the projection/revaluation/appropriation of texts across contexts<sup>20</sup>
- beyond 'speech community' as an empirical entity => the conventionalisation of semiotic processes within specific social network and local 'communities of practices', together with the semiotic production of 'community' as an ideological representation.<sup>21</sup>

This reworking can be summarised as a shift from a structuralist to a 'practice' view of language and communication, and it can be seen as a response to contemporary conditions:

“With the disappearance of small, egalitarian face to face societies, diversity of background and communicative conventions come to take on important signalling functions in everyday interaction. Any sociolinguistic theory that attempts to deal with problems of mobility, power and social control cannot assume uniformity of signalling devices as a precondition of successful communication. Simple

<sup>13</sup> This formulation was suggested by Joan Pujolar, Gregynog, April 2002.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. the assumptions that (a) language study is centrally concerned with systematicity in grammar and coherence in discourse, and that (b) these come from community membership - that people learn to talk grammatically and coherently from extensive early experience of living in families and fairly stable local social networks. These assumptions are embodied in governing notion of the 'native speaker'.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Voloshinov 1986; Pratt 1987; Le Page 1988; Rampton 1998. For an incisive characterisation of the presuppositions that dominated sociolinguistics in the 1970s and 1980s, see Bernstein 1996:147-156.

<sup>16</sup> Gumperz 1982; Hanks 1996; Verschueren 1999.

<sup>17</sup> Gal & Irvine 1995:973; Bauman & Briggs 1990

<sup>18</sup> eg Scollon 1998, Gee 1999:15ff

<sup>19</sup> eg Hewitt 1986, Zentella 1997, Rampton 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Eg Silverstein & Urban 1996; Blommaert 2001.

dichotomous comparisons between supposedly homogeneous and supposedly diverse groups therefore do not do justice to the complexities of communication in situations of constant social change such as we live in. We need to be able to deal with degrees of differentiation and through intensive case studies of key encounters, learn to explore how such differentiation affects individuals' ability to sustain social interaction and have their goals and motives understood. It is in this area... that sociolinguistic analysis can yield new insights into the workings of social process" (Gumperz 1982:7)

### 2.3 Combining interpretive and distributional analysis

For much of the time since the 1970s, sociolinguists have tended either (a) to treat the distribution of language as their central empirical problem-space, taking local sense-making procedures for granted (e.g. variationism), or (b) vice versa - treated sense-making as problematic, while leaving questions of distribution empirically under-explored (c.f. conversation analysis). These need to be taken together.

The methods of discourse analysis pioneered by Gumperz offer a particularly close view of communication as a process of negotiation, imposition and struggle, in which people draw on unevenly distributed resources to invoke, avoid or reconfigure cultural meanings and symbolic values attendant on lines and identities with different degrees of accessibility and purchase in specific situations. Gumperz also selects research sites for their significance in the allocation of material resources (i.e. gate-keeping encounters), and this attention to distributional questions needs to be extended if sociolinguistics is to engage (a) with the language and identity issues raised by contemporary European immigration, and (b) with the new and intensifying material and communicative inequalities that globalisation entails. To engage with the issues around globalisation, transnationalism, diaspora, migration, citizenship, nation-states and nationalism etc, language study needs to

- a) combine close attention to situated sense-making with analyses of the connections across space and time that shape and constrain communicative activity, and that communicative activity contributes to/intervenes in. The analysis of 'space' requires an account of
  - the relationships between locations (of varying size) and their positions and influence in the production, distribution and consumption of material and semiotic resources and capabilities;
  - processes involved in the definition and valuation of domains/locations and their characteristic practices, as well as in the construction, maintenance and rupture of boundaries
  - structures and processes involved in the disembedding, circulation and recontextualisation of texts, discourses, imageries etc.<sup>22</sup>

This in turn requires sensitivity to the varying time-scales associated with the processes running through/materialised in any given activity (historical, institutional, biographical, quotidian, and interactional.)<sup>23</sup>

- b) clarify the scope and limits to ethnography.
  - A broadly 'ethnographic' demeanour is indispensable, normalising the problematic & problematising the normal, interrogating prevailing conceptions of 'insider' and 'outsider', looking to the 'sojourner' and diaspora dimensions in each minority situation, etc.<sup>24 25</sup>
  - Ethnographic description will also play a key role both in the interpretation of local sense-making, and in identification of the position that particular communicative activities play within local institutional orders, extending this, wherever possible, to the comparison of different locations connected in time or

<sup>22</sup> Eg. Lash & Urry 1994; Silverstein & Urban 1996

<sup>23</sup> Scollon 2002; Giddens 1990 *The Constitution of Society*. Oxford: Polity.

<sup>24</sup> Cohen 1997

<sup>25</sup> Well-established criticisms of 'totalising' traditional ethnography in anthropology form a necessary

space. At least in principle, ethnography's commitment to the description of lived experience holds in check the temptation to examine ethnicity, diaspora and race independently of the processes associated with class, gender, generation etc.

- But the limits of ethnographic analysis also need to be recognised. There are bound to be points where "where change and continuity have to be conceptualised in ways not contained in the ethnographic data itself" (Willis & Trondman 2000), and very careful engagement with findings and theories from other disciplines will be essential, both to locate particular texts, practices and situations in broader trends (Hammersley 1992:85-95), and to use ethnographic analysis as tool for the reconstruction of theory (Buroway 1991).

#### **2.4 Reflexive engagement with the political and epistemological issues that emerge at the interface of research and public & 'practical' intervention**

A range of complex epistemological and translational issues emerge at the interface between research and public & 'practical' intervention, in the complicated exchange between the academy and policy-makers, professions and communities. To make any kind of adequate response, it is essential

- a) to treat linguistics itself as a historically and socially situated practice, influencing and influenced by a range of (often conflicting) language ideologies which vary in the explicitness of their articulation.<sup>26</sup> In the past, linguistics played a key role both in establishing national, standard languages, identities and communities, and in subsequently demystifying them. Sociolinguistic research takes place, and will undoubtedly continue to take place, in a social and political context characterized by vigorous and deep disagreements regarding "standard" linguistic forms, language policy, literacy, the literary canon and related matters, and it exists in competition and conflict with alternative/derivative models of language and discourse that gain dominance in education, politics, commerce etc. In an era of "Science wars" and the prioritisation of "evidence-based" policy & practice, academic research is increasingly called upon to justify itself in terms of its contribution to policy, and criticized as "unscientific" if it employs non-experimental or non-quantitative methods. Sociolinguistic research cannot enter into debates about these issues as a neutral observer, but is inevitably recruited and/or renounced by the contending sides. Language, science and the science of language are inevitably political.<sup>27</sup>
- b) to problematise the idea of 'a language' that can be identified with a name such as 'English', 'French', 'Swahili' or 'Chinese': "It is our job as sociolinguists to focus on language varieties instead of on language names, and it is our challenge to make this view acceptable and understandable to outside audiences. When looked upon from the actual ways in which people use language in their lives, what counts are particular varieties of language: repertoires, styles, genres, modes of use (Hymes 1996; Silverstein 1998)" (Blommaert 2003; see also e.g. Hudson 1980; Le Page 1988)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> e.g. Robins 1979; LePage 1988; Joseph & Taylor (eds) 1990; Kroskrity, Schieffelin & Woolard (eds) 1992; Blommaert (ed) 1999.

<sup>27</sup> This formulation extensively draws on an account offered by Adam Lefstein, who also asks: "(a) What role should sociolinguistics play in the development of policy and in public debate? Should researchers seek to derive practical, normative conclusions from their theoretical, "positive" research? (b) How should sociolinguistic researchers represent their findings and positions -- so that they are both accessible to policy makers and the public, and faithful to the complexities and ambiguities of its topic? (This problem may involve an element of translation, from professional to public discourses, which often differ not only in style and in terminology, but also with regard to understandings of basic concepts and underlying assumptions.) (c) How should sociolinguistics respond to the pressure to conform to the "gold standard" of experimental science? (d) What responsibilities do researchers hold toward informants in their research projects?" See also Hymes 1969/99; Rampton (ed) 1997; Cameron, et al 1992; Z. Bauman 1987 & 1992: Ch 1.

<sup>28</sup> J. Blommaert 2003. Situating language rights: English and Swahili in Tanzania revisited. Paper presented at the panel on 'Linguistic human rights: Charting a way forward', Annual Meeting of AAAL,

## 2.5 Implications for the language curriculum in Higher Education

The discussion in this paper has focused on research, and research is the activity at issue at the Prague meeting. But there are likely to be substantial implications for content and pedagogy in courses of language and culture study in colleges and universities. In fact, a number of institutions are already considering the extent to which globalisation and high modernity call for the redesign of traditional HE curricula,<sup>29</sup> and to stay epistemically in tune with the rethinkings of knowledge that we are currently witnessing, HE students may well need to engage more fully, for example, in an interweaving of disciplinary and experiential understanding, and in reflexive studies of learning itself (Roberts et al 2001; Thorne 2003).

## 3.0 Conclusion...

In the four scenarios discussed in Section 1, we gained a glimpse of how migration can influence individuals' experience of education (1.1), how a nation-state's traditional self-image can be challenged (1.2), how transformations in the governance of Europe collide with problems in the representation of one of its oldest and most materially deprived minorities (1.3), and how the significance of language, gender and generation are all being reconfigured in the economic processes associated with globalisation (1.4). Within each of these scenarios, there are undoubtedly a host of different issues that language researchers could help to clarify, and there may also be a number of over-arching themes that are relevant to all or most of them (e.g. tensions between national and transnational ideals and their implications for representations of the Other; shifts over time and space in the valuation of traditional resources; interethnic contact and hybridisation as features of everyday life). But the main aim in these notes has been to identify a number of more and less recent reorientations in language study that a research programme on immigration, language and identity will need to build on if it is to be productive. These reorientations have either produced or look towards:

- a 'socially-constituted' linguistics, taking real-world processes as its central problem-space, tuning as fully as it can to relevant debates and issues elsewhere in the humanities and social sciences (Section 2.1);
- a 'post-structuralist' linguistics of communicative practice (2.2);
- analyses of situated sense-making ('situated' in being both locally contingent and ideologically configured) that are combined with descriptions of the (uneven) distribution of resources and capacities, and that grapple with detectably systematic differences in meaning production across different sites (2.3)
- a willingness to think ethnographically, tied to an understanding of when to move to other methods (2.3)
- reflexive understanding of language research as itself an historically and politically situated enterprise (2.4).

Without these shifts/expansions in methodological perspective, much of the language and identity dynamics in contemporary Europe is likely to remain obscure to us.

Ben Rampton  
16<sup>th</sup> June 2003

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<sup>29</sup> See for example, the Bergen University Project 'Den Nye Norsken' ("The New Norwegian: The Norwegian language in close contact with other languages" <http://www.hf.uib.no/dnn/english.html>), and the Ford Foundation's 'Crossing Borders Initiative'

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