Neo-Hymesian linguistic ethnography in the United Kingdom

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This paper describes the development of 'linguistic ethnography' in Britain over the last 5–15 years. British anthropology tends to overlook language, and instead, the U.K. Linguistic Ethnography Forum (LEF) has emerged from socio- and applied linguistics, bringing together a number of formative traditions (inter alia, Interactional Sociolinguistics, New Literacy Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis). The career paths and the institutional positions of LEF participants make their ethnography more a matter of getting analytic distance on what's close-at-hand than a process of getting familiar with the strange. When linked with post-structuralism more generally, this 'from-inside-outwards' trajectory produces analytic sensibilities tuned to discourse analysis as a method, doubtful about 'comprehensive' and 'exotic' ethnography, and welldisposed to practical/political intervention. LE sits comfortably in the much broader shift from mono- to inter-disciplinarity in British higher education, though the inter-disciplinary environment makes it hard to take the relationship between linguistics and ethnography for granted.

KEYWORDS: Linguistic ethnography, inter-disciplinarity, methodology, Hymes

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a case study of the development of an arena for the analysis of language in society that has been taking shape amidst a major reconfiguration of knowledge production in higher education, that identifies with inter-disciplinarity, and that looks to capitalise on the importance attributed to language and discourse across the social sciences quite generally.[1] The paper describes the emergence of 'linguistic ethnography' in and around Britain[2] over the last 5–15 years, and it adopts the perspective that Hymes advocated in a 1974/1983 discussion of 'Traditions and paradigms'. The history of a disciplinary tradition like linguistics, suggests Hymes:

> . . . resolves itself into an overlapping series of local scenes, specific 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1965: 64–66), approachable through biographies . . . and lesser writings, more than through isolated classics . . . If our interest is to know what happened . . . [o]ur history must become a history, not only of great men, but of

circles, and not only circles, but also of institutions, governments, rulers, wars, and the ways in which these have shaped the renewed origins of linguistics in successive generations. (1983: 346; see also Scollon and Scollon this issue)

Similarly, a particular approach or paradigm is never really 'a matter of scientific methods and findings alone, but [is] also a complex of attitudes and outlooks . . . [C]*limates of opinion* play a part . . . [and p]articular *social origins* are a factor as well.' (1983: 355, original emphases). From this, Hymes concludes, 'a "sociolinguistic" approach [to the description of traditions and paradigms] . . . is necessary. . . . [O]ne will deal with the occurrence of a paradigm . . . as more than an intellectual accomplishment; one will deal with it as a process of sociocultural change . . .' (1983: 365).

Linguistic ethnography is in itself neither a paradigm, a cohesive 'school', nor some kind of definitive synthesis. Instead, it is more accurately described as a site of encounter where a number of established lines of research interact, pushed together by circumstance, open to the recognition of new affinities, and sufficiently familiar with one another to treat differences with equanimity. There certainly is an overarching intellectual warrant for this interaction, and it resides in two central assumptions that researchers meeting under the aegis of the U.K. Linguistic Ethnography Forum are likely to share with a lot of sociolinguists worldwide, as well as with linguistic anthropologists in the U.S. Specifically, associates in linguistic ethnography hold:

1. that the contexts for communication should be investigated rather than assumed. Meaning takes shape within specific social relations, interactional histories and institutional regimes, produced and construed by agents with expectations and repertoires that have to be grasped ethnographically; and
2. that analysis of the internal organisation of verbal (and other kinds of semiotic) data is essential to understanding its significance and position in the world. Meaning is far more than just the 'expression of ideas', and biography, identifications, stance and nuance are extensively signalled in the linguistic and textual fine-grain.

But general tenets like these will be appropriated and applied in different ways in different contexts (as the tenets themselves imply), and in my attempt to describe linguistic ethnography in the U.K. as a discursive space, I shall address not only the meeting arenas and the currents of work that have contributed so far, but also the backgrounds of its affiliates, their institutional positions, and their siting within much broader changes transforming British higher education. In the process, I will venture a characterisation of the analytic sensibilities that this discursive space encourages, and the perspective on the relationship between linguistics and ethnography that it inclines us to.

But before following Hymes to this 'sociolinguistic' account of the wider U.K. context in which linguistic ethnography has taken shape, I shall begin with a fairly straightforward outline of the main currents of analysis at play within it.

2. LINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE U.K.: ACADEMIC LINES IN PLAY

Linguistics and ethnography were linked in Britain in Malinowski's foundational work at the start of the 20th century, but it is commonly recognised that in spite of a few (very) high points (e.g. Parkin 1984; Grillo 1989; Bloch 1975, 1998; Finnegan 2002), an interest in language and linguistics has been only sporadic in British social anthropology (Henson 1974; Hymes 1983: 141, 169; Grillo, Pratt and Street 1987: 275–277; Grillo 1989: 4ff.). In line with this, there are at present no university libraries in the U.K. that carry the *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*,[3] and none of the debates about language, culture and society that have gained international attention over the last 10–15 years have been hosted by British anthropology conferences.[4] Instead, in the U.K., the links between language, culture and society have been much more fully addressed at linguistics meetings.

Sociolinguistics conferences and seminars have been one arena for this and, right from the outset, there have been substantial contributions from researchers who present their work at sociolinguistics symposia, publish in sociolinguistics journals, sit on sociolinguistics editorial boards, etc. Nevertheless, it has been applied rather than sociolinguistics that has served as the crucial formative context, and in 2001 it was the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL – www.baal.org.uk) that provided some of the key infrastructure for setting up the U.K. Linguistic Ethnography Forum (LEF), a grouping that has been running two or three academic meetings every year since its inception and that, at the time of writing, has more than 200 researchers on its email list. In fact, the shaping influence of applied linguistics extends much further than the organizational benefits provided by the links with BAAL, and this gives LE an element of distinctiveness even within a 'broad tent' view of sociolinguistics.

With only 150–250 people attending every year, BAAL annual meetings during the 1990s provided a relatively convivial arena for interaction between five lines (or 'programmes') of research that can be found in play at present in the Linguistic Ethnography Forum:[5]

a. The first of these research programmes was *Interactional Sociolinguistics.* This obviously began in the U.S. but it took root in the U.K. with John Gumperz's collaboration with Roberts and Jupp at the Industrial Language Training Centre in London, focusing on ethnicity, language and inequality in the workplace (Gumperz, Jupp and Roberts 1979). Cross-cultural communication was one major issue (Roberts et al. 1992), and culturally (and politically) embedded second language development was another (Roberts and Simonot 1987). Subsequently, code-switching and language crossing joined the repertoire of British Interactional Sociolinguistics research on the dynamics of ethnicity in speech (Martin-Jones 1995; Rampton 1995a), and the scope for connection with Bourdieurian critique was also added through the trans-Atlantic collaboration of Martin-Jones and Heller (Heller and Martin-Jones (eds.) 1996, 2001). Throughout the 1990s (and indeed often earlier,

e.g. Sapir 1949: 104; Halliday 1978), the social constructionist view that human reality is extensively reproduced and created anew in the socially and historically specific activities of everyday life, provided linguists of different persuasions with an invigorating sense of the wider social scientific value of their analytic skills. Gumperz provided a particularly sharp set of empirical concepts and procedures for seeing this, and he achieved this through a pioneering synthesis of dialectology, pragmatics, conversation analysis, ethnography and Goffmanian interaction analysis. In the process, he also opened a space for Conversation Analysis (CA) to impact on contemporary linguistic ethnography (even though the purer forms of CA weren't well represented at British applied linguistics meetings during the 1990s, though see for example Roberts et al. 1992: 82–85 and Sarangi and Roberts (eds.) 1999).

b. The second tradition hosted at applied linguistics meetings was the *New Literacy Studies* (NLS), which in Britain was originally associated with the work of Brian Street, subsequently becoming firmly rooted at Lancaster and a number of other British universities (e.g. Barton 1994; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000; Gregory and Williams 2000; Martin-Jones and Jones 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, 1995). According to Street and the NLS, the taken-for-granted 'autonomous' model of reading and writing as individualistic, psychological processes promotes particular ideological agendas when applied in education at home and in development projects overseas, and in their place, ethnographic accounts of literacy need to be rooted in an 'ideological mode' that highlights power and not just culture (compare Street 1984 and Rosen 1985 with Heath 1983). Overall, Street and the NLS have played a significant part introducing a politically engaged version of post-structuralism to language studies in the U.K. (Rampton 1995b: 234–240), and they have also influenced a wider shift of interest beyond texts-as-products to texts-in-culture-as-a-process (Street 1993).

Both Interactional Sociolinguistics and the New Literacy Studies stress ethnography, but they were not the only research programmes at BAAL conferences to feed into the U.K. LEF. Though each had some features which were harder to accommodate, there were at least three other lines of research that have had an active presence:

c. Working with clearly stated Marxian assumptions, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) was very strongly represented at BAAL, and CDA itself grew out of systemic-functional linguistics (SFL), a very significant force in British applied linguistics since the 1970s. SFL was itself already influenced by Malinowski's 1923 ideas about language and culture (to a much greater degree than

British social anthropology), and in Halliday and Hasan's relationship with Bernstein, SFL ran an active interest in sociology. CDA's major contribution was to expand on this, opening linguistics to a wider range of sociologists and social theorists. It encouraged language researchers to explore the relevance of thinkers such as Habermas, Foucault, Hall, etc., and it made ideology and the cultural dynamics of globalisation and free-market capitalism legitimate topics for critical language study. It also looked towards practical interventions in education (e.g. Fairclough (ed.) 1992), and indeed overall, though it might not be recognised, CDA's political commitments chimed well with Hymes' when he envisaged a reflexive, critical and 'socially constituted linguistics' (Blommaert et al. (eds.) 2001). At the same time, for anyone with an ethnographic sensibility, there have been at least two *difficulties* with leading CDA (and SFL) work: first, detailed and sustained empirical work on non-textual processes and relationships has often been lacking 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 and Atkinson 1995; Blommaert and Bulcaen 2000; Blommaert et al. 2001).

The final two traditions that have hitherto influenced U.K. LE both address the language learning agenda that has always been salient in British applied linguistics, one of them focusing on first language development and the other on second and foreign language education abroad.

d. In *neo-Vygotskian research on language and cognitive development,* researchers such Wells 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. Mercer's research, for example, 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 (1995, 2000). 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 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, 2006; Rampton 2006: Ch. 2).

e. Finally, as well as being central in BAAL during the 1980s, one of the earliest and most radical critiques of autonomous, 'objectivist' linguistics in Britain was articulated in *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 (cf. Rampton 1997: 5, 6, 11, 2000: 108). It also, of course, embraced Hymes' 1972 notion of 'communicative competence' (e.g. Brumfit and Johnson (eds.) 1979 *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*). In the end, though, there was no accompanying *ethnography* of communication. Widdowson and others described their research as 'conceptual' rather than empirical, 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 worldwide, 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 (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.

In some of these research programmes, then, the ethnography was/is more pronounced than in others, and they have tended to prioritise different issues – ethnicities in discourse, literacy practices, power and ideology, cognitive development, English language teaching. Nevertheless, as is fairly normative in applied linguistics, all five looked towards practical relevance, the boundaries around each were generally very permeable, and BAAL meetings provided a regular setting for contact and cross-fertilisation (e.g. Roberts, Davies and Jupp 1992; and more recently, Tusting 2000; Slembrouck 2001; Rampton 2001b; Maybin 2006: Ch. 8). In addition, each of these traditions treated the interface between language/text and situation/context as a central problem. This differentiated them from other lines of research represented at BAAL conferences (such as corpus linguistics, psycholinguistics and second language acquisition), and it laid the ground for a range of methodological discussions subsequently pursued within the Linguistic Ethnography Forum (focusing on for example reflexivity, field notes and transcripts, translation, auto-ethnography, and the limitations of 'systematic reviews of research').

The account so far, however, has been principally framed in terms of an intellectual dialogue between research programmes. But as noted at the outset, Hymes' advice is that there is more involved than this in the development of a paradigm, a tradition, or indeed a discursive space like the U.K. Linguistic Ethnography Forum, and in line with this, it is now worth turning to consider 'climates of opinion' and the 'particular social origins' of the practitioners of LE.

3. LINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHERS IN THE U.K.: ORIGINS, COMMITMENTS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

An informal survey in April 2006 of the institutional affiliations evident in the membership data available on 126 researchers on the LEF mailing list revealed that:

- 54 members were formally aligned with education (flagged up by words like 'Education', 'TESOL', 'Teaching' in the names of the Centres, Institutes and/or Departments that they belong to)
- 53 members were formally aligned with language (flagged up by 'Language', 'Communication', 'Literacy', 'Translation', 'Applied Language Studies')
- 17 members were formally aligned with culture and area studies (flagged up by 'Culture', 'Intercultural', 'Media', 'Literature')
- six members were formally aligned with anthropology (flagged up by 'Anthropology', with three in the U.S.)
- 10 members were formally aligned with other disciplines (computing (2), psychology (2), medicine, geography, sociology, etc)[6]

This distribution of formal affiliations is consistent with U.K. linguistic ethnography's base in applied linguistics, and as Brumfit noted in 1985, in applied linguistics people often embark on research a little later in life than do students in disciplines like maths, psychology, sociology or indeed formal syntax, phonetics, etc. (1985: 72, 76). Indeed, as 'mature' students in their late 20s and 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 (e.g. Rampton 1992: 30–33). After that, once established, it is common for applied linguists to engage in various kinds of consultancy research, where at least initially, the issues to be investigated are identified by people working inside the organizations that are serving as the fieldsite (cf. Roberts and Sarangi 1999). In both cases, the research 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,[7] and this has at least four consequences:

i. First, it meshes well with discourse analysis, which is often centrally involved in stepping back from the easy flow of communicative practice, interrogating its components, underpinnings and effects. For example, in spite of some striking differences (Wetherell 1998; Billig and Schegloff 1999), 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, and this commitment to de-familiarisation suits researchers whose first ethnographic priority is to achieve greater analytic distance on the activities in which they or their clients/collaborators participate on a routine basis.

ii. Second, a from-inside-outwards trajectory fosters doubt about the classical notion of 'comprehensive ethnography'.[8] On the one hand, it encourages sensitivity to the risks of stereotyping: if you are researching people and institutions in the area where you are based, the kind of people you are studying may well turn up in your classes and/or read-and-reply to what you've written, and this provides quite strong incentives to hedge your claims and clearly specify their limits. At the same time, if you live in a city like Manchester, Birmingham or London, the complexities leap out at you and you can really only aim to produce 'broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group' (Green and Bloome 1997: 183) if you accept dominant ideological constructions uncritically, or are happy to close your eyes to the rest of social science. Instead, particularly if you are sympathetic to discourse analysis, the informants' 'groupness' is itself likely to be treated as a problematic issue, 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 (Moerman 1974; Gumperz 1982: 26; see Rampton 2005; Harris 2006; Maybin 2006: 5 for U.K. examples).

iii. In a similar vein – third – if your analytic sensibility is shaped in the inside-outwards directionality, you are quite likely to be sensitive to the limitations of the ethnography 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 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 Tonkin 1984; Borchgrevinck 2003). It is likely to take you far longer to reach the levels of understanding and familiarity where you can reliably tune into the expressive nuances that generally animate communication, intimating contexts of experience, presupposition and value quite often at a tangent to the articulated propositions (cf. Gumperz 1982; Becker 1995:

299–300). 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 were 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 and McDermott that '[t]hick brushstokes of Samoans or Balinese may give some hints as to what Samoans and Balinese must deal with in their daily lives, but they can greatly distort the complexity of Samoans and Balinese as people' (1998: 137; Sapir 2002: 191–192).[9]

iv. Fourth, the inside-outwards directionality probably has implications for one's academic and political demeanour. If you are working in the country where you're a citizen, if you are studying an institution where you have spent a substantial part of your life, and if you are 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.[10] Similarly, if you start your working life as an interpreter, a health worker or a classroom teacher, 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 world, 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 1969a: 44; Rampton 2006: 372–377). Indeed, it was this kind of 'habitus' that helped to sustain (and was supported by) the dialogues conducted under the aegis of applied linguistics.

These analytic dispositions have, of course, also found ratification in the broader 'climate of the times', and the post-structuralism associated with Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Giddens, Foucault, etc. has undoubtedly also contributed to their development (e.g. Maybin 2006; Rampton 2006: 12–25). Discourse analysis has moved into a privileged position in the humanities and social sciences (Fairclough 1992: 1; Coupland 1998: 115–116), and this ratifies LE's assertion of linguistic and micro-analytic perspectives within ethnography (cf. [3.i] above). In anthropology and sociology, there's been a profound reassessment of ethnographic representation, linked to the critique of totalising description (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Bauman 1992; Clifford 1992), and this fits well with LE's proclivity for 'topic-oriented' ethnographies of specific types of professional interaction, literacy event, speech style, etc., rather than comprehensive descriptions of speech communities (3.ii and 3.iii). The objectivism

of structuralist linguistics and social science has been challenged with a reassertion of human agency (Voloshinov 1973; Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1976), and this feeds impatience with analyses devoted to structural systems (cf. 3.iii), while widespread recognition of the relationship between knowledge and power encourages the view that if neutrality's chimerical, then it is worth embracing the links between research and practical intervention (3.iv). At the same time, if it is correct that these four stances derive much of their resonance from the inside-outwards trajectory associated with applied linguistics, then this post-structuralism is probably as much a visceral apprehension as a book-learned philosophy. Indeed, if the habitus and research problems of LE researchers are as much practical as academic, none of this is likely to lead to the abandonment of data and a retreat to theory. Post-structuralism may make instinctive sense, but if you anyway always valued linguistics and ethnography more for their utility than their pedigree, critiques of objectivism and essentialism aren't debilitating, and can instead be noted as useful supplementary clarifications in the process of empirical analysis and interpretation.

So far, then, my account of contemporary linguistic ethnography in the U.K. has focused on academic arenas and influences, biographical trajectories, and the climate of the times. There is one more contextual element that requires discussion, and this is the extensive reconfiguration of academic knowledge production in the British higher education institutions where the majority of LE researchers are based.

4. LINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE RECONFIGURATION OF BRITISH HIGHER EDUCATION

U.K. linguistic ethnography is deeply influenced by a general shift in the organisation of academic knowledge in British higher education (see Gibbons et al. 1994; Bernstein 1996; Strathern 2000). In Basil Bernstein's magisterial account of it, the shift involves a move from 'singulars' to 'regions'. 'Singulars', says Bernstein:

> . . . are knowledge structures whose creators have appropriated a space to give themselves a unique name, a specialised discrete discourse with its own intellectual field of texts, practices, rules of entry, examinations, licences to practice, distribution of rewards and punishments (physics, chemistry, history, economics, psychology, etc.). Singulars are, on the whole, orientated to their own development, protected by strong boundaries and hierarchies. (1996: 65)

'Regions', on the other hand:

> . . . are constructed by recontextualising singulars into larger units which operate both in the intellectual field of disciplines and in the field of external practice. Regions are the interface between disciplines (singulars) and the technologies they make possible. Thus engineering, medicine, architecture are regions. Contemporary

regions would be cognitive science, management, business studies, communications and media. (1996: 65)

In singulars, the central problems are formulated inside the discipline and they are often theory-generated. In regions, on the other hand, the central problems are much more likely to emerge from 'real-world' processes outside any one discipline, and rather than the initial problem-*posing*, theory is a resource for problem-*solving*.

Coming out of applied linguistics, linguistic ethnography generally lives in the regions, and it faces a lot of the issues and challenges endemic to this kind of interdisciplinarity. In regions, suggests Bernstein, 'inner commitments and dedications' are sometimes replaced 'by short-term instrumentalities' (1996: 76), and this is undoubtedly a major challenge for LE. As already indicated (section 3), a very substantial proportion of LE researchers are closely involved in education – a region *par excellence* (like applied linguistics) – and if you are actually based in a university department of education, institutional pressures may tempt you: (a) to read macroscopic and historical processes in only the most obvious elements of education policy and change; and (b) to prioritise rapport and relevance above theory development and cumulative, comparative generalisation (cf. Hymes on 'educational ethnology' [1996: 19]).[11] Bernstein goes on to say that there is often also a lot of tension between singulars and regions, with the new regions being regarded 'as suspect mixed categories, and as competitors for scarce resources', and hard questions get asked about their legitimacy as university studies. Since there isn't any properly institutionalised linguistic anthropology in Britain, linguistic ethnography over here hasn't really run into very much opposition from closely related singulars, but there are fairly regular skirmishes between formal and applied linguistics (e.g. Borsley and Ingham 2001 vs Stubbs 2002), and as an activity in the interdisciplinary regions, cross-generational reproduction is potentially quite tricky in linguistic ethnography – for people on the practical-experience-to-research trajectory, one year on a conversion MA followed by three doing a PhD on their own isn't a very strong base for the development of breadth and depth in theory and analysis (Rampton 2000: 109–111). In fact almost by definition, it's harder specifying an academic identity in the interdisciplinary regions than it is if you're working in a 'singular'. If you try to do this by identifying a canon of authoritative research studies, you may have to deal with powerful contending ownership claims and interpretations already made in disciplinary heartlands, as well as a strong sense that in inter-disciplinary and interventionist work, it's texts and authors that can function as 'boundary objects' mediating between *different* discourse communities that really count.[12] Similarly, if you try to define LE in terms of a consensus on the central theoretical questions, you're impeded by the openness to practical real-world issues and by the unpredictability of ethnography itself (Strathern 2000: 286). And because research outputs are designed for varied audiences, not just academics, who differ in their types/levels of background knowledge, interest, position, etc.

(e.g. teachers or maybe doctors), it is also hard to standardise and then monitor criteria of textual adequacy.[13]

Despite these organisational challenges, researchers pursuing LE remain committed to the view that the combination of ethnography, linguistics and discourse analysis is particularly well-suited to understanding the intersection of communicative practice with social and cultural process, and the development of 'regional' research provides major opportunities to compensate for the relative lack of security. The spread of post-structuralism has produced a base line of intelligibility for people working in different disciplinary areas, and according to a recent survey, 80 percent of U.K. social scientists were involved in at least some interdisciplinary research (HEFCE 1999: iii). So in principle at least, there is a very substantial pool of partners interested in contributions to interdisciplinary research from linguistic ethnography (cf. www.rdi-elc.org.uk), and in the next (penultimate) section I would like to reflect on the implications of this for the relationship between linguistics and ethnography themselves.

5. LINGUISTICS AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN DIALOGUE

Ethnographers and (mainstream) linguists 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 on at least three counts:

i. 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, 'culture' appears to be generally less determinate as a focal entity.[14]

ii. 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.

iii. 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 and 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 structure. Grammars normally don't.

These differences set up an in-principle tension between linguistic and ethnographic methodologies, and this works in both directions. On the one hand,

- *ethnography opens 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 and Trondman 2001: 2). This was central to the argument with Chomskyan linguistics articulated in Hymes' theory of communicative competence (1972), and it is a move that has been very frequently repeated in different areas of sociolinguistics (e.g. Eckert 2000). Within the applied linguistic arena where U.K. linguistic ethnography has taken shape, it has, as already indicated, informed the responses to CDA, neo-Vygotskyan research, AL-for-LT as well as for example second language acquisition research.

And on the other hand

- *linguistics (and linguistically sensitive discourse analysis) ties ethnography down,* pushing cultural description towards the analysis of clearly delimitable processes, increasing the amount of reported data that is open to falsification, looking to impregnate local description with robust and subtle 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 that researchers can play up in dialogue with for example ethnographers in sociology or education, introducing a set of highly developed tools for analyzing and uncovering unnoticed intricacies in the discursive processes through which cultural relationships and identities are produced. This is consistent with Sapir's vision of 'The status of linguistics as a science' (1929 [1949: 166]), and it has been central in a host of contributions to social science debates about gender, generation, ethnicity, class, communities of practice, etc. (e.g. Barton and Tusting (eds.) 2005; Rampton 2006: 369–372).

At the same time, these basic differences between linguistics and ethnography can be played in different ways. One option is to treat their differences as complementary, and when this happens, ethnography can be seen as *humanising* language study, preventing linguistics from being reductive or shallow by embedding it in rich descriptions of how the users of a given variety adapt their language to different situational purposes and contexts. In the same vein, the linguistics can be seen as helping to avoid error and inaccuracy in cultural description, producing ethnographies that are more subtle and detailed. On the

other hand, it is also possible to play up their differences, using ethnography and linguistics against each other, problematising their outputs and turning the spotlight back onto the researchers and methods. Here, ethnographic (and historical) methods can be a resource for *deconstructing* language study, charting the processes of ideological reification it involves (Blommaert (ed.) 1999), while analyses tuned to the details of language can be used to fragment prevailing notions of culture and community (Moerman 1974; LePage 1980).[15]

Just how far this relationship between linguistics and ethnography gets constructed as either complementary or contradictory is likely to be influenced by a wide variety of factors, and in terms of foundational figures in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology from the 1960s onwards, Gumperz's work stands out for its empirical reconciliation of linguistics and ethnography, while Hymes develops their mutual interrogation. But harking back to Bernstein's distinction in the previous section, it seems likely that when scholars working at the language-culture interface are looking for mono-disciplinary 'singularity', they will either tend to see the relationship between linguistics and ethnography as complementary, or simply take it for granted, whereas in the interdisciplinary 'regions', scholars will be pushed to grapple with the problems and contradictions explicitly.

A good example of the former can be seen in Duranti's work over the last 10 years, which represents a remarkable effort to consolidate U.S. linguistic anthropology (LA) as a singular, with a textbook (1997), a glossary of key terms (2001a), a reader (2001b), and a 'companion'/handbook (2004). As one might expect with a textbook for students, the 1997 volume contains extensive discussion of the relationship between ethnography and linguistics, emphasising their mutual enrichment, but after that, potential complications in the relationship largely drop from view, and the two almost only reappear in the indices of the subsequent volumes as a harmonious couple ('ethnography of communication'/ 'ethnography of speaking'). There is hardly any sight of the profound methodological self-questioning that has characterised ethnography over the last 25 years,[16] and the analyses move quite fast past the tools and principles of construction to concentrate on the emerging portrait, letting the researchers and their instruments merge into the background, tacitly ratified in the portraits and models of situated language use and of language integrated with culture that the combination produces. Indeed, in a reflexive paper (which certainly also considers growing interdisciplinarity in LA in the U.S. [2003: 332–333]), Duranti himself suggests that:

> . . . the revival [of linguistics in anthropology departments] has been possible partly because of linguistic anthropologists' ability to project an image of themselves as empirically oriented fieldworkers who have more important things to do than argue with one another (or with those in other subfields). Furthermore, researchers have had no difficulty moving back and forth from one paradigm or another without confronting (or being confronted by others regarding) their own epistemological, ontological, and methodological wavering. (2003: 334)[17]

A knowing desire to affirm and consolidate the productivity of the combination of linguistics and ethnography was certainly one of the main reasons for setting up the U.K. Linguistic Ethnography Forum,[18] and even in the interdisciplinary 'regions', the kind of disciplinary singularity projected by Duranti provides an essential reference point, serving not just as an indispensable technical resource but also as an invaluable source of the authority you can invoke in interaction with people outside your own niche. Even so, there is still 'a continuous process of negotiating authority and relevance' involved in these interactions (Roberts and Sarangi 1999: 475), and when you are collaborating with non-linguistic ethnographers and non-ethnographic linguists, the tension between linguistics and ethnography often feels not just methodological but also social/cultural. More generally, in the applied linguistics where linguistic ethnography emerged, the tradition of methodological reflexivity runs deep, stretching back at least to the 1980s (as already indicated in section 3.v above),[19] and whatever the tact brought to these cross-boundary transactions, definitions and assumptions are repeatedly relativised, there is continual pressure to account for the particularity of the angles and occlusions that different methods entail, and you're often having to return to basics to try to work out how different things fit together. Yes, there certainly are a lot of occasions when it seems wise to smooth over one's 'epistemological, ontological, and methodological wavering', but these need to be understood as strategic moves within a larger context in which the denaturalisation of method has become inescapable.

6. CONCLUSION

When Hymes started theorising the relationship between linguistics and ethnography, he inserted it into the larger project 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 (1969b, 1973 [1996: Ch. 3], 1980 [1996: 4]). He went on to sketch out a 'vision' of ethnography disseminated through society at large. At one pole, he suggested, there would be people who'd been professionally trained in ethnography and at the other pole, there would be the general population, respected for their intricate and subtle knowledge of the worlds they lived in. In between, there would be people who could 'combine some disciplined understanding of ethnographic inquiry with the pursuit of their vocation' (1978 [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. Since then, significant parts of this programme have carried across the Atlantic, but in doing so, it has taken root in terrain where professional ethnographers interested in language were extremely thin on the ground. In the absence of a U.K. linguistic anthropology ready and able to train students *ab initio* and operate as a 'community of practice' where novices could absorb skills in language-and-culture analysis through 'legitimate peripheral

participation', Hymes' programme has been embraced by a mixture of his middle group and non-anthropologists doing research in applied and sociolinguistics. Many of these people had to find out for themselves how to work ethnography into their existing interests in language, and their background and position turned the emerging mixture into a way of getting analytic distance on practices and processes quite close at hand. The work emerging from this has been varied, sometimes relatively low-key, and often lacking in the textual standardisation that one can expect in more tightly focused discourse communities. It has meshed, though, with a broader shift in the organisation of academic knowledge production, away from mono-disciplines with clear boundaries towards regions where different disciplines overlap, drawn into interaction through their attention to practical problems in the real world. This shift looks more than momentary:

> If singulars were the modal form of discursive organization in the 100 years between the mid-19th century and the mid-20th century, then it may be that regions will become the modal form from the late 20th century onwards. (Gibbons et al. 1994; see also Bernstein 1996: 68; Strathern (ed.) 2000)

If this is the case, then it looks as though there is an enduring place for research activity with the kind of profile I have described.

For a number of reasons, 'linguistic ethnography' seems to be the best term to characterise this research activity, comprising as it does a number of more specific traditions that share a commitment to putting linguistics and ethnography together to try to understand the social processes that we are involved in. Although it is an invaluable reference point, 'linguistic anthropology' clearly wouldn't do as a general label, as only a few of us have a training or a job in anthropology, and nor would the 'ethnography of communication', as our work has been affected by Critical Discourse Analysis, neo-Vygotskyan research, AL-for-ELT, as well as by Interactional Sociolinguistics and New Literacy Studies (both filial developments beyond the Ethnography of Communication). Indeed, many of us remain vigorous in our particular alignments with International Sociolinguistics, New Literacy Studies, CDA, etc. (as well as other traditions), but none of these individually would work as an umbrella title capable of capturing the whole. Nor would 'applied linguistics' be any good, since this misses the background of self-differentiation from the non-ethnographic, non-interpretive methods found in fields like second language acquisition, corpus linguistics, etc. There certainly are some quite closely related variants that it might be helpful to use at certain moments with specific audiences (e.g. 'sociolinguistic ethnography', or 'ethnographic sociolinguistics'), but perhaps 'linguistic ethnography' is particularly well suited to the inter-disciplinary regions. In contrast to 'ethnographic linguistics' which would declare 'linguistics' as the principal arena for its activity, 'linguistic ethnography' situates this work within a methodology – ethnography – that is very widely shared not just in anthropology but also in sociology, education, management studies, etc. At the same time, it specifies the linguistics of discourse

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and text as the primary resource for our efforts to contribute in a distinctive way
to the broader enterprise of social science.

NOTES

1. The arguments in this paper were first posted at www.ling-ethnog.org.uk in 2004,
   with inputs from Karin Tusting, Janet Maybin, Richard Barwell, Vally Lytra and
   Angela Creese. Since then, I have circulated versions to a number of scholars and
   presented versions at panels coordinated by LEF, Lukas Tsitsipis, Mary Bucholtz and
   Kira Hall. I am very grateful indeed for all the feedback I've received, but must
   accept responsibility both for the more tendentious elements, and for sticking with
   formulations that would demand more nuancing if there were more space.
2. About a quarter of the researchers on the Linguistic Ethnography Forum's email list
   are resident outside the U.K.
3. In fact of the 123 libraries listed in March 2006, the British Library is the only one
   in Europe.
4. In a search of the website of Association of Social Anthropologists (of the U.K. and
   the Commonwealth) (www.theasa.org – accessed on 7 December 2006), I have been
   unable to find anything on 'language' in the conferences listed there (dating from
   2007 back to 1998).
5. This is attested in the proceedings of the BAAL Annual Meetings – *British Studies in
   Applied Linguistics (BSAL)* – published during this period.
6. Since some of the institutional names that I've counted combine several of these
   key words (as in e.g. 'Culture and Communication'), the figures here amount to
   more than the 126 members for whom it's possible to infer disciplinary/thematic
   alignment from institutional affiliations.
7. 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. But
   this doesn't invalidate the more macroscopic distinction between, putting it crudely,
   ethnography 'back home' and ethnography abroad (see 3.iii for elaboration).
8. Of course, there are also more mundane reasons why 'comprehensive ethnography'
   is problematic as a goal for U.K. LE, related to practitioners' disciplinary training. As
   indicated above, the U.K. Linguistic Ethnography Forum has taken shape within an
   association for applied *linguistics*, not anthropology, and only a few of the participants
   have had a thorough grounding 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, U.K. researchers have tended to develop their commitment to ethnography
   in the process of working from language, literacy and discourse outwards, and so
   even though they 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).
9. Rampton 2006 and Maybin 2006 are two recent examples of (U.K.-focused) LE
   research that dwell quite heavily on speaker agency, and for their ethnographically
   oriented consultancy work with doctors, Roberts and Sarangi insist on 'a shift from

'objectivist' explanations which grasp social explanations from the outside towards a position where practices are grasped from the inside 'in the very movement of their accomplishment' (Bourdieu 1977: 3)' (Roberts and Sarangi 1999: 474).

10. Of course, although working in a society where you are a citizen may make you feel more confident about political intervention than anthropologists doing fieldwork abroad, this is no guarantee of striking the best balance between analysis and activism. Personally, I would align with Heller's approach – 'my own preference has been to first try to understand what is going on, and then ask myself how I feel about it, and what, if anything, I want to do about it' (1997: 84; also Cameron et al. 1992). For others, though, political commitment may enter much earlier into the process of analysis.

11. One of the complications of doing linguistic ethnography in educational sites is that yesterday's theoretical conceptions – for example 'communicative competence', 'language community' – often still have a lot of currency in official educational discourses. It can be a difficult task translating back and forward between an established and a new discourse that one is still struggling to enunciate oneself, and the 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, 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.

12. 'Boundary' figures like Bakhtin, Bourdieu and Foucault appear repeatedly in LE studies, and this serves in part to build bridges into other social science disciplines (cf. Rampton 2006: 406–407, 369–372, 2001a: 286–288). I have invoked authors like these a great deal myself, but confess that I have never waited to read everything that each of them wrote before feeling entitled to do so (see also Rampton 2001a: 266).

13. Hamilton, Barton and Ivanic (1994), for example, includes contributions written by teachers, and like Heath (1983), Gregory and Williams (2000) is written to be accessible to members of the community they describe. Roberts (2003) describes the process of co-authoring articles with medical practitioners, and notes that 'our basic ontology was frequently questioned and we found ourselves talking up the authority of our analysis in a way which we were not so comfortable with' (2003: 144). These variations extend of course even to single-authored texts written for familiar audiences. Both Maybin 2006 and Rampton 2006 address the 'the minute, moment-to-moment negotiations of meaning in children's dialogues' (Maybin 2006: 184) and make extensive use of Bakhtin, but with Maybin orienting to neo-Vygotskyan debates about children's meaning-making and education and Rampton taking Interactional Sociolinguistics as his point of departure, there is significant difference in the degree of micro-analytic detail that they employ.

14. Reasons for this include 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.

15. Specifically in terms of the conflictual dimension of the relationship between linguistics and ethnography, there appears to have been a shift in the pattern of

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ascendance over the last 50 years. According to Hymes, the worry during the post-war hey-day of structuralism was that the humanities and social sciences were worryingly 'pre-scientific' (1983: 196). Linguistics was held up as a model for the scientific study of culture as an integrated system, and the intensity of U.S. anthropologists' interest in linguistics as a key to the organisation of culture was matched by linguists' lack of regard for ethnography. The emergence of post-structuralism may have changed the boot to the other foot. Fragmentation and contingency take over from coherence and system, the linguist's claims to science are relativised by growth in the belief that knowledges are situated and plural; and it's now quite commonly felt that the natural sciences have been worryingly 'pre-social', ethnography and other forms of contextual study being invoked as necessary correctives (Gibbons et al. 1994: 99).

16. In over 1700 pages, there are for example only five (rather passing) references to James Clifford (one of the leading critics of traditional ethnography).

17. Although the institutionalisation of linguistic anthropology in the U.S. is obviously infinitely greater than in the U.K., I am not in a position to judge the balance within this of the dispositions towards either mono-disciplinary 'singularity' or inter-disciplinary 'regionalism'. Within the U.S., Duranti's work may be a good example of the former, but Hymes is a major exponent of the latter, and concerns with epistemology and the relations between knowledge and power broadly similar to Hymes' are also central in for example the Scollons' 'nexus analysis' (2003, 2004), as well as in the 'collusional analysis' developed by McDermott et al. (McDermott and Tylbor 1983; McDermott 1988; Varenne and McDermott 1998).

18. In the opening paragraph of its constitution, the U.K. LEF defines its aims as being:

   ∗ 'to bring together researchers conducting linguistic ethnography (LE) here and abroad

   ∗ to explore a range of past and current work, to identify key issues, and to engage in methodologically and theoretically well-tuned debate' (at www.ling-ethnog.org.uk accessed on 25 June 2006).

19. In contrast with the situation in sociolinguistics, applied linguists have never been properly socialised into doctrines about language research being ethically neutral and 'linguistics being descriptive, not prescriptive', and if for example one rereads Criper and Widdowson's (1975) paper on 'Sociolinguistics and language teaching' in the *Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics,* one sees a much earlier, far sharper understanding of idealisation as a situated strategy, and of the limits of sociolinguistic generalisation, than anything to be found in introductory textbooks in sociolinguistics, (see Rampton 2000: 106–108 for elaboration).

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