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JAN BLOMMAERT / BEN RAMPTON

Language and Superdiversity

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften

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Abstract

This paper explores the scope for research on language and super-diversity.[1] Following a protracted process of paradigm shift, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology are well placed to engage with the contemporary social changes associated with super-diversity. After a brief introductory discussion of what super-diversity entails, the paper outlines key theoretical and methodological developments in language study: named languages have now been denaturalised, the linguistic is treated as just one semiotic among many, inequality and innovation are positioned together in a dynamic of pervasive normativity, and the contexts in which people orient their interactions reach far beyond the communicative event itself.

From here, this paper moves to a research agenda on super-diversity and language that is strongly embedded in ethnography. The combination of linguistics and ethnography produces an exceptionally powerful and differentiated view of both activity and ideology. After a characterisation of what linguistic ethnography offers social science in general, this paper sketches some priorities for research on language and communication in particular, emphasising the need for cumulative comparison, both as an objective in theory and description and as a resource for practical intervention.

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Keywords

super-diversity, sociolinguistics

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1 Blommaert & Rampton drafted this text, but it is the outcome of substantial discussion and revision involving Adrian Blackledge, Jens Normann Jorgensen, Sirpa Leppänen, Roxy Harris, Max Spotti, Lian Madsen, Martha Karrebaek, Janus Møller, Karel Arnaut, David Parkin, Kasper Juffermans, Steve Vertovec, Ad Backus and Angela Creese.

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1. Super-diversity

There is a growing awareness that over the past two decades, globalization has altered the face of social, cultural and linguistic diversity in societies all over the world. Due to the diffuse nature of migration since the early 1990s, the multiculturalism of an earlier era (captured, mostly, in an 'ethnic minorities' paradigm) has been gradually replaced by what Vertovec (2007) calls 'super-diversity'. Super-diversity is characterized by a tremendous increase in the categories of migrants, not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration, processes of insertion into the labour and housing markets of the host societies, and so on (cf.2010). The predictability of the category of 'migrant' and of his/her sociocultural features has disappeared. An example can start to show some of the communicative effects.

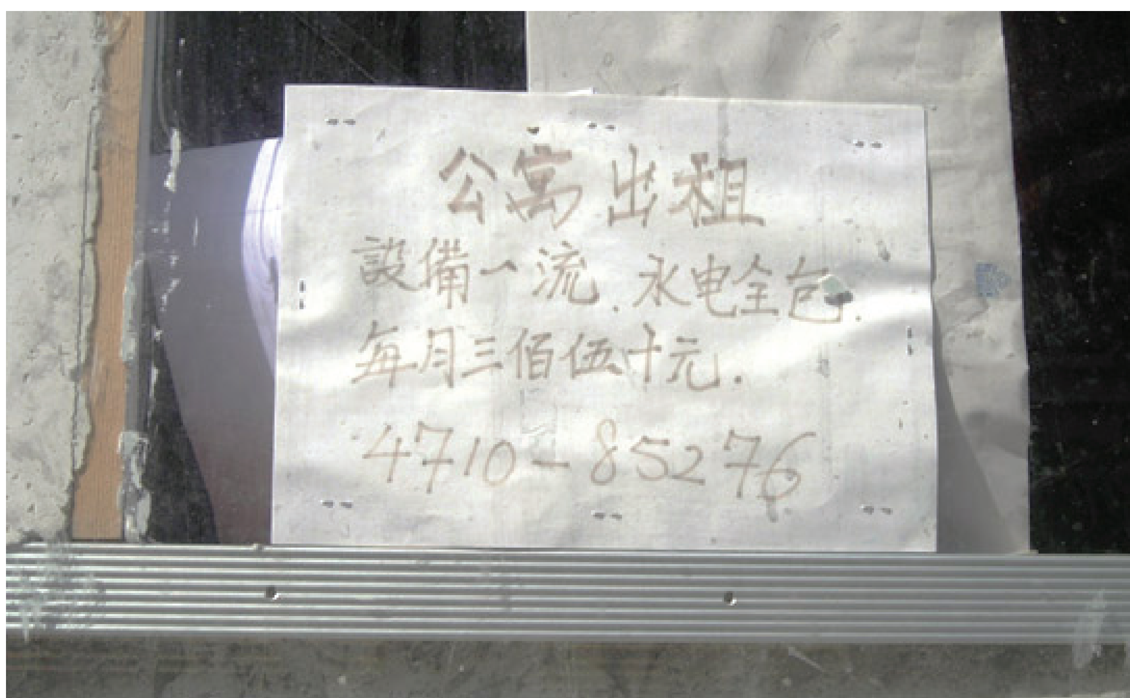

Figure 1: A notice in an Antwerp shop window

This small piece of text was found in the main street of an inner-city area of Antwerp, Belgium (see Blommaert and Huang 2010 for details). It is handwritten in 'Chinese' (though this will need to be qualified). In English translation, the text reads "apartment for rent, first class finishing, water and electricity included, 350 Yuan per month", followed by a mobile phone number. The text is mundane, and unless one

has a particular interest in it (as sociolinguists do), it is easy to overlook. But when we pay closer attention, we discover a very complex object, and here are some of the issues: (1) the text is written in *two forms* of 'Chinese': a mixture of the simplified script, which is the norm in the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the traditional script widespread in Hong Kong, Taiwan and earlier generations of the Chinese diaspora. (2) The text articulates two different styles or voices, that of the producer and that of the addressee(s), and the mixed script suggests that their styles are not identical. In all likelihood, the producer is someone used to writing traditional script, while the addressee is probably from the PRC. (3) The latter point is corroborated by the use of 'Yuan' rather than 'Euro' as the currency, and (4) the mixed character of the text suggests a process of transition. More specifically, it suggests that the producer (probably an 'older' diaspora Chinese person) is learning the script of the PRC, the unfinished learning process leading to the mixing of the scripts. Thus (5) this text points towards two very large-scale phenomena: (a) a gradual change in the Chinese diaspora, in which the balance of demographic, political and material predominance gradually shifts away from the traditional diaspora groups towards new émigrés from the PRC; (b) the fact that such a transition is articulated in 'small' and peripheral places in the Chinese diaspora, such as the inner city of Antwerp, not only in larger and more conspicuous 'Chinatowns' such as the one in London (Huang 2010).

So this text bears the traces of worldwide migration flows and their specific demographic, social and cultural dynamics. Migration makes communicative resources like language varieties and scripts globally mobile, and this affects neighbourhoods in very different corners of the world. In this Antwerp neighbourhood, Chinese people are not a very visible group, and in fact, this handwritten notice was the very first piece of vernacular Chinese writing observed here (the two Chinese restaurants in the area have professionally manufactured shop signs in Cantonese, written in traditional calligraphic script). Still, the notice shows that the neighbourhood probably includes a non-uniform and perhaps small community of Chinese émigrés, and the marks of historical struggles over real and symbolic power are being transplanted into the Antwerp inner city. Plainly, there are distinctive communicative processes and outcomes involved in migration, and this paper argues that the detailed study of these can make a substantial contribution to debates about the nature and structure of super-diversification.

In fact, these demographic and social changes are complicated by the emergence of new media and technologies of communication and information circulation – and here an orientation to communication necessarily introduces further uncharted

dimensions to the idea of super-diversity. Historically, migration movements from the 1990s onwards have coincided with the development of the Internet and mobile phones, and these have affected the cultural life of of all kinds of diaspora communities (old and new, black and white, imperial, trade, labour etc. (cf. Cohen 1997)). While emigration used to mean real separation between the émigré and his/her home society, involving the loss or dramatic reduction of social, cultural and political roles and impact there, emigrants and dispersed communities now have the potential to retain an active connection by means of an elaborate set of long-distance communication technologies.[2] These technologies impact on sedentary 'host' communities as well, with people getting involved in transnational networks that offer potentially altered forms of identity, community formation and cooperation (Baron 2008). In the first instance, these developments are changes in the material world – new technologies of communication and knowledge as well as new demographies – but for large numbers of people across the world, they are also lived experiences and sociocultural modes of life that may be changing in ways and degrees that we have yet to understand.

If we are to grasp the insight into social transformation that communicative phenomena can offer us, it is essential to approach them with an adequate toolkit, recognising that the traditional vocabulary of linguistic analysis is no longer sufficient. In fact, the study of language in society has itself participated in the major intellectual shifts in the humanities and social sciences loosely identified with 'post-structuralism' and 'post-modernism' (see e.g. Bauman 1992). It is worth now turning to this refurbished apparatus, periodically aligning it with questions that the notion of superdiversity raises.

2. Paradigm shifts in the study of language in society

Over a period of several decades – and often emerging in response to issues predating super-diversity – there has been ongoing revision of fundamental ideas (a) about languages, (b) about language groups and speakers, and (c) about communication. Rather than working with homogeneity, stability and boundedness as the starting

2 Thus, while a dissident political activist used to forfeit much of his/her involvement by emigrating, such activists can today remain influential and effective in their dissident movements back home (cf. Appadurai 2006 on 'cellular activism').

assumptions, mobility, mixing, political dynamics and historical embedding are now central concerns. These shifts have been influenced by the pioneering work of linguistic anthropologists like John Gumperz, Dell Hymes and Michael Silverstein, the foundational rethinking of social and cultural theorists like Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Foucault, Goffman, Hall and Williams, as well as, no doubt, substantial changes in the linguascapes in many parts of the world. In fact with this kind of pedigree, 'robust and well-established orthodoxy' might seem more apt as a characterisation of these ideas than 'paradigm shift' or 'developments'. Nevertheless, super-diversity intensifies the relevance of these ideas, and if the exposition below sometimes sounds a little gratuitously alternative or oppositional, this is because the notions they seek to displace continue with such hegemonic force in public discourse, in bureaucratic and educational policy and practice, and in everyday common sense, as well as in some other areas of language study.

2.1 Languages

There is now a substantial body of work on **ideologies of language** that denaturalises the idea that there are distinct languages, and that a proper language is bounded, pure and composed of structured sounds, grammar and vocabulary designed for referring to things (Joseph and Taylor 1990, Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998). Named languages – 'English', 'German', 'Bengali' – are ideological constructions historically tied to the emergence of the nation-state in the 19th century, when the idea of autonomous languages free from agency and individual intervention meshed with the differentiation of peoples in terms of spiritual essences (Gal and Irvine 1995, Taylor 1990). In differentiating, codifying and linking 'a language' with 'a people', linguistic scholarship itself played a major role in the development of the European nation-state as well as in the expansion and organisation of empires (Anderson 1983, Blommaert 1999, Collins 1998, Errington 2008, Gal and Irvine 1995, Hymes 1980c, Makoni and Pennycook 2007, Pratt 1987, Robins 1979: Chs 6 & 7, Said 1978), and the factuality of named languages continues to be taken for granted in a great deal of contemporary institutional policy and practice. Indeed, even in sociolinguistic work that sets out to challenge nation-state monolingualism, languages are sometimes still conceptualised as bounded systems linked with bounded communities (Heller 2007, Moore, Pietikänen, and Blommaert 2010, Urla 1995).

The traditional idea of 'a language', then, is an ideological artefact with very considerable power – operating as a major ingredient in the apparatus of modern

governmentality – it is played out in a wide variety of domains (education, immigration, education, high and popular culture etc.), and it can serve as an object of passionate personal attachment. But as sociolinguists have long maintained, it is far more productive *analytically* to focus on the very variable ways in which individual linguistic features, with identifiable social and cultural associations, get clustered together whenever people communicate (Blommaert 2003, Hudson 1980, Hymes 1996, Le Page 1988, Silverstein 1998). If we focus on the links and histories of each of the ingredients in any strip of communication, then the ideological homogenisation and/or erasure achieved in national language naming becomes obvious, and a host of sub- and/or trans-national styles and registers come into view, most of which are themselves ideologically marked and active (Agha 2007). Instead, a much more differentiated account of the organisation of communicative practice emerges, centring on genres, activities and relationships that are enacted in ways that are often missed by both official and common sense accounts. Indeed, this could be seen in Figure 1.

2.2 Language groups and speakers

The deconstruction of the idea of distinct 'languages' has followed the critical analyses of the 'nation' and 'a people' in the humanities and social sciences (Anderson 1983, Said 1978). Within sociolinguistics itself, an anti-essentialist critique has led to the semi-technical notion of 'speech community' being more or less abandoned (Pratt 1987, Rampton 1998, Silverstein 1998).[3] 'Speech community' has been superseded by a more empirically anchored and differentiating vocabulary which includes 'communities of practice', 'institutions' and 'networks' as the often mobile and flexible sites and links in which representations of groups emerge, move and circulate. Historically, a good deal of the model-building in formal, descriptive and applied linguistics has prioritised the 'native speakers of a language', treating early experience of living in families and stable speech communities as crucial to grammatical competence and coherent discourse. But sociolinguists have long contested this idealisation, regarding it as impossible to reconcile with the facts of linguistic diversity, mixed language and multilingualism (Ferguson 1982, Leung, Harris, and Rampton 1997). Instead they work with the notion of a linguistic **repertoire**. This dispenses

3 For a long time, linguists considered a speech community to be an objective entity that could be empirically identified as a body of people that interacted regularly, and that had common attitudes and/or rules of language use. It was the largest social unit that the study of a given language variety could seek to generalize about.

with *a priori* assumptions about the links between origins, upbringing, proficiency and types of language, and it refers to individuals' very variable (and often rather fragmentary) grasp of a plurality of differentially shared styles, registers and genres, which are picked up (and maybe then partially forgotten) within biographical trajectories that develop in actual histories and topographies (Blommaert and Backus 2011). Indeed, speech itself is no longer treated as the output of a unitary speaker. Following Bakhtin's account of 'double-voicing' (Bakhtin 1981) and Goffman's 'production formats' (Goffman 1981), individuals are seen as bringing very different levels of personal commitment to the styles they speak (often 'putting on' different voices in parody, play etc.), and of course this also applies to the written uses of language (see 2.3.3 below).

So although notions like 'native speaker', 'mother tongue' and 'ethnolinguistic group' have considerable ideological force (and as such should certainly feature as *objects* of analysis), they should have no place in the sociolinguistic toolkit itself. When the reassurance afforded by *a priori* classifications like these is abandoned, research instead has to address the ways in which people take on different linguistic forms as they align and disaffiliate with different groups at different moments and stages. It has to investigate how they (try to) opt in and opt out of these groups, how they perform or play with linguistic signs of group belonging, and how they develop particular trajectories of group identification throughout their lives. Even in situations of relative stability, contrast and counter-valorisation play an integral part in linguistic socialisation, and people develop strong feelings about styles and registers that they can recognise but hardly reproduce (if at all). So as a way of characterising the relationship between language and person, the linguist's traditional notion of 'competence' is far too positive, narrow and absolute in its assumptions about ability and alignment with a given way of speaking. Habitually using one ideologically distinguishable language, style or register means steering clear of and *not* using others (Irvine 2001, Parkin 1977; 3.2.2 below), and notions like 'sensibility' or 'structure of feeling' are potentially much better than 'competence' at capturing this relational positioning amidst a number of identifiable possibilities (Harris 2006, Rampton 2011a, Williams 1977).

In fact, much of this can be generalised beyond language to other social and cultural features treated as emblematic of group belonging, and this will become clear if we now turn to 'communication'.

2.3 Communication

Linguistics has traditionally privileged the structure of language, and treated language use as little more than a product/output generated by semantic, grammatical and phonological systems, which are themselves regarded either as mental structures or as sets of social conventions. But this commitment to system-in-language has been challenged by a linguistics of **communicative practice,** rooted in a linguistic-anthropological tradition running from Sapir through Hymes and Gumperz to Hanks (1996), Verschueren (1999) and Agha (2007). This approach puts situated action first. It sees linguistic conventions/structures as just one (albeit important) semiotic resource among a number that are available to participants in the process of local language production and interpretation, and it treats meaning as an active process of here-and-now projection and inferencing, ranging across all kinds of percept, sign and knowledge. This view is closely linked to at least five developments.

2.3.1 First, the denotational and propositional meanings of words and sentences lose their preeminence in linguistic study, and attention turns to **indexicality**, the connotational significance of signs. So for example, when someone switches in speaking and/or writing into a different style or register, it is essential to consider more than the literal meaning of what they are saying. The style, register or code they have moved into is itself likely to carry associations that are somehow relevant to the specific activities and social relations in play, and this can "serve as the rallying point for interest group sharing", "act[ing] as [a] powerful instrument… of persuasion in everyday communicative situations for participants who share [the] values [that are thereby indexed]" (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982: 7, 6). To achieve rhetorical effects like this in the absence of explicit statements about group interests, there has to be at least some overlap in the interpretive frameworks that participants bring to bear in their construal of a switch. The overlap does not come from nowhere – it emerges from social experience and prior exposure to circumambient discourses, and if the interpretations are almost automatic and unquestioned, this may be regarded as an achievement of hegemony (as in e.g. common evaluations of different accents). Indeed, the relationship here between, on the one hand, signs with unstated meanings and on the other, socially shared interpretations, makes indexicality a very rich site for the empirical study of ideology (cf. Hall 1980: 133). In fact, this can also extend far beyond language itself.

2.3.2 This is because meaning is **multi-modal**, communicated in much more than language alone. People apprehend meaning in gestures, postures, faces, bodies, movements, physical arrangements and the material environment. In different combinations, all of these constitute contexts, and shape the way in which utterances are produced and understood (Bezemer and Jewitt 2009, Goffman 1964, Goodwin 2000). This obviously applies to written and technologically mediated communication as well as to speech (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996), and even when they are alone, people are continuously reading multi-modal signs to make sense of their circumstances, as likely as not drawing on interpretive frameworks with social origins of which they are largely unaware (Leppänen et al. 2009). In fact, with people communicating more and more in varying combinations of oral, written, pictorial and 'design' modes (going on Facebook, playing online games, using mobile phones etc.), multimodal analysis is an inevitable empirical adjustment to contemporary conditions, and we are compelled to move from 'language' in the strict sense towards *semiosis* as our focus of inquiry, and from 'linguistics' towards a new sociolinguistically informed *semiotics* as our disciplinary space (Kress 2009, Scollon and Scollon 2003, 2004).

2.3.3 Together, indexicality and multimodality help to destabilise other traditional ingredients in language study – assumptions of common ground and the prospects for achieving inter-subjectivity. Instead **non-shared knowledge** grows in its potential significance for communicative processes. The example of code-switching in 2.3.1 shows indexical signs contributing to rhetorical persuasion, but this is by no means their only effect. Indexical signs are also unintentionally 'given off', with consequences that speakers may have little inkling of (Brown and Levinson 1978: 324-5, Goffman 1959: 14). When speakers articulate literal propositions in words, they have quite a high level of conscious control over the meaning of what they are saying, and even though there are never any guarantees, their interlocutor's response usually provides material for monitoring the uptake of what they have said (see e.g. Heritage and Atkinson 1984). But these words are accompanied by a multi-modal barrage of other semiotic signs (accent, style of speaking, posture, dress etc.), and the interlocutor can also interpret any of these other elements in ways that the speaker is unaware of, perhaps noting something privately that they only later disclose to others. So if we look beyond literal and referential meaning and language on its own, we increase our sensitivity to a huge range of non-shared, asymmetrical interpretations, and in fact many of these are quite systematically patterned in relations of power.

Looking beyond multimodality, diversity itself throws up some sharp empirical challenges to traditional ideas about the achievability of mutual understanding and the centrality of shared convention.

First, if it brings people together with very different backgrounds, resources and communicative scripts; diversity is likely to pluralise indexical interpretation, introducing significant **limits to negotiability**, and this in turn impacts on the idea of 'negotiation', a notion with axiomatic status in some branches of interactional linguistics. In Barth's hard-nosed empirical approach to the concept, "negotiation' suggests a degree of conflict of interests… within a framework of shared understandings[, but…t]he disorder entailed in… religious, social, ethnic, class and cultural pluralism [sometimes…] goes far beyond what can be retrieved as ambiguities of interest, relevance, and identity resolved through negotiation." (Barth 1992: 27). In situations where linguistic repertoires can be largely discrepant and non-verbal signs may do little to evoke solidarity, or alternatively in settings where there is a surfeit of technologically mediated texts and imagery, the identification of any initial common ground can itself be a substantial task (Barrett 1997: 188-191, Gee 1999: 15ff). The salience of *non*-shared knowledge increases the significance of "knowing one's own ignorance, knowing that others know something else, knowing whom to believe, developing a notion of the potentially knowable" (Fabian 2001, Hannerz 1992: 45). The management of ignorance itself becomes a substantive issue, and *inequalities* in communicative resources have to be addressed, not just 'intercultural differences'. It would be absurd to insist that there is absolutely no 'negotiation of meaning' in encounters where the communicative resources are only minimally shared. But it is important not to let a philosophical commitment to negotiation (or co-construction) as an axiomatic property of communication prevent us from investigating the limits to negotiability, or appreciating the vulnerability of whatever understanding emerges in the here-and-now to more fluent interpretations formed elsewhere, either before or after (Gumperz 1982, Maryns 2006, Roberts, Davies, and Jupp 1992).

A second empirical challenge that diversity presents to presumptions of shared knowledge can be seen as the opposite of the first. Instead of focusing on communicative inequalities in institutional and instrumental settings, there is an emphasis on *creativity* and *linguistic profusion* when sociolinguistic research focuses on **non-standard mixed language practices that appear to draw on styles and languages that are not normally regarded as belonging to the speaker**, especially in recreational, artistic and/or oppositional contexts (and often among youth). These appropriative practices are strikingly different from dominant institutional notions of multilingualism

as the ordered deployment of different language, and they involve much more than just the alternation between the home vernacular and the national standard language. Instead, they use linguistic features influenced by e.g. ethnic outgroups, new media and popular culture. The local naming of these practices is itself often indeterminate and contested, both among users and analysts, and scholarly terms referring to (different aspects of) this include 'heteroglossia', 'crossing', 'polylingualism', 'translanguaging', 'metrolingualism' and 'new ethnicities and language' (Bakhtin 1981, 1984, Creese and Blackledge 2010, Harris 2006, Jørgensen 2008, 2010, Leppänen 2012, Madsen 2008, Otsuji and Pennycook 2010, Rampton 1995, 2011a) (for reviews, see Auer 2006, Quist and Jørgensen 2009, Rampton and Charalambous 2010).

Understanding the relationship between conventionality and innovation in these practices is difficult, and there are a variety of traps that researchers have to navigate (Rampton 2010). It is easy for a practice's novelty to the outside analyst to mislead him/her into thinking that it is a creative innovation for the local participants as well (Becker 1995: 229, Sapir in Mandelbaum 1949: 504). And then once it has been established that the practice *is* new or artful in some sense or other, it is often hard to know how much weight to attach to any particular case (and not to make mountains out of molehills. See also 3.2 below.). It can take a good deal of close analysis to identify exactly how and where in an utterance an artful innovation emerges – in which aspects of its formal structure, its timing, its interpersonal direction, its indexical resonance etc., and in which combinations. The ideal may be for researchers to align their sense of what is special and what is routine with their informants', but there is no insulation from the intricacies of human ingenuity, deception and misunderstanding, where people speak in disguise, address themselves to interlocutors with very different degrees of background understanding etc. Still, it is worth looking very closely at these practices for at least two reasons. First, they allow us to observe linguistic norms being manufactured, interrogated or altered, or to see norms that have changed and are new/different in the social networks being studied. We can see, in short, the emergence of structure out of agency. And second, there are likely to be social, cultural and/or political stakes in this, as we know from the principle of indexicality (2.3.1). So when white youngsters use bits of other-ethnic speech styles in ways that their other-ethnic friends accept, there are grounds for suggesting that they are learning to 'live with difference' (Harris 2006, Hewitt 1986, Rampton 1995), and when people put on exaggerated posh or vernacular accents in mockery or retaliation of authority, it looks as though social class has retained its significance in late modernity (Jaspers 2011, Rampton 2006).

Practices of this kind certainly are not new historically (Hill 1999: 544). Linguistic diversity invariably introduces styles, registers and/or languages that people know only from the outside – attaching indexical value to them perhaps, but unable to grasp their 'intentionality', semantics and grammar[4] – and there is a powerful account of the potential for ideological creativity and subversion that this offers in, for example, Bakhtin's work on the Rabelaisian carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984). But there has been exponential growth in scholarly attention to these practices over the last 15 years, – the epoch of super-diversity (cf. 3.2.1). So when Androutsopoulos proposes that "linguistic diversity is gaining an unprecedented visibility in the mediascapes of the late twentieth and early twenty first century" (2007: 207), he associates this with different kinds of heteroglossia/polylingualism. For example, non-national language forms are now widely stylised, starting in advertising but extending beyond nation-wide media to niche, commercial and non-profit media for various contemporary youth-cultural communities – "when media makers devise an advertisement, plan a lifestyle magazine or set up a website, they may select linguistic codes (a second language, a mixed code) just for specific portions of their product, based on anticipations of their aesthetic value, their indexical or symbolic force, and, ultimately, their effects on the audience" (2007: 215). Alternatively, diaspora media often have to reckon with the fact that much of their audience has limited proficiency in the language of the homeland, so producers position "tiny amounts of [the] language… at the margins of text and talk units,… thereby" "exploit[ing] the symbolic, rather than the referential, function", "evok[ing] social identities and relationships associated with the minimally used language" (2007: 214). And in addition, "in the era of digital technologies, the sampling and recontextualisation of media content is a basic practice in popular media culture: rap artists sample foreign voices in their song; entertainment shows feature snatches of other-language broadcasts for humour; internet users engage in linguistic *bricolage* on their homepages" (2007: 208).

4 Bakhtin puts it as follows: "for the speakers of [particular] language[s] themselves, these… languages… are directly intentional – they denote and express directly and fully, and are capable of expressing themselves without mediation; but outside, that is, for those not participating in the given purview, these languages may be treated as objects, as typifications, as local colour. For such outsiders, the intentions permeating these languages become things, limited in their meaning and expression; they attract to, or excise from, such languages a particular word – making it difficult for the word to be utilised in a directly intentional way, without any qualification" (1981: 289).

2.3.4 When shared knowledge is problematised and creativity and incomprehension are both at issue, people reflect on their own and others' communication, assessing the manner and extent to which this matches established standards and scripts for 'normal' and expected expression. This connects with another major contemporary concern in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology – **metapragmatic reflexivity** about language and semiotic practice. Even though it is now recognised that reflexivity is actually pervasive in all linguistic practice, this is a substantial departure from sociolinguists' traditional prioritisation of tacit, unself-conscious language use, and it now features as a prominent focus in a range of empirical topics. As we saw with ideologically differentiated languages in 2.1, research on public debates about language shows how these are almost invariably connected to (and sometimes stand as a proxies for) non-linguistic interests – legislation on linguistic proficiency as a criterion for citizenship, for example, often serves as a way of restricting access to social benefits and/or rallying indigenous populations (see e.g.Blackledge 2009, Warriner 2007). In enterprise culture and contemporary service industries, meta-pragmatic theories and technologies of discourse and talk are closely linked to regimes of power in 'communication skills training', 'customer care' and 'quality management' (Cameron 2000). In visual design and the production of multimodal textualities in advertising, website development and other technologically mediated communication, linguistic reflexivity plays a crucial role (whether or not this is polylingual) (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996). And ordinary speakers are also perceived as evaluating and reflecting on the cultural images of people and activities indexically conjured by particular forms of speech – this can be seen in a very substantial growth of sociolinguistic interest in artful oral performance, where there is heightened evaluative awareness of both the act of expression and the performer, not just on stage or in heteroglossic speech mixing (2.3.3) but also in e.g. spontaneous story-telling (Bauman 1986, Coupland 2007).

2.3.5 In research on stylisation, performance and visual design, linguistics extends its horizons beyond habit, regularity and system to distinction and spectacle, and if a spectacular practice or event is actually significant, then there has to be some record of it that gets circulated over time and space. In this way, the focus broadens beyond the workings of language and text *within* specific events to the projection of language and text *across* them, in textual trajectories. With this extension beyond use-value to the exchange-value of language practices, ***en*textualisation, *trans*position and *re*contextualisation** become key terms, addressing (a) the (potentially multiple) actors and

processes involved in the design or selection of textual 'projectiles,' which have some hope of travelling into subsequent settings; (b) the alteration and revaluation of texts in 'transportation', i.e. the ways in which mobility affects texts and interpretive work; and (c) the embedding of texts in new contexts (Agha and Wortham 2005, Bauman and Briggs 1990, Hall 1980, Silverstein and Urban 1996).

So meaning-making and interpretation are seen as stages in the mobility of texts and utterances, and as being themselves actively oriented – backwards and forwards – to the paths through which texts and utterances travel (Briggs 2005).[5] As well as encouraging a multi-sited description of communications beyond, before and after specific events, the analysis of transposition can also be factored into face-to-face interaction. In situations where participants inevitably find themselves immersed in a plethora of contingent particularities, where there are no guarantees of intersubjectivity and indexical signs can communicate independent of the speakers' intentions, analysis of what actually gets entextualised and what subsequently succeeds in carrying forward – or even translating into a higher scale processes – can be central to political conceptions of 'hearability' and 'voice' (Blommaert 2005, Briggs 1997, Hymes 1996, Mehan 1996).

This perspective is clearly relevant to the circulation of ideological messages, to technologically mediated communication and to global and transnational 'flows' more generally. It also invites comparative analysis of the scale – the spatial scope, temporal durability, and social reach – of the networks and processes in which texts and representations travel (Androutsopoulos 2009, Blommaert 2008, 2010b, Pennycook 2007, 2010, Scollon and Scollon 2004). In other words, it encourages a **layered and multi-scalar conceptualisation of context** (Blommaert 2010b, Cicourel 1992). The contexts in which people communicate are partly local and emergent, continuously readjusted to the contingencies of action unfolding from one moment to the next, but they are also infused with information, resources, expectations and experiences that originate in, circulate through, and/or are destined for networks and processes that can be very different in their reach and duration (as well as in their capacity to bestow privilege, power or stigma).

In cultural forms like Hip Hop, for example, resources from immediate, local and global scale-levels are all called into play. As well as shaping each line to build on the last and lead to the next, rappers anchor their messages in local experiences/realities and articulate them in the global stylistic template of Hip Hop, accessing a global

5 This obviously complicates notions of 'authorship' and it is directly relevant to discussions on the 'authenticity' and the 'originality' of texts (as in 'the original version of X').

scale-level of potential circulation, recognition and uptake in spite of (and complementary to) the restricted accessibility typically associated with the strictly local (Pennycook 2007, Wang 2010). Similarly, the multi-scalar dimensions of diasporic life in conditions of super-diversity account for the complex forms of new urban multilingualism encountered in recent work in linguistic landscaping (Pan 2010, Scollon and Scollon 2003). The local emplacement of, say, a Turkish shop in Amsterdam prompts messages in Dutch; the local emplacement of the regional diasporic ethnic community and its transnational network prompts Turkish; and other local, regional and transnational factors can prompt the presence of English, Polish, Russian, Arabic, Tamil and others.

In a multi-scalar view of context, features that used to be treated separately as macro – social class, ethnicity, gender, generation etc. – can now be seen operating at the most micro-level of interactional process, as resources that participants can draw upon when making sense of what is going on in a communicative event (see the example of style shifting in 2.3.1). Most of the extrinsic resources flowing into the nexus of communication may be taken for granted, tacitly structuring the actions that participants opt for, but metapragmatic reflexivity (2.3.4) means that participants also often orient to the 'multi-scalar' and 'transpositional' implications of what is happening. After all, messages, texts, genres, styles and languages vary conspicuously in their potential for circulation – this is itself a major source of stratification – and it can sometimes become the focus of attention and dispute, as people differ in their normative sense of what should relay where. In this way, here-and-now interaction is also often actively 'scale-sensitive', mindful of the transnational, national or local provenance or potential of a text or practice, overtly committed to e.g. blocking or reformatting it may translate up or down into some sort of social or organisational hierarchy (Arnaut 2005).

2.3.6 **Methodologically**, virtually all of the work reported here can be subsumed under two axioms:

a) the contexts for communication should be investigated rather than assumed. Meaning takes shape within specific places, activities, social relations, interactional histories, textual trajectories, institutional regimes and cultural ideologies, produced and construed by embodied agents with expectations and repertoires that have to be grasped ethnographically; and
b) the analysis of the internal organisation of semiotic data is essential to understanding its significance and position in the world. Meaning is far more than just

the 'expression of ideas'; biography, identifications, stance and nuance are extensively signalled in the linguistic and textual fine-grain.

If traditional classificatory frameworks no longer work and ethnic categorisation is especially problematic in conditions of super-diversity, then this combination seems very apt. One of ethnography's key characteristics is its commitment to taking a long hard look at empirical processes that make no sense within established frameworks. And if critiques of essentialism underline the relevance of Moerman's (1974: 62) reformulation of the issue in research on the 'Lue' – "The question is not, 'Who are the Lue?', but rather when and how and why the identification of 'Lue' is preferred" (also e.g. Barth 1969) – then it is worth turning to language and discourse to understand how categories and identities get circulated, taken up and reproduced in textual representations and communicative encounters.

Admittedly, the methodological profile of linguistics has not always made it seem particularly well-suited to this terrain. During the heyday of structuralism, linguistics was often held up as a model for the scientific study of culture as an integrated system, making the rest of the humanities and social sciences worry that they were 'pre-scientific' (Hymes 1983: 196). Indeed, in Levinson's words, "linguists are the snobs of social science: you don't get into the club unless you are willing to don the most outlandish presuppositions" (1988: 161). But in this section we have tried to show that these 'outlandish presuppositions' no longer hold with the force that they used to. Instead we would insist on bringing an ethnographer's sensibility to the apparatus of linguistics and discourse analysis, treating it as a set of 'sensitising' concepts "suggest[ing] directions along which to look" rather than 'definitive' constructs "provid[ing] prescriptions of what to see" (Blumer 1969: 148), and this should be applied with reflexive understanding of the researcher's own participation in the circulation of power/knowledge (Cameron et al. 1992). But once the apparatus is epistemologically repositioned like this – repositioned as just the extension of ethnography into intricate zones of culture and society that might otherwise be missed – then linguistics offers a very rich and empirically robust collection of frameworks and procedures for exploring the details of social life, and also provides a very full range of highly suggestive – but not binding! – proposals about how they pattern together.

Among other effects produced by this combination of linguistics and ethnography, a distinctive view of ideology emerges. Rather than being treated only as sets of explicitly articulated statements (as in much policy and interview discourse analysis), ideologies are viewed as complexes that operate in different shapes and with different modes of articulation at a variety of levels on a range of objects. Explicit statements

are of course included, but so too are implicit behavioural reflexes operating in discourse practices (turning these into ideologically saturated praxis). Intense scrutiny of textual and discursive detail discloses the ways in which widely distributed societal ideologies penetrate the microscopic world of talk and text, and how ideologies have palpable mundane reality.[6] Indeed, this layered, multi-scalar and empirically grounded understanding of ideology is perhaps one of the most sophisticated ones in current social science.

This, then, is the refurbished toolkit that currently constitutes linguistic ethnography (linguistic anthropology/ethnographic sociolinguistics). It is now worth reflecting on some of the questions and issues that it could be used to address.

3. An agenda for research

There are at least two broad tracks for the study of language in super-diversity, one which adds linguistic ethnography as a supplementary perspective to other kinds of study, and another that takes language and communication as central topics. As the perspective outlined in Section 2 is itself inevitably interdisciplinary, the difference between these tracks is mainly a matter of degree, and the dividing line becomes even thinner when, for example, Vertovec (2007: 27) asks in a discussion of super-diversity and 'civil integration' what "meaningful [communicative] interchanges look like, how they are formed, maintained or broken, and how the state or other agencies might promote them" (see also Boyd 2006 on 'civility', and Gilroy 2006 on low-key 'conviviality'). Still, there are differences in the extent to which research questions and foci can be pre-specified in each of these tracks.

3.1 Adding linguistic ethnography as a supplementary lens

Wherever empirical research is broadly aligned with social constructionism (e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1966, Giddens 1976, 1984), there is scope for introducing the kinds of lens outlined in Section 2. If the social world is produced in ordinary activity, and if social realities get produced, ratified, resisted and reworked in everyday interaction, then the tools of linguistic, semiotic and discourse analysis can help us understand a great deal more than communication alone. So, if one rejects an

6 See also the discussion of 'normativity' in 3.2.1

essentialist group description such as 'the Roma in Hungary', and instead seeks to understand how 'Roma' circulates as a representation in Hungarian discourse, how it settles on particular humans, and how it comes to channel and constrain their position and activity, then it is vital to take a close look at language and discourse (also Moerman 1974 cited above, Tremlett 2007).

There is no retreat from larger generalisations about ethnicity, history or super-diversity in this linguistic focus, but it is driven by a view that in the process of abstracting and simplifying, it is vital to continuously refer back to what is daily 'lived' and expressed (itself understood as layered and multi-scalar) (cf. Harris and Rampton 2010). Without this anchoring, discussion is often left vulnerable to the highly octane dramatisations of public discourse, panicked and unable to imagine how anyone copes. Talk of 'multiple, fluid, intersecting and ambiguous identities' provides little recovery from this, assuming as it often does, that the identities mentioned all count, and that it is really hard to work out how they link together. Indeed 'fluidism' of this kind can be rather difficult to reconcile with everyday communicative practices. A close look at these can show that people often do manage to bring quite a high degree of intelligible order to their circumstances, that they are not as fractured or troubled by particular identifications as initially supposed, and that they can be actually rather adept at navigating 'super-diversity' or 'ethnicities without guarantees', inflecting them in ways that are extremely hard to anticipate in the absence of close observation and analysis.

This kind of analytical movement – holding influential discourses to account with descriptions of the everyday – is of course a defining feature of ethnography *per se*, and the perspective outlined here could be described as ethnography *tout court* (2.3.6). But it is an ethnography enriched with some highly developed heuristic frameworks and procedures for discovering otherwise un(der)-analysed intricacies in social relations (cf. Hymes 1996: 8, Sapir in Mandelbaum 1949: 166). In a field like sociolinguistics, scholars certainly can spend careers elaborating this apparatus, but as the cross-disciplinary training programme in *Ethnography, Language & Communication*[7] has amply demonstrated, it does not take long for the sensitive ethnographer with a non-linguistics background to be able to start using these tools to generate unanticipated insights.

7 See www.rdi-elc.org.uk

3.2 Language and communication as focal topics

A full consideration of issues for research focused on language and communication in super-diversity would take far more space than is available here, but before pointing to two broad areas, it is worth emphasising three general principles that should be borne in mind throughout.

3.2.1 Guiding principles

First, even though there is sure to be variation in the prioritisation of its elements, it is essential to remain cognisant of what Silverstein calls '**the total linguistic fact**': "the total linguistic fact, the datum for a science of language is irreducibly dialectic in nature. It is an unstable mutual interaction of meaningful sign forms, contextualised to situations of interested human use and mediated by the fact of cultural ideology" (Silverstein 1985: 220). And of course this in turn is grounded in a basic commitment to ethnographic description of the who, what, where, when, how and why of semiotic practice.

Second, it is vital to remember just how far **normativity** (or 'ought-ness') reaches into semiosis and communication. For much of the time, most of the resources materialised in any communicative action are unnoticed and taken for granted, but it only takes a slight deviation from habitual and expected practice to send recipients into interpretive over-drive, wondering what is going on when a sound, a word, a grammatical pattern, a discourse move or bodily movement does not quite fit. There is considerable scope for variation in the norms that individuals orient to, which affects the kinds of thing they notice as discrepant, and there can also be huge variety in the situated indexical interpretations that they bring to bear ('good' or 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong', 'art' or 'error', 'call it out' or 'let it pass', 'indicative or typical of this or that'). These normative expectations and explanatory accounts circulate through social networks that range very considerably in scale, from intimate relationships and friendship groups to national education systems and global media, and of course there are major differences in how far they are committed to policing or receptive to change. All this necessarily complicates any claims we might want to make about the play of structure and agency. It alerts us to the ways in which innovation on one dimension may be framed by stability on others, and it means that when we do speak of a change, it is essential to assess its penetration and consequentiality elsewhere. But at least we have an idea of what we have to look for, and this may help us past the risk of hasty over- or under-interpretation (either pessimistic or romanticising).

Third, in view of the volume of past and present research on diversity, we have reached the stage where individual and clusters of projects can and should now seek **cumulative comparative generalisation**. 'Super-diversity' speaks of rapid change and mobility, and to interrogate this, it is important to incorporate the comparison of new and old datasets and studies, as well as to address the perspectives of different generations of informants wherever possible. Multi-sited comparison across scales, mediating channels/agencies and institutional settings is likely to be indispensible in any account concerned with ideology, language and everyday life. But there is also now an opportunity for comparison across nation-states and different parts of the world. Among other things, this should help to clarify the extent to which the orderly and partially autonomous aspects of language and interaction reduce super-diversity's potentially pluralising impact on communication, resulting in cross-setting similarities in spite of major difference in macro-structural conditions (Erickson 2001, Goffman 1983).

3.2.2 Two broad areas for language and communication research

The general commitments in 3.2.1 themselves imply a number of specific questions for investigation. So for example, the call for comparison invites examination of just how varied the interactional relations enacted in heteroglossic practices actually are (2.3.4), while longitudinal research should illuminate their historicity and biographical durability across the life-span (cf. Rampton 2011b). Similarly, longitudinal work allows us to consider whether, how and how far the development of digital communications are changing face-to-face encounters, pluralising or refocusing participation structures, re- or de-centring the communicative resources in play. Interaction has always hosted split foci of attention – making asides to bystanders, chatting with the TV on, taking a landline call in the kitchen during dinner, dipping in and out of some reading – but are there situations where the acceleration of digital innovation has now produced a quantum shift in the arrangements for talk and the dynamics of co-presence? Exactly which, how, why, with what and among whom? And where, what, how etc. not or not much? (See Eisenlohr 2006, 2009, Leppänen and Piirainen-Marsh 2009).

The investigation of particular sites and practices will often need to reckon with wider patterns of sociolinguistic stratification in societies at large, as well as with the linguistic socialisation of individuals. Super-diversity has potential implications for these as well, so it is worth dwelling on each a little longer.

Writing about the USA during the 20th century, Hymes (Hymes 1980c, 1996) used the phrase ‘speech economy’ to refer to the organization of communicative resources and practices in different (but connected) groups, networks and institutions. In doing so, he was making at least three points: (i) some forms of communication are highly valued and rewarded while others get stigmatized or ignored; (ii) expertise and access to influential and prestigious styles, genres and media is unevenly distributed across any population; and in this way (iii) language and discourse play a central role in the production and legitimation of inequality and stratification. This account of a **sociolinguistic economy** is broadly congruent with Irvine’s Bourdieurian description of registers and styles forming “part of a *system of distinction*, in which a style contrasts with other possible styles, and the social meaning signified by the style contrasts with other possible styles” (Irvine 2001: 22).[8] And Parkin extends this view of the relational significance of styles, languages and media when he uses research on newly formed poly-ethnic urban spaces in 1970s Kenya to suggest that the relationship between languages and styles can provide “a framework for [the] expression of [both emergent and established] ideological differences,… a kind of template along the lines of which social groups may later become distinguished… Within… poly-ethnic communities, diversity of speech… provides… the most readily available ‘raw’ classificatory data for the differentiation of new social groups and the redefinition of old ones” (Parkin 1977: 205,187, 208). Set next to the discussion of super-diversity, this raises two closely related questions.

First, following Parkin, how far does the sociolinguistic economy in any given nation-state itself serve as a template bringing intelligible order to super-diversity? How far does it operate as an orientational map or as a collection of distributional processes that draws people with highly diffuse origins into a more limited set of sociolinguistic strata, so that they form new ‘super-groupings’ (in Arnaut’s formulation; and see Arnaut [2008]) and their ethnic plurality is absorbed within tradi-

8 “[S]tyles in speaking involve the ways speakers, as agents in social (and sociolinguistic) space, negotiate their positions and goals within a system of distinctions and possibilities. Their acts of speaking are ideologically mediated, since those acts necessarily involve the speaker’s understandings of salient social groups, activities, and practices, including forms of talk. Such understandings incorporate evaluations and are weighted by the speaker’s social position and interest. They are also affected by differences in speakers’ access to relevant practices. Social acts, including acts of speaking, are informed by an ideologised system of representations, and no matter how instrumental they may be to some particular social goal, they also participate in the ‘work of representation’ [Bourdieu 1984]” (Irvine 2001: 24).

tional class hierarchies (Rampton 2011b)? Alternatively, how far are national sociolinguistic economies being destabilised, their formerly hegemonic power dissipated by people's diasporic affiliations and highly active (and digitally mediated) links with sociolinguistic economies elsewhere? Blending these questions, should we look for a multiplicity of sociolinguistic economies in super-diversity, a kind of 'scaled polycentricity' made up of communicative markets that vary in their reach, value and (partial) relations of sub- and super-ordination? Looking back to the mixed speech practices increasingly identified in European cities (2.3.3), should we view these non-standard heteroglossias as an outcome of this interplay between processes of diffusion and refocusing, as the expression of emergent multi-ethnic vernacular sensibilities formed in opposition to higher classes? Are these higher classes themselves now drawn towards elite cosmopolitanism and multilingualism in standard languages? And as a non-standard vernacular emblem with global currency, where does Hip Hop figure in this dynamic? Mapping the central reference points in these sociolinguistic economies will inevitably draw us more towards a bird's eye overview, but it still requires close ethnographic observation to understand how the elements are related and sustained, and we will need to focus, for example, on the kinds of conflict or compromise that emerge in institutions of standardisation like schools when heteroglot urban populations encounter the models for language learning, teaching and assessment propounded in e.g. official documents such as the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (cf. Jaspers 2005, 2011, Lytra 2007).[9]

Following on from this, second, the **language and literacy socialisation** of individuals in super-diversity also requires a lot more research, both in- and outside formal education (see Duranti, Ochs, and Schieffelin 2011: Chs 21-27). Accounts of socialisation in community complementary schools are now increasing in number (Creese and Blackledge 2010, Li 2006), as are analyses of peer socialisation in multilingual youth networks (Hewitt 1986, Rampton and Charalambous 2010). But there is very little work on inter-generational language socialisation within families, and this is likely to vary in degrees of formalisation as well as in the directions of influence, depending on whether it covers old or new languages, styles, technologies

9 The CEFR assumes bounded languages that can be divided clearly, with identifiable levels of acquisition and proficiency. This is a good illustration of what we argued earlier, that traditional modernist ideological constructs of language are prominent and hugely influential material realities. For a critique, see the essays in Hogan-Brun, Mar-Molinero, and Stevenson (2009).

and approaches to interculturality, and whether it occurs in domestic, recreational, community, and religious settings, locally, virtually or in the countries where people have family ties (cf. Hua 2008). With words like 'freshie' and 'FOB' (Fresh off the boat) gaining currency in and around settled minority communities, the sociolinguistic and cultural positioning of co-ethnic adult and adolescent newcomers merits particular attention (Pyke and Dang 2003, Reyes and Lo 2009, Sarroub 2005, Talmy 2008, 2009), and there is a great deal of new work to be done on the Internet, mobile phones and practices like gaming, chatting and texting as sites of language learning (Blommaert 2010b, Leppänen 2009). In all of this, it is important to avoid the *a priori* separation of 'first' and 'second language' speakers – among other things, linguistic norms and targets change (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005: 201, Rampton 2011c) – and it will also need careful clarification of potential links and necessary incompatibilities in the idioms commonly used to analyse heteroglossia on the one hand ('double-voicing', 'stylisation', 'ideological becoming' etc) and standard second language learning on the other (e.g. 'transfer', 'noticing', 'interlanguage development').

3.3 Impacts

Linguistics has its very origins in the practical encounter with diversity and difference (cf. Bolinger 1975: 506ff), and as well as contributing to the formation of nation-states (cf. 2.1), there is a very large and long tradition of interventionist work in the field of applied linguistics, focusing on a very full range of issues in institutional language policy and practice. Here, too, there has been ongoing argument and change in the guiding models of communication (Seidlhofer 2003, Trappes-Lomax 2000, Widdowson 1984: 7-36), and in general, there has been a lot less susceptibility to 'outlandish presuppositions' here than in formal, non-applied linguistics. Post-structuralist ideas have also been working their way through applied linguistics, and there is now growing discussion of whether and how contemporary developments in language, ethnicity and culture require new forms of intervention (Leung, Harris, and Rampton 1997, Pennycook 2001, Pennycook 2010, Rampton 2000). So when the programme of perspectives, methods and topics sketched in this paper is called to justify itself in terms of relevance and impact beyond the academy – as is increasingly common for university research – there is a substantial body of work to connect with.

Even so, in a socio-political context often characterized by deep and vigorous disagreements about policy and practice for language and literacy in education, politics,

commerce etc., the models of language and communication critiqued in Section 2 are still very influential. In addition, non-experimental, non-quantitative methods of the kind that we have emphasised are often criticised as 'unscientific' and then excluded from the reckoning in evidence-based policy-making. So, strategies and issues around impact and application require extensive consideration in their own right.

But perhaps Hymes (1980b) provides the fundamental orientation for this environment (also Blommaert 2010a). In a discussion of 'ethnographic monitoring', in which ethnographic researchers study events and outcomes during the implementation of intervention programmes in education, health, workplaces etc., Hymes describes ethnography's practical relevance in a way that now resonates quite widely with experience in linguistic ethnography:[10]

> …of all forms of scientific knowledge, ethnography is the most open,… the least likely to produce a world in which experts control knowledge at the expense of those who are studied. The skills of ethnography consist of the enhancement of skills all normal persons employ in everyday life; its discoveries can usually be conveyed in forms of language that non-specialists can read…. (Hymes 1980b: 105).

He then goes further:

> Ethnography, as we know, is… an interface between specific inquiry and comparative generalisation. It will serve us well, I think, to make prominent the term 'ethnology', that explicitly invokes comparative generalisation… An emphasis on the ethnological dimension takes one away from immediate problems and from attempt to offer immediate remedies, but it serves constructive change better in the long run. Emphasis on the ethnological dimension links… ethnography with social history, through the ways in which larger forces for socialisation, institutionalisation, reproduction of an existing order, are expressed and interpreted in specific settings. The longer view seems a surer footing (Hymes 1980a: 121, Hymes 1996: 19).

It is this surer footing that we should now target in a coordinated programme of research on language and super-diversity.

10 In the UK at least, linguistic ethnography has close family links with applied linguistics (Rampton 2007: 586-90).

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