

ETHNOGRAPHY, LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION: A WORKSHOP

- by invitation only -

Wednesday 10 November 2010

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www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/sspp/education/staff/brampton.html

This workshop follows the MPG training course in March 2010, and it is divided into two halves. In the first, Blommaert & Rampton make presentations of their own work, drawing out issues of methodology. In the second, we invite participants from the March event to talk very briefly about the ways in which language & discourse figure (or not) in their own ongoing researching, leading into open discussion of whether and how linguistic ethnography's offers valuable analytic potential.

Programme:

10.00-11.15	Jan Blommaert: Ethnography, superdiversity and space
11.45-13.00	Ben Rampton: Linguistic ethnography & the study of identities
13.00-14.00	Lunch
14.00-16.00	MPG views & experiences of linguistic ethnography

Jan Blommaert: Ethnography, superdiversity and space

Sociolinguistics is a sensitive instrument for investigating the qualitative details of superdiversity, and for moving from details to more general patterns and structures. In this lecture, I intend to offer a set of suggestions for investigating superdiverse spaces by means of an ethnographic approach to what has become known as 'linguistic landscaping'. Starting from an ethnographic- semiotic position on signs as essentially 'demarcating' instruments, we can show how the complex interplay of signs in public space helps us see how such spaces are effectively organized in terms of belonging, ownership, legitimate usage and so on. Ethnographies of superdiverse areas can be greatly assisted by such a diagnostic technique.

Ben Rampton: Linguistic ethnography, interactional sociolinguistics and the study of identities

Studies of identity make extensive use of textual data - interviews, transcripts and documents – but 'meaning' in these data involves much more just than the content of the words used – interviews obviously entail more than the reporting of facts & opinions, and much more goes on in classrooms & consultations than the official business of 'learning' or 'diagnosis'. On the one hand, there is a continuous flow of signals about stances and social relationships carried in the small details of language & talk – in a momentarily delayed reply, in the emphasis given to one word rather than another. At the same time, the production and interpretation of these signs is profoundly influenced by the participants' expectations, assumptions and communicative resources. So in the analysis of textual data, there are considerable risks of both under- and over-interpretation.

Linguistic ethnography offers one way forward, aiming to produce rich but disciplined accounts of interactional co-construction by mixing well-tried theories of language and discourse with ethnographic sensitivity to specific social relations, interactional histories and institutional regimes. Of itself, LE provides neither the concepts nor tools for looking directly into the large-scale, wide-spread, long-term and/or interior processes that contribute to the shaping of identities, but to the extent that these are mediated by discourse, LE's descriptions of the on-line production of social meaning may serve as a significant reference point in the theorisation of identity, as I shall try to illustrate with some data on social class positioning in an urban school.