

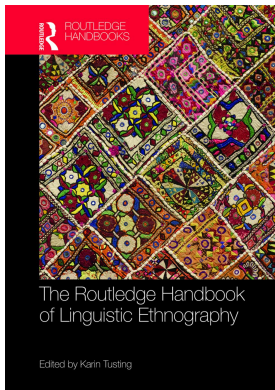
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Stef Slembrouck and Mieke Vandenbroucke

Introduction – the history and scope of the concept of scale as part of a spatial turn

Scale, as a concept, is inherently and fundamentally spatial in nature as it implies the arrangement of places and activities unfolding within these places in relation to one another. Scale in its most straightforward interpretation tends to be seen as a matter of *hierarchical ordering*, with the larger geographical reach of a particular phenomenon considered to be more important and powerful, for instance, national matters being treated as more important and influential than matters which are regionally or locally situated. Scale entered into our current scientific vocabulary as part of a geographical or spatial turn across the social, economic, political and cultural sciences and the cross-disciplinary emergence and popularity of the concept has in this respect been closely tied to the development of a programme of understanding and interpreting processes of globalisation (see also Grey and Piller, this volume). As captured in Fairclough (2006, p. 64), globalisation is

not just a matter of the construction of a global scale, it is also a matter of new relations between the global scale and other scales, and wider changes in the sets of scales and relations between them caused by the construction of a global scale.

Robertson's coinage of the term 'glocalisation' bears testimony to the latter (Robertson, 1995).

Applications of the concept of scale have ranged from a focus on the erosion and the continued relevance of the scale of the nation-state in the era of globalisation (Evans, 1997; Trouillot, 2001), the politics of scale as part of social struggle for power and control (Swyngedouw, 1996), and relationships of centre and periphery (as encouraged by, among other sources, World Systems Analysis [Wallerstein, 1974]), as well as the scaled dimensions of specific spaces being analysable in terms of a "structured coherence within a totality of productive forces and social relations" (Harvey, 2001, p. 329). At the heart have been analyses of both material and discursive processes, with variable emphasis on the circulation of, say, money, goods, commodities, labour and people, on how these entities are "talked into

being”, on attendant processes of reflexive engagement as well as, of course, on the scaled dimensions of communicative resources, languages, texts, media images and so on – thematic interconnections which are of particular interest to linguistic ethnographic enquiry. The field of applying the term ‘scale’ has been vast. In this respect, it is also worth reminding readers of Herod’s (2011) distinction between, on the one hand, capital-centric interpretations of globalisation in which ‘scale’ is seen as *produced* (top-down effects of the distribution of capital) and, on the other hand, non-capital-centric uses of the concept which pay more attention to bottom-up processes of *construction* and local agency (which are not necessarily exclusively understood in economic terms).

In these readings, scale is typically understood vertically. What is brought out accordingly is inequality in access to and/or in the spread of, the relative importance of, recognition, visibility and strength of particular resources, phenomena and/or processes. However, while a focus on the dynamics and implications of spatially uneven developments undoubtedly accompanied the fast-growing interest in globalisation-affected processes and phenomena since the 1990s, the idea of scale was at the time of the so-called ‘spatial turn’ not at all new nor alien to (socio)linguistic enquiry. This is true even for the point in time where applied language studies were theoretically and conceptually still contained by the boundaries of a language community within the geographical territory of the nation-state, seen as the main unit of distribution and membership. For instance, Leith (1983, p. 153; our underlinings) opens Chapter 6 of his monograph *A Social History of English* on the spread and imposition of English on the English Isles observing that,

[t]he opprobrium cast on the regional dialects has been visited, on a grander scale, and with far-reaching consequences, on the speech of regions diverse in language and culture, and situated far away from the metropolitan south-east. In this chapter we shall trace the long and complicated history of English as a dominant language throughout the British Isles.

Brought into view here are scalar questions of size, power and effect, and implicated within a discussion of these, we detect scaled relationships between a (national) centre and a (regional) margin. And while Leith does write in so many words about developments “on a grander scale”, his social history of the English language does not include a chapter or section which theoretically or methodologically addresses the concept of scale or its specific applications in linguistic historical enquiry. Nor does scale feature in the book’s index. The interesting question is indeed why in the current era we have experienced a clear need to pay more attention to the concept.

Adding to our reconstructed history of the concept, we can note how scale is a very old concept in geography. According to Herod (2011, p. xi), “of all the concepts that geographers (and others) use to understand the world around them, scale is a – or perhaps even *the* – central one”. As one of geography’s “foundational concepts” (Howitt, 1998, p. 50), it is to the wider world mostly known in either its *technical meaning* (understood metrically, e.g. a map-reading scale of 1:10,000, with different scales indicating granular continua of increasing/decreasing detail) or as an everyday way of talking about *geographical reach and level* (e.g. the local, the regional, the national, etc.). For a long time scale was a matter of levels of empirical observation and analysis, one which was rather intimately and unproblematically connected with a world view which consisted of empirically bounded and logically nested units of social organisation: local, regional, urban, rural, national, international, etc. It formed part of an exercise characterised by “methodological nationalism” and a view on “humankind [as] split

up in a large but finite number of nations, each of which supposedly develops its own culture, secure behind the dike of its state-container” (Beck & Willms, 2004, p. 13). As Herod (2011, pp. xi–xii) notes in the introductory pages of his book-length treatment of ‘scale’:

[t]here is no clear agreement on whether scales ‘actually exist’ – that is to say, (...) as to whether scales are real things, materially manifested, or whether they are simply mental devices by which we categorize and make sense of the world.

Perhaps it is this realisation that putting something on a particular scale is always a matter of interpretative sizing of spatial extent and importance, alongside the stress on how the world in an era of globalisation is in pressing ways constantly reminded of this, which are behind the need to move scale from the plane of a taken-for-granted methodological background assumption to the theoretical-conceptual foreground of key social scientific concepts, thus prompting geographers such as Andrew Herod to dedicate a complete monograph to it. Correspondingly, the use of term burgeoned also in the sociolinguistics of globalisation literature, as a way of capturing the stratification and uneven circulation of signs and their implications for use (Blommaert, 2007; Collins et al., 2009; Pan, 2010; Blommaert et al., 2015; Pietikäinen et al., 2016; Summerson & Lempert, 2016).

Three shifts must be noted in the light of recent widespread attention to the concept, in each case with specific reference to how geography, sociolinguistics, anthropology, and the human and social sciences, more generally, have been grappling with the era of globalisation and its implications (e.g. the relevance of transnational landscapes and flows for and within localities, the challenges posed by a global perspective, the dissolution of boundaries and processes of boundary-crossing, the scale-shifting capacities of particular engagements with distributions, the fluidity and contradictions in how we respond to the overwhelming mobility of people, images, technologies, money, communicative resources, etc.). The shifts are: (i) the categorisation of observed phenomena and their allocation to a particular scale has in many respects openly become a matter of interpretation, debate and even contestation, while often ridden by apparent contradictions and (ii), hence, globalisation in more than one respect can be understood in terms of processes which have tended to unsettle historically received scalar orderings (especially those which for a long time allowed ‘methodological nationalism’ to be taken for granted). Swyngedouw’s (1997, pp. 137–138) endorsement of the commonly used term ‘glocalisation’ bears testimony to this: the term brings out the mutual constitution of local actions and global flows, while recognising that “other spatial scales are also deeply implicated in these events as well”.

The first and second points apply both in the sense that we are increasingly grappling with the description and interpretation of not only scaled but also scale-volatile, scale-disruptive and scale-defying phenomena, and in the sense that – and this is a third shift – (iii) scalar forms of reasoning have reflexively and strategically entered into the real-time processes of social activity (Lash & Urry, 1994) and into their interpretation by key participants, attendant stakeholders and other overhearing audiences. In the contemporary world, so much that is done is also excessively reported and talked about. The prominent role of social media serves as just one factor underlining this, as illustrated in the following sociolinguistic example from Vandenbroucke (2017, 2019). What started off in 2013 as a minor incident of a locally elected Flemish nationalist alderman opposing a French shop name in a provincial town in Flanders quickly escalated and reached national major media outlets throughout Belgium as a consequence of widespread social media uproar, commentary and ridicule. This local ‘guéguerre linguistique’ about a shop name was rescaled geographically and historically in

national media coverage: *geographically*, by connecting the incident to an alleged threat of Frenchification emanating from historically Frenchified Brussels, and *historically*, by appealing to a volatile re-emergence of Flemish sensitivity to the use of French in the present. One net result of such rescalings is that it is difficult for interpretative science itself to be in a position which is clearly distinct and separate from the scaled recontextualisations and subsequent representations which nowadays accompany even the most mundane forms of social activity.

Herod (2011, p. xv) states the obvious point to take away from these examples: the world of scale-making is an ever-dynamic one, one characterised by processes of making and re-making, one resulting in temporary scalar fixes. Following Lefebvre (1976, p. 69), geographical scales experience three interconnected moments of existence: formation, stabilisation and bursting apart. In a basic way, the scale of things thus remains a problem of sustained observation, description and interpretation. For linguistic ethnographers, there is a general point to be inferred from this: the fact that scalar reasoning has been with us for a very long time matches a more fundamental claim that grappling with scale and its implications forms part of understanding the problem of context more dynamically, a problem which in the next section we will develop in terms of a nexus of space, time and size. The view which we seek to develop in this chapter is that the globalised era puts scale irrevocably in the foreground, promoting dimensions which warrant analytic attention in their own right: ‘scales of *in situ* activity’, ‘scales of representation’ and ‘scales of social scientific analysis’.

In a somewhat unsettling way, the scalar ordering of things leaves social scientific enquiry in a state of flux, subject, as it turns out to be, to processes of scaling. The latter has to do both with the shaping of thematic choices (i.e. the route via which research themes come to us) and scaling in the subsequent uptake of research findings (i.e. the fate of scientific insight which is fed back into fields of social activity beyond the university). Moore’s (2008, p. 203) criticism of the failure to draw a clear distinction between ‘scale as a category of analysis’ and ‘scale as a category of practice’ may in fact point to a more complex matter: the dynamic unfolding and sequential interdependency of scalar narratives of practice and research – and how the two constantly feed into each other. In the current era where scientists *en masse* promote their publications and dispatch summarising claims via Twitter and Facebook, scaled economies of media attention have become part and parcel of building and sustaining scientific reputations. One can notice its effects on other forms of media exposure (e.g. television interviews or documentaries), effects of thematic scaffolding, policy impact and, ultimately, fundability of research. The upside of this stated complexity and increasing interdependence is, of course, as Moore (2008, p. 214) equally notes, that scaled narratives – scientific or otherwise – also come with opportunities and affordances, when scaled interpretations turn out to be enabling and empowering because they contribute to public agenda setting and impact on policy debate.

Scale as space/time

While scale is typically seen as a spatial concept and its popularity as a concept is undoubtedly due to a spatial or geographical turn across the social sciences, it is imperative to stress the connection with time. The Wallersteinian perspective encourages us to think and talk about *spatio-temporal complexes of scaling*. This raises empirical and interpretative questions of how processes and domains of activity are governed not only by *spatial distributions* (“spatial envelopes” is the term used by Lefebvre [1991, p. 176]) but also by *time cycles*. For instance, while the dynamics of national politics in many countries depend on time cycles of four to six-yearly elections and are bounded by the geographical borders of the electorate, the

processes through which, say, institutionalised religions such as Islam or Christianity evolve depend on much longer time cycles and a transnational geographical scale. Research has stressed how this is relevant for our understanding of, among other things, sociolinguistic dynamics. For instance, for the context of Brussels, the capital of Belgium, one can note both how its more recent, rapidly expanding and evolving multilingualism (which is characterised by a transnational distribution across European urban contexts) intersects with an antagonistic *longue durée* of historical bilingualism which is to be understood both locally (the capital region) and nationally (Belgium's two major language communities), and how the two are implicated in an altogether different temporal dynamics (Collins & Slembrouck, 2009, p. 37; Vandenbroucke, 2015). The two histories intersect and collide when newspapers in Belgium report politicians' fears that extensions of franchise in local elections to international EU/NATO staff and immigrants – who are believed to orient more to French, as Brussels' main lingua franca – will unsettle the perceived imbalance between the two language communities even further, with electoral results more favourable to French-speaking political parties. In understanding the foundations of these fears, reflexive attention to both temporal and spatial scalarity is vital.

The question of relevant time cycles is also particularly raised by the work of Jay Lemke (Lemke, 2000) and Stanton Wortham (Wortham, 2005), from a more Bakhtinian chronotopic perspective. Wortham (2005) concentrates on the interconnected pathway of speech events that took place in one North American high school classroom across an academic year: is it possible to pinpoint the outcome of particular processes – e.g. a pupil becoming “a disruptive outcast” – in a single spate of recorded interaction? Schools come with interconnected time cycles of school years, terms, courses, periods, etc. The question here is one of length of ethnographic enquiry: how much sustained observation is needed to capture or register the accomplishment or outcome of certain processes of socialisation? (See Papen, this volume, for more reflection on this question.) Wortham (2005) advocates a more accumulative approach in contexts where an individual's public identity is established over a cycle of encounters in which individuals gradually feature as an incumbent of a particular categorical identity. However, other possibilities present themselves. Verhallen et al. (2016), in a discourse analytical study of a child protection case in the Netherlands, detail how the height of disagreement between a parent and a social worker was particularly evident from one recorded interaction, how it resulted in a stalemate period of competing claims towards a particular outcome preferred by the parent, but the decision-making which followed later and resulted in the preferred option being taken turned out to be unrelated to the initial disagreement between professional and client or the stalemate period which followed it.

The question of space and time must also be raised in another light, one which fundamentally bears on our understanding of globalisation processes. As Sheppard (2002, p. 309) notes correctly, globalisation, when it is understood as resulting in an increasingly shrinking world, in actual fact marks the progressive domination of space by time – in Harvey's words, “the annihilation of space by time” (Harvey, 1989). Time-space compression (Harvey, 1989) refers to a speeding up of time and a collapse of space in absolute terms as a result of, among other developments, an accelerating increase in conditions of near-simultaneity across spatial distance. From an ethnographic point of view, the question of site-specificity must be raised alongside with the question of relevant time cycles, i.e. how many different sites of a similar kind must one observe? Sheppard (2002, p. 312) proposes the term “positionality” to describe how different entities are positioned with respect to one another in space/time. In this view,

[p]lace, as Massey (1994) argued, cannot be adequately understood without considering the complex positionalities that link people and places with one another and that create heterogeneity in a place because different residents are positioned differently. The construction of scale inevitably involves shifts in positionality.

(Sheppard, 2002, p. 319; *our underlining*)

As it comes with an emphasis on networked spaces, Sheppard's preferred metaphor of scale is that of a "wormhole", a trope borrowed from physics which captures the non-Euclidian networked dimensions of spatiality in which the futures of places depend on their interdependencies with other places (2002, p. 309). Our attention is drawn not only to the time- and space-implicatedness of the different types of agency that bear on a particular site of activity: the different actors that respond and act upon a place and do so from within particular time cycles and with a particular claims of spatial reach. With positionality, a set of temporal questions is being raised, especially questions of frequency and salience of occurrence. Is 'positionality' a matter of a constant presence? Does it occur in the background? Or, more saliently at the forefront of things? Does the engagement amount to a regularly occurring feature, or is its occurrence more occasional or even a one-off manifestation?

The body as a taken-for-granted scale

Not altogether unexpectedly, Herod (2011, pp. 54ff.) devotes a separate chapter to the scale of *the body*: the body is the scale upon which other scales depend; yet it is a scale which is too easily taken for granted. This is a point which linguistic ethnographers are unlikely to miss. While linguistic practices count as embodied practices, ethnographic enquiry depends on observations and hence also on a perceptual viewpoint. In both cases, linguistic practices and ethnographic observations, acting bodies enter into the picture, bodies which are anchored in a deictic here and now of activity (what Baynham (2009, p. 144) refers to as the zero degree of scale) and whose interpretative activity depends crucially on sensorial stimuli and perceptions. A similar point applies quite straightforwardly when we link scale to context: while context is undoubtedly about situating actions and activity in time and space, our understanding of both dimensions being scaled, context is equally about participation. In an obvious way, linguistic ethnographic research will recognise the scale of the interacting body. Unlike the other scales (the local, regional, urban, the annual, the regular, etc.) being both material and social, the body is *biological* and social. Finally, like other scales, bodies have boundaries and their movement in space and time is also subject to boundaries.

In addition to this, the thematic connections with the globalisation literature deserve to be explored to the full. Alongside fears that globalisation increasingly poses a threat to the body, it must also be observed how time-space compression has depended on disembodied practices and technologies of communication. Globalisation is often about bodies which move across space: immigrants, refugees, professionals, tourists, etc. This is a point which Appadurai (1990) captures under "ethnoscapes" – one of the increasingly non-isomorphic landscapes to be observed in the globalised world, alongside "financescapes", "technoscapes", "mediascapes" and "ideoscapes". Also in the case of the body, scale has vertical dimensions: not all bodies are equal. Herod (2011) points here at historically inherited inequalities at the scale of the body – e.g. racialised bodies in the context of South Africa under apartheid, while raising more generally the question of movement-restricting features – age, ability

and health being obvious ones. Examining current affairs, it is not difficult to come up with specific instances where the transnational scale appears to be mainly about managing and controlling the movement and distribution of human bodies, e.g. Turkey's current role in literally geographically containing refugees at the scale of, and at the boundaries of, the EU. Another example is how in the face of recent waves of transnationally organised terror attacks, spatially concentrated assemblies of bodies in public places have posed a particularly vulnerable scale of social organisation (as was the case in Paris, Zaventem, Beirut, Sanaa, Sousse, Nice, New York, Toronto, to name a few).

Scales in linguistic ethnography: informants, practices and research

It goes without saying that scale is a dynamic and relevant concept in linguistic ethnography. The question of which time-space scale to invoke in delineating a linguistic ethnographic enquiry is both fascinating and pressing. It is also multi-faceted. Scalar dynamics are implicit in observed practices, scale is thematised (experientially) by informants/research subjects and scale is implicitly/actively constructed in the course of (funded) research projects. In short, scale is relevant in interconnected ways for each of the three key dimensions of language research: informants – practices – researchers. For instance, Collins and Slembrouck (2007) in their study of multilingual urban signage in shop windows note how differently scaled informants who have been invited to interpret and comment on the same textual instances scale the assumed text producers spatio-temporally. The comparative readings by 'foreign', 'immigrant' and 'native' adult informants illustrate how the text users behind the signs are located in time and space, and how as part of such an interpretative 'gap-filling' exercise, the texts' 'authors' are endowed with histories of language proficiency and community dynamics. The point deserves to be extended: scale is a relevant dimension in the interpretative readings of the publics which "listen into" and "overhear" practice, a point which not only applies in the case of informants who comment on the language use of other users, but also to whoever else functions as an active recipient of scientific findings (funders, policymakers, etc.). For instance, it can make a big difference when research into a local school is being 'scaled' as a problem of that particular inner city context, of a particular tier of education or of the way education is organised nation-wide.

Scale in a linguistic ethnographic account of border-crossing

One context in which the scaled nature of participation, practices and research initiatives is abundantly clear and relevant for linguistic ethnographic enquiry concerns migration policies and gatekeeping practices by national institutions. In this section we develop an extended example from this context to demonstrate the multiple ways in which analytic attention to scale is instrumental in a linguistic ethnographic project.

Within the European Union, migration policies prescribe strict application processes for immigration trajectories for non-European nationals to move to a European member state as part of labour migration, political asylum and family reunification schemes. In recent years, marriage migration as a form of family reunification has, in particular, become a growing focal policy concern for migration governance and is seen as the last loophole in EU migration policy, in the face of an alleged increase in the incidence of fraudulent sham marriages contracted to obtain a residency permit for the non-European spouse (Wray, 2006; Eggebø, 2013). In ratifying European-level guidelines to detect and prevent such

marriages of convenience, a number of European nations have implemented intricate bureaucratic interview-based investigations that examine marriage applications of a European citizen or resident with a non-European citizen to determine whether the intent to marry is genuine, or fake.

A recent linguistic ethnographic research project into marriage fraud investigations in Belgium has examined language use and discourse (Vandenbroucke, 2018). In these investigations the *participants* (civil servants and applicant couples) interact extensively through interviews typically conducted to determine whether the relationship is real and additional information is gathered about the applicants' identities and criminal backgrounds to judge their eligibility for migration. Similar interviewing practices were also found in other European contexts (Digruher & Messinger, 2006; Wray, 2006; Friedman, 2010; Myrhdal, 2010; Lavanchy, 2013). In these investigations, civil servants are tasked with determining which applicants are actually in an 'authentic' loving relationship and can therefore be allowed to marry and migrate to their partner's domicile. As such, civil servants act as "embodiments of the state" (Maskens, 2015) and, as individuals, they enforce migration policy regulations. As "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980), they police, regulate and control the migration-related cross-border movements, intimate relationships and bodies of individual marriage applicants.

Extract 1. Taken from official documentation, with personal information redacted and handwritten script marked in italics: this man "is unmarried prior to leaving Moroccan territory"

Attestation Administrative de CELIBAT

Nous soussigné LE PRESIDENT DU CONSEIL DE L'ARRONDISSEMENT [...]

Sur la fois des pièces qui ont été présentées et après enquête du [...]

Annexe Administrative Bureau: [...]

Atteste que [...] Né(e) à [...] fils(fille) de [...] et de [...]

Demeurant à [...] Profession [...]

Est Célibataire *AVANT DE QUITTER LE TERRITOIRE MAROCAIN*

Such institutional marriage fraud investigations are in essence about legitimising bodily connections – marriage or a marital union being one par excellence – and a body's migration from one to another national context. In determining whether an applicant is an eligible candidate for marriage migration, a number of categories are usually attributed to the individual based on bureaucratic evidence which is relevant on a particular scale. Extract 1 shows an excerpt of documentary evidence, proof of unmarried civil status, provided by a Moroccan man who applied to get married to a Belgian citizen and subsequently move to Belgium. The document is constructed on the national scale. While it confirms the man's bachelorhood based on official records in Morocco, the executing migration official in Morocco amended the statement that the man "is unmarried" by adding the handwritten phrase "before he left Moroccan territory", thereby denouncing any responsibility or control over the man's civil state after he left Morocco. In the eyes of migration bureaucracy, the civil state of the body is thus only applicable on a national, Moroccan scale. It loses its officially confirmed validity as soon as the body

crosses the border and moves into a transnational space of migration. While the bureaucratic category of ‘not being married’ is attributed to the body as an essential and prerequisite feature of the marriage application prior to border-crossing, the very act of border-crossing into a transnational space thus paradoxically undermines the validity of the civil status and the eligibility of the body to cross borders. From a linguistic ethnographic perspective, the role of the material document is striking and peculiar, as it is central in both the claim of validity and the undermining of its validity at the same time. The material and discursive documentation of the applicant’s civil status (the official form and handwritten qualification by a migration officer) takes precedence over the actual civil status of the man in reality. As such, the idea of the body as an entity with discrete natural properties of its own is not ratified in cross-border institutional gatekeeping where documentation and material discourse are likely to become the sole authoritative source for information.

However, evidence at the scale of the body can also work in favour of marriage applicants’ cases. In a marriage application case between a Belgian-Ghanaian citizen and Ghanaian woman, for example, numerous elements of suspicion were uncovered by the civil servant in charge of the investigation. This ‘incriminating’ evidence, however, was overruled by DNA paternity evidence of their three children which attested to their claim of a long-term commitment and relationship. Genetic proof in this case, as a set of properties at the scale of biological bodies, directly affected marital legitimacy and, with it, resulted in residential legitimacy. As such, the scale of the body (demonstrated genetic affiliation) connects to legitimacy in scale-crossing practices of migration and the scale of the nation-state (citizenship). The focus on genetic testing and biological linkages as instances of “biological citizenship” has been observed to play an increasingly central role in family reunification immigration policies within European states (Heinemann et al., 2014).

In the case of Belgium, bureaucratic marriage fraud investigations are locally implemented procedures in which the municipal alderman in charge of marriage celebration has full discretionary power over how to investigate a marriage application and over deciding which applications are ‘genuine’ or ‘fraudulent’ (Maskens, 2015; Vandenbroucke, 2018). In most implementations, marriage applications in which a non-European partner would obtain a residency permit through the marriage are scrutinised to varying degrees and frequently this involves (at least) one interview encounter where the future spouses are interviewed separately to establish similarities between their stories and the genuine nature and credibility of their relationship. Because of the very topic under scrutiny – one’s relationship and marriage – the interview encounter frequently also touches upon ethnic culture, traditional practices, marriage celebrations, gender roles, etc. As such, they constitute *contact zones*, i.e. “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt, 1991, p. 34). In conducting the interview, the civil servant is thus charged with the difficult task of not only eliciting detailed relationship histories from both applicants, but also with finding out to what extent the couple’s plans for marriage celebrations and life as a married couple are in line with the respective traditions of their ethnic or cultural background (lack of authenticity and inconsistencies are treated as indications of deceit and fraud). An example of a civil servant carrying out such ‘interpretive labour’ (Graeber, 2012) is represented in the following Extract 2, taken from an interview with a Ghanaian spouse who applied to have her recent marriage in Ghana with her Belgian-Ghanaian partner recognised so as to attain legal entry to the Belgian territory:

Extract 2: Interview between Civil servant (C) and Woman applicant (W)

1	C	<i>(types)</i> did you buy wedding clothes
2	W	wedding clothes no we didn't do any we didn't buy any wedding clothes just the traditional dressing clothes
3	C	so no wh- white gown or
4	W	no
5	C	why not
6	W	because it's . in Ghana when you do wedding then you buy the white clothes
7	C	yeah but you get married
8	W	yeah I get married but . we have two kinds of marriage . the one you go to church <i>(laughs)</i>
9	C	ja
10	W	that one they use a white gown
11	C	and when will you do that or will you not do that
12	W	<i>(laughs)</i>
13	C	did you do that
14	W	oh no no
15	C	are you gonna do that
16	W	we will do it <i>(laughs)</i> we will do it <i>(types)</i> . maybe we do now we are here we do it here <i>(laughs)</i>
17	C	<i>(types)</i> you gonna do it in Belgium
18	W	yeah we will do it xxx we will do it

In trying to elicit as many details as possible in the woman's account of their marriage celebrations in Ghana (to be compared for consistency to the account given by her alleged spouse), the civil servant uses a socio-temporal scale of reference which is Western-oriented, conservative and arguably anachronistic in nature. The misunderstanding in turns 1–9 revolves around the notion of 'wedding' (as the celebratory event) which for the Belgian civil servant is synonymous with 'marriage' (as the institution). In clarifying the difference, the Ghanaian woman explains that in Ghana you can have a church wedding, for which you buy a white gown, and a traditional Ashanti wedding, for which you buy traditional African dress. While the Ghanaian woman tries to explain that it does not make sense to her to have a Catholic Church wedding in Ghana after already having had the traditional ceremony of her ethnic culture, the civil servant insists on the church wedding (in spite of the fact that a Catholic Church wedding is in the present time no longer considered default practice). The woman finally concedes to planning to do the church wedding ceremony in Belgium.

In analysing the interaction, we see that the initial question by the civil servant in line 11 whether she would do a church wedding is met with laughter (turn 13), which becomes outright denial in turn 14. Under continued questioning, however, it becomes an uncertain promise ("maybe we do now") in turn 16 and evolves into a firmly-repeated confirmation after the civil servant's summary declaration in line 17. As such, the thrust of interpretive labour is carried out by the woman applicant who successfully moves from a Ghanaian frame of reference to the civil servant's Belgian scale of reference in order to accommodate the civil servant's expectations. While this scale-jump (Smith, 1992; Pan, 2010) might seem

inconsequential within the confines of this interview encounter, it could jeopardise the couple's application if significant inconsistencies between their individual accounts arise when the man in his interview truthfully denies concrete plans for a church wedding with a white gown in Belgium in the near future. The field of tension that emerges here stems from, on the one hand, pressures to conform to a particular interpretation of cultural tradition regarding marriage celebrations in the country of origin and, on the other hand, providing truthful narratives of personal choices which adopt a more modern stance and deviate in some respects from cultural tradition and practice. In processing transnational migration applicants, civil servants thus deal with transnationally scaled individuals and narratives of authentic practices which are inevitably evaluated in a nexus of scaled frames of interpretation (including converging values of locality, culture, community and nationhood).

While discursive practice is intrinsically and intricately scaled – this applies down to the level of interactional turns – it is also actively constructed in the course of research projects. Research into Belgian marriage fraud investigations can indeed be situated as an inquiry into a *national* problem (or even a European one), but also alternatively as a study of the situated investigative practices of *local* authorities (as the marriage is taken on by a locally residing partner and the municipal alderman deals with applications coming from the municipal residential community). Arguably, such a research project incorporates both scales, and the point to be stressed here is that the research initiative entailed a response to a *national* debate – which echoes European concerns – on a perceived problem of increased marriage fraud, while the ethnographic paths through which it is conducted went via individual *local* authorities which each deal in their own right with transnational relationships and identities (Glick-Schiller et al., 2006). At the same time, the claims and entities under scrutiny (a marriage migrant's identity and relationship) are inherently translocal, yet evaluated by local civil servants on the basis of a locally developed procedure informed by national criteria. This multiplicity of scalings underlying practice must be taken together as the various levels are relevant for understanding the organisation and practice of marriage fraud investigations in Belgium in a contextualised analysis.

Note finally how the local dynamics show considerable diversity: while the national and regional visibilities of urban centres, as well as the larger number of applications which they process, result in more standardised and more detailed protocols, municipal authorities in villages were able to maintain a more personalised, ad hoc stance in the matter for a longer period of time. In this way, it becomes apparent how the scaled positions of the municipalities themselves inform how a locally administered procedure connects to national requirements. As noted by Glick-Schiller et al. (2006, p. 616), local entities “that differ in scalar dimensions also may differ in their modes and pathways of [migrant] incorporation” and, as practices change over time, the cross-scalar fixations are as much temporal as they are spatial.

Future directions

Combining careful ethnographic observation and detailed linguistic analysis, linguistic ethnography seeks to encompass a wide range of textual and contextual vantage points, from the micro-interactional over various applicable meso-perspectives to the macro socio-cultural (Rampton, 2006; Copland & Creese, 2015). While the range of perspectives is obvious in theory, in practice the various levels of analysis need to be attended to simultaneously, and statements about the space and time of what is happening require careful qualification and precision. This is arguably where ‘scale’ comes in most handily as a concept which can fruitfully direct analysis and interpretation.

In this chapter, we have raised the question of epistemological relevance and engagement with specific publics. Who is the ethnographic account meant for? How does it come into existence? And what do we seek to accomplish with it? So, more important perhaps than attempting to settle the matter of scale allocation, linguistic ethnographers can reflexively engage with *scaled inputs* into research processes as well as the *scaling of outcomes*. Herod (2011, p. 256), while underlining how any scalar classification is always historically and geographically situated rather than universal, invites us to actively consider the relationship between geographical scale and the production of knowledge, the spatial (and we would add: temporal) diffusion of what is known by whom.

Second, if with globalisation the world has indeed become ‘a smaller place’, more than ever before open to scrutiny all around and with information circulating faster than ever, then one must equally note increasing complexity and fluidity. Paradoxically, despite homogenising tendencies, diversity increases and we may be tempted to seek heightened diversity and complexity exclusively in the globalised multi-ethnic urban centres, where it peaks, and assume traditional homogeneity and constancy in the peripheries. The risk that comes with this view is that a significant part of the globe’s dynamics may remain unnoticed (cf. Pietikäinen et al., 2016, pp. 194ff. on the “rhizomatic” dimensions of centralisation and peripheralisation). Future directions in linguistic ethnography should therefore strive to actively include peripheries – and critically examine the discourses about them – be they geographical, experiential, linguistic or conceptual in nature.

Our third point builds further on this. Does scaling always result in a unidirectional (one-sided?) picture of importance, geographic extent and temporal durability being exclusive properties of higher scale phenomena? Herod (2011, pp. 254–255) advocates against such a “litany of dualism”. The alternative view, quoting Massey (2004, p. 7), is that of interdependency, interconnectedness and the relational constitution of places and processes in the world. The obvious conclusion is that the significance of a scale varies across time and space.

Fourth and finally, we wish to repeat our commitment to the scale of the body, in its manifestations of individuals, groups, populations and communities. While interpretative orientations to the complexities of time and space have been necessitated by the globalised era, it is the speaking and acting body, anchored in time and space, which must particularly invite the attention of anyone interested in processes of language use and communication.

Further reading

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- Herod, A. (2011). *Scale*. London: Routledge. (A standard textbook on scale within Geography; cites applications across the social sciences.)
- Summerson, C. E., & Lempert, M. (2016). *Scale. discourse and dimensions of social life*. Oakland: University of California Press. (Outlines the relevance of scale to linguistic anthropology; case studies of scalar projects, interscalarity and predatory scales; examples from various parts of the world.)

Related topics

Sociolinguistic ethnographies of globalisation; Literacy studies; Social class; Policy.

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