

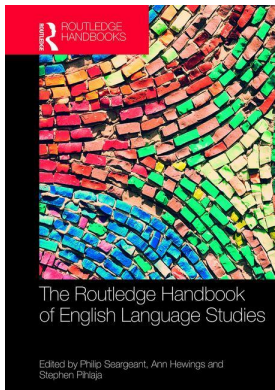
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Linguistic ethnography

Studying English language, cultures and practices

Lian Malai Madsen

Introduction

The understanding of languages as bounded, enumerable codes closely tied to distinct national and ethnic cultures has been questioned from a range of perspectives for the past three or four decades. Alternative ways of seeing and studying language have been contributed in particular by the vast research focusing on language as situated practice, such as linguistic anthropology (Hymes 1974; Silverstein 1985; Bauman and Briggs 2003; Agha 2007), interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982; Rampton 1995), and, more recently, research affiliated with the strand that has become known as *linguistic ethnography* which builds on these traditions (overviews in Copland and Creese 2015; Snell et al. 2015). This approach combines ethnographic methodology (observations, interviews etc.) with micro-analysis of recorded interactions (employing tools from conversation analysis and linguistics), and it sees social and linguistic categories and structures as being produced and reproduced through practices in everyday life. This line of research has also had an impact on studies of English language, since questioning the conceptualisation of language as an object in general inevitably throws into relief the idea of English as a distinct linguistic object as well (Pennycook 2007).

The ideological consequences and limitations of the established close association of (national) culture and language is put on display particularly in spaces of linguistic and cultural contact. Therefore it is not surprising that there has been a renewed concern with the theorisation of language and its relation to culture within linguistic ethnographic research in such contact zones that have developed as a result of globalisation. While much of this research has focused predominantly on unpredictability, hybridity, agency and creativity, recently scholars within the field have called for more attention to be paid to larger-scale social stratification and structuring (e.g. Rampton 2006; Collins 2009; Block 2014; Jaspers 2014; Madsen 2015). Within such research on language and globalisation English has held a central position, whether it has been seen as the productive linguistic accompanist of globalisation, the less pretty face of linguistic imperialism or the ludic, contextualised practices of global Englishes used by particular groups or individuals under particular circumstances (Pennycook 2007: chapter 2; cf. Blommaert 2010).

This chapter presents the foundation for these debates and discusses their relevance to the study of English language. Through examples of situated use of forms of English from research conducted among youth in heterogeneous urban contexts in Denmark, it unfolds the theoretical and empirical directions suggested by the linguistic ethnographic approach. Through this lens, the chapter illustrates the potential of starting with the lived local realities of language users and linking these to larger-scale socio-cultural processes through an ethnographic perspective and a close investigation of contexts.

Languages, languaging and communicative cultures

Linguistic ethnography, through a focus on lived local experiences, contributes to the challenging of traditional concepts of language. In this it connects to a longer and wider development in language research where the discontent with the traditional concept of language has been raised in different shapes, with different aims and within different scholarly traditions, but the critical voices share an emphasis on language use in *interaction*, a concern with *contextualisation* and attention to *social (re)-construction*. Linell (1998) characterises the shift away from viewing language as a bounded structural entity by contrasting what he refers to as a ‘dialogic’ view of language with the ‘monologic’ view characterising the traditional code understanding. A dialogic approach sees cognition, language and communication as inherently interdependent. Communication is not seen as the use of codes existing in readymade form before communication occurs; rather communicative acts are constructed through the practice of using language, that is through *languaging*, which is defined by (Jørgensen 2008: 169) as ‘language users employ[ing] whatever linguistic features are at their disposal with the intention of achieving their communicative aims’ (see also García and Wei 2014; Madsen et al. 2016 for discussions of the term), and communicative and linguistic meaning is focused in dialogue with various kinds of contexts and interlocutors (Linell 1998: 35). Communicative acts respond to and anticipate other acts, and although such acts are always situation-specific they also always ‘make manifest aspects of culturally constituted routines and ways of seeing the world’ (Linell 1998: 48). Language is seen as a socio-cultural artefact and as mediating cognition and communication. From such a practice-focused and constructionist understanding, language as a bounded entity becomes a highly problematic construct. Integrationists for example have called this concept a ‘myth’ (Harris 1998) and have taken linguists for ‘language-makers’ (Harris 1980), while linguistic anthropologists Bauman and Briggs (2003) have closely traced how the common idea today of a language has been constructed through consistent representations of languages as associated with particular national communities.

Linguistic re-conceptualisations

More recently within linguistic ethnographic research, and fuelled by empirical observations of linguistic hybridity in culturally diverse communicative contexts (e.g. in urban settings and internet communication), a range of different labels have been introduced. The new terms are meant to signal a reconceptualisation of the practices the authors observe. These include, among others, ‘polylanguaging’ (Jørgensen et al. 2016), ‘metrolingualism’ (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015) or ‘translanguaging’ (García and Wei 2014). These notions are in themselves not interchangeable and they are tied to specific places and projects, but the relative abundance of this type of terminology betrays a common, growing, twofold dissatisfaction. Empirically and theoretically the inventors of these labels are unhappy with 1) the explanatory adequacy of the traditional language concept; it is not precise enough or even distorts descriptions of the

phenomena we can observe; and 2) the ideological and political implications of the concept of separate, bounded languages may be undesirable; the idea of language as a bounded code is tied to a specific language political history in which plurilingual behaviour and pluri- or transcultural affiliations are seen as problematic, and this can lead to disadvantages for particular language users (see discussion in Jaspers and Madsen 2016).

At the same time as voicing such discontent with the bounded code-model of language, this linguistic ethnographic research is also occupied with the significance of the bounded code understanding. There is a great interest in how language users associate linguistic resources with different languages on a normative and ideological level, and how these constructions are based in well-established (national-romantic) ideologies. Yet, while languages may be understood as bounded and even seemingly natural categories, it is emphasised that these categories are socio-cultural and socio-historical constructions not descriptive facts (Madsen et al. 2016). It has been thoroughly documented how speakers use multilayered combinations of linguistic forms, and how single linguistic forms do not necessarily carry clear distinct connections to specific codes or languages, and it is argued that when individuals refrain from drawing on parts of their entire linguistic repertoire, complex and heterogeneous as it will be, it also has a social motivation (Jørgensen et al. 2016). Emphasising that languages are ideological constructions also entails that widely used notions such as monolingualism, bilingualism and multilingualism are inadequate as descriptive tools. Instead they can be described as norms of behaviour that are built on the ideological presuppositions that a) languages may be separated and counted, and b) it is possible to establish when speakers possess languages (Jørgensen et al. 2016; Madsen et al. 2016).

Global Englishes

Within the field of English language studies and research on globalisation such recent discussions of the relationship between language, nation and culture have targeted both what Pennycook (2007: 19) refers to as a homogenic ‘linguistic imperialism’ and a heterogenic ‘world Englishes’ position. As Pennycook (2007: 20) states, the *homogeny position* suggests that the worldwide spread of English leads to homogenisation, while the *heterogeny position* focuses on how English is pluricentric. However, Pennycook argues that the pluralisation of English within the world Englishes approach is no less founded in close associations of nation and language than the imperialistic position and that it does not take us far enough in the direction of an adequate conceptualisation of English in the globalised world, because it remains exclusionary in its vision of English (e.g. it does not include creoles). As he claims, ‘The irony here is that while resembling a pluralist, localised version of English, this paradigm reinforces both centrist views on language and dangerous myths about English’ (Pennycook 2007: 22). Instead Pennycook advocates a critical approach to language (as explained above) as well as to globalisation. Rather than giving pre-eminence to economic relations, the cultural, social and political aspects of globalisation need to be taken into account with an approach considering both the historical dimensions and the culturally specific, linguistic articulations of worldliness. Pennycook urges that we ask ‘what kinds of desires and mobilizations are at stake when English is invoked’ (Pennycook 2007: 30) in specific encounters and communities.

The methodology of linguistic ethnography

Globalisation results in increasingly complex relationships between language and culture, not merely because intensified mobility and migration lead to the make-up of populations

becoming increasingly diverse, but also because individuals' possible linguistic expressions of identity and affiliations with socio-cultural values become more complex and less predictable. Since language and linguistic styles through repeated use come to be associated with particular people, places and purposes, language use is a prime heuristic for tracing the desires and mobilisations Pennycook refers to above, as well as the experience and construction of personal and social identities, cultural interpretations, social differentiation and alignments. Since such meanings are often communicated indirectly and linked to activities and background understanding we need appropriate research methods and tools for capturing this.

Linguistic ethnography is well tuned to attend to such unpredictability, to get beyond established categories and connections and to engage with the complexities of situated social identification and language use with its key principle that the contexts for communication should be investigated rather than assumed (Rampton et al. 2007; Copland and Creese 2015; Snell et al. 2015). The approach has developed among applied linguists in the UK with strong inspiration from North American linguistic anthropology as well as interactional sociolinguistics and discourse analysis (Snell et al. 2015: 2). It is an interdisciplinary research strand which comprises a range of data types such as field diaries, interviews, various documents and recordings of interactions in the pursuit of combining an ethnographic focus on insider-knowledge, rich contextualisation and participant reflexivity with the analytical refinement of linguistics and micro-analysis of interaction. It thereby allows us to analyse the details of communicative activities and their relation and sensitivity to the social contexts in which they are produced. This is done by combining analytical perspectives addressing different levels of context to investigate the links between semiotic practices in the here-and-now situations as well as the historical and socio-cultural embeddedness of the resources used. Linguistic ethnographic work which includes interactional data, as I will demonstrate in the examples below, typically takes into account how turns-at-talk relate to one another in a stretch of conversation. What do the individual turns do? What are the displayed reactions and alignments in the following turns by other participants? But also, how are the utterances composed with respect to accent, grammar and word choice, and how does the form relate to their function? In addition, it considers the types of activities relevant to the interaction. What are the participants engaged in during the conversation? Where does the interaction take place? Who are present? And what type of conversation is it? The linguistic ethnographic analysis will also involve the social relationship between the participants, and their former interactional history (accessed across a dataset also including the ethnographic observations). Finally, it addresses institutional, moral or ideological codes, values and identities possibly made relevant, reproduced or negotiated during particular and across a range of interactional encounters.

Linguistic ethnography shares theoretical underpinnings with linguistic anthropology. This US-based tradition also combines ethnographic and linguistic methodology, but tends to take culture as its principal point of analytic entry were linguistic ethnography which has developed within UK applied linguistics, typically takes language as the starting point. Both approaches, however, account for the consideration of the local, socio-cultural meanings given to particular semiotic resources and their relation to wider cultural models through the notion of indexicality (Silverstein, 2003). Indexicality refers to the associations between forms and (typical) usage, contexts of use and stereotypes of users that are (re-) created in communicative encounters through linguistic and other signs. An example of indexicality could be how forms of African American Vernacular English have become associated with hip hop (Cutler 2007). Indexical associations are metapragmatic which means that they characterise signs' links to pragmatically usable systems of signs and activities on various social levels. These levels range from widely circulating stereotypes to local speaker practices

and contribute to enregisterment (Agha 2007); that is, the processes and practices whereby performable signs become recognised as belonging to distinct semiotic registers.

Thus a linguistic ethnographic approach to English language in the contemporary globalised world can grasp how forms of English become enregistered as part of recognisable semiotic models in particular cultural communities without relying on the language myths criticised by recent sociolinguists and integrationists. As I will argue below based on examples from research conducted in Copenhagen, such an approach can capture the complexity and heteroglossic character of local situated language use, but also pay attention to its wider socio-cultural embeddedness and thereby respond to recent calls that we do not lose sight of the stratifying forces and unequal relations in contemporary sociolinguistic orders.

Complexity, agency and stratification

Due to the concern within applied- and sociolinguistics with deconstructing the traditional language concept and highlighting its descriptive inadequacy, there has been a tendency to emphasise linguistic creativity, agency, unpredictability and hybridity. In line with post-structuralist thinking more generally (the so-called ‘cultural turn’ in social and political theory) the focus has shifted away from larger societal structures, socio-economic inequality and class relations. Class, in particular, has been problematised and considered of less relevance; it has been proposed that there is a decline in class awareness in particular among young people (Bradley 1996: 77), and that it is after all less clear what social class refers to in contemporary, rapidly changing societies. Instead ethnic culture and gender have been the dominating interpretive frameworks invoked (see discussions in Rampton 2006; Block 2014). Recently, however, several scholars have argued that we need to reintroduce social stratification, inequality and class in our ethnographic and linguistic analyses (Rampton 2006; Collins 2009; Madsen 2013; Block 2014). Based on a line of work within British sociology incorporating a view of class as a tacit sensibility Rampton suggests that

In class societies, people carry class hierarchy around inside themselves, acting it out in the fine grain of ordinary life, and if we look closely enough, we may be able to pick it out in the conduct of just a few individuals.

(Rampton 2010: 4)

Although class societies may be more difficult to depict in an area of globalisation, Coupland (2003: 470) writes:

It would be naïve to assume that [...] globalised societies will be less unequal. We can be sure they will be more complex, and therefore that the critical capacity of sociolinguistics will be increasingly tested. But we can only critique what we can theorise, only theorise what we understand, only understand what we see, and only see what we look at.

As it has been demonstrated, for instance in Blommaert’s (2010) work on African communities, English is centrally placed in the dynamics of inequality of globalised linguascapes, coexisting as an idealised (often inaccessible) ticket to economic and professional status and success and as a local pragmatic register of daily communication (Blommaert 2010: chapter 3). In addition, Englishes are closely connected to youth- and popular cultural flows (Pennycook 2007). I will now turn to look at the indexical values and the potential dynamics

of inequality related to the use of English among adolescents in Copenhagen, while basing my interpretation of the complexity of situated language practices firmly in ethnographically based accounts of the context in which it occurs.

Indexicalities of English registers among Copenhagen adolescents

I will discuss two examples from two different linguistic ethnographic research projects conducted in Copenhagen because they illustrate well how different forms of English are used by Danish youth and how the local meaning of these ways of speaking can be grasped with a linguistic ethnographic approach. The first is from a linguistic ethnographic study of 16 children and adolescents (between 10 and 15 years old) in a martial arts club, where, from 2004 to 2005, I carried out observations and collected audio-recorded self-recordings from the participants as well as video-recorded group-conversations and audio-recorded semi-structured qualitative interviews (see description in Madsen 2015). The second is from a larger collaborative collection among students from two secondary school classes at the age of 13–16 (conducted 2009–2011) of similar ethnographic and linguistic data types (observations, recorded interactions in different settings and interviews, see Madsen 2013; Madsen et al. 2016). Both examples involve teenage boys (with a linguistic and ethnic minority background in the Danish context) and their use of English in entertaining performances, but they illustrate different ways of invoking indexical values and socio-cultural stereotypes through English features that are not easily captured without the ethnographic insights into the local community within which they are produced.

In excerpt 1, the two boys Murat and Ilias (14 and 15 years old) who participated in the martial arts study recorded themselves on their way back to Copenhagen on the train, after a regional talent team practice for young elite taekwondo fighters. Murat carried the mp3 recorder. Salim, another young male talent team member (but not a participant in my study otherwise), was present as well. Before Murat's first utterance, the boys had been engaged in playful teasing of Salim (in a stylised stereotyped immigrant speech style). Murat in this sequence then initiates a switch into English and seems to further contribute to the teasing frame. Note that English is used in a large part of the original speech (this is marked by italics in the translation; for transcription key see the Appendix at the end of this chapter).

Excerpt 1: Speak English

1	Murat:	you' re so <i>desperate</i>	<i>you' re so desperate</i>
2		that you sleep with <i>goats</i>	<i>that you sleep with goats</i>
3		(0.3)	(0.3)
		[maybe]	[maybe]
4	Salim:	[who?]	[who?]
5	Murat:	you could have choose do:gs	<i>you could have choose do:gs</i>
6		or ca:ts	<i>or ca:ts</i>
7		or even ↑him	<i>or even ↑him</i>
		(1.1)	(1.1)
8		but you choose ↑goats hhh	<i>but you choose ↑goats hhh</i>
		((amerikanske accent-træk intonation/vokaler))	((American accent features intonation/vowels))
		(1.0)	(1.0)

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- 9 Salim: no goats is better than him. *no goats is better than him.*
- 10 Murat: åh ha hhh ((griner)) oh ha hhh ((laughs))
- 11 Ilias: i lige måde din nar. you too you fool.
- 12 Murat: jeg kan ikke tale engelsk I can't speak English
13 det hedder i lige måde it's called you too right
14 eggår hhh hhh
(stiliseret jysk) ((stylised Jutlandic))
(1.8) (1.8)
- 15 Murat: don't try to change the *don't try to change the subje*
16 subje subject *subject*
17 you've got a exam *you've got a exam*
18 in what in (.) one week *in what in (.) one week*
19 and you start speaking *and you start speaking Danish*
20 Danish speak English you *speak English you*
piece of shit *piece of shit*
(amerikanske træk) ((American features))
(0.2) (0.2)
- 21 Salim: hhh hhh °piece of shit° hhh hhh hhh °piece of shit° hhh hhh hhh
22 hhh((hvisker grinende)) hhh((whispers laughing))
(1.7) (1.7)
- 23 Murat: I love you. *I love you.*
(forvrænget stemme) ((distorted voice))
(3.4) (3.4)
- 24 Ilias: °nå hvad så° °well what's up°
- 25 Murat: SPEAK ENGLISH. *SPEAK ENGLISH.*
- 26 Ilias: næ ((Murat griner)) no ((Murat laughs))
(2.9) (2.9)
- 27 Salim: you have an English exam. *you have an English exam.*
- 28 Ilias: ↑hold din kæft. ↑shut up.
(intonation karakteristisk ((intonation characteristic
for nutidig storbystil)) of contemporary urban speech))
(1.6) (1.6)
- 29 Salim: speak English *speak English*
- 30 Ilias: ↑hold din kæft. ↑shut up.
(samme intonation som ((same intonation as above))
ovenfor) (ovenfor)

Murat's first utterance (lines 1–3 and 5–8) is an insult which builds on several taboos. It involves shortcomings with respect to sexuality and uncontrollable (or unsatisfied) sexual desires, and it evokes norm transgressions related to bestiality and homosexuality. At the same time it involves cues pointing to a playful frame: Murat laughs while he speaks, and the utterance is marked as a performance by a shift into American-accented English (mainly signalled by the stress pattern and the length of the vowels). The employed accent indexically points to urban American hip hop culture (e.g. Cutler 2007), which can also be associated with the activity of ritual insult. Salim's clarifying question in overlap with Murat's turn: 'who?' (line 4) and his reaction with a counter-insult 'goats is better than him' (line 10), indicates that Salim understands himself as the target of the insult and the appropriate responder. The fact that Salim's response to Murat includes reference to a third person, 'him', suggest that he understands Murat's 'or even him' (line 7) to refer to someone different from himself and this is likely to be Ilias, who is the only other person participating in this encounter. Thereby Ilias and Salim are both the targets of Murat's tease. The laughs accompanying the turns and the sequential order corresponding to that of ritual insult, with insult, counter-insult (line 10) and appreciation (line 11) further suggest that this is not a serious fight. Salim's reaction to Murat's insult is not a direct counter-insult, but rather a deflection developed from Murat's previous turn. Salim also employs English. Thereby he confirms the code choice of Murat, although Salim's contributions in English are pronounced with a rather Danish-sounding accent (this could be a matter of linguistic competence). Murat's response of surprised laughter shows alignment with Salim's contribution to the activity. The excerpt continues with several demands on Ilias to speak English, referring to school achievements because of an upcoming exam (line 25, 27, 29). Ilias does not seem willing to participate in this activity. He is playfully challenged, not only because of the content of the insults, but also because he does not treat the insults as laughable, as he is supposed to within this activity type, and because he does not follow the others' language choice.

The practice of ritual insult in this example does not only serve as a demonstration of the skills of causing offence for the entertainment of the interlocutors, but also of English skills. English skills are explicitly oriented to by the reference to the upcoming exam, but from the wider ethnographic accounts it is furthermore clear that these boys have discussed achievements in foreign language tests in school and linguistic competence several times both before and after this particular episode. In fact it is characteristic of their local community and communicative culture that they orient strongly to positive school results, while they also orient to global youth and popular culture, sports and school-related competition, toughness and street-credibility, and the way English is used here seems to invoke all of these aspects at once. In this case Ilias fails (or refuses) to demonstrate linguistic skills while Murat has success doing so. Salim appears to act more as a tag-along, echoing Murat's contributions. So Murat locally achieves a positioning as competent (youth culturally appropriate) English speaker as well as a skilled teasing performer. More generally, the excerpt illustrates how among these boys an English register not usually associated with school success (with its slang features, tabooed expressions and non-standard pronunciations), but rather with American popular culture, such as hip hop (and the image of tough masculinities related to this) can locally function as an index of positive school orientation as well.

Excerpt 2 illustrates a different type of situated linguistic performance in English which also relates to educational success, but in a different way. The sequence is a recording during a school break among class mates (13–14 years old). The girl Kurima and the boy Shahid had

been discussing their results in a recent reading test. Shahid achieved a mid-level mark, but just before this excerpt he claimed that next time he would achieve top marks. Bashaar, who was another boy present in the school yard, joined the conversation at this point (again English in the original is marked by italics in the translation).

Excerpt 2: Heart of gold

1	Sha:	åh jeg er bedre end	Oh I' m better than
2		jer alle sammen mand	all of you man
3	Kur:	[na] ha :j	[no:]
4	Bas:	[you] (.) my friend you' ve	[you] (.) my friend you' ve
5		got a very beautiful	got a very beautiful
6		future in front of you	future in front of you
7		you' re gonna travel	you' re gonna travel
8		to Lon↑ <u>don</u> (.) and stu↑ <u>dy</u>	to Lon↑ <u>don</u> (.) and stu↑ <u>dy</u>
9	Sha:	hey lad nu være (hvorfor	hey don' t (why should I)
10		skulle jeg) lad nu være	just stop doing that
11		med at gøre det herovre	that here (gu:) you shall
12		(gu:) du skal BARE IK gøre	just NOT do it over here
13		det herovre KORAN jeg	CORAN I shall not touch
14		skal ikke røre det der	that kind of
15		vand	water
16	Bas:	you' re gonna study in	you' re gonna study in
17		Bol↑ <u>ton</u> I think it' s	Bol↑ <u>ton</u> I think it' s
18		gonna be a very good eh	gonna be a very good eh
19		eh lesson for ↑you	eh lesson for ↑you
20		because you are are are	because you are are are
21		a man with a heart of	a man with a heart of
22		gold	gold
23	Sha:	thank you thank you	thank you thank you
24	Bas:	and and and and you have	and and and and you have
25		a good[brain]	a good [brain]
		((girls approach Bashaar	((girls approach Bashaar
		and interrupt))	and interrupt))

After Kurima has protested against Shahid's claim of being better than everyone, Bashaar begins a performance in English marked by a range of pronunciation features. Apart from the switch to English, the marked features include unrounded and fronted /u/ in *London* and *study*, rolled /r/ in *front* and *brain*, monophthong instead of diphthong in *brain*, aspirated final /d/ in *friend* and r-sound instead of /t/ in *beautiful*, as well as stress and pitch rise on the final syllables in certain words (*London* and *Bolton*). The pronunciation features leave the impression of a stereotypical index of an adult English learner (or a non-Anglo accent). In addition, the content, intonation and pauses index a performance of a public speech. After this sequence, some girls interrupt Bashaar and address Shahid. Bashaar reacts with the utterance: 'let me finish let me finish my speech with my boy with my son' and the girls after this react with a 'stop that Lebanese'. Thus, as a reaction to a friend's academic boasting, Bashaar performs the voice of a supportive fatherly persona praising the heart and the mind of his son

and hoping for a bright future. In contrast to this evocation of high academic aspirations, the voice of this figure is performed with features associated with adult-learner English. This combination indexes a naivety on the part of the father figure, highlighting the unrealistically high ambitions in relation to the relatively poor academic value of the linguistic resources demonstrated here. Thereby Bashaar's performance seems to function locally as a playful sanctioning of a friend's boasting and evokes a stereotype of (unrealistic) parental expectations for a successful future.

The accented English performed by Bashaar here resembles what Jaspers (2011) identifies as the practice of 'talking illegal' among adolescents in Antwerp. Jaspers describes how the practice of stylising accented or 'incorrect learner speech' locally serves the purpose of critically engaging with and at the same time co-constructing dominant structures of societal and institutional inequalities. Thus, stereotypic ethnically-marked voices are used to highlight a general marginal social positioning associated with linguistic incompetence, rather than specific ethnic differences. From the wider ethnographic study we know that these adolescent boys, similarly to the boys in the martial arts club, orient positively to school achievements and we know from the participants' metapragmatic and linguistically reflexive accounts that speech practices stereotypically associated with ethnic minority communities are socio-linguistically placed in a contrasting position to standard, academic registers associated with high social status (see details in Madsen 2013). Thus there are several indications that within this community, relations of ethnic minority and majority are mapped onto relations of inequality related to social stratification and status. These insights thus supports the interpretation that the kind of employment of recognisable ethnically-coloured pronunciation or non-standard learner styles that Jaspers describes also seems to be at play in excerpt 2. The non-academic and incompetent associations stereotypically related to adult and newcomer-accented speech are here locally exploited playfully to put a friend in his place after he has explicitly claimed a perhaps too-ambitious academic and linguistic status.

These two examples of English speech by young Copenhageners exhibit the situated use of different registers. Murat performs an urban, hip hop-inspired tough character through the use of American accent features, slang and taboo expressions, within the frame of playful insulting; while Bashaar parodies a fatherly adult figure speaking in learner-accented English projecting high academic aspirations for his son within the frame of a public speech genre. Both examples are certainly creative and complex and they illustrate the speakers' agentive and reflexive linguistic practices in response to the immediate communicative concerns of entertaining and having fun with peers. Both examples, however, also throw into relief wider cultural stereotypes and relations of social status and inequality. English as idealised means of academic (and professional) success in a globalised world is invoked in both examples. But to get at how this indexical potential is relevant in the two case studies it is necessary to include the ethnographic contexts. Among the taekwondo practitioners this aspect of English is made relevant through their investment in English as school-related capital as well as resources associated with popular cultural practices. Among the adolescents in the school yard, this idealised image of English is in fact explicitly put on display in Bashaar's parodying performance and mocked through the accented speech of the character articulating the image. In both cases established stereotypical assumptions of what usually belongs together can be said to be disturbed; non-standard slang-infused English is integrated with displays of academic skills, and signs of particular ethno-cultural stigmatisation intersects with educational and socio-economic status relationships. Thereby these studies of the situated speech practices of youth in Copenhagen support Rampton's call for more attention to 'high' and 'low' status differences in contemporary sociolinguistics (Rampton 2010), and they show that although

current rapidly changing societies may complicate the study of inequality in sociolinguistics it does not mean that socio-economic hierarchies, power and status lose significance. In this way the interactional activities of the young people observed in these studies complicate the picture drawn by influential stereotypic ideas circulating in society more widely, about the links between particular linguistic forms and social values, and a central principle of linguistic ethnographic research is, in fact, that such complications constructively add to our knowledge of language, categories and cultures (see also Blommaert and Dong 2010).

As another of the guiding principles of a sociolinguistics sensitive to contemporary complexity, Blommaert and Rampton (2015) point to the importance of remaining aware of what Silverstein (1985) refers to as ‘the total linguistic fact’. Silverstein notes that the object of study of a science of language should be ‘sign forms contextualised to situations of interested human use and mediated by the fact of cultural ideology’ (1985: 220). This of course means that micro-analysis of contextualised human use should not only inform studies of sign forms, but the study of situated use needs to consider the elements of wider ranging ideology and patterns of available resources as well. With the discussion of these two episodes I have demonstrated how this can be done from a linguistic ethnographic perspective.

Future directions

As I have described at the beginning of this chapter, it is well documented in recent research on linguistic and cultural diversity that speakers in practice draw on their collective linguistic repertoires of resources to achieve their communicative aims in a given situation (within the restrictions of their abilities and with concern for the abilities of their interlocutors), and this complicates the very notion of a language. Linguistic ethnographic studies in diverse contexts have led to re-examinations of the traditional conceptions of a language or a variety as bounded and separable sets of linguistic features, and it has become clear that speakers’ language use is often not limited by common associations of certain linguistic resources belonging to certain varieties or languages. We will continue in the future to observe how everyday communication is characterised by a mix of linguistic resources usually associated with different named languages or varieties and how they use multilayered combinations of linguistic forms not necessarily ascribable to any recognisable language. The idea of *linguaging* rather than the use of languages and the point that the idea of separate linguistic codes needs to be seen as a socio-cultural and ideological construction rather than an unquestioned linguistic fact aptly captures linguistic practices as they occur. Agha’s theory of enregisterment (2007) moreover appeals to and is fruitfully combined with this kind of approach to language with attention to how linguistic signs over time become associated with wider cultural formations and how these wider formations interact with everyday communication, and it has been widely employed and discussed within the past few years of sociolinguistic research.

As a theoretical conception, enregisterment concerns how we display and enact social functions of language by talking about and employing linguistic resources in particular ways, and it points out how the situated semiotic activities of language users over time shape the broader socio-historical development of language as social practice. Ways of speaking come to point to, or index, ways of being and acting, because they are repeatedly used in certain types of situations by certain types of speakers or talked about or parodied in certain ways (Agha 2007; Silverstein 2003). From an enregisterment perspective, speakers’ interactional use of different linguistic forms (re)creates the stereotypic indexical values of the used forms. Hence, in interactional use of resources associated with different registers, the stereotypic indexical values of the registers can be said to be brought into play and used for situational

purposes, such as to comment on a classmate's conduct. At the same time, the employment of linguistic resources continuously contributes to their enregisterment through ratified usage, and in this sense the indexical values of the linguistic features used are also (re)created. Thereby the concept of enregisterment can fill the gap left when the notion of language has been deemed insufficient and undesirable.

Seeing language as embedded in and depending on processes of enregisterment makes it possible to relate linguistic practice to interactional positioning and wider cultural alignments, and to talk about different styles or registers. This kind of analysis can then include the broader tendencies and historical pattern of usage of linguistic resources, and it is still useful for us to be able to recognise features as belonging to registers, because the speakers we study do draw on the understanding that certain linguistic resources belong to larger systems of resources in their interactional practices even if linguists consider language a myth. What is interesting is to investigate how a language, e.g. English, is constructed as a myth in particular contexts and how it relates to patterns of differences, social positions and patterns of inequality on different social scales.

It is certainly true that the relationship between material conditions, social affiliation, culture and linguistic conduct is not straightforward in contemporary globalised societies (Blommaert and Rampton 2015), and there is no reason to believe this will become less complicated. However, this is also the case for e.g. the relationship between ethnic inheritance, national alignments and language practice. If social stratification and class relationships are abandoned as interpretive frameworks in relation to language use on these grounds, the way ethnic differences link up with social stratification and inequality in contemporary sociolinguistic economies may be overlooked. The challenge is, of course, how we uncover these links, but the combination of detailed linguistic analysis, ethnographic investigation of contexts and consideration of enregisterment and indexicality appears a promising option.

Finally, studies of communication, cultural communities, linguistic practices and, not least, English, which are all in tune with the current focus on globalisation and the polycentric communicative conditions it entails (Blommaert and Rampton 2015; Blommaert 2010), pay increasing attention to computer-mediated communication (CMC) as a significant research site. Since online communication sites are by now common vehicles for self-expression, content sharing and engagement in both worldwide and local interest communities social media has, more recently, become an important field site also for linguistic ethnographic research (Varis and Wang 2011; Stæhr and Madsen 2015). The status of an ethnographic account in such research may not be simple, but as Varis and Wang (2011: 75) phrase it, such work clearly shows that 'Global cultures, codes and flows [...] are not swallowed without chewing' (see also Pennycook 2007; Stæhr and Madsen 2015). Appropriation of global cultural flows, often involving forms of English, are regulated by local norms and meaning-making. This is certainly the situation in the cases I have discussed above, e.g. when it comes to the way hip hop culture is understood within the local frame of educational activities, and in the case of the school-based study this involves CMC to a large extent (Stæhr and Madsen 2015). Hence there is a case to be made for linguistic ethnography in relation to sociolinguistic studies of CMC. Such a methodological framework and epistemological perspective can help uncover how wider cultural flows and practices are 'chewed' in specific context without losing sight of the relations to wider patterns of differences and stratification.

Coupland (2003) argues that what we can see depends on what we look at, and the argument of this chapter is that what we see also depends on *how* we look at it. Looking at English through the looking-glass of linguistic ethnography makes it possible to uncover how it is used and metapragmatically commented on in playful performances. In this way I have

argued that the ecological descriptions provided by this approach helps uncover structuring principles of wider societal currency in low-key, that is, situated in the everyday, linguistic and interactional practices.

Appendix

Transcription key:

[overlap]	overlapping speech
LOUD	louder volume than surrounding utterances
xxx	unintelligible speech
(questionable)	parts I am uncertain about
((comment))	my comments
:	prolongation of preceding sound
↑	local pitch raise
(.)	short pause
(0.6)	timed pause
<u>stress</u>	stress
hhh	laughter breathe

Further reading

- Copland, F. and A. Creese (2015) *Linguistic Ethnography: Collecting, Analysing and Presenting Data*. London: Sage. To read more about the methodology of linguistic ethnography.
- Madsen, L. M. (2015) *Fighters, Girls and Other Identities: Sociolinguistics in a Martial Arts Club*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. For an example of a linguistic ethnographic study of a leisure community discussing aspects of cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Pennycook, A. (2007) *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows*. New York: Routledge. To read more about Englishes and globalisation including discussions of language as a concept.
- Rampton, B. (2006). *Language in Late Modernity. Interaction in an Urban School*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For a comprehensive account of the significance of social class relations from a linguistic ethnographic approach.
- Snell, J., S. Shaw and F. Copland (2015) *Linguistic Ethnography: Interdisciplinary Explorations*. London: Palgrave. For an interdisciplinary collection of contemporary studies employing linguistic ethnography.

Related topics

- English and colonialism
- World Englishes: disciplinary debates and future directions
- English and multilingualism: a contested history
- English and social identity
- The politics of English
- Sociolinguistics: studying English and its social relations.

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