

Thematic Workshops

Researching language in education in diverse, twenty-first century classrooms

New times, new mobilities and communicative practices: challenges for minority language research

Cyfnod newydd, mudoleddau newydd ac arferion cyfathrebu newydd: heriau i ymchwil ym maes ieithoedd lleiafrifol

2 - 3 May 2012

This two day thematic workshop at the School of Education, University of Birmingham, brought together researchers from Europe and North America who are engaged in sociolinguistic and ethnographic research with speakers of languages that have been historically positioned on the political and economic periphery e.g. Basque, Canadian French, Catalan, Galician, Irish, Sámi, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh. The contributors included Monica Heller (University of Toronto), Alexandra Jaffe (University of California), Patricia Lamarre (University of Montreal), Bernadette O'Rourke (Heriot Watt University), Joanna McPake (University of Strathclyde), Sari Pietikäinen (University of Jyväskylä), Joan Pujolar Cos (Open University of Catalonia), Mark Sebba (Lancaster University) and Daniel Cunliffe (University of Glamorgan). The focus was on the conceptual and methodological challenges posed in the field of minority language research by the large-scale social changes ushered in by globalization, by the advent of new media and communication technology and by shifts in political economy. The study of the new sociolinguistic realities of the times in which we live requires new research lenses and new epistemologies.

Abstracts / Crynodebau

Montreal on the move: An ethnographic study of the language practices of young adults in a city redefined

Patricia Lamarre, University of Montreal

Language in Quebec is a politically charged and much researched issue, yet much of the research to date has been unable to catch the complexity of a language dynamic in emergence. Research has heavily focused on language dominance, relying on census data and on surveys in which participants are asked which language they use the most often in the home, public places, and the workplace - the underlying concern being whether French is gaining or losing ground to English.

There has also been an inability to think in terms of a blurring of linguistic categories and the hyphenation or hybridization of linguistic identity (eg: being French-English) is difficult even to imagine for some. In a place where language politics colors most everything, there is very little data on actual language practices and, surprisingly, not much research on how these language practices are perceived and represented by actors in respect to social situations and identity. The complexity of current linguistic practices of young Montrealers, the majority of whom are bilingual or multilingual, has largely been ignored.

This instigated a new approach to data collection to examine how linguistic repertoires are drawn upon as people move through their daily lives and what lies beneath choices made about language use. More specifically, why does a speaker choose to use French in one situation, English in another, choose heteroglossic ways of speaking among friends or even customers and coworkers, and then adopt much more conservative unilingual practices in other settings or interactions? How are the stakes underlying these situations understood and what is being negotiated by speakers? And finally, are traditional conceptions of language and identity salient to these young multilingual Montrealers? There are obviously many local policy implications for this study. At the theoretical level, the study contributes to the growing academic interest in metrolingualism/polylingual languaging, bringing to the fore constraints to heteroglossic ways of speaking.

A non-static approach to data collection will be presented, which was developed to follow young adults through their daily lives in the city, through social networks and a range of sites and activities, including in virtual space. The approach is inclusive, bringing participants into the analysis of data and engaging them in a reflexive process. Data from 15 completed case studies with young multilinguals will be drawn upon to illustrate the approach. In conclusion, what the study brings to theory will be discussed.

New Times, New Mobilities and “New Speakers”

Bernadette O'Rourke, Heriot-Watt University

In many parts of the world, traditional communities of minority language speakers are being eroded as a consequence of increased urbanization and economic modernization. Indexes of language endangerment, such as those proposed by Fishman (1991), identify a break in home transmission as the single most important indicator of language decline, an indicator which is also linked, at least implicitly, to the maintenance of a native speaker community. Romaine (2006) has however questioned what it means for a language to “survive” without home transmission, and therefore without traditional native speakers and the linguistic models they provide, thus turning our attention to “new speakers” or non-native speakers of a minority languages and their potential role in the process of linguistic revitalization. The “new speaker” model prompts us to look at language reversal in a different way and to move away from a focus on “bringing the language back into social place with its past structure and social variety unchanged” (Jaffe 1999: 285). The “new speaker” model also prompts us to look at the methodologies that have tended to be used to assess linguistic vitality in minority language contexts. Large scale sociolinguistic surveys have provided useful insights into general patterns of language use, ability and motivation for use or non-use of a minority language and have on this basis put forward predictions about the survival prospects of these languages. However, very often these surveys have been based on an understanding of language (and language practices) as bounded and fixed entities, sometimes failing to capture the in-between spaces of language reversal often represented by “new speaker” profiles. In this session, I will explore these in-between spaces, drawing on examples of “new speaker” life-histories with specific reference to two minority languages contexts – Irish and Galician.

Mobility, multilingualism and methods: Sociolinguistic ethnography in the globalized new economy

MASTER CLASS

Monica Heller, University of Toronto

This class will explore the shifting realities of heretofore marginalized linguistic minorities, and ask what consequences these realities have for the questions we ask about minorities, for what counts as data in addressing those questions, for how to generate that data and for what constitutes legitimate knowledge production about “minorities” and “multilingualism”. We will begin by examining my own experiences of reshaping my research methods while tracking the changing political economy of francophone Canada from industrial modernity to the globalized new economy. I will show how that shift forced a move away from understanding fieldwork as community”- (or even institution-) based towards an encounter with mobility, and from “language” to a Bakhtinian view of communicative practice. We will then work with participants' concerns to formulate questions which use political economy and mobility as lenses, and to explore what kinds of data and data generation methods might be adequate to explore them.

Shifts and continuities on the ground and in the research paradigm: Reflections on fieldwork in Corsica

Alexandra Jaffe, California State University, Long Beach

In this presentation, I draw on my current research on Corsica to explore both conceptual and methodological shifts and continuities in my approach to studying language practices and ideologies with respect to issues of globalization, mobility and new media of communication. Using the example of my participation in Corsican adult language classes separated by a 20-year interval, I discuss how using the same method over time captures the complexity of the contemporary moment, which includes discursive and ideological shifts related to the use, value and positioning of Corsican as a “heritage” resource in a changing world-- but also includes striking forms of continuity. In a slightly different vein, I evoke changes over time in my own positionality (assumed and attributed) and the extent to which they are related to issues of globalization and mobility.

Secondly, I provide an overview of the multiple methods that I am currently drawing on to address issues of multilingualism and mobility as lived realities/trajectories, as tropes/discursive formations, and as orientations for practice. In schools, these include visually based methods (the use of "reflexive drawings" as the basis for interviews that address both children's current language usage and their imagined (multilingual) linguistic trajectories and involving older children as analysts and collectors of linguistic landscape data "at home" and during school trips abroad) as well as ethnographic, interview and survey data on forms of mobility and exchange related to Corsican as it is positioned relative to its internal varieties and with respect to other languages. I also discuss two school projects that explore how new media are implicated both as a medium of exchange, and as a catalyst for ideological shift in the way that the Corsican language, and what it means to be or become a speaker are imagined. Finally, I touch on ongoing and planned data collection in sites of exchange and representation involving tourists and tourism and the tension between language-as-heritage and language-as-(economic) resource they index.

This overview will, I hope, offer some insights into the particular values/limitations of specific methods alone, and in combination. It will also be the springboard for a reflection on some more general issues: 1) the tension "on the ground" and in the research between a focus on bounded codes ("languages," "dialects") vs. communicative activities and 2) what is "new" and what is not-so-new about the current moment and the methodological and conceptual tools we need to address it.

Starting out in Gaelic: Balancing language learning and early years pedagogy in a pre-school immersion programme – insights from qualitative research

Joanna McPake, University of Strathclyde

Educational provision via the medium of a minority language is one of the key ways in which language revitalisation programmes seek to reverse the fortunes of endangered languages, by supporting children who already speak the language fluently and encouraging others with little or no previous exposure to learn it.

This paper, based on two recent studies of provision for Gaelic-medium (GM) pre-school provision in Scotland, explores some of the challenges inherent in seeking to address both specific linguistic and broader (national) educational goals. The first study (2008-9), based on survey and interview data, and case studies of three pre-school settings, was commissioned by the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig, to investigate supply and demand for GM pre-school provision, gaps and weaknesses, and opportunities for development and improvement. (Review of Gaelic medium early education and childcare. Edinburgh: Scottish Government

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/06/22090128/0> (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/06/22090128/0>))

The second study (2010-11), drawing on playroom observations and discussions with children and pre-school practitioners over the course of a year, focuses on children's experiences: how they encounter and use Gaelic, how they interact with adults and other children, and how they access the curriculum. This latter study was funded by the British Academy. (Young children learning in Gaelic

<http://www.ioe.stir.ac.uk/research/projects/youngchildrenlearninggaelic.php> (<http://www.ioe.stir.ac.uk/research/projects/youngchildrenlearninggaelic.php>)).

Both of these studies were conducted in collaboration with Dr Christine Stephen, at the University of Stirling and Dr Wilson McLeod, University of Edinburgh. This paper draws attention to ways in which the specific linguistic goals for GM pre-school provision fit (or not) with the national curriculum goals for all early years provision (in both Gaelic and English) in Scotland. It focuses on points of agreement and difference in the underpinning pedagogical theories and seeks to identify opportunities for synthesis, using examples of playroom discourse to illustrate current practice.

Issues of comparative fieldwork and analysis

Joan Pujolar, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Kathryn Jones, IAITH: Welsh Centre for Language Planning

In this session, we are going to expound and discuss about our experiences of joint work in a comparative project on language, identity and tourism. In this project, three researchers from Catalonia (Joan Pujolar), Wales (Kathryn Jones) and Francophone Canada (Monica Heller) explored the different ways in which, in linguistic minority contexts, new initiatives were being developed to exploit local languages and cultures as tourist attractions or as touristic themes. We developed the concept out of our observation that local languages and identities were increasingly present in areas such as souvenir marketing or heritage sites. In Canada in particular, cultural tourism had been identified by both national and regional authorities as a strategic asset for the economic development of minority Francophone communities. So we anticipated that a comparative study of the different regions would help to appreciate, beyond local differences, the fundamental and underlying social processes that were at work in these developments.

We adopted a flexible, multi-sited, ethnographic approach to data collection that combined the gathering of documentation (mainly in the form of press reports and internet sites), the visit to tourist sites and interviews with actors involved in the development and management of these sites. The choice of sites was the first problem with regards to comparative procedure. We first sought to identify locations that were similar in the three areas; but found that our early explorations did not yield clear candidates. In Francophone Canada, for example, a great emphasis was laid on the staging of old villages or activities with large projects that had no parallel elsewhere. In Wales and

Catalonia, there were rather tentative discussions in tourist sectors about identity issues; but developments were small and disperse. The tourist industry was, in any case, substantially different in all three contexts, where the access of minority communities to the infrastructures and profits of tourism was also very different. In the end, we chose what we thought were the most significant contemporary developments in each region, no matter how different: the Acadian World Congress in New Brunswick, the literary heritage network in Catalonia, and the town of Glanporth in Wales. Interestingly enough, the project has yielded three interesting publications: one about Francophone Canada, one about Catalonia and one about Wales. Two of these started as comparative works in the first drafts; but the comparative element was lost in the editorial process for various reasons. We shall describe what happened here with the article on literary heritage that the authors wrote jointly, and we will discuss about the conceptual and practical issues that rendered comparison impractical in this case.

Researching carnivalesque multilingualism in the indigenous Sámiiland

Sari Pietikäinen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

In this paper, I wish to explore shifting and emerging multilingualisms in the indigenous Sámi community. More specifically, I adopt a bahktinian understanding of carnival as a temporal liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order (Bahktin 1968:10) to study moments and spaces of multilingual transformations in Sámiiland. The concept of carnival in this context seems to provide a way to study changing norms and emerging language and discourse practices across fixed boundaries and categories, now set in motion by the new economic, cultural and political conditions. In such nexus of competing forces, we can see creation and circulation of polyphonic performances, important for new identities and creative language practices, and yet at the same time, a challenge to established practices and norms (cf. Pietikäinen 2010, Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Drawing on my longitudinal ethnographic and discourse analytical research in Sámiiland (www.peripheralmultilingualism.fi (<http://www.peripheralmultilingualism.fi>)) I will give examples on such performances and discuss some of the methodological implications in researching carnivalesque multilingualism in indigenous language community.

Bakhtin, M. (1968). *Rabelais and his world*. Trans. H. Iswosky. Indiana University Press

Blackledge, A. & Creese, A. (2010). *Multilingualism: A critical perspective*. Continuum.

Pietikäinen, S. 2010. Sámi language mobility: Scales and discourses of multilingualism in polycentric environment. *International Journal of Sociology of Language* 202, 79-101

Studying minority languages online: why, what and how.

Daniel Cunliffe, University of Glamorgan and Mark Sebba, Lancaster University

Despite a good deal of interest, the impact on minority languages of technology such as the internet is poorly understood. While policy makers and activists may claim it to be significant, the actual evidence is sparse. In this presentation, we will examine some of the claims and counter-claims and suggest factors which might indicate when the online domain could be considered significant for a particular language community. We will then consider what 'things' might be worth studying, both in terms of technologies (the WWW, email, mobile applications...) and focus (language use, language learning, attitudes, language policies...). Different ways of characterising and defining the online domain will be outlined (top-down vs. bottom up, public vs. private, artefacts vs. actors...). Two case studies will then be presented. The application case study will discuss the experiences gained from three different studies of Facebook. The method case study will present an analytical framework for multimodal, multilingual texts. The case studies will be

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Multilingualism in faith settings: research perspectives

Researching discourses and practices in Adult ESOL

Researching Multilingualism in Complementary Schools