

Report to BAAL
BAAL/CUP Seminar, MOSAIC Centre for Research on Multilingualism, School of Education,
University of Birmingham

BAAL Seminar Title:

Conceptualizing multilingualism under globalization: membership claims, social categories and emblems of authenticity

Date:

11th and 12th June 2013

Place:

MOSAIC Centre for Research on Multilingualism, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

Names of Seminar Co-ordinators:

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The University of Birmingham's MOSIAC Centre for Research on Multilingualism and the IRiS Institute for Research on Superdiversity hosted a two day seminar at the School of Education, University of Birmingham. The seminar was organized in collaboration with the Linguistic Ethnography Forum.

Seminar abstract:

In complex societies people belong to, or are ascribed membership of, multiple social categories. The papers presented in this colloquium ask questions about the value and force of social categories. They consider how and why people claim or reject membership of those categories, and how trajectories of belonging change across time and space. They interrogate the stability of membership of social categories, and of the categories themselves. Furthermore, the papers engage with the implications of these questions for social policy. In this seminar the presentations consider how membership of social categories is negotiated in the delicate weave of social interaction. The papers argue that analysts may gain purchase on what we commonly refer to as 'identity' by attending to acts of performance and construal through which emblems and social personae are linked.

Objectives:

1. To explore recent research which questions the stability of social categories such as language, community, and ethnicity in contexts of globalization and multilingualism.

2. To provide a forum to engage in close analysis of identity and membership claims in linguistic interaction.
3. To consider the implications of these discussions for social policy.

The objectives were met in total. The programme (see attached) was designed to allow speakers to present their ideas in depth followed by a generous time for discussion. Each paper had a 45 minute slot followed by 30 minutes of discussion. This allowed for a close engagement with data. The discussant Prof. Jenny Phillimore, (Professor of Migration and Superdiversity, School of Social Policy) attended all papers, and brought a policy perspective to the seminar. The seminar achieved an interdisciplinary focus by bringing together applied linguists with social policy scholars.

Speakers:

- Adrian Blackledge and Angela Creese (University of Birmingham)
- Hugh Escott and Kate Pahl (University of Sheffield)
- Kamran Khan (University of Birmingham)
- Michele Koven (University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign)
- Adrienne Lo (University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign)
- Ben Rampton (King's College London)
- Caroline Tagg (University of Birmingham)
- Sabina Vakser (University of Melbourne)

Discussant: Jenny Phillimore (University of Birmingham)

Three of the speakers were doctoral researchers: Kamran Khan, University of Birmingham ; Sabina Vakser, University of Melbourne; and Hugh Escott, University of Sheffield.

Eight papers were presented, over two days, plus discussants' remarks. Each morning and afternoon session was chaired by a senior researcher. Three of the chairs held or had held positions on the Linguistic Ethnography Forum Executive Committee (Fiona Copland, Acting Chair; Frances Giampapa, Meetings Secretary; Vally Lytra).

Individual Paper titles and abstracts

'You can tell he's public school': Metapragmatic stereotypes as systems of distinction Adrian Blackledge and Angela Creese (University of Birmingham)

In this paper we consider the discursive means by which families and peer groups create systems of distinction between categories of persons. This 'metacommentary' serves as a resource to reproduce the existing social order. As such, metacommentary and the representation of metapragmatic stereotypes are recruited in the service of unequal relations with respect to social class, ethnicity, and national belonging. In order to discuss the deployment of these resources we engage with the notion of 'register' and 'stereotypes'. The study reported here is the United Kingdom section of an international linguistic ethnographic research project, 'Investigating Discourses of Inheritance and Identity in Four Multilingual European Settings' (09-HERA-JRP-CD-FP-051).

Language as talisman: Realising materialisations of dialect Hugh Escott and Kate Pahl (University of Sheffield)

Language as Talisman involved young people from youth centres and schools, together with academics from English and Education departments, and was based in Rawmarsh, Rotherham, UK. We explored the way in which contemporary dialect was understood and then semiotically and materially realised. The project used a collaborative ethnographic approach with a focus on linguistic

ethnography (Lassiter 2005). We consider the materially situated concept of language, drawing on a theoretical framework from Blommaert (2008), Kress (2010), and Snell (2013). We apply this understanding to an understanding of language and dialect as a site for belonging and for forging identities.

Ideological Becoming as an entry point to investigating belonging and community
Kamran Khan (University of Birmingham)

Gaining citizenship represents entrance to a national ‘community’ and a form of legal belonging. My paper examines the process of becoming a British citizen through an ethnographically-informed case study in two ways. Firstly, on an individual level I will explore Bakhtin’s notion of ‘ideological becoming’ using the ‘Life in the UK’ citizenship test as a ‘zone of contact.’ I explore how individuals assimilate authoritative discourses promoted by politically and ideologically oriented preparation materials. Secondly, this opens up how a community functions in preparing to pass the test by drawing on their multilingual resources. This not only undermines the ideological nature of such tests, but also shows how multilingualism is used in relation to providing practical assistance. Combined with Baumeister & Leary’s theory of belonging (1995), this paper will investigate how such communities provide belonging and multilingual assistance. This is then viewed alongside prevalent political discourse which promotes notions of community, language and belonging.

Between skepticism and credulity: Interdiscursivity, stance, and social category
in Luso-Descendants’ talk about the supernatural
Michele Koven (University of Illinois Urbana Champaign)

Scholars have long discussed the relation between transient micro-interactional footings and how those footings signal “types” of people. I discuss how participants link locally recognized stances and identity categories in Luso-descendants' (LDs) storytellings about potentially supernatural events. In these stories, these young women, daughters of rural Portuguese migrants raised in urban France, must display recognizably skeptical or credulous stances. I investigate how their narrating stances toward narrated supernatural events summon up broader French and Portuguese categories of person. In other words, it is through these stances that they assign each other to and recognize each other in more and less valued identity types. As such, I examine the reflexive, interdiscursive work participants engage in, as they interpret each another’s transient footings as signs of each other’s inhabitation of more perduring social types.

How not to learn English in South Korea: Gender, modernity, and multilingualism
Adrienne Lo (University of Illinois Urbana Champaign)

In South Korea, multilingualism is often presented as a key emblem of modernity, as an individual’s multilingual proficiency elevates his status and the status of the nation. Yet for South Korean women, displays of English can instead frame them as non-moderns who are linked to chronotopes of postwar South Korean poverty and gendered subjugation. This paper traces the indexical processes through which contemporary South Korean women’s language learning trajectories are moralized and they are linked to gendered, sexualized, raced, and classed models of personhood. By showing how women are understood as speakers of restricted vernaculars that tie them to a supposedly bygone past, while men are imagined as speakers of a global standard that links them to the expansive global future, this paper looks at the importance of historical figures of personhood in mediating understandings of authentic multilingualism.

Styling in a language learned later in life
Ben Rampton (Kings College, University of London)

This paper tackles the traditional split between sociolinguistics and second language research with an integrated account of linguistic form, language ideology and situated practice – what Silverstein calls the ‘total linguistic fact’ (TLF). Emphasising one or two of these dimensions to the exclusion of the third leaves us vulnerable to the default interpretations of SLA and sociolinguistics – erasing or romanticising our informants’ political, rhetorical or linguistic positioning. But if we pursue the TLF, we can watch what happens in conditions of contemporary superdiversity, where the old predictabilities dissolve and forms, acts and social categories no longer co-occur in the patterns that we once expected. The paper draws on an ESRC-funded project in a London suburb where >40% of the population was born abroad, and explores these issues through interactional and variationist analyses of the stylistic practice of an adult who started to use English in his late 20s.

Negotiating social roles in semi-public online contexts

Caroline Tagg (University of Birmingham)

Communication on social media takes place in an environment defined by ‘context collapse’, whereby various offline audiences (e.g. family members, work colleagues, friends) are brought together into one online space. In negotiating ways to conduct interpersonal relationships within this ‘semi-public’ environment, users reveal their interpretations of their own social roles, as well as their perceptions of the people and communities with which they interact. For example, a father is likely to be restrained in what he posts on a social network site by the knowledge that his children may have access to his posts (even if he is not addressing them directly) and thus he needs to conform to certain expectations of his own parental role. Such practices show how social identities – and claims to authenticity – are interactively co-constructed online through responses to perceived social categories and conventions.

Voices of Russia: The making of a band

Sabina Vakser (University of Melbourne)

This paper draws on one case study from my doctoral research to trace the recontextualization of resources in the creation of a ‘Russian’ band. This trajectory begins in 20th century USSR and ends in present-day Melbourne. I consider how multiple sources of inspiration are ‘re-sourced’ over time and space, serving various social agendas, before leading to the band’s inception. These sources include song lyrics, musical genre, tone, style, as well as political struggles, ideas, and even human legacy, all of which become emblematic in the creation of an ‘authentic’ image of the band. I explore the complexity of this historical echoing, as well as what it might contribute to a deeper understanding of dialogism and authenticity in globalization (Blommaert & Varis, 2011).

Participants

There were 36 delegates. Of these 11 were doctoral students. The seminar was also successful in attracting visitors from overseas including Germany, Brazil (2), Spain, Japan, Portugal, USA (2), South Africa (2), Switzerland. We were able to offer a travel and accommodation bursary to one doctoral researcher (£100).

Financial Support

In addition to BAAL’s grant of £750, the University of Birmingham provided a grant to cover the expenses and airfare of the two international speakers (Michele Koven and Adrienne Lo). The University of Birmingham also provided administrative support (Ann Bolstridge) through its new Institute for Research in Superdiversity.

Outcomes

1. Plans are in place to organise a ‘return’ seminar on a related theme at University of Illinois Urbana Champagne 2015.

2. Publication of Prof. Phillimore's seminar discussant comments on Kings College London, Working Papers in Urban Language and Literacies - <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/groups/ldc/publications/workingpapers/download.aspx>
3. Publication of a version of Kamran Khan and Sabina Vakser's presentation in a Routledge volume (Series Editor, Marilyn Martin-Jones). *Researching multilingualism: critical and ethnographic approaches* (editors Marilyn Martin-Jones and Deirdre Martin).

Implications for Applied Linguistics

The timing of this two-day colloquium was appropriate given current interests in Applied Linguistics. The seminar used a sociolinguistic and social theory lens to interrogate key questions for late modernity. It achieved an interdisciplinary focus by bringing together applied linguists with academics in social policy and education.

In complex societies people belong to, or are ascribed membership of, multiple social categories. The papers presented in this colloquium asked questions about the value and force of social categories. They considered how and why people claim or reject membership of those categories, and how trajectories of belonging change across time and space. They interrogated the stability of membership of social categories, and of the categories themselves.

A number of questions became salient during the colloquium:

- what constitutes 'enough' authenticity to be authentic;
- whether one person's authenticity is another person's inauthenticity;
- whether what is authentic now will be or was inauthentic at another time;
- whether what is authentic here is inauthentic in another place.

The papers engaged with the implications of these questions for social policy.