**Ethnographic Monitoring:**

**A beginner’s guide**

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*Bristol: Multilingual Matters*

*[...] there are plenty of writers, scores upon scores of them all the way down to the present, whose only quotations are from other anthropologists. And for that matter, even when a few native lines do appear, they seem to have been inserted for the sake of illustrating some point the writer was already trying to make [...]*

*(Dennis Tedlock, 1983:325)*

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**Chapter 1**

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***THANK YOU***

1. ***DIALOGUES FROM PLATO TO BAKHTIN AND BLOMMAERT***

To add

Plato: Dialogues

Bakhtin: Dialogical thinking

Vygotsky’s proximal thinking

Blommaert and voice

1. ***WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHY?***

To analyze our field, we need to turn to a mode, a theoretical perspective, to grasp what is actually going on. The complexity of a non-familiar ‘way of speaking’ is studied qualitatively here with attention to both unfamiliar linguistic detail and contexts of usage. Functions of language are relative, depending on the specific functions, so then these functions need to be investigated empirically (Hymes 1966, Blommaert 2006). If we are to understand how Mr. Stone, Mrs. Small and their students negotiate a complex sociolinguistic order in which small phonetic details between a decreolizing Bajan Creole and a Barbadian English formally very close to Standard English, we need a description that can also bring out certain regularities and in fact, a system.

**2.1. Tradition**

This description can only be developed in a systematic way by paying attention to two crucial aspects that are rooted in what came to be known as ‘the ethnography of speaking’: form and function (Hymes 1964). Ethnography has its roots in anthropology, and the bulk of the work done by Sapir, Whorf, Boas and Malinowski was the systematic study of both grammar and structural semantics of ‘native languages’. Starting from these linguistic data, Sapir and Whorf formulated a hypothesis that made it possible to infer other aspects of culture from looking at language. Their point of reference was always ‘relative’ structure: this means that function is a given and presupposes the equality of languages. In a ‘colonized’ world, arguing for the equality of languages, in other words saying that Hopi or Chinook are equal to American English was quite revolutionary. Of course, the world changed and in a decolonizing and globalizing environment such a view of languages as being equal (when they were really not politically) needed a different approach, but an approach that would not deny this formal relativity, but would complement it. Let me explain this by using an example.

Let us assume that I read the Barbadian greeting ‘how yu doin’ or ‘how yu’ in Barbados as a purely phatic formula, rather than a way of seeking out information. In other words: a rhetorical question. Even if the greeting would take on a Standard English form, e.g. including a copula, ‘how are you doin’, the function may remain purely phatic. If I only look at the form, I cannot establish the function such a greeting has in Barbados. It may be that the question needs an answer or that it is a rhetorical question. So to truly define what the greeting means, I need something more: a way to establish the function of utterances besides pure linguistic form. It is here that a systematic description of the functions of language comes in the picture where function is not fixed, but fluent, or ‘relative’. Even though forms may be the same, their function may be very different. Hymes (1966) calls this ‘second’ or ‘functional’ relativity, as it brings more insight to the original Sapir-Whorf claim about relativity. If we take the example of the greeting above, I would need a systematic description of language-in-society, in a particular society where the utterance was produced, in order to arrive at a full comprehension of its function. However, ‘how yu doin’ in Barbados is not a purely phatic formula as it is in many other English context around the world; it has the specific function of seeking out information. Function then becomes relative (whereas for Sapir and Whorf form was relative), and patterns of use cannot be postulated or assumed, but rather need a full-fledged description and analysis. This leads us to a contrastive insight with regards to a particular society, group or individual use of particular narrative devices: what works where for whom, and what does not work. This contrastive insight of what functions when and where, and what does not function, does not mean that we need a microscopic depiction of every Barbadian school. We rather need a robust description of the particular speaking situations in which Mr. Stone, Mrs. Small and the children found themselves, a description which shows patterned use of resources. These resources were then functionally mobilized within a specific situation of the Independence Day tellings, so at this point of description we cannot yet make specific claims about significance of these patterns in culture other than the generic assumption that such significance exists (Hymes 1966:114-115). So what do we have here? We need to describe the patterned use of particular resources, we need to show how they are functionally mobilized in a particular situation, and we need to look at the possible connection of these patterns with wider societal issues. The description we then need is hypothesis-driven because it assumes that there are patterns and relations between language and culture. Building on this insight,, Hymes argues later on that to find these relations, the indispensable tool would not be a tape recorder, but a hypothesis (Hymes 1981:340). The patterns that the teachers and children in St. Joseph Primary school use are very much related to the Independence Day context. And of course, the more relations one finds, the more refined the hypothesis becomes. There is, in other words, a constant dialogue between the ethnographic description (‘what happened in the field’) and the theoretical/methodological hypothesis of the ethnographer (‘what happened before and after fieldwork’). Ethnography works at the level of systematic description, at the ‘engine’ level, and it is at this level where ‘new theory’ is created, in constant dialogue with the informants/participants in the field that is being studied. The connection between linguistic pattern and say, ‘the rest of culture’, is explained through its ethnographic groundings. I want to add one more thing about the ‘before and after’. Ethnography as an act, an intervention in a particular place by a relative outsider, does not happen in a theoretical vacuum. In this globalized world, everything and everyone has been ‘discovered’ and unmasked. Of course the notion of ‘discovery’ is a problematic one and grounded in colonial ideologies; however a lot has been written about almost every place in the world. Of course, not all that ‘literature’ is ethnographic. Still I believe it to be useful to read everything there is to read on the topic/region/people one genuinely wants to work with. Next to ethnographic articles on Barbados (monographs are non-existent), I have immersed myself in newspaper articles, tourist literature, travel testimonies, and so on. Once one goes into the field, additional observations may be more accurate and more precise because they can be more directed. When one is in the field, materials obtained may later serve to answer very different questions than the initial questions one had set out to answer. Theoretical and methodological frameworks are not only built up beforehand and then verified in the field; they themselves are under constant scrutiny because of unexpected circumstances. To look at ethnography as not only a methodology (a set of fixed procedures to follow to accomplish a certain result) but also as a possibility for theorizing, ethnography as a heuristic, has now begun to take shape in linguistic ethnography (Blommaert 2006, Rampton 2007, Lillis 2008, Blommaert and Huang 2009). This means that traditional methods such as participant observation and interviewing are not per se ‘ethnographic’. Rather, ethnography looks back at a rich tradition in which several methods have been successfully adopted, such as critical discourse analysis, nexus analysis, philology and even statistics, which allows for a variety of empirical ‘methods’ to verify an initial hypothesis based on literature research and looking around thoroughly.

The main way of ethnographically describing sociolinguistic function is by paying close attention to the speech event itself. Context plays of course a crucial role here. The ethnographic ‘base’ will be the main input for the functional profiling of the Independence Day tellings as ‘events’. To grasp this, I am deploying three key theoretical/methodological concepts. First, I explain the concept of voice as an analytical heuristic, which allows me to say something about the different pieces of discourse, or fabric that makes up the tellings. Second, I explain ethnopoetics as a toolkit to analyze this patterning, which starts from studying the discourse-internal features of the stories and the interactional realization of them and which has as its finality the restoration of the master narrative. Or as Rampton (2007:585) argues that the analysis ‘of the internal organization of verbal (and other kinds of semiotic) data is essential to understanding its significance and position in the world.’ Third, I work from the practice of ‘ethnographic monitoring’ (Hymes 1980, Blommaert 2010b, Van der Aa and Blommaert 2011), which involves a high degree of co-operation between the people in the field and the ethnographer, in my case between the teachers, the parents, the children and me. I will now continue with sketching these three key concepts. Along with that, I illustrate some key points with data examples. 2.2 Voice as an ethnographic heuristic3 Voice addresses the human problem of making oneself heard on one’s own terms. As a heuristic, it can function to investigate the ways in which different educational actors make sense of school life. Looking at narrative detail, patterned use of resources and aspects of concrete classroom performances, we can see the voice of the student and the teacher emerge. The toolkit for this is ethnopoetics, which I explain in Section 2.3. Secondly, voice can also serve as a heuristic for empowerment by taking serious the voice of teachers and students. This way, real problems in the educational situation at hand can be discovered. Moreover, when we bring the analyses of teachers’ and student’s voice back to the field, a collaborative perspective can be developed which democratizes the scientific practice itself. This is known as ethnographic monitoring and I explain it in Section 2.4. Finally, the study of voice can lead to a new vision on education and society. Certain educational arrangements only work for certain children. In some cases, the school system or the classroom situation needs rethinking in order to accommodate the needs of everyone involved. Such a need was pertinently raised by Blommaert and Makoe (2009) in their study of class issues in a primary school in a suburban area east of Johannesburg. They conclude that ‘we see how a group of black children are trained to “adjust” to the demands of ex-white education. This adjustment constructs learning as the natural order of things, perhaps even the only one applicable to this particular group of children’ (Blommaert and Makoe 2009:9). Voice as an ‘analytical heuristic’ (see also Hornberger 2006) allows us to search in our data for instances of conflict, inequality and power as well as resistance, creativity and counter-hegemonic practices. Voice provides a tool for finding and dealing with alternative understandings of language, education and society. Taking seriously what educational actors say, and how they say it, has the potential to challenge our scholarly understandings of our research object and its subjects, and to renew our theoretical and conceptual apparatus. In other words: voice makes our research object subjective. In what follows, I first outline the academic etymology of the concept of voice in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. I then place the notion of voice as a central concept in an ethical ethnographic research program, as a methodological tool for empowering research subjects. Finally I elaborate this ethical program by linking voice to a democratic vision on education and society. 2.2.1 Theories of voice Voice is a concept with quite a lengthy history in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology dating back to Jakobson (1960). In the 1960s sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, voice has been tied to language and context and has been developed both in dialogue and in opposition to Prague School structuralism. Jakobson’s structuralism reached the United States in the late fifties and early sixties and was influential to a number of founding fathers in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics (among whom Hymes and Gumperz) and carried with it a strong emphasis on form-function relationships. Jakobson’s (1960) own focus on poetics tied back into Bakhtin’s occupation with literary texts and his scholarship on stylistics, or the study of poetic devices, and directly fed into the emergence of the ‘ethnography of speaking’, launched in the 1964 volume of the American Anthropologist (Hymes 1964; see Bauman and Sherzer 1975 for a historical review). 18 ETHNOGRAPHIC MONITORING The ehnography of speaking has found its way into many handbooks of sociolinguistics as a model for studying the interaction of language and social life. Its success is largely due to the mnemonically convenient acronym of speaking with a contextual factor for every letter of the word (Situation, Participants, Ends, Act sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, Genres). As a model it is an imperative for descriptive holism rather than an instant recipe to be routinely applied in describing and analyzing communicative events. Hymes (2003) in his work with Native American storytellers and their respective narrative traditions insisted on restoring lost voices by reformatting Boas’ and Sapir’s Native American fieldwork texts as poetry. He argued that by doing so ‘some of the original poetic qualities of the voice can be heard’ (Hymes 2003:121). The occupation with restoring lost traditions also found its way to linguistic anthropology, and to current critical efforts of language documentation and salvation (see e.g. Moore et al. 2010). The concern with voice thus arose out of this particular school of ethnography and was largely developed further in two directions: an interactional and a narrative one. The interactional tradition was spearheaded by Gumperz (1982), and focused on how the quality of voice (prosody in context) was interactionally realized and leads to particular (mis)understandings. Possible elements of misunderstanding and, by extension, of misrecognition and exclusion are, for instance, accent, intonation and bodily hexis (Fenigsen 2003). Gumperz’ (1982) contextualization cues – later reconceptualised as (metapragmatic) indexicality (Silverstein 1993; see also Gumperz 2003) – are largely interactionally realized linguistic features that are immediately recognized as ‘marked’, ‘deviant’ or ‘different’ from the norm. C. Goodwin (2011) and M. Goodwin (2011) on the other hand focus on the immediate realization of voice in interaction, taking into account the consequences of vocal quality such as intonation and pitch as measureable in Hertz. Also micro-interactional studies of voice with their analytical attention to jokes, repair work, salient turn-taking patterns and recurrent terms (e.g., Larson et al. 2011; O’Connor et al. 2011) have as their focus the vocal immediacy of participants as they collaborate (‘coauthor’) to make emergent meaning in interaction. The second tradition is occupied with voice from a narrative point of view. Michaels’ (1983) groundbreaking study with her attention to what happens with African-American children’s stories when they are told in school, shifts the focus from the immediately recognizable conversational markers to a problematic understanding of deeper structures at the level of syntax. The structure of African-American children’s stories, their voice, becomes problematic only AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE 19 when told in an institutional environment led by a white American teacher (see also Collins 1986). Another strand was added by Hymes’ narrative work, first with Native American stories as recorded by Boas and Sapir, later with re-analyses of educational narratives, among them the ones studied by Michaels. In 1981, Hymes published his first narrative anthology, and in it analyzed Native-American myths for which he had no recordings (Hymes 2004 [1981]). Being unable to pay attention to actual voice quality, he found other ways in which the stories were ‘voicing’ form and content. He attempted to ‘make patent and to explicate their rhetorical power as verbal art’ (Silverstein 2010:933). At first this was done by paying attention to actual voices of characters in the stories told (Hymes 2004 [1981]), but later developed into a full-fledged methodology (called ethnopoetics) to find larger patterns and relationships in children’s classroom stories (Hymes 1996). These ‘larger than syntax’ relations were subsequently not recognized by the teacher and led to social exclusion. Cazden (2001), for instance, insisted on the actual inequality in teachers’ recognition and appreciation of children’s narrative styles. Blommaert subsequently developed an ‘applied ethnopoetics’ that allowed him to dissect the linguistic misrecognition during asylum seekers’ bureaucratic interviews (Blommaert 2006, 2009; Maryns and Blommaert 2002). By doing so, he pays attention to larger patterns of exclusion in encounters with authority, and reconciles both traditions outlined above. The ethnographic study of semiotic resources is fundamental to the study of voice in education, because voice is something that is produced through these resources by people who have vested interests in them. Therefore it cannot suffice to study a transcript without contextualizing the actual persons involved in its making, including the ethnographer, or without taking into account the semiotic means on the basis of which this interaction is triggered. Thus, an analysis of a sixth grade science classroom episode needs to account for the macro and micro education policy of the school and the state, the pedagogical biography of the teacher, and the discursive history and semiotics of the science textbook used. 2.2.2 The ethics of voice Ethnographic approaches to language and education research entail a commitment to the lived realities of ordinary people in their everyday lives (see Blommaert 2008a, Cazden 2001, Heller 2007, Hymes 1996, Rampton 2005 [1995] for excellent examples). Ethnography aims to build understanding of the 20 ETHNOGRAPHIC MONITORING messy, chaotic reality of social life in real time, mainly through talking with and listening to actors in the environment that is being investigated. In the case of ethnographies of education, this environment entails everything that happens in and around schools; and the actors include students and teachers in the first place, and local and central decision-makers, parents, etc. after that. Doing ethnography means working with human beings and gives rise to a range of ethical issues that need to be dealt with in a respectful manner. Ethics is not, or should not be, primarily an institutional affair but is in the first place a problem of inter-subjectivity, of human subjects relating to other human subjects. In this way ethics becomes very firmly anchored in discourse and cycles of discourses, and becomes a problem of voice as well. The question to ask ourselves then is: Whose voice is being heard in ethnographies? The work of Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton and Richardson (2006: 1992) provides a useful entry point for this discussion. They suggest that there are three positions researchers may take up in relation to the people they work with. The first of these is an ethical position which involves an awareness and attempt to minimize ‘the potentially exploitative and damaging effects of being researched’ (Cameron et al. 2006:139), directly as well as indirectly, on the short term as well as on the long term. The second position is one of advocacy, and involves the researcher getting involved in local concerns and agendas and using ‘her skills or her authority as an expert to defend subjects’ interests’ (Cameron et al. 2006:139) as service to the researched community in return for the knowledge that was shared. The third position ethnographers may take up is one of empowerment and this does away with the positivist notion that researchers need to keep distance from the object of study in order to be objective. We may refer to the people we work with in ethnographic research as ‘ethnographees’ and acknowledge their work and input more consciously. The relation between researcher and the researched, or between ethnographer and ethnographees is a particularly precarious relation and is key in the construction of ethnographic knowledge, which is always intercultural communication (Briggs 1986, Fabian 1995). As research with an ethnographic agenda falls or stands with the input given and collaboration granted by human subjects in the field, taking voices from the field seriously is only a natural thing to do (see also Pennycook 2007). Evidently, there can be no ethnography without ethnographees. AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE 21 2.2.3 The vision of voice So far I have argued that voice has a lengthy history in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, and that it is a key heuristic for studying patterned use of resources. I also argued that voice has an ethical dimension with the potential to empower knowledge generated through intense fieldwork contact. It is exactly through the co-operative dimension of voice that a vision, or program emerges. The ethnographic potential of studying voice in educational discourses is twofold. Hymes (1996) links issues of voice to issues of democracy and freedom. Before I sketch the potential of voice, I must turn to issues of inequality. In an article entitled ‘Inequality in language: taking for granted’, Hymes (1992) sketches the underpinnings of this ethnographic potential for voice. He points out that while we take the potential equality of languages for granted (also in education), we bluntly ignore the actual inequality of languages in education. As an institution of the state, education does not only empower or create opportunities for everyone, but also disempowers and enforces a particular order. This is poignant with respect to what Painter (2008), referring to Dolar (2006), calls the domesticated or the nationalized voice: ‘While language is […] certainly a symbol and instrument of national unification, standardization and mobilization, it eauqlly is an instrument of diversification, hierarchization, and restriction of movement. […] Language also facilitates the reproduction of the state by distinguishing between different kinds of human subject: between natives and immigrants; between citizens and non-citizens; between different economic classes; between racialized groups; between metropolitan elites and those from rural areas; and between the hegemonic national culture and those who are identified or identify themselves as ‘‘ethnic’’ or ‘‘minorities’’. This is not primarily a question of some having ‘‘voice’’ and others being left ‘‘voiceless’’ in the representational structures of liberal democracy. Rather, one’s voice, one’s audibility, literally positions one within and in relation to the state’ (Painter 2008:178) The solution to this problem of disempowerment lies in Hornberger’s (2006) take on voice, in its ‘activation’. Through putting emphasis on the revitalization of particular sociolinguistic resources (indigenous languages in Hornberger’s case) we can ‘activate indigenous children’s voices [in order to] enable them to negotiate along and across the various continua making up the development, 22 ETHNOGRAPHIC MONITORING contexts, content and media of biliteracy’ (Hornberger 2006:284). It is precisely this activation that ethnographers can collaboratively accomplish with ethnographees in education. Here I return to Hymes’ (1996) twofold vision of voice. This vision consists of a negative and a positive freedom: (1) to bring out inequality by investigating which voices are unrecognized or misrecognized; and (2) to empower those voices that deserve to be heard through qualitative contributions from the field, advanced by ethnographees or native researchers themselves. In both cases, analyzing voice becomes a matter of empowerment. Voice is more than semiotic artistry, it is a real problem for real people in educational contexts across the world. The vision of voice is a democratic vision: it is about analyzing actual inequality and reimagining potential equality. We need to situate the concept of voice in a tradition of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics that is geared toward understanding (and solving) inequality as a multi-layered and scalar problem in language and society. Now we need a tool that can bring to the surface the concrete dynamics of voice, and I will argue that ethnopoetics can do just that.