

## Book Review

***Linguistic Ethnography: Interdisciplinary Explorations*, edited by Snell, Julia, Shaw, Sara and Fiona Copland** (2015). Palgrave MacMillan, 298 pages. Hardcover £63.00, softcover £21.99, eBook £16.99. ISBN: 978-1-137-03502-8 (hardcover), 978-1-137-52906-0 (softcover), 978-1-137-03503-5 (eBook)

**Jessica Bradley**

*School of Education, University of Leeds, United Kingdoms*

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*Linguistic Ethnography: Interdisciplinary Explorations*, edited by Julia Snell, Sara Shaw and Fiona Copland, offers an insight into Linguistic Ethnography (LE) informed methodologies and epistemologies across a broad range of disciplines and sectors, from healthcare, to the workplace, to education. In a 2004 discussion paper on LE, written four and a half years after the launch of the Linguistic Ethnography Forum (LEF), Ben Rampton and colleagues set out a number of ‘commonalities’ across research taking place with a broad linguistic ethnographic approach. They describe the ‘tension’ between ethnography and linguistics, with the resultant combination having the effect of both ‘tying ethnography down’ and ‘opening linguistics up’ (p.4). LE is an ‘approach’, but crucially not yet a paradigm, which enables researchers to develop richer and deeper understandings of the “intersection of communicative practice with social and cultural process” (Rampton, et. al, 2004, p.17). Moreover, in this volume Fiona Copland and Angela Creese explain that LE is not the “welding together of two different disciplines” (p. 268). Instead, they consider it in terms of the linguistic anthropological tradition, more broadly in the United States, as one which is interdisciplinary at its core. For these authors, “the study of language and social life should be seen as unitary” (ibid). Copland and Creese are authors of another book on LE, also published in 2015, which offers a broad and insightful introduction to the approach and methodologies associated with it. These two volumes together enable the reader to gain a comprehensive understanding of what LE entails, its historical roots, and examples of its application and affordances across disciplines and fields.

This edited collection focuses on the interdisciplinary affordances of a linguistic ethnographic approach, with chapters from a diverse range of scholars offering insights into how linguistic ethnographic approaches are developed through their work and how they came to them. LE, according to Fiona Copland in this collection, offered a way to go beyond

linguistic analysis and to develop an “ethnographic sensibility” to her data (p. 111). This ethnographic sensibility afforded more “nuanced and equivocal research findings” (ibid). Crucially, it allowed her to understand her own positioning as a researcher and develop a critical reflexivity about her own reactions to the data she was collecting.

Bearing in mind this critical reflexivity, I will explain my own interest in these case studies. LE is an approach which I am adopting for my own doctoral research which is conducted with multilingual artists, and I approached this volume as a relatively novice researcher coming from a background as a higher education professional in outreach and engagement. I do not research my previous professional practice, but that of artists and performers, and my research is part of the UK AHRC-funded ‘Translation and Translanguaging’ project (TLANG), which has LE as its core methodology. Both the interplay and the tension between ‘ethnography’ and ‘linguistics’ are of particular interest to me in terms of also visualising the tensions between verbal communication and the visual in my own research. These tensions and the ways in which they can come to the fore and be addressed through the research itself, holds significant appeal. My own work, although grounded in sociolinguistics, is interdisciplinary and I find myself wishing to see fine-grained linguistic analysis when I attend arts-based conferences and more visuals and ‘context’ when I attend applied linguistics conferences. To what extent as ethnographers are we embedded in the contexts in which we are researching and to what extent are we able to develop analytic distance from these same contexts? How can we carry out interdisciplinary research which remains sensitive to the contexts in which we are working but also retains disciplinary coherence? These are pertinent questions to researchers adopting a LE approach and in particular for doctoral students who will need to make the case for their choices in their thesis and during the viva. Not least, how does LE enable us to do as Rampton (2004, p. 15) and colleagues suggest (following Todorov, 1988) in making the familiar strange and the strange familiar? And to what extent are we aware of this familiarity, this strangeness and the spaces in between?

*Linguistic Ethnography: Interdisciplinary Explorations* seeks to make visible the (often messy) mechanisms of conducting research in diverse educational and institutional settings, and is also in a sense a state of the art introduction to the field. Arising from a conference, *Explorations in Ethnography, Language and Communication*, which started in 2008, the edited collection aims to bring together researchers from across disciplines whose work draws from this approach. The editors asked three questions to the chapter authors, and these are addressed across the case studies:

1. In what ways did linguistic ethnography enable you to get to parts of the process you study which other approaches couldn't reach?
2. In what ways has appropriating linguistic ethnography led to changes in your work and the methods you use?
3. How has your own discipline influenced the concepts and emphases within linguistic ethnography? (pp. 4-5)

The book is structured into fourteen chapters, with the first giving a brief but broad-ranging introduction to linguistic ethnography by the three editors. Here they set out five common features in the work discussed across the twelve case studies. These are as follows:

- adopt an interdisciplinary approach to research;
- use topic-oriented ethnography;
- combine linguistics with ethnography;
- bring together different sources of data; and
- aspire to improve social life. (p. 5)

These five overarching features are drawn out in different ways across the chapters. Interdisciplinarity, or even *trans*disciplinarity as was the theme of the most recent American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) conference, can risk becoming a buzzword. Researchers are encouraged to develop their work across, through and beyond disciplines, to collaborate and to therefore extend and develop the reach of their work. But true interdisciplinarity can be difficult to incorporate into research which must also show disciplinary rigour and coherence. In chapter two, Ben Rampton, Janet Maybin and Celia Roberts develop an in-depth introduction to theory and method in LE and in the final two parts discuss its possibilities and affordances in terms of working across disciplines and working across sectors, with professionals and non-academics. The latter is a key consideration for linguistic ethnographers, with the development of the approach with regards to praxis and practical considerations and applications foregrounded in much scholarship in this area. This “commitment to real-world processes” (p. 37) can occur in different ways. As the chapter authors explain, this is firstly in terms of practitioners returning to their professional field as researchers, and secondly in terms of researchers working collaboratively with non-academic professionals. The authors suggest that the case studies detailed in the book represent a cross-section of linguistic ethnographic work, and an opportunity for us to “take stock of the character and quality of work that self-identifies as linguistic ethnography” (p. 45). In this review I have broadly categorised the chapters according to their main theme.

In the workplace, Karin Tusting (chapter 3) describes how LE and literacy studies converge and combine to develop understandings of literacy practices in the workplace –in this case in an early years centre. She explores how LE informs the methods used and the understandings developed through her research, which centred on paperwork and pressure for staff in the early years educational setting. A key finding for Tusting is in terms of how close engagement with the people she was working with and a focus on meaning-making developed her understanding of the multiple pressures of an audit culture.

Also in the workplace, although a different setting –in this case the business news desk of a Belgian newspaper– Tom Van Hout (chapter 4) gives an in-depth insight into the methodologies he employed for his work with journalist, in particular in tracking the trajectory of a story as it first hits the desk and ultimately is written into a news article. Van Hout’s innovative approach combines LE with software that captured the journalists’ computer use across this process. In chapter 8, Frances Rock describes her research in legal settings, and sets out three ways in which LE ‘bursts the bonds’. This is firstly in terms of not prescribing methods or procedures. Instead, drawing from Jan Blommart (2009, pp. 260-261), she states that it develops a “way of being in and knowing through research” (p. 149). Secondly, as recognition of the situated nature of language. And thirdly as an approach in which the ‘insider’s view’ is valued. For Rock, LE enabled her to go beyond disciplinary boundaries in Linguistics and develop deeper understandings of language in use.

In the first of four chapters focusing on healthcare settings, Deborah Swinglehurst (chapter 5) describes how LE has informed her work with the electronic patient record (EPR) in UK general practices. Swinglehurst came to LE from her previous professional practice as a general practitioner (GP). Her reasons for employing LE came from her desire to understand how EPR influenced GPs and nurses while understanding the broader context, and she developed her methodology from the bottom up (p. 94). Sara Shaw and Jill Russell’s chapter (chapter 7) focuses on their qualitative research into health policy and practice. They turned towards LE from a desire to develop research methodologies which encompassed Interpretive Policy Analysis (IPA), as a way to address issues around empirical naivety. This led to adopting LE to focus on language-in-use, developing the authors’ work within the field of linguistic ethnographers in healthcare settings, and demonstrating the strengths of combining LE and IPA. In chapter 9, Sarah Collins describes how LE informed her work in patient participation in decision-making. This chapter highlights how patients’ concerns can be understood more broadly through a linguistic ethnographic approach, most specifically in terms of combining different data sets in analysis. LE extends the reach of the researcher in

these settings, for example, in understanding patient encounters outside of the medical visit (p. 183). Jeff Bezemer's chapter (11) focuses on research carried out in collaboration with surgeons. His chapter firstly details how his research is shaped by the partnerships with practitioners, and secondly how LE could be developed more broadly in health care settings. He describes the tensions of writing from linguistic ethnographic perspectives for different audiences, for example in how LE might be perceived by practitioners and researchers from across different fields. For Bezemer, partnerships and collaborations with practitioners and LE approaches are a way to develop a broader understanding of unfamiliar practices.

Fiona Copland (chapter 6) found that by adopting LE in her research with TESOL trainers and trainees changed not only the methodologies she developed for her work but also how she understood research and its purpose. For Copland, LE offers significant insights for TESOL-based research, particularly in terms of convergences with research into superdiversity and migration (see for example the TLANG project). Adam Lefstein and Mirit Israeli (chapter 10) offer insights into how LE might be used within educational research, explaining that these methods may not always seem the best suited for the kinds of questions arising within these settings. Building on Charles Goodwin's (1994) concept of 'professional vision', the authors set out how a LE approach enabled new and nuanced understandings and how pedagogical and LE insights differ, finally offering some options for bringing the two into dialogue.

In chapter 12 Julia Snell writes about linguistic ethnographic perspectives on working class children's speech, based on her doctoral research in Teeside in the north east of England. She demonstrates how research methodologies within LE developed her own research beyond methods and towards an ethnographic approach which enabled her to manage her own subjectivity. Snell shifted her analytical framework from a variationist linguistics paradigm to a linguistic ethnographic approach, drawing from micro-ethnography. Her insights develop a case for responding to "deficit accounts of working class children's speech" (this volume, p. 241) using a combination of quantitative and qualitative linguistic ethnographic analyses.

Lian Malai Madsen and Martha Sif Karreboek's chapter (13) reports on research with adolescents' engagement with hip hop which takes place both inside and outside formal educational settings. Their research findings were around the dominating educational norms which they found occupied not only the classrooms themselves but also street and community initiatives. They also found that the young people engaged with different and "multiple centres of cultural norms" (p. 247) at various points and even within the same setting. Their

chapter highlights how a combination of approaches which draw from linguistic ethnography –linguistic micro-analysis, meta-pragmatic analysis and ethnographic accounts– were used to inform their study of polycentricity, allowing them to develop ethnographic insights to activities and behaviours that linguistic analysis alone would not have achieved. In the final chapter (14), Angela Creese, Adrian Blackledge and Jaspreet Kaur Takhi discuss the concept of metacommentary. Here they use fieldnotes collected from a multilingual ethnographic project which took in complementary schools to shed light on how metacommentary can be an analytical tool for participant observation. Five types of metacommentary are identified and these are used to develop an analytical frame for the research. The authors describe how making visible the mechanisms of LE research, including fieldnotes, enables researchers to understand more of the “situated communicative repertoires” in action (p. 282).

This collection serves as a diverse and engaging set of case studies which shed light on the different applications of LE and the other research methodologies with which it can be combined (see Tusting, chapter 3 for Literacy Studies, as a good example). The chapters authors demonstrate how LE can enable the opening up of linguistics and the tying down of ethnography, as particularly notable in the chapters by Swinglehurst, Copland and Snell. It establishes a starting point for further literature on interdisciplinary (and transdisciplinary) LE-informed research. It also establishes a starting point for subsequent, innovative work across disciplines. In a short paper delivered as part of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference of the Department of Applied Linguistics at Birkbeck College, Ben Rampton (2015) sets out a number of possibilities for the next ten years of applied linguistics. These include what he describes as “blending teaching and research around increased civic engagement” (p. 5). Civic engagement offers challenges and affordances for researchers in LE as demonstrated in this volume. Collaboration with practitioners formed the focus of Jeff Bezemer’s chapter and raised the challenge of how researchers using LE can collaborate with practitioners in the field, and how this can develop LE and its possible applications, not least in the area of cross-sector collaboration and interdisciplinary research. This edited collection demonstrates the broad application of research conducted using a linguistic ethnographic approach, as well as opening up the field to further interpretation and extension. It is recommended for novice linguistic ethnographers and more experienced researchers alike.

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**Author information:** Jessica is a Doctoral Researcher on the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project 'Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities' (TLANG). She is undertaking research into translation and translanguaging in community arts, focusing on processes of production. Previously, Jessica worked in the Arts team within Educational Engagement at the University of Leeds for over 9 years, developing and managing projects with schools and colleges to promote modern languages and arts based subjects. She holds an MA in Applied Translation Studies from the University of Leeds and a B.A. in French with Spanish from the University of Newcastle.

**Email:** [J.M.Bradley@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:J.M.Bradley@leeds.ac.uk)  
**@JessMaryBradley**

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