Converging offline and online ethnographic research: Insights from Belizean and Nigerian data sets

Theresa Heyd (University of Greifswald) and Britta Schneider (University of Frankfurt Oder)

In this presentation, we want to discuss, on the one hand, the relevance of ethnography for establishing a realistic estimation of language practices that avoids a Eurocentric bias in data interpretation, which, in linguistic traditions, tend to conceptualize language as a cognitive, mostly homogenous and bounded entity. This is particularly problematic in socially complex and/or multilingual sociolinguistic settings, to which virtually all settings in which *New Englishes* have emerged belong. In order to understand the concepts of language – in other words, the language ideologies – of speakers, qualitative ethnographic methodology is crucial. Methodological openness can give access unexpected indexical meanings of language use and thus to discourses that, firstly, may be different from Western scientific ideologies of language and that, secondly, may impact on language practice (e.g. in practices that symbolize fixity, belonging, 'correctness' or, on the other hand, creativity or playfulness). Therefore, prolonged field stays, participant observation and the collection of field notes allow for understanding situated behavior and for getting access to insiders' views (see e.g. Geertz 1973; Gobo 2008), which are important to triangulate linguistic data. This also allows for a more critical approach towards the sampling of informants as stays in the field, bringing about diverse social contacts, make the limitations of only documenting language practices of highly educated speakers visible.

At the same time, we argue that ethnographic data collection can no longer be realized as observing offline practices in the field only. Everyday language use cannot be understood as either written and formal, or oral and informal as digital linguistic practice does not exist alongside but converges with and extends situated language use. While linguistic theories so far have been dominantly shaped by an *a priori* assumption of oral face-to-face communication as the 'natural' form of communication, emanating from the cognitive competences of the individual and contrasting with written language (see e.g. Stubbs 1980: 109), these phonocentric language ideologies are generally not tenable in an age of convergent digital practice (see e.g. Blommaert 2013). As converged offline-online linguistic practices have a crucial impact on the constitution of social relationships and on dynamics of mobility, it becomes necessary to include online data into ethnographic observation and to develop new forms of data collection that allow for an understanding of how offline and online language practices interact.

In order to illustrate our claims, we discuss examples from our own *New English* data, among them field notes, interview data, online data and spoken (offline) data from Belize and from the Nigerian digital diaspora.

References

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