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Breaking classroom silences in London & Nicosia

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BREAKING CLASSROOM SILENCES IN LONDON AND NICOSIA

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Abstract

Just like silences themselves, breaking silence can be good or bad, but how do you decide? That is obviously not an exclusively academic question, but the answer is going to be influenced by how a rupture is actually analysed, and this paper proposes linguistic ethnography as a way of unpacking the layered processes and systems colliding in the breach. Focusing first on a Turkish language class in a Greek-Cypriot secondary school and then on some talk about Standard English in an inner London comprehensive, the paper concentrates on episodes in which someone raises critical questions about types of division and stratification that are normally taken for granted. The details of linguistic form, individual positioning, local institutional history and developments in national education policy all count in these classroom dynamics, and the paper concludes by reviewing the value of using this kind of data and analysis in professional development sessions with teachers.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I'm going to look at two classroom examples of breaking the silence about social positioning – episodes in which someone speaks out about a potentially very sensitive social category, touches a deep prejudice, and raises critical questions about types of stratification and division that are normally taken for granted. I'm also going to ask what you should do when this happens? Do you freeze and panic or do you cheer? Do you try to restore the silence, or amplify and even broadcast the rupture? Or do you do something in-between?

And let's not forget that there have to be some silences in social interaction. First, when people interact together, each person always operates with a huge array of unstated assumptions about the social world that they can't put into words. Second, they also act as if there was general agreement on a lot of these assumptions among the people they're talking to¹ - as McDermott & Tylbor put it, there is a lot of silent collusion (1983). And third, keeping quiet isn't necessarily a bad thing. Billig, for example, argues that on some issues silence and

“psychological repression can be justified as progressive, moral and socially beneficial. It can be a means of replacing ways of talking that belong to discriminatory times” (1999:259-60)

So how do you work out which ruptures to celebrate, and what silences to try and reinstate?

That's obviously not simply a scientific or academic question – the answer is going to depend a lot on your values and political priorities. In addition, though, your answer is also going to be influenced by the way you actually analyse a rupture, and although it certainly doesn't eradicate interpretation, I'd like to propose linguistic ethnography as a valuable contribution to this analysis.²

With linguistic ethnography, you can attend both to the specifics of what actually happens in the moment of breach, and to the breach's significance in context, taking context as a layered set of broader social processes that not only shape what's happening in the here-and-now, but also take some shape in it themselves. You start with some empirical episodes that look potentially relevant to

¹ cf Garfinkel's breaching experiments.

² 'Interactional sociolinguistics' can also be characterised in a very similar way, and in collaboration with Roberts and others, Gumperz pioneered the use of interactional data in professional development around controversial issues (Gumperz 1982; Gumperz, Jupp & Roberts 1979). On the relationship between linguistic ethnography and interactional sociolinguistics, see Rampton 2007.

whatever issue it is that you're concerned with, and then analytically, you begin to unpack the layered and multi-scalar systems and processes that coalesce in it. You try to understand separately the systemic characteristics of processes that are variously institutional, biographical or historical; you identify the precise phase in a process that your episode instantiates; and then you try to figure out how all these processes interact together, with what outcomes, at what levels.

The value of this multi-levelled analysis is at least two-fold. First and more generally, it increases the empirical precision of what we say about the social construction of reality, about the interplay of structure and agency, or about agentive innovation. Second, it is a way of getting particular episodes into perspective, and is a useful precaution against making mountains out of molehills, against over-inflating the claims we want to make about particular episodes where silences get breached.

I will try to illustrate this with two examples of classroom breaches: the first comes from Constadina Charambous' study of Turkish language learning in a Greek-Cypriot secondary school in 2006, and the second comes from my own work on a London secondary school in 1997.

2. Nicosia: Learning Turkish in a secondary school

As everyone knows, there is a fairly recent history of violent conflict in Cyprus between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots. This led to the de facto division of the island in 1974, and after that, communication between the two parts was impossible for almost 30 years. But when the Republic of Cyprus signed the EU accession treaty in 2003, restrictions of movement in the buffer zone in Nicosia were partially lifted, and among other things, the Turkish language was introduced as an option in Greek-Cypriot education for the first time, framed within a rhetoric of reconciliation.

But the task of teaching Turkish has proved very far from straightforward, because historically, Greek-Cypriot education has been a major site for the construction of Turkish otherness.³ Here is what one official at the Ministry of Education and Culture reported in 2006, three years after the Treaty was signed:

Extract 1:

"Unfortunately there is still a lot of chauvinism amongst students. For example, after the gates were opened I said to a class that the two communities should be reconciled and come closer and a student raised his hand and said to me 'But sir all this time we have been taught to hate the Turks and now all of a sudden you are asking us to love them?'" (Charalambous 2013:xxx)

Indeed, a Greek-Cypriot teacher of Turkish admitted that:

Extract 2

"Some teachers denigrate the [Turkish] language as a school-subject...or the students who don't attend Turkish might go to the classroom where the lesson is going to be held and write 'Cyprus is Greek' and other slogans... Personally, if I have any books with the Turkish flag visible on them, I always cover it, because our society is not mature enough so that I can have a book with the Turkish flag in public. And in my house too, all the similar books that I own, I have them... well, not hidden but in the room I use as an office. I can't, say, take the book with the Turkish flag in the living room."

³ See e.g. P. Charalambous 2010

So how did this teacher cope with this kind of hostility?

Charalambous observed 32 hours of Mr Andreou's lessons, and she found that he consistently avoided referring to the Turks and Turkish-Cypriots in the class, using the terms 'Turks' or 'Turkish-Cypriots' only four times during the entire period of observation. Instead, he focused his lessons on the teaching of grammar and vocabulary, treating language as a code cut off from its cultural settings and social connotations.

But there was one lesson with 16-17 year old beginners where Mr Andreou was teaching the Turkish personal pronouns, and this included the 'politeness plural'. Here he explained that in Turkish, people always use the politeness plural when addressing someone older, and he went on to say that Turkish was a very polite language, with some phrases sounding even more polite than Greek. According to Charalambous' fieldnotes,

Extract 3

"[t]he moment Mr A said that the Turkish language might sound better than Greek, the students, who until then had been quietly listening to his talk, started shouting. This was unusual for this class which was always well-behaved. Students started talking all together despite Mr A's repetition of 'please'. Although it was not clear what they were saying, since they talked simultaneously, I could hear a student saying 'but they are Turks' and some others saying about Turkish players of 'Survivor' being impolite during the reality show." (Extract from fieldnotes, 07/11/06)

Charalambous also audio recorded this lesson, and she provides a detailed discourse analysis in the 2013 paper listed in the bibliography. But here are some of the features that Charalambous identified in the interaction: Mr Andreou lost control of the turn-taking; the normal IRE sequence was abandoned; his calls for order were ignored; and the students all talked at the same time. Mr A was interrupted; his epistemic authority was challenged ('how do you know'); and he was addressed in the non-polite singular. In his own speech, there were lots of cut-off words, abandoned phrases, stretched vowels, hesitations and repairs, and as well as the audible loss of fluency, he increased his use of Greek-Cypriot dialect.

So what happened next? Well, Mr A extricated himself from this disorder by shifting back to language as a code, and business continued more or less as usual. In fact, he told Charalambous that this was his best group, not just in that particular school but in all of the four schools where he was working. He said that the students always paid attention to what he was saying; they wanted to get high marks; they always did their homework; and it was generally very easy for him to follow the lesson-plan he had prepared. Indeed, almost everyone in the class scored very highly in their tests, and at the end of the term, they also got very high marks for Turkish-language as a subject.

So what was going on here? Charalambous' discourse analysis provides ample evidence that this episode was different and difficult for Mr A, and that this was sparked off by his positive comparison of Turkish with Greek, and then intensified by the favourable description of Turkish-speaking people that he produced immediately after. But let's not forget the crucial fact that these students had actually all volunteered to come to Turkish language lessons, and in doing so, they'd often braved taunts of 'traitor' from their peers. So they were already deviating from the Hellenocentric orthodoxy that dominated the rest of the curriculum. More than that: when Charalambous talked to the students outside lessons, some of them showed that they could draw a rather wider range of discourses into discussion of the 'Cyprus question', invoking anti-racism, differentiating right and leftist representations, making a favourable distinction between Turkish-Cypriots and Turks (2009:267-8).

So what exactly kind of silence breaking is this? Well we obviously can't claim that Mr A is dragging up something that's been deeply buried in the collective unconscious, and even though his positive references Turkish people and manners were treated as transgressive, there was nothing spectacularly iconoclastic about them. What's happened is that he's allowed the linguistic structure of

the politeness plural to divert him into a stronger alignment with things Turkish than his class is willing to accept. And what seems to disturb them is really only an (unplanned) invitation to come one small step further *down a path that they're actually already all standing on*, albeit maybe rather furtively. In addition, their sensitivity to this kind of offence seems to be spatio-temporally specific - the expression of offence sounds unanimous in the secondary school lesson, but outside, there's much more variety and equivocation.

There are several issues here that we should come back to but let's first look at some data from London.

3. London: Preparing for an oracy assessment

In the recording that I'm going to play you, it's the 10th March 1997, early on in a English lesson with 14 year olds at Central High, an inner city comprehensive school in London. The teacher is Mr Newton, who is popular, committed but not very commanding, and he has told the class to do silent reading for the first five minutes. But now he wants to get them started on their Standardised Assessment Task in oral English, which is going to involve small groups role-playing a coroner's inquest on the deaths of Romeo and Juliet. In the episode that I'll play to you, Mr Newton is talking about the grading scheme, and here's what he has said just before the extract that you'll hear:

Extract 4 (simplified transcript)

if you look at the big newspapers today (1.0) you'll find that they've
all got these erm charts: (1.5)
they're called the league tables about all the primary schools
what the- yeah ((louder)) what the league tables are about
whats:: ((single clap)) sh::: sh: sh:
what the league tables are about are what percentages of the students
are getting Level Fou:r (.) in English Maths and Science at the
end of their- primary school(.) at the end their junior school
when they're eleven
now (1) it's no secret last year Guy (3.0) most of the students in
this school (.) the biggest number of students got Level Four (.)
Level Four in English is the most popular level the- most common
level that students got
we've got to raise that (.) because Level Four is what you should be
getting at eleven (.) not fourteen (1)
so if you're getting Level Four at fourteen it means that you're sort
of like way way behind
you've got an awful lot of catching up to do before you do your GCSEs
((school leaving exams)) two years later (1.5)
OK? (.)

Now he begins to talk about getting a Level Five:

Extract 5

1 Mr N: TO GET a Level Five
2 ((three claps))
3 sh:::
4 listen
5 (.)
6 listen
7 (2) ((still some low voices))
8 to get a level Five it starts:
9 to be a little bit more difficult because
10 Shahid (.)

11 the words Standard English start to crop up
12 Rafiq: ((*in a constricted sing-song voice:*))
13 ^\oh
14 |thats |very [|,(good)
15 Mr N: [and (.)
16 Shahid: >I DON'T ([English)<
17 Mr N: [so:
18 Anons (male): ((*laughter*))
19 Mr N: sort of people who er answer every question
20 (.)
21 with lots of aints and innits
22 Mr N: (.)
23 ?Hanif: ((*quietly:*)) yeh
24 Mr N: are in fact
25 (.) handicappin' 'emselves
26 Mr N: (.) so unfortunately
27 Hanif: yeh I know
28 Daily Times
29 Mr N: because you're all from (.)
30 Hanif: Ban[gladesh
31 Mr N: [because you're all from Lon[don
32 Hanif: [Bangladesh
33 oh (.)
34 Several: ((*laughter, noise level[s rise gradually]*))
35 Rafiq ((*in hyper-Cockney*)): [sonar bangla ((*laughs*))
36 ?Masud: ((*hyper-Cockney accent:*)) sonar bangla
37 John: ((*hyper-Cockney accent:*)) sonar bangla
38 Mr N: (you know) I'm getting fed up with (back)
39 ((*quite a lot of talk going on*))
40 Mr N: because you're from London
41 you're handicapped to a certain ext[ent
42 Several: [((*loud laughs*))
43 Mr N: because erm: (.)
44 your everyday language (.)
45 if you're at Eton (.)
46 wouldn't include too many innits
47 would it
48 (.)
49 alright
50 [listen
51 Anon(m): [((*in a posh voice:*))
52 (because they're very) posh
53 Mr N: ((*fast and quieter:*)) yes exactly
54 ((*single clap*))

There are several similarities between this episode and the case from Nicosia.

First, in both episodes, the teachers are working in an environment where the wider socio-symbolic connotations of language have been repressed for educational reasons, but they break with this by referring to the socio-cultural embedding of particular linguistic forms. In the Turkish case, it was Mr Andreou himself who normally separated Turkish language off from Turkish culture as personal pedagogic strategy. But in England, it's the National Curriculum that presents standard English as a neutral code, equally learnable by everyone, and Mr Newton is contradicting this, arguing that non-standard dialect forms like 'ain't' 'innit' are more deeply inscribed in the speech of pupils at his school than in the language of posh Etonians.

Second, both teachers implicate the students they're addressing in zones of negative sociolinguistic evaluation. Admittedly, in the Cyprus case, it's more a matter of students inferring 'guilt by association', and all Mr A does is to evoke images of Turkish-speakerhood that are just too positive or vivid for the students to tolerate as a learning destination for themselves. But in the

English episode, Mr Newton is right upfront about it: people from London use aints and innits, and because you kids are from London, you're handicapped.

Just like Mr Andreou in Cyprus, Mr Newton gets a strong affective response from his students when he links them to linguistic practices that are widely seen as undesirable at school. But the similarity ends there. The rather indirect association entailed in Mr Andreou's reference to Turkishness elicited strong indignation from his students, but Mr Newton's explicit attribution of handicap gets greeted with laughter and merriment. So what on earth is happening?

Well let's first take a closer look at how Mr N's presents this, and then provide a bit more local context. In line 11, notice the way Mr Newton says "the words standard English start to crop up", rather than saying, for example, "to get a level 5, you've got to use standard English". In the formulation he's selected, he's evoking some text elsewhere as the source and authority on this, rather than appropriating these requirements as a pronouncement of his own. Next, look at his vernacular pronunciation in line 25 – the non-velar ING and the dropped TH in "handicappin' 'emselves". These may be strong terms of denigration, but in them, he seems to be tuning more his students' speech than the style required by the national curriculum. In lines 40 & 41, yes, the words "because-you're-from-London-you're-handicapped" do seem very blunt, but remember all the trouble Mr Newton's had holding the attention of the class – the claps in line 2, the 'listen' 'listen' in lines 4 and 6, and the 'I'm getting fed-up' complaint in line 38. In a context like kind, Mr Newton's handicap-attribution looks like what Pomerantz calls an 'extreme case formulation' – "[i]nteractants use extreme case formulations... when they anticipate or expect their co-interactants to undermine their claims and when they are in adversarial situations" (1986:222). Plus there's the softening immediately afterwards – "to a certain extent" in line 41.

On closer inspection, then, Mr Newton's personal stance on standard English looks rather less draconian than a quick reading might suggest, and in fact this was consistent with the ideology of language in the school more generally. Yes, the UK government was promoting standard English as a central element in its legally binding national curriculum, but in this particular school, there has been a long and distinguished tradition of multicultural respect for different vernaculars.⁴

So even though calling kids handicapped because of their non-standard speech sounds a little shocking at first, it would be a mistake to interpret the laughter from students as, say, a defiant response to oppressive pedagogy. Instead, the interaction we can hear is actually rather convivial – look at the agreement about Eton in lines 49-53, or at Hanif's collaborative completion of Mr Newton's turns in lines 29-32.

But if that's the case, if the negative assessment directed at these students is treated as entertaining rather than threatening or offensive, how serious an issue is this? Indeed, how far does the episode really count as 'breaking silence', voicing the otherwise unspoken? Well, let's locate what's discussed in this episode in a set of wider processes.

First – and pervasive throughout the interaction in this episode – there was the introduction of a market system for the state funded education sector as a whole. The class in Extract 5 was preparing for a set of national tests that the Conservative Government introduced in the late 1980s, and as Mr Newton indicated just before, the school's overall performance in these tests would be published in league tables. The purpose of these tables was to provide essential 'consumer information' for parents, who now also had the right to choose which school their child went to, with state funding following the child. Poor performance in the tests, and a low position in the league tables of test results, would have an adverse influence on the school's intake, and this was part of a polarisation process in which families with more cultural capital worked their way into the higher placed schools. Central High was already feeling the effects of this: about half the students received free school meals; almost a third were registered as having special educational needs; about 30% of the school's population moved away before they'd completed compulsory education; and the exam results were worse than the borough average.⁵ In fact there were manifestations of all this in the classroom recordings: some of the students were very keen to learn, but there were others who were deeply disaffected. This made teaching very hard, and ultimately perhaps, it tempted staff to treat students as consumers and to adopt a non-intrusive 'take it or leave' approach to curriculum delivery.

⁴ See Rampton 2006:45-47 & 277-284 for fuller discussion.

⁵ See Rampton 2006:Ch.2.1

Second, there's Mr Newton's reference to 'Eton' and the very longstanding division between private and state schooling in Britain. In England in 1999, close to the time of this recording, an average of £5,500 per head was spent on the 5%-10% of pupils attending a fee-paying school, compared with £2,732 per pupil at schools funded by the state (Davies 2000:116). There were exam results to match: in the borough where Central High was located, over 65% of private school pupils got 5 or more GCSE grades at A-C*, while in state and voluntary aided schools, the figure was less than 40%. **Something about Oxbridge & political class?**

So in Extract 5, it really isn't a laughing matter when Mr Newton outlines the requirements of the oracy assessment and describes the penalisation of non-standard forms. Why, then, do the students take it so lightly? Let's turn now to Raymond Williams' discussion of ideology, bring Mr Andreou's class back into the frame as well.

4. Dominant, residual and emergent ideologies

I mentioned earlier that at Central High, there was a tradition of leftish multi-cultural respect for vernaculars, and that this was likely to have provided the students with some protection against the stigmatisation of non-standard speech. But this was now far less powerful than it had been in the 1970s and 80s. As one teacher explained, Central High had been "a star in the borough, peaking in the 1980s. You got a lot of middle class kids. But not now". Nowadays, the upper echelons of the local education authority tended to be "technocrats" and they were much less impressed with the school. Borrowing from Williams, we can say that this commitment to linguistic pluralism was now a residual ideological formation:

"The residual... has been... formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process... as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation." (Williams 1977:122; Harris 2006:86)

In contrast to the residual multiculturalism at Central High, the dominant formation in education involved a system of mandatory topics, targets, tests, tables and parental choice, and the continuing reproduction of inequality was blamed on schools, teachers and pupils themselves, rather than being seen as an outcome of the system itself.

A process of this kind could lend itself to a class analysis, but in the 1990s when I conducted my fieldwork, there was very little room for this in mainstream discourses. In curriculum documents on language, social class was also erased, overlooking the evidence from 20 years of sociolinguistic research on the topic.⁶ As we saw in Extract 5, Mr Newton tried to restore some of this class consciousness, and eventually, after stumbling through ethnicity and region ('Bangladesh' and 'London'), 'aints' and 'innits' did get linked to social class. But students generally had far less to say about class stratification than about race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, even though the linguistic markers of British social class were deeply inscribed in their routine speech.⁷ The class ideology that denigrated aints and innits was generally hegemonic, saturating everyday practice to

"such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense." (Williams 1977:109)⁸

⁶ See Rampton, Harris & Leung 2007:424-5

⁷ See Rampton 2006:Ch.7.3

⁸ The students also regularly produced spontaneous strategic performances of exaggerated posh and Cockney, and I have analysed these 'creative practices' that denaturalised class hierarchy (Rampton 2006:Part III). But this wasn't accompanied by much collective propositional debate about class, and in my data, students were relatively unresponsive when teachers tried to introduce the topic (ibid Ch.7.2).

So to return to why students laughed at being called handicapped: Well we first have to say that some of them didn't – either they didn't find it funny or they simply weren't attending. But with those who did, it sounds as though they either accepted the situation or thought it didn't matter, and this left them free to enjoy their teacher's lively rhetorical formulation.⁹ In Mr Newton's speech itself, maybe there is an emancipatory purpose, drawing on the school's residual commitment to linguistic pluralism by highlighting linguistic prejudice. But the system makes it's hard to hear his words as anything more than an exhortation to try harder in the tests.

In Cyprus, the episode with Mr Andreou is also a case of ideological contestation, but rather than illustrating a tension between hegemonic and residual perspectives, it's a clash between the dominant and the emergent, set within the ideological confines of Greek-Cypriot schooling.

According to Williams, we need to be careful identifying emergent ideological formations:

“new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it... Again and again what we have to observe is in effect a pre-emergence, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named” (1977:123,126)

As well as studying classrooms, Charalambous 2009 looked at the EU and Cypriot government discourses which had proposed that Turkish-Cypriots should enjoy more rights within the Republic of Cyprus, and she suggests that these were only a 'new phase of the dominant', since there was little change to the idea that Greek-Cypriots were essentially Greeks (2009:42). And certainly, if we return to 2006 and the very recent introduction of Turkish language teaching in Greek-Cypriot schools, Mr Andreou himself actually worked very hard to construct his lessons as only a (harmless) 'new phase of the dominant', repressing the language's social meaning and treating it as a matter of grammar and vocabulary. But plainly, Mr A wasn't completely successful in this, and instead, the episode described by Charalambous looks more like a situation of 'pre-emergence', with a positive view of Turkish-Cypriots being "active and pressing but not yet fully articulated". In fact outside school, a number of these students also participated in leftist or bi-communal networks, or they had contact with Turkish-Cypriots through their families, and as a result, they were able to access long-standing discourses that opposed ethnocentric and nationalist ideologies, that emphasised 'shared Cypriotness' instead, and that cast Turkish-Cypriots as 'brothers' rather than 'others'. So there were resources very close at hand for pushing this 'preemergence' further. But both here and in other episodes where Charalambous saw the silence being broken in Turkish-language classes, the institutional power of the dominant ideology was rather effectively reasserted.

Let's now step back to consider the implications of these analyses.

5. Implications for practical intervention

At the start of my presentation, I talked about linguistic ethnography as a methodology that starts with the close analysis of particular episodes and then engages in layered analysis of the multiscalar processes that constitute the 'context'. Pursuing this, I've tried to show overall how rather routine everyday practice is permeated by widely-circulating ideologies that are deeply rooted in history, and how easy it is for ideological struggle to break through the surface. By attending carefully to these different scalar processes, we've identified aspects of ideology that might not be immediately obvious – for example, the subtlety of Mr Newton's ideological stance in interaction, and the institutional

⁹ The laughter was of course of course also governed by a very local discourse dynamic. Mr Newton develops a syllogistic argument over the course of this extract, which can be summarised as: (1) SATs are hard because they require standard English (lines 8-11); (2) people who use (vernacular) aints and innits are handicapped in SATs (19-25); (3) because you're from London (and speak London vernacular), you're handicapped (26-41). He leads up to the climax in line 41 with a triple repetition of 'because you're all from (London)', including a dramatic delay before the last one, and he culminates with a (bald on-record) 'extreme case formulation'. The structure of Mr N's speech invites a collective response immediately after line 41, and students provide this with their laughter (cf Atkinson 1984).

specificity of the dominance of Hellenocentrism. And when it came to comparing these two episodes, we've seen the importance of attending to longer term processes of the kind addressed by Williams.

But I also said that we ought to consider the practical implications of this kind of analysis, and in fact the data cry out for this: we've seen Mr A struggling to teach Turkish in an environment that was hostile to Turkish-speakers, and to put it at its harshest, we've witnessed Mr N recognising that he's educating kids for failure, an experience that drives a massive percentage of UK teachers out the profession within two years of starting.¹⁰

Well if we're pursuing practical relevance, it's important first of all to recognise the distinctive ideological climates in which different professionals are working. If Mr Andreou is operating at the interface between dominant and emergent discourses within the Greek-Cypriot school system, then I'd guess that any teacher development would need to contend with a pressing awareness of risk, whereas if Mr Newton's riding a tension between the dominant and the residual, then it'll be a pervasive sense of defeat that the intervention would have to address. More than that, an analysis of the ideological climate is likely to influence your overall approach to using research in professional development. In situations characterised by risk, it's vital to attend very closely to the local fields of force, to ensure you don't trigger a conflagration accidentally. But in contexts of demoralisation, you probably need to persevere, and not read a lack of universal interest as a sign that your work's all irrelevant.

In saying all that, my underlying assumption is that instead of delivering a verdict, research provides professionals with careful but unorthodox interpretations, throwing new light on situations where they're still the ones in charge, and where it's up to them to decide whether or not the research has implications for their practice. This is consistent with ethnographic epistemology,¹¹ and I'd like to close by reviewing some of the reasons for using interactional data as a resource for reflection in professional development work.

Of course, professional development work with recordings and transcripts is very well-established as an application of discourse analysis, and sometimes, it generates practical recommendations that aim to redesign the details of talk, targeting specific discourse moves and particular types of inference that professionals make in their encounters with particular types of participant – participants identified by ethno-linguistic background and/or institutional identity, such medical patient, job applicant, helpline caller etc.¹² But this sort of micro-intervention is much harder in longer-term, heteroglossic, multi-party interactions like the ones you get in classrooms, and it also tends to downplay ideological contestation.¹³ Instead, let me float the possibility that in situations of endemic ideological struggle, there's more chance of optimising professional reflection on these tensions and uncertainties if you engage in a relatively open-ended exploration of episodes like the ones we've seen today, where there's some disruption to the fragile interactional settlement.

Certainly, there are a lot of situations where you'd need more than just interaction data on its own. My colleagues have developed materials for use in situations like Mr Newton's, and to help teachers to articulate the layered context in which interaction unfolds, they've brought in material that is relevant to other levels of the social process – media texts, policy documents, institutional records and academic meta-analyses.¹⁴ Indeed, to neglect these and confine the focus to a technical micro-analysis could itself end up as a repressively hegemonic move, obscuring the influence of wider forces. But if it's properly embedded in a set of resources that provide some purchase on wider processes, my guess is that interactional data on silences being broken can contribute to practical intervention in at least five ways:

First, showing heterodox alignments and transgressive identifications repeatedly erupting in mundane interaction puts a question mark over hegemonic claims like 'social class no longer matters'.

Second, the fact that you're focusing on fragments, on single episodes extracted from far longer and broader fields of activity, leaves your claims to significance very much open to discussion or even

¹⁰ In 2008, the GTC reported that this was 40%.

¹¹ See Hymes 1980, van der Aa & Blommaert 2011

¹² See e.g. Gumperz, Jupp & Roberts 1979; Antaki 2011; also Lefstein & Snell 2011 on the difficulties

¹³ Antaki 2011:11, though see Gumperz's discussion of the intimate relationship between interaction and ideology in Gumperz et al 1979.

¹⁴ See Harris, Lefstein et al 2011

denial. It works against the inclination to position the researcher as all-seeing judge, and fronts the process of dialogical interpretation central to ethnography.

In addition, third, recordings of ideological struggle embedded in ordinary classroom practice encourage teachers to bring their own first-hand school experience into the frame, along with their sensitivity, interest or affection for young people as individuals. In contrast, if you explore ideological conflict by focusing first and foremost on official ceremonies, exemplary rituals or canonical texts, it may be harder to break free from the models of professionalism, or the grand narratives of nation, inscribed at the core of these practices and artefacts.¹⁵

Fourth, close examination of interaction shows how actions are jointly produced among participants who are differentially tuned to the institutional requirements. What people say is minutely synchronised with the feedback they're getting from their interlocutors, and they're always having to adjust their plans to the contingencies generated by other people and their reactions to the situation as it unfolds.¹⁶ This makes it much harder to blame individuals. Yes the bluntness of Mr Newton's "you're handicapped" contravenes all the nostrums of sociolinguistics, but it's forced on him by the precarious levels of pupil attention he's having to contend with. Similarly, when it's set next to EC pronouncements about foreign language learning and intercultural understanding, Mr Andreou's language pedagogy looks narrow and unimaginative. But once you engage with the transcripts, you can start to see that his indexical sanitisation of Turkish is actually a strategy born of experience, and it's rather well-adapted both to the pressures of the institution and to the possibilities of cultural encounter at this particular moment of history.

Last, when you look at recordings of classroom interaction, you realise that there is a lot more going on than the teacher can imagine, or that the researcher could possibly capture in any single analytic line or argument. The people assembling in a classroom can relate to each other in a whole range of different capacities, generating all sorts of unpredicted ties. Mr Newton may have been construing the people in his class as pupils, worrying about social class positioning both for them and for the school. But the youngsters he was addressing related to each other in different ways as friends, as co-religionists, as team mates, potential sexual partners, companions in popular cultural consumption etc.

So if, for example, you wanted to use Extract 5 to lighten the depressing view of class reproduction, then in lines 35-37 there's 'sonar bangla', a fusion of Bengali and Cockney chorally produced by friends with Bangladeshi, Moroccan and West African parents. This is an instance of what Gilroy describes as low-key urban 'conviviality' – it's "undetected by either government or media," but it's capable of rendering "racial and ethnic difference... unremarkable" (2006:39-40). Roxy Harris and I have discussed how you can document this with transcripts of routine interaction, counterposing it to the monoscopic way that 'race' gets thematised both in academic and public discourse.

Of course that's quite easy to do in London, but I wonder what you'd find in a transcript of mundane interaction in, for example, the Hebrew-Arabic bilingual schools studied by Bekerman in Israel? Indeed, in their 2012 book, Bekerman and Zembylas

“emphasise the importance of appreciating the primacy of the interactional, affective and material over idealised and reified categories” (2012:67),

and they close by arguing that

“a school student should not be labelled Palestinian, Turk, Jewish or Greek... [Instead, our] efforts should be directed at the sphere of daily localised and contextualised interactions in their historical trajectories, trying to identify the specific practices, discursive and material, that enable them” (2012:222).

¹⁵ See Bekerman & Zembylas 2012:Part III

¹⁶ See e.g. McDermott & Tylbor 1983.

These are processes that you can investigate in a lot of detail with linguistic ethnography, and I think that the transcripts produced by linguistic ethnography can provide a quite lot of scope for opening up new and unanticipated counter-hegemonic possibilities.

At the start of my talk, I suggested that linguistic ethnography can help us to figure out what ruptures to celebrate, and what silences to try and reinstate. Obviously, a crucial part of this deliberation has to be done with and by the people who inhabit the focal environment, who implement the continuity or change, and who have to live with the consequences. But when you look closely at the interactional evidence in its layered context, it seems to me that there are a lot of reasons for respecting Mr Andreou's general strategy of avoidance, despite its failure to meet the canons of communicative language teaching. Similarly, you could suggest that Mr Newton's social class consciousness-raising could be better timed, separated off from the immediate exigencies of test-preparation and placed within curriculum content (as actually happened elsewhere at Central High). Or at least that's how it looks from my position, working on the evidence and analysis that I've been able to assemble. But of course you may have more and different.

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