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**Interactional sociolinguistics, crossing
and North/South research relations**

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This is the draft of the discussant commentary in a special issue of *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* on *Critical and Alternative Approaches to 'Language Crossing'*, edited by Kathryn Masters & Sinfree Makoni

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Abstract

Taking interactional sociolinguistics and my own research on crossing as focal cases, this paper responds to Masters & Makoni who ask “what happens to epistemologies that originate in the Global North when they are used in the Global South to confront concerns about... how to address, mitigate, and possibly reverse the social inequality, discrimination, economic, political oppression, and heteropatriarchy encountered by peoples of the South”. The paper lays out my interpretation of the theory, methods and politics underpinning interactional sociolinguistics (IS), and sets this next to five recent papers by scholars with Southern links. There are several aspects of IS that dovetail with discussions of decolonial research, at least in principle, but outside “the most lavishly funded universities and research establishments” (Burawoy & von Holdt 2012), how practicable is the slow and sustained immersion in discourse data that interactional sociolinguistics involves?

In their introduction, Katherine Masters and Sinfree Makoni frame this collection on *Critical and alternative approaches to 'language crossing'* within a broader question:

“what happens to epistemologies that originate in the Global North when they are used in the Global South to confront concerns about... how to address, mitigate, and possibly reverse the social inequality, discrimination, economic, political oppression, and heteropatriarchy encountered by peoples of the South[?]... Our interest in analysing ‘language crossing’ occurs at a time when there is a ‘decolonial turn’ characterized by a massive shift in knowledge production... challenging the notion and principle of a ‘truth without parenthesis,’ or a truth applicable everywhere”

The main authors in this special issue collection, Felix Banda, Sender Dovchin, Jerry Won Lee, Busi Makoni and Shaila Sultana, each provide their own answers, from the position of scholars linked to the Global South. But from their reinterpretations of crossing, it is not self-evident what the original epistemology was, and this leaves a significant part of the process that concerns Masters and Makoni unaddressed. So in what follows, writing from London (England), I will first try to answer two questions:

- what *was* the epistemology underpinning my work on language crossing? and
- what kind of politics did it try to articulate in the UK (where it was written)?

With the answers to these questions in place, I will then offer a few reflections on:

- the manner and extent to which I think this epistemology has been reinterpreted in the five papers, and
- the scope for connection with concerns in the Global South more generally.

1. Epistemology and politics in my research on language crossing

Around the time that my 1995 book was published, the destabilisation of traditionally essentialist perceptions of ethnic identity and the development of new inter-ethnic solidarities was already being discussed in sociology and cultural studies, strongly influenced by British scholars with substantial

links to the Global South (e.g. Gilroy 1987, Hall 1988). My book certainly took these processes as its central theme, but following Hewitt 1986, I felt that it would be worth showing how, in particular places, this was happening in the details of everyday communication. To do so, I drew on ‘interactional sociolinguistics’ (IS), the analytic perspective on language and identity developed by John Gumperz. In fact, although I will also refer to quite closely related sociolinguistic traditions that preceded and followed it (‘ethnography of communication’ and ‘linguistic ethnography’), IS provides the best focus with which to address Masters & Makoni’s question about North/South epistemological relations. So I will start by sketching (my take on) basic IS assumptions about communication before moving on to its frameworks and methods of analysis, turning then to its politics.

IS conceptualizes communication as an intricate process of imposition, collusion and struggle in which people invoke, avoid or reconfigure the cultural and symbolic resources attendant on identities with different degrees of salience, purchase and accessibility in specific situations. So instead of, for example, seeking to typify how African Caribbeans, Asians and Anglos use language, either together or on their own, interactional sociolinguistics allowed me to look at the role that language plays when humans interact together in situations where (a) discourses of race and ethnicity have currency (impacting on the distribution of material and symbolic resources, circulating in local, national and global networks), where (b) these discourses are potentially relevant to the participants (classifying and rating them differently), where (c) the participants may want or happen to activate these associations, but where (d) they might also have other things on their minds, or have come to an understanding that neutralizes the personal impact that these discourses can have, potentially generating alternative forms of local solidarity (cf Hall 1988 on ‘new ethnicities’).

To try to understand these processes, IS draws on a range of analytic frameworks, which it treats as sets of ‘*sensitising*’ concepts “suggest[ing] directions along which to look” rather than as ‘definitive’ constructs “provid[ing] prescriptions of what to see” (Blumer 1969:148). Linguistics and discourse analysis provide a provisional view of the communicative affordances of the linguistic resources that participants draw on in situated communication. Goffman and conversation analysis illuminate: the ongoing, sequential construction of ‘local architectures of intersubjectivity’ (Heritage 1997); the rituals and moral accountabilities permeating the use of semiotic forms and strategies; and the shifting spatio-temporal distribution of attention and involvement in situations of physical co-presence. And ethnography provides: a sense of the stability, status and resonance that linguistic forms, rhetorical strategies and semiotic materials have in different social networks beyond the encounter-on-hand; an idea of how and where an encounter fits into longer and broader biographies, institutions and histories; and a sense of the cultural and personal perspectives/experiences that participants bring to interactions, and take from them.

Empirically, IS generally seeks as rich a dataset on naturally occurring interaction as it can get. Data-collection involves the audio- and/or video recording of situated interaction from particular events, people and groups, supplemented by as much participant observation, metapragmatic discussion and retrospective commentary from local participants as possible, and analysis moves across a wide range of levels of organisation, from the phonetic to the institutional. So in my own work on crossing practices, I attended to: (i) the activity and genre that an act of crossing emerged in; (ii) the linguistic forms within the act itself, (iii) the details of what prompted it and how it was received, (iv) the interaction of these situated details with the images of the social world that the utterance indexically called into play; (v) the established and emergent ideologies of language and social life that crossing contested, contributed to and/or was assessed against; while (vi) trying not to lose sight of the extra indeterminacy of meaning that was often crossing’s hallmark. Dwelling on strips of interaction in particular activities, it soon became clear that local, institutional, activity- and discourse-specific identities¹ could be a lot more compelling for the participants than their Anglo, Pakistani or African Caribbean family backgrounds, and that when ethnicity did become an issue with an instance of crossing or stylisation, this happened in all sorts of different ways – disdainful, mocking, racist, respectful, approving, aspirational, some quite spectacular and others hardly noticed. So the published outcome presented a range of transcripts of moments and activities which varied a great deal in their scale and duration (greetings, self-talk, games, jocular abuse, musical performance),

¹ Neighbour, pupil, trouble-maker, goalkeeper, card-dealer, joke-teller, bore etc. etc. – see e.g. Zimmerman 1998 on ‘transportable’, ‘situated’ and ‘discourse’ identities.

with individuals playing, arguing and hanging around together, chatting to friends and associates about people they knew, about recent events, about food, music, school and so forth.

From the analysis of over 450 interactional episodes, a definition of crossing and stylisation emerged inductively,² and I then started to look at whether, how far and in what ways it would be possible to generalise about these practices (without erasing the particularity of the situations in which they occurred). A commitment to generalisation and theory-building is often important in ethnography, and this usually proceeds through the cumulative comparison of socio-historically situated case-studies, looking, in ethnographic sociolinguistics, for “a kind of explanation that will link speaking with human history and praxis” rather than for something that is “‘essential’ or ‘internal to language... and human nature’” (Hymes 1972:70). I embarked on this comparative process within the 1995 book itself (see e.g. Ch.11); during the late 1990s and 2000s, studies by other scholars appeared which broadly corroborated the book’s theorisation of crossing and stylisation within migration, interethnic relations and social change (see Rampton & Charalambous 2009); and more recently, the notion of crossing has helped to illuminate precarious processes of reconciliation in a setting profoundly affected by the legacy of war, where the violence has been much more than merely symbolic (Burawoy & von Holdt 2012; Rampton, Charalambous & Charalambous 2019; Charalambous, Charalambous & Rampton 2019; cf Mac Ginty 2014). At the same time, it is also clear that over time, mixed language practices that are initially experienced as crossing can develop into fluent vernacular styles (Rampton 1995:Chs.5.5 & 8.5; 2011; Banda, this issue)

So if that has been the interactional sociolinguistic methodology in my research on crossing, what of the politics? In the period my 1995 book describes, racism was (and certainly still is) a strong ideological current in British society (Rampton 1995:Chs.1.2, 12.3), and the book was explicit about this in, for example, its accounts of language education policy (Ch.13) and representations of Asian English in the media as well as in some local adolescent practices (Ch.2.4; Ch.6.2). But beyond this, interactional sociolinguistics provides a window on ‘hegemony’ in Raymond Williams’ sense: “relations of domination and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living... a whole body of practices and expectations” (Williams 1977:110; Comaroff & Comaroff 1992:Ch.1). This is similar to Bourdieu’s notion of ‘symbolic violence’ –

“ways of looking, sitting, standing, keeping silent, or even of speaking (‘reproachful looks’ or ‘tones’, ‘disapproving glances’ and so on) [which] are full of injunctions that are powerful and hard to resist precisely because they are silent and insidious, insistent and insinuating” (1991:51; Burawoy & von Holdt 2012)

but Williams goes further by referring to counter-hegemonic ‘creative practice’, which involves

“the long and difficult remaking of an inherited... practical consciousness: a process often described as development but in practice a struggle at the roots of the mind – not casting off an ideology, or learning phrases about it, but confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships” (1977:212).

Broadly in line with Williams’ perspective, as well as with the observations of Hall, Gilroy and others, many (but not all) of the crossing practices described in the 1995 book seemed to illustrate a collective anti-racism in the everyday activities of the young people I studied (cf 1995:Ch 12.4). Indeed, looking beyond that particular study, there is, it seems to me, broader political value in the kind of documentation that interactional sociolinguistics can provide. Larger and more abstract sociological generalisations about racialisation and other kinds of domination and inequality certainly matter a very great deal, both in analysis and politics (Harris & Rampton 2009), but on their own, they

² My definition of crossing and stylisation has remained fairly stable over time (e.g. Rampton 1995:270-1; 2009:149): crossing involves reflexive communicative action in which a person performs specially marked speech in a language, dialect or style that can be heard as anomalously ‘other’, raising questions of legitimacy and entitlement for the participants; stylisation also breaks with ordinary modes of action and interpretation, but doesn’t entail a strong sense of social or ethnic boundary transgression. It is maybe also worth noting that although most of my work focuses on ethnicity, from the outset the definition has referred to “social or ethnic” boundaries, leaving open the possibility of crossing centred on gender, class and other identities.

can either lull us into complacency,³ or leave us panicked and unable to imagine how anyone copes. Close attention to the generally rather low-key practices of the day-to-day provides an important supplementary perspective, and it can show, for example, that “[t]he notion of resistance as it has conventionally functioned... is too simple and flattening” (Rose 1999:279). Instead, suggests Rose, “one [s]hould examine the [much smaller] ways in which creativity arises out of the situation of human beings engaged in particular relations of force and meaning, and what is made out of the possibilities of that location” (ibid). This is a task that IS seems particularly well-equipped to address.

So if that is interactional sociolinguistics – its approach to historically configured identities-in-situated-interaction, its analytic resources, its data-collection and -processing strategies, its mode of generalisation, its commitment to understanding politics in everyday activity – what of the questions posed by Masters and Makoni? If we take the five papers in this collection as Southern studies, what do they reveal of what happens when “ideas that emerge from a specific locality at a particular time, in our case, in the West in a... neighbourhood in the United Kingdom” are reworked in places where there are substantial “differences in context and political history” (Master & Makoni, this issue)?

2. Crossing and its methodology in the present collection?

In Banda’s illumination of the historically and culturally configured multivocality in Zambian popular music, Dovchin’s portrait of the tension around racialisation experienced by Mongolian women in Australia, Lee’s theorisation of the dilemmas of identification with Korean, Busi Makoni’s account of strategic responses of surveillance in South Africa, and Shaila Sultana’s analysis of sexism and cultural insecurity in the stylisation practices of young men at university in Bangladesh, there is a shared matrix of interest in linguistic diversity and the reflexivity generated by the lived disjunction between sociolinguistic practice and the ideological equation of a language with a culture and a nation. My own work on crossing also shares this interest, but for the most part, the people described in these papers have much higher levels of verbal expertise in the language(s) they use than my research participants. So among other things, this raises the possibility of *passing*, and this important and innovative focus is enriched by multimodal description covering phenotypical appearance, dress, movement and music. Together, the papers present a fascinating set of reflexive experiences of difference, ranging from positive to negative, from artful performance in which linguistic differentiation is an aesthetic resource (very much ‘beyond crossing’ – Banda), to metro-ethnic individualism sometimes reluctant to assimilate to other-ethnolinguistic values (Lee), to de-differentiation to escape demeaning racialisation (Dovchin), to hostile stylisation covering anxiety (Sultana), to an acute precarity in which failure to meet sociolinguistic expectations could mean deportation (Makoni).

The richness of this material certainly deserves much fuller comparative discussion than I can provide here, probing for example, at the contextual significance of class and gender (Sultana, this issue; Dovchin, this issue p.5). But instead of this, I will pursue Masters and Makoni’s question about “what happens to epistemologies that originate in the Global North”, prefacing this with two essential observations. First, all the papers refer to crossing, and at a personal level, it is a real honour if ideas formulated a quarter of century ago are still thought to hold some value. Second, fidelity to exactly what I wrote in 1995 certainly isn’t a central concern. If someone like Foucault could say he wanted his books “to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area” (1974:523-4), I am more than happy to follow. That said, if we are addressing the relationship between these four papers and the *interactional* sociolinguistic epistemology in which my own work on crossing was embedded, it is striking that only Sultana’s contains an analysis of naturally occurring interaction (although Dovchin briefly goes into some of the details of interview interaction).

Of course, interaction analysis certainly isn’t mandatory in high quality research. There is a huge amount that we can learn from first-hand experience, observation, interviews and documents, much of it lost or inaccessible to recordings of interaction (Briggs 1997). In my own recent work on crossing

³ Whereas my 1995 book shows that adolescent participants were less dominated and divided by discourses of race than one might have imagined from public media at the time, my 2006 book contradicted widespread claims in the 1990s and 2000s that social class no longer mattered, describing a much sharper sensitivity to class stratification than the media, policy and academic literature suggested (Rampton 2006:Part IV).

in conflict-troubled Cyprus, detailed interactional micro-analysis has come quite low in our list of descriptive priorities,⁴ and it is irrelevant to Banda's paper, which seeks a rich cultural and historical account of mixing, pursuing the multidimensionality of the indexical associations of the forms and structures used in song, rather than the multidimensionality of situated activity itself. Indeed, across most of the collection, the timescales of biography and history are more important than the moment-to-moment unfolding of specific encounters. Nevertheless, Dovchin, Lee and Makoni and Sultana all attach theoretical significance to the part that interaction plays in the production of social relations, so in what follows, my interactional sociolinguistic lens is not entirely out of place.

Indeed, even with Banda's paper, we could ask how the songs that he describes are actually received by their audience. Genres in music and artistic performance tend to be specially licensed, and although song lyrics may contain fluid translanguaging, ethnic and social boundaries may be much sharper both within and beyond the arenas where they are performed (Rambukwella 2019:128; Rampton 1995:Ch.10).

Turning to Lee's paper, 'ethnolanguaging' is a very elegant way of grouping together notions like "crossing, metroethnicity/lingualism and (poly/trans)languaging" (2019:2) – in fact I think it is much more appropriate as an overarching concept than 'crossing', which refers to only some types of pragmatic action, not others. But there is potentially a problem if ethnolanguaging is taken to be *more* than a higher-level abstraction clustering a broad range of practices relevant to the analyst's interest in language and ethnicity. If it is actually inserted into the description of specific encounters, the risk is that ethnicity is then assumed to be the central issue at stake in an activity when actually, for the participants, it may be other identities that are really important (see §1; Harris & Rampton 2009). In Lee's paper, this problem arises when he talks about Jina listening a lot to K-Pop (presumably more for its musical qualities than its Koreanness), and then finally describes her wanting to *escape* an ethnic framing – something that researchers are likely to refuse if they are committed to 'ethnolanguaging' as an analytic term. The key point is that people have the capacity to act unexpectedly, and as a result, sociolinguists should be ready to have to struggle to make sense of what participants in an interaction are doing. If definition and classification become the priority, there is a danger of promoting the analyst's conceptual framework above the participants' own alertness to the constraints and possibilities problematically on-hand in any activity being investigated.

I think this may also be an issue in Busi Makoni's paper. Makoni describes how her informants pass as nationals by creating the impression that they belong to one of South Africa's officially recognised ethno-linguistic groups. The semiotic materials that her informants' produce in their encounters with law enforcement officers and others are marked for ethnicity, but the boundaries most acutely at stake in the interaction, producing a strong sense of insecurity and danger, are actually *national*, centred on whether or not the women have official rights of residence in the country. So the situation is in fact too complex to be adequately captured by *either* of the terms that Makoni refers to in the article – 'self-styling', which involves intensifying the signs of an inheritance to which you're connected, and 'crossing', using a language that doesn't obviously belong to you. The situation can be construed as being *both*, and the risk is that an overemphasis on labelling questions – are the practices described her informants 'crossing' or 'self-styling'? – will result in a reductive account of the complex indeterminacy of the lived encounter itself. From the vantage point of ethnographic and interactional sociolinguistic epistemology, recognising and understanding the subtleties in an empirical situation is more important than its abstract classification, which is always only going to be a rather baggy approximation, sensitising us to the possibilities of what could be going on, not defining them.⁵

⁴ Understanding the political and institutional situation has had to come first, through participant observation, ethnographic interviews and document analysis.

⁵ There are other points in the collection where a commitment to precise definition results in oversimplification, at least with regard to my own work (cf §1 & Rampton 1995, though see Canagarajah 2012, 2013; Creese & Blackledge 2015). So in Lee's paper, 'metro-ethnicity' provides a very suggestive pointer to Jina's relatively individualistic positionality and experience, but its differentiation from crossing seems at times a little bit forced, since the latter can also be "below the radar" (1995:Ch.7.5), sometimes 'superficial' (Ch.8.1), connected to the consumption of popular culture (Part IV), the focus of a great deal of ideological metacommentary (accessed through interviews) (Ch.2), contributing to the formation of a different sense of community through linguistic performance. Makoni's characterisation of crossing is also somewhat different from mine: crossing isn't confined to speech production in my own account of it – the hearers' potential and actual interpretations are vital; crossing is by no means always genuine or sincere; the shifts in linguistic form can be slight and

It is partly because of their approximative character that there are likely to be varied and sometimes discrepant interpretations of any ethnographically grounded concept that has been around for a while, and this is certainly the case with crossing.⁶ As in my discussion of Makoni's data, I have often found the dividing line between crossing and stylisation hard to draw: how strong a sense do the participants in an interaction have that the use of particular language or style has been *illegitimate*, potentially warranting a challenge ('crossing' in my definition), or is this just seen as 'putting on' an exaggerated voice that stands out but doesn't raise issues of entitlement ('stylisation')? Sultana, however, circumvents this problem by using stylisation and crossing at different levels of analysis. At the first stage in the account of her data, the strips of speech that stand out are described as stylisation (a characterisation with which I'd agree), and then at the next stage, she draws on the emergent framework of transglossic analysis to argue that these expressions are also all significant as crossing because of, for example, "the complexity of translocal and transtextual relations of communication, not only through stylisation" (this issue). So rather than being a matter of nose-to-data micro-ethnographic interpretation (as in interactional sociolinguistics), crossing here becomes a term within critical post-structuralist theory, where its durability and value can be tested as the framework develops.

Being approximative and re-construable does not mean, though, that there are no limits to the applicability of a concept like crossing, and there does come a point where alternative categorisations could prove more productive in the longer term. I think this may happen in Dovchin's paper. As noted, in my definition of it, crossing is a kind of code switching in which there is a distinct sense of movement across social or ethnic boundaries, raising issues of legitimacy that participants feel they need to negotiate (1995:271). In contrast, when Dovchin describes her participants shifting into the Mongolian they grew up using, they are using their "preferred means of communication" (2019:9), establishing "an ingroup linguistic... space" (p.15). I would call this code-switching or code-alternation rather than crossing (see also Bhatt & Bolonya 2019). In a similar vein, when her participants use English, this is the dominant language that migrants are routinely expected to use, and they are unlikely to be faced with questions about their right to use it whenever they do so. So for me, the data on English fall into the broad category of second language use. Dovchin provides a compelling description of her informants' feelings of unease around ethnolinguistic boundaries, but these are unlikely to be confined to the moments when they venture forms of speech that their interlocutors don't think they're entitled to use ('crossing' in my definition). Instead, these feelings are likely to pervade all sorts of linguistic practice, and if there is an analytic shift away from the 'crossing' classification, both code-switching and second language research are likely to be enriched by the nuanced understanding that the paper develops. Conversely, if instead of crossing, Dovchin's data are compared with the findings from research on code-switching, second language use and/or the broader matrix of multilingualism, reflexivity, homogenist ideology and high-level expertise addressed in this collection, they could also provide a stronger base for theory-building and cumulative generalisation.

So in order to engage with Masters and Makoni's overarching questions, I have looked at these papers from the vantage point of interactional sociolinguistics. There is really no warrant for this perspective in Banda's paper, but in the others, I think it may perhaps point to a tendency to over-emphasise theory and classification, moving too quickly away from the subtleties of interaction and the indeterminacies of identification that animate it. But whether or not this is fair, we can now leave the discussion of individual papers to take a step further with Masters and Makoni's agenda, asking: does the approach associated with interactional sociolinguistics depend on the kinds of conditions and resourcing one is only likely find in "the most lavishly funded universities and research establishments in the North" (Burawoy & von Holdt 2012:211).

fleeting; and embodied activity is hugely important to the analysis, which reckons with games, smoking, queues, corridor meetings etc.

⁶ Indeed at the review stage in the submission of a recent article of mine about crossing, one reviewer said s/he couldn't actually see how it figured at all in the paper!

3. Social and material conditions of knowledge production in interactional sociolinguistics?

Since the vast majority of Northern social scientists have no interest at all in the micro-analysis of interaction and it is easy to think of very fine full-scale interactional sociolinguistic studies produced by scholars based in the South (e.g. Chick 1985 in South Africa; Borba 2015 in Brazil), if there is a relationship between methodology and North/South location, it is not straightforward.

Even so, if we take my own work on crossing as an (admittedly maybe rather extreme) example, the time requirements were very substantial: about 12 years from the start of my PhD to publication of the monograph, including 4-5 years as a full-time researcher and 6 months clear of teaching for writing at the end. IS data-analysis is itself a slow process (Rampton 2018:6, 2006:395-9), and it also took quite a long time to pick up the skills in linguistic, interactional and cultural analysis required to do justice to my data. Beyond these time demands, the fact that quite a lot of ethnographic work had already been conducted with adolescent peer groups like the ones I studied made it easier for me to move to micro-analysis, shifting from 'what they did' to 'how they did it'. The political climate at the time maybe also made it more likely that research participants would allow me to pin radio-mics on them to record them in their day-to-day activity.

In much of the UK and Europe, the ongoing marketisation of higher education now makes this kind of 'slow science' increasingly difficult (Keating 2019), and with the intensive securitisation and surveillance of people with migrant backgrounds, it would probably be much harder nowadays to observe and record the kinds of day-to-day activity that I analysed in the book (cf Khan 2018 on England, and Mangual Figueroa *etc* on the US). Even so, according to Raewyn Connell (2007:218), the institutional base of social science is generally more fragile in the Global South. As Sinfree Makoni notes in a discussion of decolonial scholarship, "[i]f one's employment status is precarious, one is not likely to want to invest much time and energy into long, drawn-out research projects, but may prefer, instead, short-term projects or to reanalyse secondary data" (2019:150). And in an account of the positioning of interaction analysis in Brazil, Pedro de Moraes Garcez and Ana-Cristina Ostermann (2017) have described, among other things, a widespread resistance to the recording of natural interaction, routine scepticism about Anglo-American empiricism, and an impatience with the 'unmotivated looking' and temporary suspension of political questions that micro-analysis normally entails (though see Lee, this issue p.6).

So social, political and material conditions may make it harder to do full-scale interactional sociolinguistics in the South, which leads to my last question: Does this matter?

4. Potential value in interactional sociolinguistics in the Global South?

As before, I'm obviously not at all well-positioned to answer this authoritatively, and of course in even a single project, there can be a multiplicity of elements that lean in very different directions. Even so, there are several aspects of the interactional sociolinguistic research programme that potentially lend it value in the spaces prioritised by Masters and Makoni, judging at least from recent discussion of the coloniality of knowledge in the journal *Language Culture & Society* (1/1:106-156, 2019).

First, as with my own work on crossing, interactional sociolinguistics stresses context and contingency, prioritises empirical description, and is wary of overgeneralisation. Rather than hurrying to universals, it dwells on situated particularities, and when it does produce 'truths' (like my generalisations about crossing and stylisation), these are set within a lot of parentheses. By fully "engag[ing] with the messiness of language use" like this (Rambukwella 2019:128), it also looks beyond "a fashionable, depoliticised, and comfortable multiculturalism" (Cusicanqui 2019:116; Lorente 2019:152; Pratt 2019:122).

Ethnography is a central element in interactional sociolinguistics but it has also played a very dubious role in colonialism. So does IS simply reproduce this? It is worth first noting that Dell Hymes, a foundational figure in ethnographic sociolinguistics, was himself very conscious of this question, critiquing anthropological ethnography as "the study of coloured people by whites" (1980:55). In his quest for a mode of enquiry that avoided "scientific colonialism" (1969:49,55) and was more "appropriate to a democratic society" (1980:99), Hymes developed the ethnography of communication, and there is a case for saying that at least some of the traditions following from this

are able to engage with the kind of inquiry proposed by Arturo Escobar, who suggests that there is a place for ethnographies in Latin American modernity/coloniality research programme as long as they avoid the grand narratives of modernity (2007:192;181-2; Connell 2007:13,16; Dovchin, this issue pp.6-7). So when, for example, Escobar criticises “liberation discourses in philosophy and other fields [that] have relied on postulating a foundational alterity and a transcendental subject who would constitute a radical alternative in relation to an equally homogenized modern/European/North American Other” (2007:200), interactional sociolinguistics offers a perspective that goes beyond homogenizing portraits of ‘peoples’, ‘communities’ and ‘cultures’, instead presenting detailed and *de-totalising* accounts of the practices with which ideologies and experiences of personhood and belonging are constructed and contested. Equally, when Escobar calls for analyses that “acknowledge the partial, historical, and heterogeneous character of all identities”, recognising “the historical production of difference” (2007:200), there is a good match to the view of identity sketched in §1.

The claim that linguistic ethnography’s fine-grained attention to situated practice provides it with a way of escaping at least some of legacy of colonial ethnography – its ethnic absolutism – opens another challenge. According to Clara Keating, “decolonial thinking... tends to consider language and discourse research minor, opaque and technical” (2019:141; Lorente 2019:152). Indeed, this is a longstanding and widespread criticism of sociolinguistics, and it was certainly directed to Gumperz and IS. His answer, though, was that when it comes to engaging with non-linguists, “there is no need for real technical analysis... [We just] need to use a tape recorder [for] a sort of action replay like our TV newscasters do when they use a slow-down mechanism to show us the details of a particular piece of play in football” (Gumperz 1979/1990:52). In this way, listeners/viewers can experience (or relive) the particularity of specific encounters while reflecting in empirical detail on their links to more general problems and processes. In fact replays of audio or video recordings of interaction are crucial at every stage of IS research: during fieldwork, talking to the people who were actually recorded in an event; during analysis, intensively following the moment-by-moment unfolding of an encounter; with other kinds of social scientist, showing what micro-analysis can reveal; working with professionals, citizens and community members, reflecting on their everyday activity (cf Gumperz, Jupp & Roberts 1979; Harris et al 2010; Rampton & Charalambous 2016). Overall, this dialogical reflection on the situated specifics of particular interactions looks compatible with Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ description of productive research for the Global South, which, he argues, needs to involve “not avant-garde but rather rearguard theories” – “artisanal rather than architectural work, work of committed witnessing rather than clairvoyant leadership” (Santos 2012:51; also Rose 1999 cited above).

Using recordings of interaction to engage with people outside the academy potentially fits with another strand in decolonial research: according to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “[t]here can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing practice” (2019:112; Pratt 2019:123). In fact, as well as being integral to interactional sociolinguistics, scope for practical engagement was central to Hymes’ formulation of the ethnography of communication as a ‘democratic science’, and starting in the UK and Europe about 20 years ago, linguistic ethnography has developed as a fusion of linguistic anthropology and applied linguistics that makes it easier for rapport and relevance beyond the academy to take priority over the traditionally scholarly responsibilities of theory development and cumulative, comparative generalisation – a form of research, to quote Foucault again, “for users, not readers” (*op.cit.*; Rampton 2007:594; Rampton, Maybin & Roberts 2014; Snell, Shaw & Copland (eds) 2015).

So there are at least three elements in IS that dovetail with discussions of decolonial research: its caution about ‘truth[s] applicable everywhere’; its ethnographic focus on situated interactional practices, not ‘peoples’ and ‘cultures’; and its emphasis on collaborative data exploration, engaging with people outside the academy. Their *actual* value for Southern research is for others to assess. But if we follow Banda (this issue) and look beyond the assumption that influence only “flows in one direction”, turning instead to the transfer of sociolinguistic theory from South to North, there is quite strong evidence of epistemological compatibility in the fact that the concept of ‘Linguistic Citizenship’ has a good deal resonance in a place like Britain (cf Stroud 2001; Stroud & Heugh 2004; Williams & Stroud 2015). Among other things, Linguistic Citizenship starts in a critique of ethnolinguistic essentialism, and in reality, the kinds of language repertoire and mixed practice that Banda, Stroud and others describe in Southern Africa can be found in many parts of the UK, where

discussions of superdiversity also recognise that contemporary socio-cultural heterogeneity challenges the demographic categories that public policy has traditionally relied on (see Rampton, Cooke & Holmes 2018). Citizenship is a hugely contested issue in the UK, and in mainstream politics, it is usually only linked to language in talk about immigrants needing to learn English for social cohesion and national security. But even though it is originally “a Southern and de-colonial concept” (Stroud 2018:18), Linguistic Citizenship articulates a commitment to democratic participation, to voice and to linguistic heterogeneity that speaks to a great many relatively small-scale initiatives seeking to capitalise on the UK’s wide-spread vernacular multilingualism. This Northern appropriation of the theory of Linguistic Citizenship certainly entails contextual modifications (Rampton, Cooke & Holmes etc). But from my own vantage point in London, I think it provides an unparalleled sociolinguistic rallying point for the considerable national challenges ahead. So this is one clear instance where “the political economy of meaning-making” in sociolinguistics “goes beyond distinctions between the Global North and Global South” (Masters & Makoni, this issue), and the strength of Linguistic Citizenship’s compatibility with the traditions of ethnographic sociolinguistics descended from Gumperz and Hymes – interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, linguistic ethnography – suggests that there may be many more.

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