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## **Sociolinguistics meets Memory Studies: A conversation**

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# Sociolinguistics meets Memory Studies: A conversation

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## Abstract

What do Sociolinguistics and Memory Studies have in common, and why should they be interested in each other? What are the likely obstacles to their interaction? How could they be overcome? And what are the potential rewards? This conversation between an interactional sociolinguist (Ben) and a memory scholar (Thomas) notes from the outset that while sociolinguistics (Slx) can enrich memory studies' growing interest in mundane practice, Memory Studies (MS) can enhance increasing sociolinguistic attention to the communicative significance of exceptional, traumatic and violent events. This potential complementarity runs, though, into quite substantial differences in 'analytical culture'. One tradition leans towards respectful curation (MS), the other towards irreverent 'myth-busting' (Slx). While one attends hermeneutically to the after-life of events in narratives, archives etc. (MS), the other captures, somewhat 'positivistically', the ongoing enactment of society across a plurality of genres in the factuities of recorded data (Slx). And while one handles material of considerable public interest, often surrounded by legal and ritual discourses (MS), the other works hard at amplifying the (bureaucratic, educational etc) consequentiality of what's generally taken for granted (Slx). To facilitate the conversation between them, data-sessions focused on short recordings of interaction are a powerful resource, stimulating a plurality of abductive inferences that not only draw on theories from each but also hold them both to account in the data on hand. The Slx/MS encounter can of course lead in a lot of different directions, but for one of us, it offers a way of thickening the sociolinguistic analysis of (in)securitisation as a mode of governance, setting reverence next to suspicion, commemoration of the past alongside fear for the future, and for the other, it opens up an action-oriented Memory Studies, adding an extra dimension to the analysis of inter-scalar processes.

## 1. Introduction(s)

Ben: I often call myself an 'interactional sociolinguist', operating in the Anglo-American tradition associated with John Gumperz and Dell Hymes. That means that I'm very interested in the big social processes that researchers in lots of different disciplines are interested in, but I get at them by looking very closely at recordings of everyday interaction among ordinary people, embedding this in ethnography. So I've written about social class, ethnic relations, youth culture, and education, but I start with a microscope and then gradually scale up, seeing how routine practices on the ground reproduce or interrupt much wider structural processes.

Fine, but why am I talking to Thomas like this, especially when I'm not a text or corpus linguist, I don't do CDA <sup>1</sup> and I'm not especially interested in the most prominent genres in Memory Studies, narratives, interviews, media reports. Well, over the last 10 years, I've been working with Constadina Charalambous, Panayiota Charalambous and then Lavanya Sankaran on linguistic practice in the aftermath of traumatic large-scale conflict in Cyprus and Sri Lanka,<sup>2</sup> and we're also faced with intensifying securitisation and surveillance in countries like the UK.<sup>3</sup> So I've had to think a lot more about the violent dystopia that I see as a defining interest in Memory Studies, and that shifts me a bit closer to Thomas....

Thomas: I represent the Memory Studies pole in this conversation. I was trained as a contemporary historian and then as a cultural studies scholar. My main interest is in understanding when, how and why people mobilize narratives about conflictual events in the past that they haven't witnessed themselves. I have come to realize that understanding this requires more than a few theoretical, conceptual and methodological tools. I work with approaches from sociology (bridging between cultural and interactional sociology), political science,<sup>4</sup> sociolinguistics,<sup>5</sup> and literary theory (in the pragmatist tradition of Wolfgang Iser and Wayne Booth). During my PhD at King's College London, I joined Ben Rampton's research group during data sessions because I felt like I needed to learn more about how situational context and how interactional ritual practices inform the content, form and function of cultural memories.

BEN: So it looks like this could be a productive conversation, and assuming that we're not unrepresentative, let's try to encapsulate this interpersonal convergence as something broader, as in Figure 1 below:

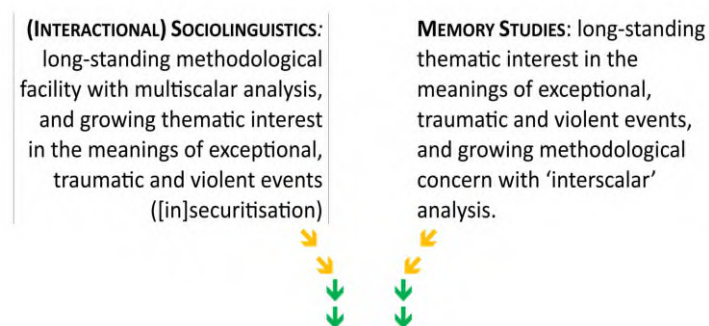


Figure 1: Scope for convergence between Sociolinguistics & Memory Studies?

To that, it's worth adding that both fields are very much at ease with inter-disciplinarity, which is another good sign.

<sup>1</sup> For excellent examples of these traditions contributing to Memory Studies, see Milani & Richardson 2022 and the papers presented at the Language & Memory Conference at Nottingham Trent University 5/6/23-6/6/23?

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Charalambous, Charalambous & Rampton 2021

<sup>3</sup> Rampton & Charalambous 2020, Rampton 2021

<sup>4</sup> Dybris McQuaid and Gensburger 2019

<sup>5</sup> Rampton, Maybin and Roberts 2014

At the same time, interdisciplinary conversations are never straightforward, and in trying to figure out some of the ins-&-outs, we'll start with disciplinary *differences*, not only in the topics we tend to focus on but also in how we position ourselves within the business of knowledge production (Section 2). After that, we'll talk about 'data sessions' as an effective arena for both experiencing and overcoming our differences (Section 3). Then in 4, we'll return to the main reason for having this conversation – the common ground emerging between us – and we'll try to end with a balanced view of the prospects, taking on board the hazards (Section 5).

Let's start with some very broad-brush reflections on the differences in our 'disciplinary personalities', in our 'analytic habituses', our patterns of intellectual deference and demeanour – differences that could turn out to be either an enrichment or a challenge to our relationship, depending on how we play them.

## 2. Disciplinary differences

Ben: sociolinguists are obviously interested in language and communication in a range of different forms, modes and media, but as the name of their first journal says, they study [Language in Society](#). There's quite a bit of diversity in the models of society that sociolinguists work with, but in social theory, Foucault and Bourdieu have been very influential reference points for quite a long time,<sup>6</sup> and this means that sociolinguists do a great deal of work on how social structures and social inequalities – inequalities of class, race, gender, sexuality, generation and so forth – get reproduced through everyday communicative practices, themselves enacting highly influential systems of governance like standardisation and marketisation.

Moving from *social systems to individuals*, there's a lot of interest in mundane practical consciousness – communicative competence, habitus – and in the way that this shapes and takes shape in everyday conduct (even though heightened awareness also moves into focus when the everyday gets breached, resisted and denaturalised from time to time<sup>7</sup>).

The *data* with which sociolinguists pursue these interests are very diverse in terms of institutional locale and generic form: schools, communities, clinics, offices; lessons, lectures, chats, jokes, consultations and committee meetings. In sociolinguistics, theories get turned into technologies quite quickly, and once they've become 'analytical frameworks', these theoretical tools are picked up and valued for what they can spotlight in communicative practice. Across all this, there's usually an overarching commitment to holding theories and analysis accountable to the hearable facticity – to the 'truth' – of recorded data.

Thomas: Memory Studies' main field of empirical research and theorizing is the collective and personal remembering of high-profile events of major social significance in institutional practices of commemoration, and in cultural texts. Contrary to tendencies within Sociolinguistics, Memory Studies scholars are generally interested in the meanings of past events, not in the past as such – we study and interpret how the meaning attributed to events in the past changes or remains stable across time, situations, cultural and political contexts.

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<sup>6</sup> To give just one example, they are the most frequently cited non-sociolinguists in e.g. Nik Coupland's 2016 edited collection *Sociolinguistics: Theoretical Debates*.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Coupland 2007.

This usually involves the sacralisation of past events, and mostly leaves aside the profane and everyday realms in which cultural and collective memories are reactualized.

The field of memory studies in the humanities and qualitative social sciences tends to conceive of its own pedigree in three phases.<sup>8</sup> The first phase is the phase in which the ‘classical’ founding fathers have written their texts on collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs, Aby Warburg and Frederic Bartlett are being cited as the core three of these founding fathers. Although, in practice it is the Durkeimian tradition in which Halbwachs is working that is the most widely cited. The general takeaway from Halbwachs for memory scholars today is that our personal acts of remembering are informed by all kinds of social frameworks, which make memory inherently social and thus ‘collective’. Warburg and his work on ancient history and culture seems to be only of significant concern for German culturologists (Assmann and Erll, for example), and Bartlett’s ‘schematic approach to collective remembering is key to the psychological study of collective memory.’<sup>9</sup>

Phase two is the theoretical consolidation of the field in ‘schools’ and the boom of the field in terms research. Two schools are key here. First, there is the historical and nation-focussed school inspired by the work of Pierre Nora (1997), which main project has been to theorize and study material and immaterial ‘sites of memory’ (*lieux de memoire*) of the nation, first in France and then elsewhere. Nora’s main (somehow nostalgic) thesis is that there is less and less active and living memory in society (in so called ‘*milieux de memoire*’). Modern societies tend to close the past in ‘sites of memory’ (*lieux de memoire*) sooner and sooner. Secondly, there is the German, more cosmopolitan and literary orientation of Jan (1995, 2008, 2011) and Aleida Assmann (1999). The Assmanns operationalize collective memory as both communicative and cultural memory. Communicative memory is what is directly relevant for members of groups and societies, usually until only a few decades after the events. Some of these events and meanings are then culturalized in the cultural memory of societies. Those cultural memories are durable and relatively stable and are disconnected to direct experiences of the remembered events. The Assmanns have worked on all kinds of cases, ranging from cultural and communicative memory in Ancient Egypt, modernist literature, and Holocaust memory. This second phase of the field runs roughly from the 1980’s until the early 2010’s.

In phase 3, we see that the Assmannian cultural memory frame takes dominance in Memory Studies in the humanities and is being mobilized to study cases around the world. With the adoption of the Assmanns as key theorists, the third phase of the field is more media-oriented, transcultural, ethically cosmopolitan and sees the most theoretical innovation coming from literary and cultural studies. In those two fields new concepts emerge to study the mediation and movement of memory through time and between cultural contexts. Memory is said to be travelling, multi-directional, transnational, transcultural, prosthetic, post-, and so much more.<sup>10</sup> In this move towards the Assmanns and mediated movements, Pierre Nora became the ‘defining other’ of the field. He is everything the main proponents of the third phases don’t want to be. He is said to treat the nation as container, he is conservative, and too site- and space oriented.<sup>11</sup>

When it comes to ‘source material’ for Memory Studies, we often look at the afterlife of events. Most often these are discourses or narratives: monologic texts, testimonies, archives, interviews etc. When they are not linguistic in nature (monuments, for example) they are

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<sup>8</sup> Erll 2011

<sup>9</sup> Hirst, Yamashiro and Coman 2018

<sup>10</sup> Erll 2011, Rothberg 2009, Kansteiner 2017, Bond and Rapson 2004, Landsberg 2004, Hirsch 1997

<sup>11</sup> e.g. Rapson 2015, 9; Rigney 2008, 94

often treated as ‘texts’ that can be read and interpreted.<sup>12</sup> When confronted with these materials, the researcher needs to figure out and distill what is the weight of what s/he is being told.

Ben: Here’s a brief summary of what we’ve said about these canonical objects of study:

| <b>Principal objects of study</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
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| (INTERACTIONAL) SOCIOLINGUISTICS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | MEMORY STUDIES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sociolinguistic systems</i>: language &amp; communication in the mundane (re)production of inequalities within contemporary modes of governance (e.g. standardisation, marketisation) (Bourdieu, Foucault)</li> <li>• <i>Individuals in society</i>: mundane practical consciousness, communicative competence and habitus (with heightened awareness emerging in breaches and resistance in moments of de-naturalisation).</li> <li>• <i>Data</i>: a plurality of genres (lessons, jokes, chats, consultations etc), from a lot of different institutional settings (schools, clinics, communities, offices etc etc), with ultimate authority residing in the facticity of empirical recordings.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Collective and personal remembering</i> of high-profile events of major social significance, in institutional practices of commemoration, musealization, political ritual (sacralisation) (Halbwachs/Durkheim, Warburg, Barlett [‘phase 1’]; Nora, J &amp; A Assmann [‘phase 2’]); since 2000, mediatisation ( [‘phase 3’]).</li> <li>• <i>Collective identification</i>: Heightened attention and affective unity among the participants (consecration); mediated multi-directional movements of memories.</li> <li>• <i>Data</i>: the afterlife of events in narratives, monologues, testimonies, archives, interviews and e.g. monuments interpreted hermeneutically as texts.</li> </ul> |

Figure 2: Principal objects of study

These are very substantial differences in focus, although as we’ll say later, it’s not hard to see how they could be mutually very enriching. But different fields of interest like these may also push analysts towards different moral and political stances, which may be a bit more difficult to reconcile.

So as an undergraduate, one of the first things you learn is that variationist sociolinguistics does ‘myth-busting’, using systematic analysis and the ‘empirical facts’ to debunk prejudices about the inferiority of non-standard language and non-standard speakers. In Critical Discourse Analysis, a programme of counter-hegemonic research unmasks the language and ideology that imbue everyday texts with persuasive power,<sup>13</sup> and although Conversation Analysis isn’t particularly political, CA also discloses extraordinary feats of coordination in what at first looks trivial and mundane.<sup>14</sup> Whether it feels like iconoclasm, radicalism or alchemy, all three traditions position themselves as social science, ambushing commonsense through the application of systematic frameworks to empirical texts and recordings.

That said, sociolinguists have a lot of freedom to pick and choose what they want to study. There is often a lot of non-academic, professional, bureaucratic, educational and journalistic discourse around the practices that sociolinguists decide to focus on, but it’s not really very common to find much interest in what sociolinguists themselves have to say, and it can be a big effort to get attention outside the academy. So when I search my soul about the value of the research I do, it’s the “so what? who cares?” question that I grapple with – “Is this actually all just trivial pedantry?”, “Am I really just making a mountain out of a molehill?”

<sup>12</sup> e.g. Violi 2017, Young 1993

<sup>13</sup> Wodak 1988; Fairclough 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Schegloff 2007

Thomas: For memory studies, the picture looks different. Epistemologically, memory studies emerges from the post-structuralist and post-modern turn in which the past itself may be unknowable. The scholarly focus, therefore, turns to reinterpretations and thus hermeneutics, and memory scholars' accounts enter arenas that are already very well populated with narratives and discourse from other disciplines and socio-political actors.

In memory studies, a lot of different people care about the representations that memory scholars study and produce. In that sense, memory scholars are often heavily involved in co-shaping and enterprising the cultural meanings and narratives they study.

While sociolinguistics is generally concerned with myth-busting, the normative position in memory studies varies, depending on who the actors are that do the memory. For example, liberal interpretations of the Holocaust, or the memories of marginalized communities, tend to be treated less critically, and in cases like these, the memory researcher contributes to the *sacralization* of memory. On the other hand, nationalist interpretations of the Holocaust, or imperial nostalgia might be debunked.<sup>15</sup> So, as a memory scholar, it is not the triviality of what you're studying that worries you (as in Sociolinguistics) – what you try to avoid is either transgressive desecration or public endorsement, depending on what you are examining.

**Self-positioning in the production  
of knowledge about their objects of study**

| (INTERACTIVE) SOCIOLINGUISTICS<br>(investigating the contemporary reproduction of social systems through mundane practices)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | MEMORY STUDIES<br>(investigating individual remembering & the collective commemoration of major events in the past)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Social scientists</i> denaturalising taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs by applying rigorous procedures and systematic frameworks to empirical datasets. (Sociolinguists as iconoclasts, radicals or alchemists?)</li> <li>• <i>Accountability</i>: A good deal of freedom selecting what to focus on, though sociolinguistic findings are often quite easy to ignore, drowned out by the bureaucratic, professional and journalistic discourses surrounding sociolinguistic objects of study.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Humanists (and qualitative social scientists)</i>: The originating facts are now unknowable =&gt; hermeneutics, with a lot of other disciplines and sectors also interested in the remembered events in focus (MS scholars as co-curators, entrepreneurs).</li> <li>• <i>Accountability</i>: A lot of non-academics &amp; non-specialists may care about the remembered event, which may be embedded within a lot of ritual, legal/judicial, historiographic and popular discourse.</li> </ul> |

Figure 3: Self-positioning in knowledge production

Ben: Collaboration across disciplinary boundaries is affected, of course, by a host of contingencies, overcoming differences in analytical culture much greater than those we've suggested here. And of course, you may also think that we're exaggerating the differences between memory studies and sociolinguistics – indeed, our argument so far is quite a lot harder to sustain if we bring North American linguistic anthropology into the picture, as we'll do towards the end.

But because we've introduced the idea of 'academic personality' differences, it's incumbent on us to propose some practical ways forward, some workable steps to move on from 'compare-&-contrast' to 'combine', and whether or not you agree with what we've said so far, we think that there is a great space for building interdisciplinary understanding in the kind of data sessions that we're now going to talk about.

<sup>15</sup> e.g. Craps 2013, Grabowski 2016

### 3. Data sessions

Thomas: We have been meeting each other regularly in data sessions in London, Trento and online over the course of the last seven years. In these two-hour sessions, one person brings along a short piece of data and the group engages with this both individually and collectively. This is very good for getting to know each other's approach to verbal data – instead of engaging in high-flown theoretical and methodological discussion, you analyse a piece of interaction together, and this almost always leads to surprising insights. In fact, we got interested in collaboration because we saw how the other tackles data. Ben goes detailed and micro, and builds larger observations from there upwards. I generally work the other way around: I take cultural phenomena and see how they are (re)actualized and performed in interactions.<sup>16</sup>

So let's describe what these data sessions look like in a bit more detail.<sup>17</sup>

To start off, one 'data bringer' shares a small excerpt of their verbal research data. These are usually short recordings of around 3 minutes and transcripts of face-to-face or online interaction taken from naturally occurring talk, from interviews, focus groups or more 'staged' encounters (speeches, ceremonies and other scripted performances). The data bringer first introduces the transcript and gives some limited situational context to the interactions. Then, individual workshop members take 20 minutes to study the data by themselves.

After that, the group engages in a 60-90 minute discussion of the data, and all topics, findings and ideas that were deemed interesting can be shared and discussed. Generally, the discussion starts off with hypothetical answers to questions like 'What is happening here?', or 'What is striking, interesting in this fragment'? These questions don't guide the discussion in particular direction and they allow for shared observations and interpretations to emerge spontaneously. Key to this part of the data session is that the 'data-bringer' remains silent and doesn't intervene with the analytical ideas they've formulated earlier. It is only in the last 10-15 minutes of the session that the data-bringer takes the floor again to reflect on the group's discussion and to say whether it fits or contradicts their own analysis and/or generates new ideas.

#### The structure of a data session

- 0:00-0:05: situational context by the data bringer
- 0:05-0:15: listen to the audio file/watch the video recording
- 0:15-0:35: in-depth individual study of the data
- 0:35-1:50: group discusses their interpretations
- 1:50-2:00: data bringer reflects on the discussion

Figure 4: Data sessions

The format and structure of the collaborative data sessions is inspired by similar sessions organised by Conversation Analysts, but without CA's analytical objectives, staying open to methodological reflection on, for example, the kinds of ethnographic evidence you might need to consolidate what looks like a very speculative inference.

Theorising this a bit more, we can say that data sessions are fertile ground for 'abductive' reasoning, theorizing and imagining.<sup>18</sup> Abduction "refers to a creative inferential process

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<sup>16</sup> Van de Putte 2021a

<sup>17</sup> For further discussion of data sessions, see e.g. Rampton, Maybin, Roberts, 2014: 13-16; Rampton & Charalambous 2016:55

<sup>18</sup> Timmermans and Tavory 2012, Tavory and Timmermans 2014



aimed at producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence” (Tavory & Timmermans 2014:5), and it leads the research “away from old to new theoretical insights’ (2012:169). It is an attitude towards data, method and theory that doesn’t balance towards either deduction or induction. It isn’t a deductive logic – it does not seek to verify a theory in data – and it also isn’t inductive: it does not try to formulate a new theory ground-up from a comprehensive analysis of the dataset (such as in the grounded theory approach). An abductive analysis starts from the proposition that (1) the empirical reality is complex and surprising, and that (2) pre-established theories allow us certain creative insights and perspectives on data. The abductive ‘trick’ is to go constantly back and forth between empirical analysis and theorizing, adjusting and innovating both analysis and theory whenever they don’t match.

- **Abduction starts with consequences and then constructs reasons.** The surprising fact C is observed. But if A were true, C would be a matter of course. Hence, there is a reason to suspect that A is true. (Peirce 1934:117)
- **Deductive** reasoning begins with a rule and proceeds through a case to arrive at an observed result, which either demonstrates the rule or falsifies it
- **Induction** starts with a collection of given cases and proceeds by examining their implied results to develop an inference that some universal rule is operative: All observed A are C. Thus all A are C.

Figure 5: Abduction, deduction & induction compared

To optimise abductive creativity, the epistemology also needs to be collaborative. In the data session, we constantly move back and forth between observation and conjecture, but also between *each other’s* observations and conjectures. Talking about a piece of data forces data session participants to explain the potential relevance of theoretical perspectives they’re bringing to the table, and this then gets discussed by everyone else – scrutinized, tested on the data, and weighed up against other interpretations and theories. All this means that in only two hours, you work with many more theories than you could gather in a month of reading by yourself.

Ben: I think that data sessions are often also actually rather exhilarating as you experience the names, the words and the slices of life transcribed on paper starting to dance with purposes, projects and problems interpellated in different lines of analysis. At the same time, they can also be quite humbling as you come to understand how it’s all much more complicated than you first thought. In fact, overall, whether it’s sociolinguists and memory scholars, academics and professionals, teachers and students, on-line or off-line, these sessions generate an unusual feeling of communion, and we’re both-of-us fairly convinced that they can offer an important resource helping to take the conversation between memory scholars and sociolinguists forward.

Okay, so data sessions are a very strong practical bridge between us, but of course the stimulating and affirmative experience that data sessions generate *isn’t in itself* enough to justify an extended process of collaboration. So at this point we need to return to the figure we started with, focusing more on what’s characterised as ‘growing’ in each column in order to elaborating a little more on the common ground emerging between us (the theme of (in)securitisation in sociolinguistics and interscalar analysis in memory studies).

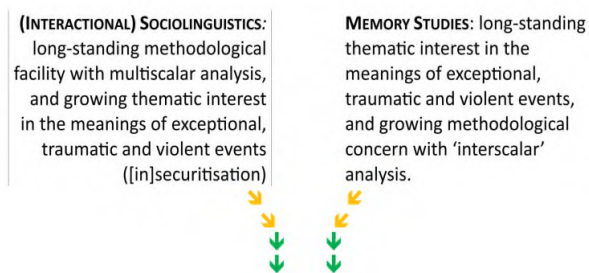


Figure 1 (again): Scope for convergence between Sociolinguistics & Memory Studies?

## 4. Common ground emerging

### 4.1 (In)securitisation

Ben: Over the last two decades in places like the UK and western Europe, issues of security have become increasingly prominent, and 'securitisation' has itself become an influential mode of governance. Securitisation can be described as the "practice of making 'enemy' and 'fear' the integrative, energetic principle of politics displacing the democratic principles of freedom and justice" (Huysmans 2014:3): it's a way of managing populations, in which the normal laws and rules guiding citizens in contemporary liberal democracies don't apply, and instead, people act as if there is a state of exception (or a state of siege) where there are existential threats and the strong possibility of violence and/or death. Securitisation usually works in two or more directions – security to one person can be insecurity to another, and this can change with the situation, sometimes quite quickly. So researchers often put 'in-' in brackets as a prefix, referring to '(in)securitisation'.

In a great many parts of the world, there's absolutely nothing new about securitisation, but it hasn't been a routine concern for sociolinguists looking at everyday practice in rich countries in the West, whereas now it really needs to be.<sup>19</sup> Of course a range of different modes of governmentality operate in countries like these, and sociolinguists have done lots of work on mundane communication regimented by standardisation, marketisation and so forth. But to open security up a bit more for sociolinguists looking at everyday interaction, Constadina Charalambous and I have characterised (in)securitisation as "an intensifying apprehension of institutionally authorised vulnerability and existential threat, produced (and received) in communicative practice in a range of social settings" (Rampton & Charalambous 2019:6). But what exactly is the link to Memory Studies?

Thomas: In situations like these, discourses of cultural memory and securitisation are often connected and sustain each other in the management of politics. Discourses about political action needed to manage the existential threats conjured in securitisation are often informed and justified by cultural memories. Here, those vouching for increased 'security' and secrecy either invoke a past mistake, or a glorious mythical past, in order to justify some of the choices they make in the present. In this sense, cultural memory functions as a conservative

<sup>19</sup> Rampton, Silva & Charalambous 2022

force in society that can be relied on as an argumentative resource, providing narratives and discourses for those in power to continue already ongoing securitization processes.<sup>20</sup>

Ben: So for me, the practices and processes spotlighted in Memory Studies can enrich the sociolinguistic study of (in)securitization as a powerful contemporary mode of governance. and if we're going to build up the complementarities, maybe we can say very broadly that:

- programmes of commemoration differ from securitization itself in the public emotions that they seek to stimulate – trust and conviction in one, suspicion and fear in the other,

and

- they've obviously got different temporal emphasises: one keeps events-from-the-past active and influential in the present, the other orients to the future in its efforts to control the present with fear and uncertainty.

Of course, broad-brush differentiations like these often break down when they're examined with empirical data, but what they both share is

- a common interest in how people manage the lines and boundaries between the ordinary and the exceptional, between familiar routine and dystopic disruption.

#### 4.2 Multi/inter-scalar research

Thomas: To pick up on the ways that Memory Studies creates scope for cross-fertilisation, I'd like to go back to the phases in Memory Studies that I mentioned earlier.

When I started my PhD in 2016, I sensed that we were at the highpoint of Memory Studies phase three – the phase focusing on mediated and transcultural movements of memory. Now, writing in 2023, the third phase seems to be over. But what's come in its place is still emerging. In general we see a broader tendency towards theoretical integration whereby cultural and collective memory scholars are seeking inspiration from different disciplines to (finally) retheorize memory. In that respect, there is a broader call in the field for interscalar<sup>21</sup> and relational approaches.<sup>22</sup> The interscalar and relational calls are not in themselves new theories – they are urgent calls for scholars from different disciplines to get together and interpret the same phenomena, taking seriously each other's theories and moving towards integration and innovation.

It is in this multi- or inter-scalar endeavour that (interactional) sociolinguistics can help. It is clear that if MS needs to go multi-scalar, or interscalar, it will need to do more than interpret acts of remembering from either cultural or political perspectives. In addition to these macro and meso approaches, we will also need to pay attention to the micro-level: interactional contexts and situations.

That can happen in two ways. First, sociolinguists and linguistic ethnographers offer insight into how cultural meanings and political power take shape in everyday, non-elite contexts of

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<sup>20</sup> see also Jones and Van de Putte, forthcoming

<sup>21</sup> Keightley, Pickering and Bischt 2019; De Cesari and Rigney 2014; Van de Putte 2021b

<sup>22</sup> Jones 2022, Gensburger 2016, Erll 2017

interaction. Second, they also look at how extraordinary events and process are ‘normalized’ in everyday interactions, regardless of whether the participating actors are elite or non-elite.<sup>23</sup>

For scholars in memory studies, reaching out to interactional sociolinguists can complicate the master narratives and chronotopes we work with. One of the virtues of interactional sociolinguistics is that it gets to the negotiations, stance nuancing and dissonance in local enactments of all sorts of different kinds. In the everyday, people don’t just reproduce the hegemonic chronotopes, narratives and discourse. They borrow from the resources and repertoires available to them and tailor them towards very local situations, interactional norms, expectations and interests. For the politics of memory, this is especially interesting, because local enactments of the grand political memory narratives are sometimes surprisingly different from what we think is dominant and hegemonic, and some of those performances are often unintended by policy makers. This has certainly shown up in the work that I have been doing uncovering the contingency of situated acts of remembering and grand memory reproduction, both among the inhabitants of the town of Auschwitz today,<sup>24</sup> and in the situated performance of EU memory policy.<sup>25</sup>

Ben: To develop the sociolinguistic links to what Thomas is saying about ‘multiscalarity’ more fully, I actually need to row back a bit on what I said in Section 2 about sociolinguists being rather low-church empirical positivists, and I now also need to bring in linguistic anthropology. In fact, at this point, I can bring in the founder of interactional sociolinguistics, John Gumperz. Here’s a quote from Gumperz that can really open up *any piece* of recorded data to the analysis of remembering. Interactional sociolinguistics, says Gumperz,

“shifts from the search for grammar like-rules of language use... to questions such as: (1) how and by what signaling devices [does] language... evoke the contextual presuppositions that affect interpretation; (2) what presuppositions are at work in particular talk exchanges” (Gumperz, 2015, p. 313).

Presupposition is Gumperz’s typically modest way of talking about the expectations, images, beliefs, values, ideologies and memories that specific semiotic signs conjure up for us,<sup>26</sup> and in Gumperz’s theorisation, the bits of language that spark these inferences and associations are called ‘contextualisation cues’. But in linguistic anthropology, they’ve been extensively theorised as ‘indexes’, and to give you a glimpse of the horizons that this opens up, let’s take a quick look at William Hanks’ paper on ‘Co-presence and alterity in Maya ritual practice’ (200).

Hanks provides a close description of a shamanic healing session in Mexico, and in it, he weaves three temporal frames together. First, there is the ‘actuality of ongoing experience’,

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<sup>23</sup> see e.g. Charalambous, Charalambous and Rampton 2018:4

<sup>24</sup> Van de Putte 2021c

<sup>25</sup> Van de Putte forthcoming

<sup>26</sup> This actually takes right back to abduction (Section 3). In data sessions we try to explicate and systematise the images and associations that particular bits of interaction evoke for us, but as Tavory and Timmermans spell out, “in Peirce’s broader theory of inference, meaning, and action, people constantly perform abduction in their everyday life, continuously recalibrating their expectations of the future when they face surprising phenomena... Indeed, as Peirce (1934:181) wrote, ‘abductive inference shades into perceptual judgement’” (2012:171, 172).

the rhythms of the participants' corporeal co-presence.<sup>27</sup> Next, there's 'mid-range schematic time', which includes the participants' prior familiarity and past patterns of interaction, which Hanks considers contemporary but not current like the actuality of ongoing experience. Third, there's 'memorial history', which includes the cosmology of the spirit world that is presupposed in the rituals that the shaman and patient perform.<sup>28</sup> And across all three, Hanks shows how "rapidly emerging features of action combine and interact with more slowly changing schematic and memorial ones, and how this process produces the [meaningfully varied social relations] that bind coparticipants together" (2000:230).

Hanks is a marvellous analyst, but he's certainly not unique combining horizons like these. The concept that Hanks uses to tie different time-frames to semiotic signs in the here-&-now, *indexicality*, is easily supplemented with concepts like chronotope and ideology.<sup>29</sup> and it's not hard to transpose this kind of framework to political speeches, to mundane interactions in conflict-troubled environments, or to events within asylum application procedures, truth & reconciliation commissions and so forth. These are all sites where sociolinguists and memory scholars ought to be able to collaborate, thickening our understanding of (in)securitisation as a form of governmentality.

But perhaps we should now move to a conclusion, returning to the risks and limits of this conversation between Memory Studies and sociolinguistics as well as the possibilities.

## 5. Conclusions: Academic identities, doubts and resolutions?

Ben: We've reached a point where it's worth bringing in Sarah Gensburger, the current President of the Memory Studies Association. Gensburger came up with the wry observation that

"[t]oday, if researchers from various disciplines tend to call for interdisciplinary practices, it is generally to *assert the primacy of their own discipline* for the more specific study of 'memory'....For contemporary memory studies, discipline-specific expertise on 'memory' hides behind an 'interdisciplinary' label and becomes an object of *academic one-upmanship*" (2016:407; emphases added)

Indeed, laying it on thicker and extending this scepticism to sociolinguistics as well, are Thomas and I really just saying that these two fields should come together because Memory Studies has a topic but no method, while sociolinguistics is a method with no topic?

Well, I'm not going to lie: I really do think that as an eclectic synthesis of linguistics, pragmatics, CA, Goffman & ethnography, interactional sociolinguistics *is* better at looking at situated interactional practice than anyone else.<sup>30</sup> On top of that, I can't deny that

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<sup>27</sup> "The rhythm of breathing, touching, gazing, and experiencing anchors the phenomenal present of performance in the local copresence of participants. One layer of the ritual 'now' is equivalent to the emerging corporeal present" (2000:233)

<sup>28</sup> Memorial history refers "to factors such as the cosmological framework within which spirits have certain axiomatic characteristics inherent in their identity. For instance, individual spirits... are held to have been created *before* other spirits, such as the Catholic derived saints. This fact never changes according to local circumstances, but is part of the background presupposed in any performance... While features of memorial time are present in performance, they are present as originating in a distant past" (2000:225-6)

<sup>29</sup> See also e.g. Lempert & Perrino 2007, Agha 2007, Riskedahl 2007, Hallman 2013, Dick 2010

<sup>30</sup> See Rampton 2022

sociolinguists get interested in other people's topics – rightly so, if communicative practice is anywhere involved in what they're investigating. So for me, yes, the idea of sociolinguistics-as-topic-neutral-methodology has a lot of appeal, especially in a wider landscape of the humanities and social sciences. BUT sociolinguistics *isn't* all just about interaction. Sociolinguistics also has larger-scale heartland topics of its own like language policy, language ideology, linguistic discrimination, language education, and to illustrate what a field like Memory Studies can contribute to other kinds of core sociolinguistic concern like these, let me briefly point to some research I did with Constadina and Panayiota Charalambous on Greek-Cypriots learning Turkish in Cyprus.

Turkish and Greek have both been spoken in Cyprus for a long time, but there is a very substantial legacy of conflict between Greek- & Turkish-Cypriots, so when the government in the Greek-speaking part of the island introduced Turkish as an option in secondary schools and adult education institutes in 2003, it was hard to make sense of what was going on. These couldn't really be *foreign* language lessons because Turkish is a national language in Cyprus, but these weren't *community* language classes either because of the conflict and division. Luckily, a close relative of Memory Studies – Critical Heritage Studies (CHS) – came to the rescue,<sup>31</sup> giving us a sophisticated vocabulary for talking about Turkish as a 'heritage language' in the Greek part of the island. This really complicates the untheorised way that the term 'heritage language' usually gets used, enriching it with concepts like museumification, commodification, trivialisation, erasure and so forth:

“[CHS puts] contestation at the heart of the discussion.. and... for contexts affected by conflict, it allows us to connect and compare language education to a broader range of social and political practices and strategies of managing a conflicted heritage... [T]he notion of conflicted heritage keeps in sight the relationship to a past that involves trauma and conflict and highlights the role of language in post-conflict struggles and (in)securitization processes... At the same time, [the study of Turkish in Cyprus] also adds language in the CHS agenda, where it has not featured prominently” (Charalambous 2019:4,13).

Thomas: Like Ben, I should also be honest: I haven't considered becoming a sociolinguist 'proper'. I don't see myself worrying whether I am making a mountain out of a molehill. The minute linguistic detail is relevant and interesting, but only up to a point. I am pragmatic and pick theoretical ideas, methodological tools and perspectives from sociolinguistics where they serve my own analytical and theoretical interests. I have talked about those in the first parts of the conversation. But I do believe there is something key to take away from sociolinguistics: memory is not just something to either describe or prescribe. People *do* things with memory (cultural and collective), and potentially, memory can also do things with people. If I hadn't been exposed to interactional sociolinguistics, I would spend my time describing meanings. Now, instead, I am actively stressing that what I look at is how people *attribute* meaning to the past. I look at when, how and why people use specific discursive devices to sacralize or profane past events. That always happens in specific politico-cultural contexts, in interaction with others in specific situations. In short, sociolinguistics offers me some of the possibilities for an action-oriented memory studies.

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<sup>31</sup> Constantinou & Hatay, 2010; Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996; Graham 2002.

Ben: So that's more or less where we stand, and our perception of the ground around us. Of course elsewhere, both in Memory Studies and in Sociolinguistics, there are a lot other interdisciplinary conversations going on, some of which we're also independently involved in. Still, there is a growing sense that these two fields have quite a lot to offer each other, and over the course of our data-sessions, maybe we've developed quite a particular sense of what we'd like to take from the encounter.

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