Key Concepts and Methods in Ethnography, Language and Communication: A Review

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PhD students and early career researchers from around the world met at King's College London from 11th – 15th September 2017, to participate in a short course on *Key Concepts and Methods in Ethnography, Language and Communication*. The annual course, which was initiated with funding from the Social and Economic Research Council (ESRC) in 2007, is organized by King's Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Centre. The five-day course was tutored by an international group of high-profile academics, which consisted of Ben Rampton from King's College London, Jan Blommaert from Tilburg University, Jeff Bezemer (UCL Institute of Education), Adam Lefstein (Ben-Gurion University of Negev), and Julia Snell from the University of Leeds. The participants, a diverse group both with regard to their geographical as well as academic background, were mostly doctoral students and some post-doctoral researchers. According to the organizers (King's College, 2017), the aim of this short course was to help the participants to navigate the twin perils of over-and under-interpreting discourse data, by introducing a range of key perspectives and tools used to study language and communication ethnographically, in a wide range of settings, such as education, workplace, and health.

On the first day, the main theoretical perspectives and frameworks concerning linguistic ethnography, as well as common difficulties and problems specific to this approach, were discussed. This intensive day concluded with a superb dinner in the National Theatre, where participants socialized and enjoyed tasty food and drinks within a friendly and informal atmosphere. The following days, respectively, focused on specific concepts and methods of analysis, such as micro-analysis, discourse genres, multimodal analysis, semiotic landscaping and trans-contextual analysis. Sessions were intensive with a high-level of involvement, as a lot of importance was placed on interaction between participants. Research related questions and problems were directly addressed during the lectures and answered by specialists in the relevant fields.

In addition to the daily readings, discussions, and workshops, several participants were given the opportunity to present data extracts from their own research during allocated data analysis sessions; here, room was given for in-depth group discussions and opportunities to receive extensive feedback from peers and the chairing tutors. These student-led data sessions further explored the analytical themes and methods discussed during the individual days. Much effort, both by students and tutors, went into the preparation of these data session. After submitting proposals in due time before the short course, tutors offered in-depth, one to one feedback via video call, to discuss suitable data samples from students' own research. Once a particularly relevant and exciting piece of data was agreed on, transcriptions were prepared, and contextualising documents were drafted.

One of the authors of this review took up the opportunity to prepare a 90-minute data session, focusing on the multimodality theme. In the author's case, a two-minute extract of interactional

data, showing the author's research participant utilizing his smartphone in an interview setting, was selected. A multimodal transcript and additional supporting documents were handed out, before the video sequence was shown numerous times. As expected, the data session was a very insightful and valuable experience; the supportive audience offered detailed feedback, confirmed and substantiated analytical ideas, and provided particularly useful commentary concerning issues related to the multimodal transcription of the presented data sample. More than that, entirely new facets and dimensions of the data snippet concerning the interaction between the participant and his smartphone were explored and brought forward by the audience. For the author, this was an equally fascinating and uncanny experience, as seemingly familiar moments within the data extract were interpreted in novel and unprecedented ways. Many of the thoughts and ideas that were developed and discussed during this particular data session at King's College are still significant and central to the author's research project today. Thus, preparing and sharing 'raw data' for discussion, was a unique and particularly stimulating experience, which can only be recommended.

The King's College *Key Concepts and Methods in Ethnography* short course has much to offer to novice ethnographers and early career researchers within the Social Sciences, particularly to those, who have already collected data and are in the early stages of analysis. Yet, the course is not cheap (£600 course fee plus one week's accommodation in London), especially for students who have no, or little, financial support. However, the authors are convinced that attending the course is well worthwhile for the following reasons; first, King's College offers stipends on course fees and provides complimentary food and drink during the week. More than that, a high-quality dinner was provided on the first night, further bringing down the overall costs. Second, the short course has been up and running for several years; this is a big plus, as the overall structure and style of delivery of the course is based on years of experience. It seemed that much thought was spent on the planning and preparation of each session. Furthermore, carefully selected reading packs with relevant literature were distributed before and during the course, which are useful resources to the authors thereafter. Third, during the course, participants work on real data and experience the analysis process from the introduction of 'raw data' to the development of analytical ideas. This hands-on and exemplary approach is helpful for novice researchers, who might be intimidated and overwhelmed by the data analysis process. Particularly those students who took up the opportunity to lead their own data sessions benefited greatly from this. Last, the length and intensity of the course makes a lasting impression; although the course is intense at times, the overall structure allows for formal but also informal interactions with both participants and tutors. During this week, many opportunities to connect and network with fellow students but also with the tutors themselves, who were very communicative and approachable, were given. Thus, it comes with little surprise that this short course has led to successful collaborations and lasting partnerships in the past, such as student-led workshops and conferences (e.g. the biannual *Explorations in Ethnography, Language and Communication* conference, instigated by Fiona Copland, Sara Shaw, and Julia Snell), as well as co-authored publications (Copland et al., 2015).

Authors' biographies

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