

# Minority languages : a view from research on 'language crossing'

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Bulletin suisse de linguistique appliquée / VALS-ASLA**

Band (Jahr): - **(1999)**

Heft 69/2: **Les langues minoritaires en contetxte : les minorités en mouvement : mobilité et changement linguistique = Minderheitensprachen im Kontext : Minderheitensprachen in Bewegung : Mobilität und Sprachwandel**

PDF erstellt am: **11.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-978210>

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**Minority Languages:  
A view from research on 'language crossing'**

**Ben RAMPTON**

**Abstract<sup>1</sup>**

This paper first questions whether sociolinguistics is especially well-equipped when it comes to the analysis of minority situations, and it then looks at some interactional data in order to explore improvements. The practices and processes illustrated in these data are potentially very significant both for language revitalisation and education, and the paper ends by highlighting concepts, theories and frameworks that I think can be more productive.

**Introduction**

In the major part of this paper, I will try to address the question of how to describe membership of multiple linguistic communities, the characteristics of linguistic and cultural overlap and the resulting hybrids vis-a-vis purer definitions of linguistic and cultural identity.

At the same time, though, I will also glance towards questions of standardisation and education. The sections in the paper will be as follows:

1. Conceptualising minority, community and language
2. Some data
3. The promotion of languages
4. Education
5. Sociolinguistic concepts, theories and analytic frameworks

It is worth beginning by briefly reiterating some of the problems of definition and description that have become salient in recent years.

**1. Conceptualising minority, community and language**

“Purer definitions of linguistic and cultural identity” have been very influential in public debate for a number of years in Britain, and a great deal of policy and popular vision sees minorities as clearly bounded, relatively homogenous and principally preoccupied with issues of ethnic distinctiveness (cf RAMPTON, LEUNG & HARRIS 1997; LEUNG, HARRIS & RAMPTON 1997). Paul Gilroy calls this ethnic absolutism, and set against it, the more enlightened consensus

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was a keynote presentation at the biennial meeting of the Swiss Association for Applied Linguistics (ASLA/VALS) in Chur, September 1998, and I would like to express particular thanks to Lorenza Mondada and an anonymous reviewer.

seems to be that there are at least three dimensions that need to be considered when one analyses minority issues:

- a) (and most obviously), historical and contemporary processes of interaction between dominant and minority individuals, groups, institutions and discourses;
- b) the crucial influence of other structural relations and social identities - relations of class, gender, sexuality, generation, residence etc;  
and then
- c) diaspora connections - the historic and ongoing links that a group maintains beyond the boundaries of the nation-state (the nation-state being the principal frame which turns a group into a minority).

There are of course different kinds of diaspora<sup>2</sup>, as well as autochthonous minorities where diaspora is not such an issue. Even so, diaspora is important in the context where I have been working, and I shall return to all three points later on. Before that, however, we should refer briefly to the contribution that linguistics has made to these discussions.

As is now routinely noted, the differentiation and description of vernacular languages in 19th Century Europe made a crucial contribution to the development of the nation-state (cf. e.g. ROBINS 1979:Ch7; ANDERSON 1983:Ch 5; GAL & WOOLARD (eds)(1995), and the image of a community being integrated, homogeneous and bounded has carried over from the conceptualisation of nations into a good deal of the discourse on minorities. Turning to modern sociolinguistics, it is tempting to suggest that the discipline's very *raison d'être* consists of its opposition to precisely this idea of languages and nation-states being integrated, unitary systems<sup>3</sup>, but in fact, my preference is for Mary Louise PRATT's (1987) claim that if one looks closely at analytic assumptions and procedures in sociolinguistics, there is remarkable tenacity in the idea of "unmolested languages, one to a community, each working out its own destiny in an autonomous community" (HYMES 1980:52). Certainly, sociolinguists show that individuals often belong in more than one speech community, that a single speech community often has more than one language, and that each language is itself variable, but a wide range of studies of linguistic diversity nevertheless assume:

- a) that language study is centrally concerned with systematicity in grammar and coherence in discourse, and

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<sup>2</sup> cf eg CLIFFORD [1994] 1997, BRAH 1996:182; COHEN 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Cf the rejection of Chomsky's ideal-speaker hearer in the homogenous speech community, and the attempt to win space for minorities in national school systems in the 1960s and subsequently.

- b) that this comes from community membership - that people learn to talk grammatically and coherently from extensive early experience of living in families and fairly stable local social networks.

Assumptions like these were embodied, for example, in the variationist's quest for the vernacular (GUMPERZ 1982:26; RAMPTON 1992:46-7); in code-switching research, they led to an emphasis on the *conventional* syntactic and pragmatic patterns used inside groups where bilingualism was seen as a routine and unnoticed part of everyday life (WOOLARD 1988:69-70; RAMPTON 1995a:280); and one could even find an emphasis on the integrity of *ingroup* tradition when sociolinguistics focused on intercultural contact - in cross-cultural interaction analyses, the focus was on the *breakdowns* that occur in encounters between people with different linguistic and communicative backgrounds. Sociolinguistics has certainly recognised that neither language nor society are homogenous, but when it meets diversity and variation, one of its strongest instincts has been to root out what it supposes to be orderliness and uniformity beneath the surface, an orderliness established through community belonging. Sociolinguistics may initially look as if it offers tools for rethinking language and belonging, but things are actually more complicated than they might at first appear.

There is of course more to sociolinguistics than just the three subtraditions that I've mentioned - important though they are - and later on, I shall focus on the sociolinguistic schools and research programmes that I have personally found quite helpful trying to get to grips with the relational, contrastive, local-global dynamics of 'host'-minority processes - schools and programmes that may enable us to give something substantial back when cultural theorists use concepts like 'creolisation' and 'translation' as metaphors to talk about the flows and encounters of late modern experience. But before that, I would like to try to anchor the discussion in some data.

## 2. Some data

The data extract below is very short, but it does encapsulate quite well some of the features and practices that recurred again and again in my corpus of observations, interviews and radio-microphone recordings<sup>4</sup>. The comments that

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<sup>4</sup> The extract comes from a project that involved two years of fieldwork, focusing on one neighbourhood of the South Midlands, with 23 eleven to thirteen year olds of Indian, Pakistani, African-Caribbean and Anglo descent in 1984, and approximately 64 fourteen to sixteen year olds in 1987. Methods of data-collection included radio-microphone recording, participant observation, interviewing and retrospective participant commentary on extracts of recorded

follow it are relatively obvious and general to begin with, and then move into closer analysis of situated processes. In doing so,

- a) I shall try to orient to the three analytic dimensions necessary for any non-absolutist description of ethnic processes - to the contrastive, relational and diaspora dimensions of minority identity outlined in Section 1;
- b) I shall also draw on sociolinguistic frames and concepts that seem to me to be particularly relevant to a non-essentialist description.

The extract comes from an interview in which I was trying to get three boys to comment on some recordings that I had made of them. Things were not going quite as I hoped:

### Extract 1

*Participants:* Asif (15 yrs old, male, Pakistani descent), Kazim (15, male, Pakistani descent), Alan (15, male, Anglo descent), Ben (the researcher/author, 30+, male, Anglo descent).

*Setting:* 1987. Having recorded these three friends with radio-microphones during their informal recreation, Ben is trying to get some feedback on extracts from the recordings. But the boys are in high spirits, Asif and Alan have just been talking playground Punjabi into the microphone from close up, and Ben is now trying to reestablish their commitment to the listening activity. [II.15; A Ex 133 P Ex 156; FBS8:272]

- 1 Ben: right shall I- shall we shall we stop there
- 2 Kazim: no
- 3 Alan: no come | on carry on
- 4 Asif: | do another extract
- 5 Ben: le- lets have (.) | then you have to give me more=
- 6 Alan: | carry on
- 7 Ben: =attention gents
- 8 Asif: ((l.)) yeh | alright
- 9 Alan: ((l.)) | alright
- 10 Asif: ((l.)) | yeh
- 11 Ben: I need more attention
- 12 Kazim ((in Indian English)): **I AM VERY SORRY BEN JAAD**  
[ Aê œm veRi sARi ben dZA\_d ]
- 13 Asif ((in Indian English)): **ATTENTION BENJAMIN**  
[ 'thenSA\_n bendZ'mên ]
- 14 : | ((laughter))
- 15 Ben : | right well you can- we cn-

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interaction. The analysis was based on about 68 incidents of Panjabi crossing, about 160 exchanges involving stylised Indian English, and more than 250 episodes where a Creole influence was clearly detectable. Three significantly different contexts for language crossing were identified: interaction with adults, interaction with peers, and performance art.

- 16 Alan : | BENJAADEMIN  
 17 Ben: we can continue but we er must concentrate a bit  
 18 | more  
 19 Asif: | yeh  
 20 Alan: alright (go on) then  
 21 Asif((in Indian English)) : | **concentrating very hard**  
 [ kʌns'ʃtRetê= veRi AR ]  
 22 Ben: okay right  
 23 : ((giggles dying down))  
 24 Kazim((in Indian English)) : **what a stupid ( )**  
 [vUd 'stupêd ]  
 25 Ben ((returning the microphone to what he considers to be a  
 better position to catch all the speakers)): concentrate a little bit-  
 26 Alan: alright then  
 27 Kazim: ((in Creole)): stop movin **dat ting aroun**  
 [ døt tê= '®Aun ]  
 28 Ben: WELL YOU stop moving it around and then I'll won't  
 29 need to (.) rlight  
 30 Kazim ((in Creole)): | stop moving **dat ting aroun**  
 [ dø? tê= '®Aun ]  
 31 Ben: right okay |  
 32 Kazim: | BEN JAAD  
 33 Alan: ((laughs))  
 34 Ben: what are you doing  
 35 Alan: ben jaa lad  
 36 Ben: | well leave ( ) alone  
 37 Kazim: IT'S HIM that ben jaad over there  
 38 Ben: right  
 ((Ben continues his efforts to reinstitute the listening activity))

First and maybe most obviously, the extract shows the boys code-switching into ethnic languages which one would not normally expect them to speak. Kazim and Asif switch out of their usual vernacular into strongly accented Indian English; Kazim also briefly shifts into a Caribbean Creole accent; and Alan's 'benjaad' represents a fairly ephemeral piece of multiracial playground Punjabi. I've called this 'language crossing', and it was performed and talked about a great deal in the adolescent peer group where I did my research.

'Language crossing' turned out to be a very socially sensitive practice. When I asked who did and who did not engage in language crossing, it seemed to be a multiracial ingroup with quite a specific class and gender distribution: I was told you would not find language crossing either among the posh white boys at the local school, or among the most recently arrived immigrant groups, neither of whom were likely to live in the rather run-down ethnic neighbourhoods which

the informants aligned with. Within the stratum where crossing *was* felt to have currency, there was actually also a lot more social differentiation and this was strongly influenced by the wider circulation and status of Indian English, Creole and Punjabi. At the time - in the mid to late 80s - both Indian English and Creole had high media profiles: the first as a racist caricature, and the second as style closely associated with both militant anti-racism and prestigious vernacular youth culture. These profiles made it particularly difficult for whites to use Creole or Indian English in an acceptable way, and it is indicative that Alan stays clear of Indian English in the Extract. In contrast, Punjabi had a safer and stronger local profile: it was the only code where crossing seemed to flourish in face-to-face interaction with bilingual inheritors, though as bhangra music and dance became more popular, this too became more complicated. In its rather vulgar *playground* forms, Punjabi crossing flourished within the dynamics of friendly male rivalry, but the growing association with stylish youth culture blocked this, and instead crossing became the practice of non-local white girls oriented to heterosexual romance with Punjabi boys - a pattern that also had quite strong parallels with Creole.

That is a very truncated resume of some of the background to this extract, but it is probably enough to show how even rather a broad view of language crossing provides insight into the intricate political processes involved in what Stuart HALL (1988) calls emergent 'new ethnicities' - feelings of interethnic community which may be complicated but which nevertheless run counter to an absolutist Englishness. But rather than just pointing out language practices that seem very relevant to these processes of overlap and hybridisation, it is also necessary to try to identify analytic frameworks that seem particularly productive, and here it will help if we take a more detailed look at these data.

It is fairly obvious that the extract as a whole involves a period of some uncertainty about the official activity that the participants are supposed to be engaged in. As already mentioned, my aim in asking the boys to listen to carefully selected extracts from my recordings of them is to get them to clarify what had been going on, to comment on striking bits of language use and so forth. The boys are very willing to give up their lunch break to do this, but it is very hard to keep them focused, I am starting to feel a bit compromised, and in line 1, I am coming close to a final bid to get them back 'on task'.

The episode itself, then, can be characterised as a struggle between two different definitions of the situation - very approximately, my research-oriented 'retrospective-participant-commentary-on-extracts-of-recorded-data' vs their 'havin'-a-good-time-listening-to-Ben's-tapes'. But within this higher level

indeterminacy, it is particularly important to look at the precise occasions when the boys switch codes.

In lines 5 & 6 of the extract, I lay down the conditions for carrying on with the listening activity, and I also imply that the boys have made it pretty difficult hitherto and that it will be their own fault if we stop. Asif and Alan appear to accept the conditions, and then a small sequence of ritual remediation begins in which the boys use stylised Asian English: Kazim apologises in line 12; Asif declares his allegiance to what I wanted in lines 13 and 21; and Kazim seems to take my perspective in line 24's muttered disapproval. But of course none of this can be taken at face value. As GOFFMAN makes clear in his analysis of remedial sequences (1971), in apologies people split themselves into two parts - the self that was guilty in the past, and now the new self that recognises the offence and disavows the self of old. And so normally, one would expect people apologising for noisy disorder to signal the split by switching into relatively quiet, serious, sincere voices. Not so here. In this episode the boys apologise for messing around by moving into a conspicuously false accent, which is accompanied with an equally contradictory loudness and hilarity.

In fact a moment later, just as I seem to be signalling 'back-to-business' by repositioning the microphone, the boot moves to the other foot, Kazim switches into Creole in line 27 and himself directs a 'prime' at me, this time constructing *my* activity as an impropriety. Rather than a remedial sequence, this leads to a short 'run-in' in which I account for my action by laying the offence with him, a move which he ignores by simply repeating his directive. I do not then take issue with this, but instead continue my efforts to reinstate the listening activity, using some optimistic boundary markers ("right, okay, right" - lines 29, 31 & 38). They respond with "ben jaad", a nickname for me in multiracial Punjabi, opaque to me at the time, but which I later learn is an interlanguage invention falling ambiguously between [ben jAR], meaning 'Ben, friend', and [pEn tSOd], 'sister fucker'.

There is a lot more that could be said here, but I would like to underline the kinds of symbolic creativity and inferencing that occur at the moments when transgression and impropriety are made the focal issues. According to both GOFFMAN (1971) and GARFINKEL (1984), our sense of the common moral order of everyday life is temporarily jeopardised when infractions arise, and when this happens, we do not simply seek to repair whatever has been damaged or disrupted. What we mainly look for are ritual signs of the culprit's more general respect and regard for social rules and the order we approve (GOFFMAN 1971:98).



What the boys provide, of course, is something rather different. It is not just that they withhold support for the norms and decorum I'm appealing to. They actually switch into language varieties which symbolically activate domains of meaning where a white man's judgment actually loses a lot of its legitimacy. Switching into Asian English in a sequence where they were bowing to my calls to order, the boys conjure a stereotype of Asian 'babu' deference which is historically ensconced in white British racism and which can be depended on to embarrass a white liberal conscience. The switch indexes race stratification as a potentially relevant issue in our encounter, and this strategic racialisation is carried further in the switch to Creole, a code associated with the rejection of illegitimate white power.<sup>5</sup>

What we get here is a glimpse of how the interaction order itself provides a number of valuable sites for the suspension of dominant orders and for the ritual invocation of alternatives. In fact there is a second point to be made about the way in which the boys seem to position themselves in relation to the symbolic voices they adopt - a point that allows us to elaborate a bit on the way that interaction hosts the dynamic identity processes generated around migration and population flow.

With the boys' stylised Asian English, there was a fairly clear break between the deferential words uttered through the 'babu' persona on the one hand, and on the other, the commitment to enjoyment on their own terms that they display much more generally through for example laughter, noise and nick-naming. In contrast, with Kazim's Creole, it is not at all clear that he does not mean what he says: there are no other accompanying cues to suggest he is joking, and the switch starts a sequence in which dispute is much more explicit than before<sup>6</sup>.

The difference illustrated here fitted with a very general pattern in my data: when adolescents used Asian English, there was nearly always a wide gap between self and voice; when they crossed into Creole, the gap substantially diminished. Both of these patterns seemed to fit with local adolescent views of the different social worlds indexed by each of these language varieties.

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<sup>5</sup> The switch into multiracial playground Punjabi worked on a slightly different tack. One of its effects could be to evoke a world of jocular peer group recreation in which the best role a monolingual adult could hope for would be the role of a benign but gullible onlooker. Another could be to maintain the ties with Alan, who was white like me but who was also a regular participant in multiracial playground Punjabi.

<sup>6</sup> Following Kazim's bald imperative in line 27, there is a 'return and exchange' move with a justification from me (lines 28-9; cf GOODWIN 1990:152-3,163-5), and then some 'recycling' from KAZIM (line 30; GOODWIN 1990:158).

From interviews and other data, it was clear that, as well as its links with the babu stereotype, Asian English was associated both with adults who had come to England from India and Pakistan (towards whom informants often expressed solidary sentiments) and with recently arrived Bangladeshi peers (towards whom they were generally hostile)<sup>7</sup>. In all of its connotations, Asian English stood for a stage of historical transition that most adolescents now felt they were leaving behind, and in one way or another it consistently symbolised distance from the main currents of adolescent life<sup>8</sup>.

In contrast to the retrospective time frame conjured by Asian English, Creole stood for an excitement and excellence in vernacular youth culture which many youngsters aspired to, and it was even described as 'future language'. In line with this, when it was used in interaction, Creole tended to lend emphasis to evaluations that synchronised with the identities that speakers maintained in their ordinary speech. Its use lent power to the speaker, and indeed when directed towards deviance, it often expressed approval. Putting them together, we can describe these processes in the terms of Bakhtin's (now very familiar) theory of double-voicing<sup>9</sup> - Bakhtin's idea of 'vari-directional double-languaging' can be applied to the self-voice opposition running through the

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<sup>7</sup> cf RAMPTON 1988 and 1995:Ch 2.4 on the ambiguous and troublesome connotations of Asian English.

<sup>8</sup> The gap between speaker and voice illustrated in the feigned deference in Extract 1 was just one interactional correlate of this. There was another in the way that stylised Asian English was used to criticise agemates, and when Asian English was used to criticise a peer, either seriously or in joking, it was used as a 'say-for' (GOFFMAN 1974:535), a voice not being claimed as part of the speaker's own identity but one that was relevant to the person being targeted. As such, it seemed to achieve its effect as a negative sanction by threatening the recipient with regression, symbolically isolating them on a path of historical development now abandoned by adolescents who had arrived at an endpoint they now took for granted.

<sup>9</sup> With double-voicing, speakers use someone else's discourse (or language) for their own purposes, "inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has... an intention of its own. Such a discourse... must be seen as belonging to someone else. In one discourse, two semantic intention appear, two voices." (BAKHTIN 1984:189) . Bakhtin describes several kinds of double-voicing, and one of these is described as 'uni-directional'. With uni-directional double-voicing, the speaker uses someone else's discourse "in the direction of its own particular intentions" (1984:193). Speakers themselves go along with the momentum of the second voice, though it generally retains an element of otherness which makes the appropriation conditional and introduces some reservation into the speaker's use of it. But at the same time, the boundary between the speaker and the voice they are adopting can diminish, to the extent that there is a "fusion of voices". When that happens, discourse ceases to be double-voiced, and instead becomes 'direct, unmediated discourse' (1984:199). The opposite of uni-directional double-voicing is varidirectional double-voicing, in which the speaker "again speaks in someone else's discourse, but... introduces into that discourse a semantic intention directly opposed to the original one". In vari-directional double-voicing, the two voices are much more clearly demarcated, and they are not only distant but also opposed (BAKHTIN 1984:193). On Bakhtin's notion of double-voicing in sociolinguistics, see eg HILL & HILL 1986, CAZDEN 1989, FAIRCLOUGH 1992, & RAMPTON 1995a:Chs 8.5 & 11.1. In cultural studies, see eg MERCER 1994:62ff, BHABHA 1996:57.

many uses of stylised Asian English, while his 'uni-directional double-languaging' describes the much closer self-voice identification in Creole.

To sum up the micro-analysis as a whole:

- first of all, there are points of indeterminacy in interaction which provide showcase moments for the symbolic display of social allegiance and for the affirmation, contestation or redefinition of dominant orders;
- secondly, interaction involves a dynamics of self-projection which can be studied as a micro-scopic counterpart to the historical movements and transitions that constitute diaspora.

Let me now try to move from this perhaps rather jumbled collection of observations - intended as a practical demonstration of particular sociolinguistic approaches - into some more general claims and arguments, first about the promotion of minority languages, then about education, and lastly about concepts, theories and frameworks in sociolinguistics.

### 3. The promotion of minority languages

There are a number of very striking parallels between the ways my informants mixed and played with their own and other local minority languages and the ways that Jacqueline Urla describes Basque being used on free radio in the Basque provinces of Northern Spain. But Urla inserts her description in a provocative account of minority language revitalisation movements, which she characterises as often being bourgeois, as giving priority to literacy, as working for normalisation and legitimacy *within* hegemonic language hierarchies, and as generally orienting themselves to notions of what constitutes a 'modern' or 'rational' language<sup>10</sup>. But she says, this is not the sum total of minority language

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<sup>10</sup> "minority language revitalisation movements are typically bourgeois and universalistic in nature; the... linguistic community is imagined in the singular and envisioned primarily as a reading and writing public... [L]anguage politics tend to be oriented towards normalisation, expanding literacy, and gaining legitimacy within the terms of state hegemonic language hierarchies. The past century has seen ethnic minority intellectuals form their own language academies, literary and scientific societies, and mobilize the tools of linguistic analysis, orthographic reform, mapping, and even the census in order to document the 'truth' of their language and to reform the language according to notions of what constitutes a 'modern' or 'rational' language" (URLA 1995:246).

But she says,

"[t]his is not the prevailing attitude for all spheres of minority language production. Free radio works by a different logic creating a space that is simultaneously syncretic, local and transnational. Free radios... aim to take the Basque language out of the private domain and into the street, and to take... the reality of the street into the public domain... In many ways, the imaginary space of free radios is heterogeneous in contrast to the unitary space of nationalism... These low powered, ephemeral stations, with their radical philosophy of democratic communication, are urban in the sense that they try, in however imperfect ways, to place the heterogeneity of Basque society on the airwaves. These representations too, deserve our attention as part of the ongoing construction of minority languages" (259).

production, and free radio tries to create public space for a much more heterogeneous versions of Basque identity.

I am not in a position to say exactly how relevant these arguments are to minority language movements in the UK, and I certainly would not claim that you had to chose between these different (official and unofficial) paths to language revitalisation. Even so, it does seem to me that there are major blindspots in any analysis or intervention which neglects modalities of use where transactional purposes give way to play and ritual, where indexical meaning and the poetic function dominate the lexical and referential, where invention and mixing are celebrated, and where language operates insecurely as only one semiotic channel among several, music and dance often being preeminent. In fact, from what I have seen, there may be an example of this oversight in discussions of English linguistic imperialism. Ludic modalities have obviously become increasingly important in the mass mediated global spread of black vernacular varieties of English, and in some places, there has been some very conscious official resistance to them<sup>11</sup>. But I am personally not aware of very much systematic sociolinguistic discussion of this, which is a pity because the politics of world English become much more complicated if alongside the British Council, you see Bob Marley as a major influence on global spread<sup>12</sup>.

#### **4. Language Education**

There are three points worth making with regard to language education.

First, and maybe most obviously, data like these show quite clearly that British education policy is wrong to think that it is only youngsters with Punjabi backgrounds that are ever likely to be interested in knowing the Punjabi language.

Second, there has been very little official thought given to the huge and varied resources that diasporas provide in an increasingly globalised economy. Education remains largely gripped by a nationalist curriculum, though it may be that at a local peer group level, there is often quite a strong sense that indigenous Englishness is something of cultural limitation. In the meantime, if they can,

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<sup>11</sup> cf. e.g. Wendy BOKHORST-HENG on Lee KWAN YEW in Singapore in 1972 (forthcoming p4).

<sup>12</sup> There is work to be done relating Creole studies to the mass-mediated spread of black Englishes. Both are intensely related to global capitalism, but where pidgins and creoles are frequently seen as having their origins in the transactional requirements of material production, much of the contemporary global spread of vernacular Englishes seems more geared to ludic modes of material consumption.

youngsters draw on transnational resources in some quite surprising ways, as illustrated, for example, in Rehman's account of returning to Bangladesh to improve his English:

Rehman: ... when I came back to England, I had to, you know, catch up with the [English] and I was really slow, I was really bad in [English] and my gran- my grandfather, he said there's this school in Bangladesh... it's really good and my dad said, right, I might as well take him there

Third, if one spends much time listening to recordings of urban classroom interaction, it again becomes clear that analyses of classroom discourse are hopelessly inadequate if they fail to address the ludic, ritual and poetic modalities mentioned in the previous section. BERNSTEIN recognised a long time ago that with the development of 'child-centred' pedagogies, with growing emphasis on learner autonomy and group-work etc, there would be a shift at school "from the dominance of adult-imposed and regulated rituals to the dominance of rituals generated and regulated by youth" (1975:60). And yet routinely, all this gets washed out in classroom discourse analyses, where as PRATT says,

"Students are presented... only as they are interpellated directly by teachers, and even then in a reduced and idealised fashion. Parodies, refusals, rebellions and so forth fall outside this account, and with them the struggles over disciplining that are such a fundamental part of the schooling process" (1987:52)

In fact, there may well be much more at stake here than just the honest description of pupils' disenchantment: the modalities being discussed here are also a major part of what PRATT call the 'arts of the contact zone'.

The "arts of the contact zone" include the kinds of practice that one finds in language crossing<sup>13</sup> and on Basque free radio, and PRATT talks about how she set up a course which explored contact sensibilities through literature. The course focussed on the the multiple cultural histories that intersected in the Americas, it attracted a very diverse student body, and all the course texts stood in a range of different historical relationships to the members of the class<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> For example: 'autoethnographic' texts, which are texts "in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (PRATT 1991:35); and 'transculturation', in which "members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (1991:36).

<sup>14</sup> "It was the most exciting teaching we had ever done, and also the hardest. We were struck, for example, at how anomalous the formal lecture became in the contact zone... The lecturer's traditional (imagined) task - unifying the world in the class's eyes by means of a monologue that rings equally coherent, revealing and true for all, forging an ad hoc community, homogeneous with respect to one's own words - this task became not only impossible but anomalous and

PRATT says it was the most exciting teaching they had ever done - traditional lectures felt hopelessly monologic and instead, identities were on the line, with students seeing their roots traced back to legacies of both glory and shame and nearly everyone having the experience of seeing the world described with him or her in it. "Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain," says PRATT, "there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding and new wisdom - the joys of the contact zone." (1991:39-40)

To cite this certainly is not to deny the importance of coherent, accountable and centred public discourse (which after all is precisely what a paper like this is supposed to be), and in terms of the kind of multi-perspectival involvement and intensity that PRATT points to, there is also obviously a very large difference between on the one hand, what one can do in a university class once a week for a term, and on the other, what one can do from 9am to 3.30 everyday in secondary school full of adolescents who do not want to be there. However, having said that,

- a) there are classes of 14 year olds where teachers do accomplish something similar to what PRATT describes, and
- b) more importantly, whether they like it or not, events like this often happen of their own accord, and if teachers are not tuned to the dynamics, it can become very difficult.

The points in this section and last may seem rather speculative and polemical, though they do seem to me to indicate issues that we should take seriously, and in the last section, I would like to talk about some of the sociolinguistic concepts, theories and frameworks that might move us towards a deeper understanding.

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unimaginable. Instead, one had to work in the knowledge that whatever one said was going to be systematically received in radically heterogeneous ways that we were neither able nor entitled to prescribe.

The very nature of the course put ideas and identities on the line. All the students in the class had the experience, for example, of hearing their culture discussed and objectified in ways that horrified them; all the students saw their roots traced back to legacies of both glory and shame; all the students experienced face-to-face the ignorance and incomprehension, and occasionally the hostility, of others. In the absence of community values and the hope of synthesis, it was easy to forget the positives; the fact, for instance, that kinds of marginalisation once taken for granted were gone. Virtually every student was having the experience of seeing the world described with him or her in it. Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain, there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding and new wisdom - the joys of the contact zone. The sufferings and revelations were, at different moments to be sure, experienced by every student. No one was excluded, and no one was safe." (PRATT 1991:39-40).

## 5. Sociolinguistic concepts, theories and analytic frameworks

One way of encapsulating what's required is to say that sociolinguistics needs to expand its concepts of ethnicity.

Hitherto, sociolinguists have tended to think in terms of two kinds of ethnicity. The first is what GUMPERZ & COOK-GUMPERZ (1982) call the 'old interactive ethnicity', which is seen as a tacit cultural inheritance, an inheritance realised in the distinctive patterns of language use that people acquire in local community networks and in the early years at home. The second notion is more group-for-itself than group-in-itself, and Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz call this the 'new reactive ethnicity'. This is more self-conscious and one can see it at work in symbolic *assertions* of inherited identity, symbolic assertions that are strategically activated in different ways and different contexts. Here, rather than being the cultural legacy itself, ethnicity is a contrastive, positional construct which participants use to create, express, and interpret a variety of social and political differences. Overall, this formulation seems to allow individuals just two options: they can either embrace and cultivate the ethnolinguistic legacy passed on by their parents and grandparents, or they can drop it as a category that is personally relevant to them.

The data and situations that I have referred to require us to pay much more attention to a *third* notion of ethnicity in sociolinguistics: a deracinated ethnicity, ethnicity as represented and accessed by outsiders, neither group-in-itself nor -for-itself but group-for-someone-else (see Table 1). 'Group-for-someone-else' is not of course completely neglected in sociolinguistics - there is a great deal of work on intergroup stereotypes in the social psychology of language<sup>15</sup>; there is a burgeoning literature on racist representations in interviews and media discourse<sup>16</sup>, and there are long-standing studies of phenomena like Secondary Foreigner talk. The crucial difference, though, between the data and issues in Sections 2 to 4 and all the research on stereotyping is that overwhelmingly, the research on stereotypes assumes that speakers and writers have a relatively stable view of their own ethnic position, that they know which in-group they belong to, and the ethnic category they are representing is definitely 'other'. In contrast, for example in my data, people do not sit contently in the social group categories that society tries to fix them in, they do not confine themselves only to those identities that they are expected to have legitimate or routine access to. What you see is not just adolescents

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<sup>15</sup> e.g. RYAN and GILES 1982.

<sup>16</sup> e.g. VAN DIJK 1987, WETHERALL & POTTER 1992.

*attributing* particular outgroup identities to other people, but adolescents *claiming particular outgroup identities for themselves* - Anglos who know that they have not grown up with Creole and Panjabi being used at home, but who in one way or another, often actually affiliate themselves with these languages and see them as part of their own youth community speech repertoire. More generally, we need to try to make sense of some of the new ways in which ethnicity is being commodified, bought and sold - a wide variety of ethnic forms, products and symbols are widely disseminated as desirable commodities, life-style options and aesthetic objects on the open market, and there is bound to be enormous diversity in the ways in which both members and non-members of the ethnicity in question react to these and take them up<sup>17</sup>.

The limitations in traditional sociolinguistic conceptions of ethnicity go back, of course, to the cluster of ideas about homogeneous nation and community belonging mentioned at the outset, and our ability to deal with commodified ethnicities and mass-mediated 'neo-tribes' is also limited by the traditional sociolinguistic division of labour between researchers who do media text analysis and researchers who look at interactions in local communities and institutions. In fact, there are a few fairly recent ethnographies of media reception which do address the renegotiation of sociolinguistic identities, and this is a trend that will certainly grow. But what about more general theories and frameworks capable of retuning sociolinguistics to the kinds of empirical reality that we have looked at?

The first and most obvious point is that one can not get very far without a great deal of borrowing from sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, but in terms of specifically sociolinguistic work, the long-standing ideas of LePage and TABOURET-KELLER (1985) seem to me as valuable as any as a framework of philosophical assumptions that tries to break clear of modernist preconceptions about coherence and systematicity in language and society<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Language often serves as one of the key features that marks the ethnic origins of these products, and there is going to be a whole range of linguistic effects on the consumers. Hewitt discusses reggae's highly complex sociolinguistic impact on adolescents in South London, I've looked at bhangra, and Cutler looks at rap.

<sup>18</sup> For a start, they reject the idea that there's systematicity out there waiting to be discovered in the heart of variation - "Would[ not we] do better to recognise", asks Le Page, "that each individual's competence subsumes partial knowledge of many socially marked systems, and [that] each individual's performance reflects choice among those systems, constrained by [an unpredictable confluence of] social and psychological factors operating upon [her or him] at any given moment" (1980:336)? The degree of grammatical structuring in speech and language is something to determine empirically, and communication varies in the extent to which it relies on pragmatic or grammatical meaning, in the extent to which it is idiosyncratic or communally-agreed, and in the extent to which it is channelled through a range of semiotic modes or just through words and language (LE PAGE 1980b:332). As far as they can, LePage and Tabouret-Keller try to avoid methods of analysis which *presuppose* what society looks like, what the speakers' identities are,



Admittedly, their theoretical vocabulary is astonishingly sparse, indeed almost mantra-like, but rather like a mantra, it helps to recondition one's consciousness. In comparison with the sociolinguistic theories dominant in the English speaking world at least in the 1970s and early 80s, LePage and Tabouret-Keller rehabilitated all kinds of data that other approaches idealised out; they talked about the sociolinguistic construction of reality and the role of linguistics as an ideological practice long before these became fashionable topics; and in my experience anyway, the reorientation they provide allowed the sociolinguist to look at social theories about late modernity without feeling epistemologically lost or threatened.

Their major limitation, though, is that although they see it as a key site for the production of social and linguistic identities and systems<sup>19</sup>, they do not offer any apparatus for describing interaction itself (due, no doubt, to the dominance of quantitative sociolinguistics in Britain in the 70s). To describe interaction, the eclectic mix of conversation analysis and the ethnography of communication that one finds in interactional sociolinguistics and in textbook like DURANTI's (1997) *Linguistic Anthropology* is much more productive, and within this, the recent intensification of interest in stylisation and artful performance seems to me to be a particularly valuable development.

BAKHTIN (1984) is one important influence here, though crucially, Bakhtin's approach needs to be enriched with ethnography and interaction analysis so that performance is described as a situated time-bound event in which the audience is an active participant, itself partly shaping the product. In BAUMAN and BRIGGS' (1990) definition of it<sup>20</sup>, performance has at least three characteristics:

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and what the language is they're speaking; there's a reflexive view of how linguistics, language and society all influence each other; and the urge to uniformity common among speakers and epidemic among linguists is itself a topic of enquiry. As LEPAGE put it in something of a manifesto:

"I wish to be able to describe the behaviour of [children and their peer groups] in such a way as to reveal something of the process of growing up in a fluid, multilingual society, of choosing an identity and a social role; to say something about the way in which the concept of what it means to be a Belizean in this newly-independent country is developing, is revealed by linguistic symptoms, and so on. I wish to do so in such a way that I may reveal something of general value about the way in which societies come into being; jell; and then dissolve; and the relationship of such processes to the historical and synchronic parameters of language" (1978:1-2).

<sup>19</sup> So too does Gumperz, who grounds the codeswitching research agenda on the idea that speakers understand each other, there must be regularities.

This certainly does not amount to a rejection of standard languages as a relevant reference point in analysis. But it shifts the emphasis so that instead of the standard language being an independent yardstick that the analyst uses to describe or assess utterances, the standard language becomes part of the speaker's socio-cognitive environment, part of the language ideology that speakers orient to (or do not orient to) in the course of interaction.

<sup>20</sup> "As the concept of performance has been developed in linguistic anthropology, performance is seen as a specially marked, artful way of speaking that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame within which the act of speaking is to be understood. Performance puts the act

- firstly, it involves an invitation to break with routine habits of interpretation;
- secondly, it spotlights and objectifies the ways of speaking that the performer is using, and in doing so, BAUMAN and BRIGGS say that it moves "the use of heterogeneous stylistic resources, context-sensitive meanings, and conflicting ideologies into a reflexive arena where they can be examined critically" (1990:61);
- third, performance is not just a procenium event sharply separated from ordinary everyday speech.

These three properties certainly characterised the data extract in Section 2: the talk was interspersed with quite rapid code-switching, the routine communicative flow was disrupted, and ideologies of language and race were drawn symbolically into the interactional arena. This recurred again and again in the code-switching data that I analysed, and in view of the social, historical and political boundaries that these switches explored - in view, also, of the kinds of complex personal investment which adolescents had in the categories they invoked - I do not think it is pretentious to single out practices like these with a label like 'language crossing'<sup>21</sup>. On the other hand, it is important to see language crossing as just one of a huge range of performance practices and genres, just one element in the development of a profoundly situated stylistics trying to document social creativity and contest.<sup>22</sup>

It seems to me that there is now a substantial apparatus capable of producing fine-grained analyses of the 'arts of the contact zone', and that we can now draw on theories of sociolinguistic process that are relatively free from

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of speaking on display - objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience..."[P]erformances move the use of heterogeneous stylistic resources, context-sensitive meanings, and conflicting ideologies into a reflexive arena where they can be examined critically" (BAUMAN & BRIGGS 1990:73,61).

"[P]erformance may be dominant in the hierarchy of multiple functions served by speech, as in what Dell HYMES (1974:444) has called 'full performance', or it may be subordinate to other functions - referential, rhetorical or any other" (BAUMAN 1986:3).

<sup>21</sup> I'm not convinced however that the term 'border crossing' is very productively applied just to the mixing of textual genres or orders of discourse (as in eg FAIRCLOUGH 1996:13; GOODMAN 1996:141). Right now, it seems to me particularly important to investigate the ways in which people try to renegotiate structural categories like ethnicity, class, sexuality and/or gender, and that terms like 'crossing', 'border' and 'boundary' usefully mark out this agenda. This gets rather lost if notions of 'border crossing' are applied to movement across any kind of category boundary (eg the nominalisation of verbs!), neglectful of the kinds of history and politics which make the ordinary word 'border' such a charged concept. Another way of putting this would be to draw attention to Bakhtin's distinction between 'double-voicing' and 'double-languaging', and to say that 'border crossing' is a term that should be reserved for the latter.

<sup>22</sup> In fact, beyond that, I think that the notion of artful performance can itself be rearticulated within a larger theory of ritual - a theory that synthesises the reinterpretations of Durkheim offered by GOFFMAN 1967, BROWN & LEVINSON 1987, Victor TURNER 1974, Jeffrey ALEXANDER 1988 and others, and that tries to show why it is that something like language crossing occurs in greetings, apologies and self-talk as well as in more obvious performance genres like songs, games and abuse exchanges (cf ROTHENBUHLER 1998).

presuppositions about uniformity and system integration - theories where the lack of presuppositions about coherence and community in fact also allows us to stand back from processes of linguistic homogenisation and get a clearer view of these too. In this paper, I have tried to identify some of these resources, as well as some of the reasons why we now need them.

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**Table 1: Three notions of ethnicity in sociolinguistics**

|  | <b>Ethnicity 1</b>  | <b>Ethnicity 2</b>   | <b>Ethnicity 3</b>  |
|--|---|--|---|
| <b>Otherwise known as:</b>   | Interactive, experiential, group-in-itself  | Reactive, referential, group-for-itself ('us')   | Deracinated, represented, group-for-someone else ('them')   |
| <b>The linguistic and cultural substance of the ethnicity in question:</b>               | Ingrained linguistic & cultural dispositions & practices, developed over time through face-to-face interaction at home and in local networks  | Certain features selected from local or domestic tradition ('Ethnicity 1'), strategically stressed in order to symbolise ingroup membership in multiracial interactions and settings. 'Ethnicity 2' is a selection/simplification/idealisation from 'Ethnicity 1'  | Widely or locally disseminated tokens and images of other groups and cultures, generated either within or outside the group depicted, with currency that either partially or totally beyond the group's control. 'Ethnicity 3' is an idealisation/ reduction/ fabrication of the experience entailed in 'Ethnicities 1 and 2' |
| <b>How do people become aligned with the ethnicity in question?</b>                      | Individuals have no choice: their identities and conduct are extensively shaped by ethnic experience  | Ethnicity can be either positively claimed, or it can be negatively imposed. In racist societies, it can be hard to escape ethnicity as a social category that is potentially relevant to the definition of you.   | Alignment is voluntary - individuals are attracted to outgroup cultural forms. Otherwise, the outgroup ethnicity either has little personal relevance, or it serves as a negative Other against which the Self is defined positively.   |
| <b>Illustrative studies:</b>   | Philips 1972, Heath 1983  | McDermott & Gospodinoff 1979, Erickson & Shultz 1981, Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1982  | Hewitt 1986, Heller 1992, Hill 1993, Rampton 1995 etc   |
| <b>Emblem:</b>   | Roots   | Routes   | Aeriels   |
| <b>COMPLICATIONS/ PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN SEEING THE ETHNICITY IN QUESTION AS DISTINCT.</b> | In what ways can you really say that on their own, these dispositions and practices constitute ethnic identity rather than class, gender, regional, idiosyncratic etc identity? Defining cultural inheritance as ethnicity is in fact a matter of the social processes associated with Ethnicities 2 and 3. | A sense of your own ethnicity arises out of both a sense of other people's ethnicities, <i>and</i> an awareness of their representations of yours. Sometimes, other people's representations of your ethnicity may be attractive rather than offensive - something you want to embrace rather than reject. | People can get to know, interact, identify and often live with people from ethnic outgroups. In doing so, ethnicities 2 & 3 can become quite closely tuned.   |

