

## Further Expansions of Ethnography of Communication Research: A Response to Katriel

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I have been asked to respond to Tamar Katriel's 2015 *Communication Theory* article "Expanding Ethnography of Communication Research: Toward Ethnographies of Encoding." Her goal in that article was to expand the sorts of research being considered or conducted by ethnographers of communication, especially those based in Communication, into at least one direction, encoding, as evident in her title. My goal here is to spark further discussions of her ideas by other readers of the Ethnocomm listserve. In order to do so, I will mention several research directions open to potential future investigations as a way of continuing the conversation. These can be most easily divided by topic. Other subscribers to the listserve will hopefully respond in turn to any of these topics, or introduce others. Through such conversations, this listserve can develop from a bulletin board to an interactive forum.

One generalization before moving on to specifics: Katriel refers to the beginnings of the Ethnography of Communication (EC), as proposed by Dell Hymes (1962, 1967). As part of the discussion below, I will expand on some early assumptions and their relevance today. I begin with the topic of encoding, Katriel's focus, but will move beyond it to consider other suggestions less central to her argument that would also expand EC research in order to broaden the conversation, and provide more entry points for others.

### Encoding

Katriel (2015) proposes expanding EC research generally, and argues for further consideration of, and research on, encoding specifically. Emphasizing encoding would likely lead to a greater focus on *process*, so as to understand how codes develop, rather than viewing them as static, and just describing them as they exist at a particular moment in time. Witteborn and Sprain (2009) examine how groups are enacted through communicative practices, thus emphasizing process over product, encoding over coding. Another implication would be a greater focus on *social construction*, so as to understand how multiple people jointly coordinate in the development of patterned codes. Social construction theory is central to EC, although its role has not always been made explicit. As highlighted by Katriel, Philipsen (2008) was uncommonly explicit about the connection, defining speech codes as "historically situated and socially constructed systems of symbols, meanings, premises, and rules about communication conduct" (p. 4771; see also Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015). Other obvious resources for social construction theory include Galanes and Leeds-Hurwitz (2009) and Witteborn (2012). A related question would be the extent to which encoding and *entextualization* overlap (Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Androutsopoulos, 2014). Another would be the potential influence of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984) on encoding. Salö (2015) has already meshed the concept of habitus with that of entextualization.

## Mediated Interactions

Katriel highlights the overlaps between subjects studied within Language and Social Interaction (LSI) and those within Media, bringing them together more substantially than most prior work from either. Specifically, while maintaining an EC perspective, she takes up the emergence of media technologies as one appropriate topic. While similar arguments have been made periodically (including not only Katriel, as in 2004, but also others, such as Boromisza-Habashi & Parks, 2014; Carbaugh, 1988; Radford et al, 2011), many scholars still take for granted that ethnography is primarily about face-to-face interaction, while media scholars use other tools to study mediated interactions. The organizational structure of the national and international associations supports this by placing LSI and Media scholars into different divisions, thus encouraging the assumption that research in one has little relevance to the other. Oddly, there have been more incursions from media into ethnography (as with "online ethnography," described by Skågeby, 2011), than acceptance by EC scholars that mediated communication has become part of our interactions, and so must be included in our research. Clearly the line between interaction and media continues to blur. Just as conversation analysts have no difficulty in accepting Harvey Sacks' (1992) data drawn from telephone conversations, interactional scholars must include the new forms of technology that expand the ways in which people can interact across time and space. One recent example of how discourse analysts are treating media can be found in Tannen and Trester (2013).

## Overlapping Approaches

Communication scholars in EC typically cite Dell Hymes as their ancestor, and he certainly was the person who wrote the first article on the topic (Hymes, 1962). They also cite Gerry Philipsen (1992), who introduced the relevance of EC to Communication scholars, and trained many of those using the approach today. Hymes' initial intellectual and organizational partner in developing EC was John Gumperz, his colleague from 1960 to 1965 at the University of California, Berkeley (Murray, 1998, 2010). They jointly co-authored the special issue of *American Anthropologist* on EC (Gumperz & Hymes, 1964) later published in book form, frequently cited as the landmark collection (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972), both of which Duranti has termed the "manifestos" (2003, p. 327) for a new way to study language in culture. Gumperz students most often use the phrase Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS) as the cover term for their approach, and today the two strands operate independently, with cross-citation less frequent than is justified by overlap in concerns. Related studies labeled Sociolinguistics, Linguistic Anthropology, Linguistic Ethnography, or Anthropology of Communication also have frequent overlaps with EC, and should also serve as a resource, in much the same way that publications labeled Conversation Analysis, Discourse Analysis, or Pragmatics are regularly taken into account by EC scholars. (It is at least interesting that a search of the term EC on Academia.com turns up use by those self-identifying with all of these strands as well as others.) For those new to any of these topics, starting points include Gumperz (1982, 2005); Duranti (2006); Wodak, Johnstone and Kerswill (2011); Snell, Shaw and Copland (2015); Winkin (1996). Kaplan-Weinger and Ullman (2015) provide a current effort to explicitly tie Linguistic Anthropology and Sociolinguistics to EC.

## Internationalization

A clear focus on EC across various communities in the entire world, rather than just the United States, is taken for granted by all these other approaches, and for EC as Hymes introduced it (demonstrated in Bauman & Sherzer, 1974, a collection of essays by Hymes' first generation of students at the University of Pennsylvania). Clearly Katriel's own work is nearly always international, but many others today emphasize diversity among cultural groups within the US instead. Hymes' original mandate was comparative (1964, p. 9), an emphasis which is muted if all examples come from a single country. In fact, much of his interest was in *ethnology* paired with ethnography. "Ethnography has two major components: the description of ethnographic facts, and the development of general propositions about human behavior...the second really is a separate step, formally termed ethnology" (Hahn, Jorgenson & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2011, p. 148). In classes in the 1970s, Hymes used a pre-publication version of Irvine's (1979) brilliant analysis of formality and informality as a model to show what he intended by the use of ethnology: using what could be learned through the comparison of ethnographic descriptions of different groups in order to show the pattern underlying the range of possible human behaviors. Given the ease with which the new social media cross national boundaries, it seems likely that EC will become more international again if and when Katriel's suggestions about encoding and/or media are applied.

## Interdisciplinarity

Similarly, Hymes' own work was substantially interdisciplinary, to an extreme in fact, and he always assumed that a variety of disciplines had much to contribute to EC. At least while at the University of Pennsylvania, he collaborated closely with faculty based in Linguistics (John Fought), Sociology (Erving Goffman), Anthropology (Peggy Sanday), Communication (Ray Birdwhistell), Education (Shirley Brice Heath), and Folklore (John Szwed), among many others (see Leeds-Hurwitz & Sigman, 2010, for details on connections with these and others, and his own multiple appointments across departments and schools), so it should be no surprise that scholars in all these disciplines use EC today. The ICA Blue Sky Workshop entitled "Ethnographers of Communication Joining Theoretical Conversations Outside Their Subfield: Challenges and Possibilities" (Sprain, 2015) made a good start at arguing for just such interdisciplinarity, although the focus there was on moving outside EC yet staying within Communication. I think this is helpful, although not sufficiently ambitious.

## Multimodality

In discussing encoding, Katriel emphasizes the need to examine nonverbal components of behavior. This again harks back to the origins of EC. After Hymes' move from the University of California, Berkeley to the University of Pennsylvania, he was substantially influenced by Ray Birdwhistell, to the point of changing the name of the approach from the "Ethnography of Speaking" to the "Ethnography of Communication" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1984). While Katriel does not mention explicitly the current strand of research on multimodality, publications by Mondada (2014) and others seem directly relevant. Dicks et al (2011) outline the connections between multimodality and ethnography; Jones (2009) links multimodality, ethnography, and digital media.

## Meaning

Katriel emphasizes the study of meaning, and in particular the value of a semiotic approach to meaning. As something I've previously argued for (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993), obviously I agree. One caveat: as discussed in that book, it is easy to slide into extensive discussion of analytic vocabulary rather than communication behavior, and semiotic theory has much arcane vocabulary, with the result that this inclination is more often indulged than with other theoretical approaches. So it is important to emphasize ethnographic observation of what and how meanings are established and used, rather than pursuing discussions of the meanings of the analytic terms used to describe meaning. The related concept of ambiguity (Braithwaite, 1990), and the implications of the possibilities of multiple simultaneous meanings (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009) have been surprisingly often ignored.

## Applied Research

As is the case for Katriel, Hymes believed in the value of applied research (most obvious in his classroom ethnography projects, as in Hymes, 1980). Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi (2013) discuss the issues involved in bringing EC to applied research generally; Witteborn, Milburn and Ho (2013) explain how EC can be used as an applied methodology in three specific organizational, health, and institutional settings. A very different example is the work on crossing and superdiversity by linguists such as Ben Rampton (2005), which have not yet had near enough influence on research in the US. Given the current refugee crisis, it seems obvious that EC would provide a useful tool to understanding how newcomers are being accepted (or rejected), named, integrated (or not), into new communities, so presumably this strand will expand in the near future.

## Construction of Community

Katriel mentions virtual communities, but does not take the time to highlight the constructed nature of all communities (Anderson, 1983; Cohen, 1985). Technology permits virtual rather than physical communities, of course, but how community boundaries are both constructed and crossed remains a topic worthy of further investigation. Hymes always emphasized communities: "the starting point is the ethnographic analysis of the communication conduct of a community in their totality" (1964, p. 13). Even in such early comments, Hymes pointed out that there were actually often several speech communities to be found within any geographic community (p. 17). Today, others have moved this discussion much further, and *speech community* (Milburn, 2004) has morphed into the more subtle and complex *communities of practice* (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Wenger, 1998). The fluidity and multiplicity of communities of practice, as compared to the original concept of speech community, makes it particularly well suited to a consideration of the role of new media in interaction, as a wide range of norms of practice might be thus accommodated in an ethnographic description, as exemplified in Verschueren (2013). One example explicitly emphasizing the construction of community, or how community is accomplished, within EC is Boromisza-Habashi and Parks (2014). Another way to study communities is through the establishment of membership within particular groups, as in Milburn (2009).

## **Reflexivity**

Katriel specifically mentions the need to study reflexivity. There is an obvious starting point readily to hand: Fred Steier's 1991 book, *Research and Reflexivity*, has never had the impact on EC scholars that it might have, and I strongly recommend it as useful. Reflexivity is useful primarily as a research tool, involving the ability to analyze not only the behavior of others but also an ethnographer's own role in a context. One example of how the concept has been used in EC is in Carbaugh et al (2011).

## **Public/Private Dichotomy**

Katriel specifically mentions, albeit briefly, the current slippage between public and private. This dichotomy seems an obvious choice for EC researchers. As is often pointed out, much current technology leads to a blurring of the boundary between public and private. Charland (1987) considers public and private in his discussion of the construction of social identity, but there are multiple potential contexts to be examined. Gal (2002) and Rawlins (1998) provide beginning points useful to, though not drawn from, EC. One source from within EC is Fitch (1998), although the public/private dichotomy is not the primary focus, as it has been in some of her recent conference presentations.

## **Boundary Objects**

Katriel mentions Science and Technology Studies (STS), but does not highlight one of the most useful concepts to come from that research: boundary objects. These "both inhabit several intersecting social worlds...and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them" (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393) and are often used in interdisciplinary teams as a way to bridge the barriers to understanding one another. They frequently serve as a form of metacommunication, another useful concept that attracts less research than it deserves (Castor, 2007; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2013; Leichter & Castor, 2009). Groth (2012) combines boundary objects with EC in his study of international deliberations.

## **Conclusion**

This discussion has moved far from the argument for studying encoding and process that Katriel presented. Presumably this list of potential topics for exploration by ethnographers of communication arising from lesser points in Katriel could go on, but what has been mentioned so far should be sufficient for the purpose of getting others to join in the conversation. Nothing here is intended to be complete, only suggestive. In sum, I've pointed out that a focus on encoding has implications for process and social construction, and possible overlaps with entextualization and habitus; that EC includes mediated contexts as well as face-to-face interactions, and so these should more routinely be studied, and the often rigid divide between LSI and Media weakened, especially given the current role of social media in everyday life; that EC does not stand alone but shares concerns with related research strands; that EC was always designed to be international, interdisciplinary, and to take multimodality into account; that both meaning generally and semiotic theory specifically are relevant to EC; that a variety of applied topics (including organizations, health, institutions, migration, the environment) would benefit from attention by those in EC; that community as an interactional accomplishment, and thus a focus on the later concept of

community of practice, rather than the earlier concept of speech community, makes sense for EC; that reflexivity, the public/private dichotomy, and boundary objects all constitute relevant topics for EC that have been addressed only minimally to date; and that, as a general rule, emphasis on observation is to be preferred to emphasis on arcane vocabulary. Hopefully others will now pick up on any of the ideas either in Katriel's article or in this response, resulting in an expansion of EC and its application to a larger set of concepts and contexts.

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