

Symposium on Scales Language and Spatiotemporal Organisation

Wednesday, 15 November 2017

Cardiff: 12.00 p.m. – 5.15 p.m. (GMT), John Percival Building, Room 3.62
Tilburg: 13:00 – 18:15 (CET)

Join us for a one-day symposium on scales organised by the *Centre for Language and Communication Research* at Cardiff University, Wales in collaboration with the *Babylon Centre for the Study of Superdiversity* at Tilburg University, The Netherlands.

The concept of scales was introduced to sociolinguistics and critical theory to allow us to understand how social, cultural and linguistic meaning is achieved in contemporary globalised society. In the networked global village meanings conflate, overlap and erase each other, which leads to complex renegotiations of space, time and identity. Scales make such processes in globalisation visible, responding to questions of how the local and the global intersect; how mobile actors gain or lose voice as they travel; and how meaning is globally and locally organised. The symposium will feature presentations, discussions and workshops to explore the possibilities of using scale as an analytic heuristic to understand complex spatiotemporal organisation of language in contemporary societies.

Everyone is welcome!

Please rsvp to Jaspal Singh (SinghJN@cardiff.ac.uk) or Tom Bartlett (BartlettT@cardiff.ac.uk).

PROGRAMME

Cardiff time	Tilburg time	
12-1.20pm	13:00-14:20	(Re)scaling processes in nurse shift-change handover interaction <i>Virpi Yläanne, Michelle Aldridge-Waddon, Tereza Spilioti, Tom Bartlett</i> The waiting room of globalisation: interactional sociolinguistic regimes in a Flemish asylum seeking centre <i>Massimiliano Spotti</i>
1.20-1.35pm	14:20-14:35	Break
1.35-2.55pm	14:35-15:55	Representation of responses to a political crisis: a study on the UK parliament response towards the Syrian crisis <i>Yaser Altameemi</i> Parallel downscaling: Comparing bilingual news reports of the “Arab Spring” <i>Banan Assiri</i> Gender and identification in space and time: Latent and manifest chronotopes at work <i>Jenny Van der Aa</i>
2.55-3.10pm	15:55-16:10	Break
3.10-4.30pm	16:10-17:30	Overstandin: Inverting value within colonial scale systems <i>Jaspal Naveel Singh</i> Scales and more <i>Jan Blommaert</i>
4.30-4.45pm	17:30-17:45	Break
4.45-5.15pm	17:45-18:15	Open discussion with commentaries from Frances Rock and Jan Blommaert

ABSTRACTS

(Re)scaling processes in nurse shift-change handover interaction

Virpi Ylänne, Michelle Aldridge-Waddon, Tereza Spilioti, Tom Bartlett

Previous literature on nurse handovers has approached them as clearly bounded and highly structured events. Interpersonal work is seen as interfering with the primary institutional goal of information exchange and is construed as one of the main potential 'sources of failure' that result in discontinuity of care (e.g. Ye *et al.* 2007). Our approach to nurse shift-change handover discourse takes an ethnographic perspective that attempts to examine handover interaction as a situated activity, placed at the intersection of medical, organisational and interpersonal dimensions (see also e.g. Eggins and Slade 2012; 2016). In this case study, we illustrate the important interplay between discourses operating at the institutional scale and interpersonally oriented talk operating at the scales of team membership and on-ward practice.

Our study goes beyond previous research in examining not only the formal, highly-structured, and formulaic shift-change handover event (the Safer Patient Initiative, or SPI), but also pre-SPI social talk and the post-SPI one-to-one handovers within each bay. Within each of these stages of the handover process we observed highly-functional processes of scaling (e.g. Blommaert, Westinen and Leppänen 2014) as the practitioners downscaled institutional discourse to foster empathy and team-building and to facilitate daily tasks and upscaled on-ward discourse to disseminate medical and institutional knowledge and good practice.

The rescaling operations in this context include organisational – local; public – private; information-focused – person-focused, and in this paper we examine when these various rescaling processes occurred during handover, how they were indexed, and the different goals to which they were oriented.

References

- Blommaert, J., E. Westinen and S. Leppänen (2014) Further notes on sociolinguistic scales. *Tilburg Papers in Cultural Studies* 9.
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- Eggins, S. and D. Slade (2016) Contrasting discourse styles and barriers to patient participation in bedside nursing handovers. *Communication and Medicine* 13(1): 51-70.
- Ye, K., D. Taylor, J. Knott, A. Dent and C. MacBean (2007) Handover in the emergency department: Deficiencies and adverse effects. *Emergency Medicine Australasia* 19: 433-441.

The waiting room of globalisation: interactional sociolinguistic regimes in a Flemish asylum seeking centre

Massimiliano Spotti

Taking superdiversity as its point of departure, the present contribution takes you into the spaces of an asylum seeking centre in Belgian Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. From the sociolinguistic ethnographic enquiry carried out there it emerges that although falling in a discourse frame of 'supporting the bare existence of asylum applicants', the spaces of the centre are no socio-cultural and socio-linguistic vacui. Rather, at certain times of the day, these spaces come across as heavily languagised worlds inhabited by normative regimes of language use. At other times of the day, through the use of infrastructures of globalisation - like the web - these very same spaces allow for the construction of convivial fleeting encounters that grant the participants the possibility to go beyond ethnic, linguistic and religious connotations attached to the category 'asylum seeker'. The contribution concludes by advancing some considerations on the validity of the concept of integration for asylum seekers in mainstream society with conviviality as a valid alternative to the concept of social cohesion.

Representation of responses to a political crisis: a study on the UK parliament response towards the Syrian crisis

Yaser Altameemi

My doctoral research investigates the strategic use and negotiation of key signifiers such as “military action” and “intervention” at the time of the first and second UK parliamentary votes to take action in response to the Syrian crisis. The first vote, to authorise the principle of UK military action in response to the use of chemical weapons (CW) in Syria, was defeated on 29th August 2013; and the second vote, to authorise UK air strikes in response to the role of ISIL in Syria, was passed on 2nd December 2015.

The main data for the research comprises the Prime Minister’s and Leader of the Opposition’s speeches during the two parliamentary debates. I shall analyse each of these according to Fairclough & Fairclough’s (2012) practical reasoning approach to see how the speakers construct and legitimise different understandings of the key signifiers at risk through the argumentation strategies they employ and the semantic networks they establish.

By means of this approach I show that the meanings of empty signifiers do not shift through their own momentum but as a result of numerous micro-interactions in context. However, it is also the case that these micro-interactions respond to and reconstitute the wider discourses around them and in the present study I shall analyse the media construal of the situation in Syria around the time of the votes as a way of evaluating the discursive environment in which the debates took place and the ways in which the different speakers drew on aspects of the popular discourse to construe the concepts of “military action” and “intervention” according to their respective political positions. Looking at the movement between these two contexts of discourse is an issue of *scales* (Blommaert 2015).

Adopting the lens of scales I will analyse data from my PhD research to show how the different speakers “downscale” select elements of the wider public discourses and incorporate these for strategic purposes within the microculture of parliamentary parliamentary debate.

References

- Fairclough, I., and Fairclough, N. (2012) *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students*. London: Routledge.
- Blommaert, J. (2015) Chronotopes, scales, and complexity in the study of language in society. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 44:105-116.

Parallel downscaling: Comparing bilingual news reports of the “Arab Spring”

Banan Assiri

Beginning in Tunisia and spreading rapidly across Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and Syria, the wave of Arabic popular movements that became known in Western media as the ‘Arab Spring’ attracted global media interest. Besides their production and reception variation, international news media have normalising power to frame and legitimise particular social and political views. Cross-cultural comparisons of national or international news text provides an understanding of how different cultural groups ‘negotiate specific reality’ (Jiang et al. 2016). Despite that, research on reporting of the same events by the same news outlet in two languages leads to a varied and contradictory view of particular political and social actions. This of interest because it may problematize the notion that a single news source has a coherent story or stance. My study investigates the representation of social actors in the ‘Arab Spring’ in the Arabic- and English-language articles of two international news outlets: Aljazeera and BBC. The research is intended to reveal some underlying mediated ideological meanings behind the news coverage of the participants in the ‘Arab Spring’. In this talk, I will discuss how the concept of ‘downscaling’ of news audience culture may ‘read out’ in the bilingual global news and explore the notion of ‘parallel downscaling’ by investigating how discourse features are changing to index legitimacy at the different scale. Corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis (van Leeuwen 2008, Reisigl and Wodak 2009) will be adopted to triangulate the analysis of the Arabic- and English-language representations of social actors in the ‘Arab Spring’. Comparing these mainstream global media might reveal significant differences in the representation of social actors in the ‘Arab Spring’ from contrasting bilingual perspectives.

References

- Jiang, K., Barnett, G.A. and Taylor, L.D. (2016) Dynamics of culture frames in international news coverage: A semantic network analysis. *International Journal of Communication* 10(1): 3710–3736.
- Reisigl, M. and Wodak, R. (2009) The discourse-historical approach (DHA). In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (eds.) *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*. 2nd ed. London: Sage, pp. 87-121.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (2008) *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gender and identification in space and time: Latent and manifest chronotopes at work

Jenny Van der Aa

I show how Sophia, a 21-year old transgender lady produces YouTube videos on her own channel in which she discusses topics such as coming out to your parents, dating, transgender violence, make-up and so on. At several moments, e.g. in the coming-out video, she explicitly invokes specific conversations with her mother which when narratively analyzed show dramaturgic elements of a different time and space, such as voices, noises, colors and so on. What is rather drastically absent from Sophia's videos, yet always present in her ongoing changing outer appearance, is a discussion on the use of estrogen, a female hormone that is often used by male-to-female transgenders as part of their feminization process. Whereas almost all other ladies proudly feature n-month 'hormone updates', in which they describe the changes they have gone through, these are completely absent from Sophia's online appearances. Elsewhere on the internet she mentions that she in fact does use them, but does not want to discuss them. By avoiding to situate herself in this specific monthly 'hormone timespace', she is perceived as 'alternative' and 'special' by her audience.

Thus, whereas a number of studies focus on the manifest openings and closings of different scale levels with possibilities for a broad range of identifications, this case shows a more latently present type of timespace scale, a 'chronotope' (the medical aspects of (trans)gender), only observable in its contrastive absence. Thus, the openings and closings of chronotopic formations of identity are often only observable in its longer form, in its bigger context: in its longitudinality.

Overstandin: Inverting value within colonial scale systems

Jaspal Naveel Singh

Scale is an analytic and metapragmatic category that captures the imagination that contexts are hierarchically ordered and valued, i.e. some contexts are imagined to be more powerful, better, higher and longer, while others are less powerful, worse, lower and shorter (Blommaert 2007). Scale is a spatiotemporal – and thus quantitative – metaphor to qualitatively describe value and processes of evaluation in communication. Speakers' and researchers' evaluations of such hierarchically-ordered contexts are neither fixed nor universal, rather they depend on the pragmatic understanding, or active reception (Vološinov 1973), of instances of communication. This pragmatic understanding could in fact also lead someone to evaluate a particular utterance as not understandable at all and thus not powerful, irrelevant or out of reach, even though the utterance operates on a valid, high scale for the speaker. Scales can be misinterpreted; and in fact it is through misinterpretations that we can observe how scales correlate with power.

In this theoretical paper I will discuss the notion of overstandin, a post-colonial inversion of the term 'understanding', which was coined by Rastafarians in Jamaica in the 1960s (Franke 2015) and then taken up in hip hop cultures worldwide, as well as in semiotics, critical cultural theory and theology (e.g. Sykes 2001; Sullivan 2001). Overstandin explicitly conceptualises how a reader brings pragmatic understanding to a text, how she agentively fills the gaps of what is not signified in the text, how she copes with ambivalence, silence, rupture, erasure and the ineffable (Culler 1992). Overstandin thus allows for evaluations of instances of language and communication that cannot be understood due to the epistemic violence of colonial power-knowledge systems imposed on former second and third worlds. The inversion from 'under-' to 'over-' seeks to overturn the hierarchical order imposed by the colonial scale-system and its metropolitan languages (High varieties) to restore a possibility of evaluation and independent sense-making for post-colonial subjects (Slade, forthc.). In this sense, overstandin also challenges 'truths' – scientific, philological, philosophical, cultural and political ones – established in the European Enlightenment movement and exported through colonialism. Does overstandin therefore represent post-truth? If so, how is overstandin different from contemporary mainstream political populism? My talk will pose these and similar questions without answering them in any finite ways.

References

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Scales and more

Jan Blommaert

I intend to offer a brief historical review of how scale emerged in my work and how it developed as part of a larger project on language and globalization. Scale was and is necessary as a tool for identifying two elementary phenomena: one, the non-unified nature of meaning, and two, the differences in scope of distribution of Sociolinguistic patterns in globalized online-offline societies. But more is needed.