

**Language, Culture and  
Ethnography**

Michael Agar  
Presentation #2  
UCSB Theme Course  
**PRELIMINARY VERSION**

10/25/05 Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**The Next Question**

- Given an ethnographic purpose, what view of languaculture makes sense?
  
- L2, or LC2, learning for the process
  
- Translation for the product

10/25/05 Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Why Language?**

- Uniquely human design features
- Memory and imagination
- Powerful semiotic system
  - In sense of control
  - In sense of agent creativity
  - In sense of reach
  - In sense of ethno access
  - In sense of ethno result
- But not the only focus

10/25/05 Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Why Linguaculture?

- Ethnography of Speaking, Ethnoscience, Ethnomethodology
- The move to D/discourse
- Linguaculture about the competence/communicative competence gap
- El oso ni baila ni canta
- Telling lies

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Translation Metaphor

- The purpose of ethnography is to *translate*
- “Translate” here means showing how social action from one point of view makes sense from another. Language mediates
- Avoid the moral relativity trap. The Hitler example. This is about meaning-making across languacultural differences, not moral evaluation

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

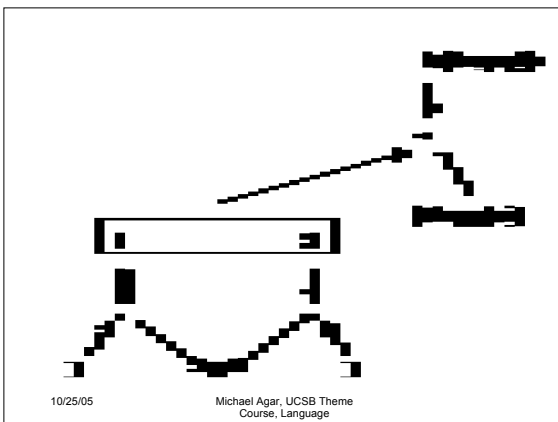
---

---

---

---

---



10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Language Learning Metaphor

- In order to translate you have to know both languacultures
- The second metaphor for language in ethnography is second language learning
- Only now I need to shift to second *languaculture* learning
- LC2 instead of L2

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## LC2 and Translation in the California Courts

- Family law and pro pers
- Language learning--Domain, order to show cause, churn the calendar
- Translation--Narrative vs. legal schema, legal info/advice, problem segments
- Applications everywhere

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Context and Meaning?

- They lost their objectification and crisp edges, because
- With a shift to LC2 as a model for ethnography, and translation as the ethnographic goal C/M pervade and inform the entire process and product
- The book should have been called *The Professional Immigrant*

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## And Then the Concepts Collapse

- By Malinowski's lights, context and meaning collapse into "context of situation"
- Not to mention American pragmatics concept of meaning as consequence of use
- Not to mention Wittgenstein's language as a form of life
- Etc

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## And Then They Expand

- Meaning and context are the master questions to show how a LC2 rich point makes sense to an LC1 audience
- The problem is, context and meaning are, for all practical purposes, infinitely expandable, especially given global focus and scope
- Where do you snip the webs of connection?

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Sample Collapse and Expansion

- Six degrees of separation, though not in the middle ages
- Levels, as in heroin epidemics
- The meaning of methadone
- Chimayó = genizaro

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Boundaries Revisited

And so this use of languaculture better specifies the ethnographic space from Presentation #1. A concern with “context” and “meaning” is specified with LC2 learning and translation.

*But C/M both relevant to both metaphors*

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## How To Think About C/M?

- Consider the old idea of topic and comment, problematic as it might be
- Let's say that in a translation “meaning” is always the topic and “context” is always the comment

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Does This Work?

Meaning and context are LC relevant names for topic and comment.  
What's meaning in one might be context in another, and vice versa

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Translation

So a translation consists of a commentary on various rich points. That commentary consists of target audience languaculture organized into topic and comment structures, where topic is the meaning and comment is the context.

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Themes

Topic/comment with frequent application for an LC1 audience is a theme for understanding of LC2 by LC1

Topic/comment with frequent application for a range of LCn with reference to LC2 is a theme of LC2 for that range.

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

And now let's look at the kind of knowledge we usually think of when we think of "E-linguistics" and its application to the ethnographic process as LC2 learning

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## SLK--Specialist's Linguistic Knowledge

SLK summarizes concepts and techniques for examining both I- and E-language that originated with sociolinguistics, ethnoscience, and ethnomethodology in the 1950s continuing up to the present.

It, like translation, blurs C/M at the outset.

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Of What Use is SLK?

- Rich points initiate an ethnographic / LC2 learning process
- See *Language Learners as Ethnographers* for an example
- SLK useful as a template to force rich points to appear and to approach their investigation
- Rich points are the pointers. Most will appear in language

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Couple of Quick Examples

- CA on crack oral history
  - Kids
  - New economic opportunity
- Language observation in the courts
  - The “pro” pro pers
- The truck transcripts
  - Profit and respect
  - The many pieces of profit

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## And IRA?

- IRA guides the pursuit of rich points into the LC2 world to figure them out
- For ethnographers, data gathered to make a case, in Toulmin's sense, and falsify, in Popper's sense, will be of many different types, sought after or stumbled upon
- Language will be the most important of all

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## C/M Only Clear At The End

- C/M will blur throughout and only take shape at the end, in the translation. The Schrödinger's Cat of languaculture
- In the flow of ethno/LC2 learning, then, what is "context" and what is "meaning" blur, just as the great fieldworker Malinowski said
- What we learn only becomes one or the other in the end, when we translate, and put one thing in "topic" and another in "comment"

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Multiple (potential) relevance of SLK

- If we think of ethnography as LC2 acquisition, and the results as translation, it is clear that SLK is relevant in multiple ways
- But it is not a *formula*; it is rather a *repertoire* occasioned by the what the ethnographic moment "affords."
- Difference between building or learning a tool and carrying it around in case you need it
- Politeness 1, 2, 3 etc.

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Let's Close Presentation #2...

- What kind of approach to languaculture makes sense for an ethnographer?
- A process model like LC2 acquisition
- A product model like translation
- Product features topic/comment structures of meaning/context
- Process features IRA where C/M blur
- Primary validity from LC aha's and use
- Different from usual "methodology"

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## ...On to Presentation #3

- The LC2 learning metaphor is ecological
- The translation metaphor is relative to source and target
- Contingencies, interdependence, indeterminacy abound, just like an ethnographic "run"
- How do we define the space?
- How do we "make our case?"
- A "new kind of science?"

10/25/05

Michael Agar, UCSB Theme  
Course, Language

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---