

# From events to assemblages

Mike Baynham  
University of Leeds

# Preamble

- “All practices emerge from entanglements between people and things.” (Bhatt 2017: 30)
- Two metaphors for theory: theory as a tool for thinking with and theory as a way of seeing.
- Theory as a space of play?

# The “New” Literacy Studies (NLS)

A reaction against universalistic claims for literacy. Key texts:

- Street (1984) *Literacy in Theory and Practice*
- Brice Heath (1983) *Ways with Words*
- Prinsloo & Breier (1996) *The Social Uses of Literacy*
- Barton & Hamilton (1998) *Local Literacies*
  
- Key constructs:
  - *Texts*
  - *Events*
  - *Practices*

# Critiques of localism in the NLS

## Limits of the Local: Brandt and Clinton (2002)

Context became associated with ethnographically-visible settings (the here-and-now), and the technology of literacy was demoted in relationship to the human agent who held power in assigning meaning to acts of literacy. But can we not recognize and theorize the transcontextual aspects of literacy without calling it decontextualized? Can we not approach literacy as a technology – and even as an agent – without falling back into the autonomous model? Can we not see the ways that literacy arises out of local, particular, situated human interactions, while also seeing how it also regularly arrives from other places – infiltrating, disjointing, and displacing local life?

( Brandt & Clinton 2002, reprinted in Prinsloo & Baynham 2013: 40)

# Community or Contact Zone? Pratt, Mezzadra & Neilson (1)

- The idea of the contact zone is intended in part to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication and culture that gets done in the academy. A couple of years ago, thinking about the linguistic theories I knew, I tried to make sense of a Utopian quality that often seemed to characterize social analyses of language by the academy. Languages were seen as living in “speech communities”, and these tended to be theorized as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members. (Pratt [1991] in Prinsloo & Baynham Vol V, 2013: 1-14)

# Community or Contact Zone? Pratt, Mezzadra & Neilson (2)

- Anyone who has used the taxi system in New York City over the past decade will know the vast diversity that exists within the labor force that drives the city's cabs.....Mathew's book is in many ways a story about borders – not only the linguistic borders that separate these workers but the social borders they routinely cross as part of their working lives, the international borders they cross to reach New York City, and the social borders that divide them from their clients and the owners from whom they lease their cabs. (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013:1)

# Transnational literacies: Warriner & Kell

- Doris Warriner has researched transnational literacies, explicitly linking her agenda to the arguments of Brandt & Clinton discussed above. The study of transnational literacies has of course to take account of, indeed be informed by, global mobilities and flows but in the current phase of the world system needs also to take account of the hardening and closing of borders which can be seen around the world, not least in the countries that surround the Mediterranean. So if we are thinking of transborder, transnational literacies we need to take into account both the dynamics of globalization and the embordering that resists it, or shall we say filters it.

# Kell: Travelling texts

Kell (2017) describes five dimensions or lenses for considering the access to and practice of literacy by migrants, asylum seekers and refugees:

- The travelling and circulating texts of migrants;
- Day to day literacy and translanguaging practices in the lives of migrants and refugees;
- The intricate ways in which the experiences and lives of migrants and refugees are bound up with formal education and the capital it represents;
- The mediation through written texts of the experience of migration itself;
- The forms of surveillance by which the movements of migrants and refugees are tracked and traced.
- To these one might add a further element:
- The ways that language and literacy are used as gatekeeping devices through language and citizenship tests to identify the “desirable” skilled and educated migrants from the “undesirable/unskilled”.

# Kell 2009 Transcontextual literacy practices

Kell's travelling texts travel within national borders:

- Kell (2009) examines of literacy activity in an ethnography of house building a South African township of Khayaalethu, identifying processes that started in Khayaalethu but went further: these included:
- Ordering building materials;
- Dealing with the consequences of building a house that was over-sized for the allocated plot, involving local meetings, meetings in the city centre;
- Recording members "activeness" to be sure they qualified to be allocated a building site;
- Writing a story that became an important element in "writing a wrong" for a disabled woman, Noma, who had been unjustly treated;
- Attempting to establish an office for the civic association which included the "occupation" of a building.

# Literacy across space and time

- .....I started with the concepts of literacy events and practices and focusing on the joins between one local and another not-local, but questioned them. In following the threads of meaning making, I moved across space and time. ( Kell 2009: 95)

# Actor Network Theory (ANT) i

- ANT is a way of understanding the organization or perhaps coordination of social and indeed natural life, including literacy. We it involves the notion of actants both human and non human. The network of actants can be visibly present, but also remote, still acting on and influencing ongoing activity. So let's illustrate the scope of ANT with a familiar : the classroom

# Who are the actants in the classroom?

Remember:

- *Actants* can be both visibly present and remote
- *Actants* can be both people and things

# Actor Network Theory (ANT) ii

- How do we “see” this densely saturated classified world? We are commonly used to black-boxing this behind-the-scenes machinery.....All classification and standardization schemes are a mixture of physical entities such as paper forms, plugs, or software instructions encoded in silicon and conventional arrangements such as speed and rhythm, dimension, and how specifications are implemented. Perhaps because of this mixture, the web of intertwined schemes can be difficult to “see”. In general, the trick is to question every apparently natural easiness in the world around us and look for the work involved in making it easy. (Bowker & Star 1997, reprinted in Prinsloo & Baynham Vol II, 2013:95)

# Assemblages: Deleuze & Guattari

- Originating in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari 2013) the notion of assemblage has been taken up by a number of researchers on language such as Pennycook (2018) and Canagarajah (2018) who both link to the concept of spatial repertoires. This is in line with the thinking of Deleuze & Guattari who evoke space in their discussion of assemblage, writing in *Mille Plateaux* : “Tout agencement est d’abord territorial” (every assemblage is first and foremost territorial).

# Assemblage/agencement: dynamic process or product? (i)

- The word assemblage is a translation from French of the word “agencement” meaning bringing elements together into a whole. It can be used in the every day world to mean for example the furnishing of a room. The concept is of bringing together disparate elements to make a whole. One of the problem with the English translation “assemblage” however is that it misses an important meaning of the French. Agencement in French can mean the end product, the whole created by assembling the parts, meaning ii) below but it also means the *dynamic process* of bringing the parts together:
- Agencement i ) action d’agencer; ii) état de ce qui est agencé

# Assemblage/agencement: dynamic process or product? (ii)

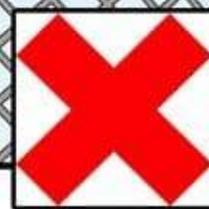
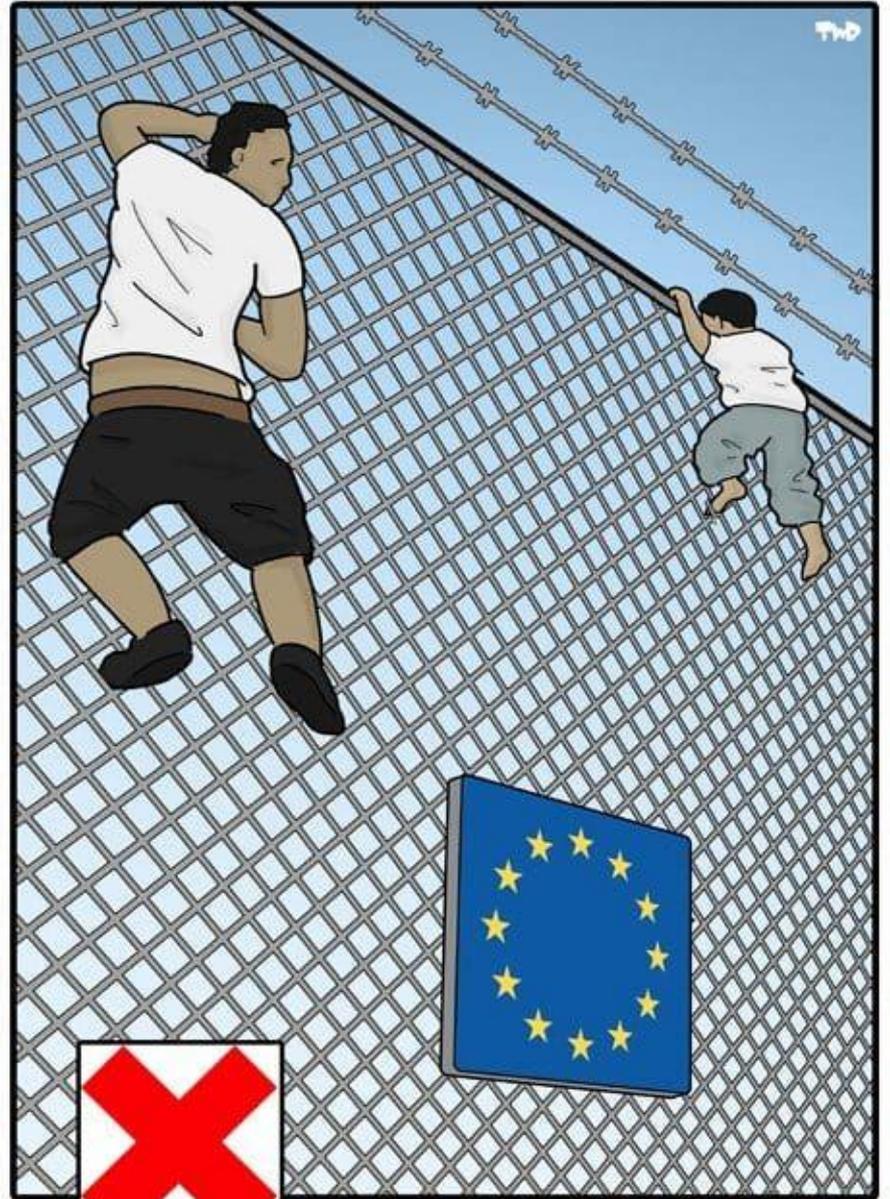
- This dynamic aspect of assemblage/ agencement is crucial, not just in the thinking of philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari, but also in the thinking of those who are trying to develop more dynamic and processual accounts of language, literacy and communication, as mentioned above Pennycook and Canagarajah but also many others, including myself. Such perspectives talk about *linguaging* or *translinguaging* to characterize this dynamic process aspect (cf the work of Garcia & Li Wei ( Garcia & Li 2014) and myself and Tong King Lee (Baynham & Lee 2019)).

# Assemblages

- The notion of *assemblage* helps to consider how diverse semiotic resources play a collaborative role as a spatial repertoire in accounting for the success of this activity, when language is not predefined as the sole, superior, or separate medium of consideration. Assemblage corrects the orientation to non-verbal resources in scholars addressing ‘multimodality’. From the perspective of assemblage, semiotic resources are not organized into separate modes.

( Canagarajah 2018)





# TLang project



Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities

- AHRC, 2014-2018 (AHRC AH/L007096/1)
- Principal Investigator: Angela Creese, University of Birmingham
- Teams in Birmingham, Cardiff, Leeds & London
- <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tlang/index.aspx>

# TLang project

- Detailed linguistic ethnographic investigations in superdiverse wards in four cities in England and Wales: Birmingham, Cardiff, Leeds and London
- The research is conducted in and beyond institutional sites in each area, across domains of:
  - Business and entrepreneurship
  - Heritage, libraries and museums
  - Sport
  - Legal advice



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# A literacy event in a contact zone

- We observed repeated interpreting events, all with a very similar structure. The rooms were not specifically designated or designed for interpreting/advocacy, typically with bare institutional tables and chairs, appropriated temporarily for the purpose at hand. Again typically, interpreter and advocate were seated on one side of the table with the client, often with a friend, relation or child, seated at the other. The client would typically arrive with a clutch of papers, often dog eared, either in a plastic bag, a wallet or folder or a shopping bag. These are the sedimented accumulation of relevant documents, containing information that may be pertinent to the claim. A proportion of time is spent fishing around in the document cache to find the relevant information. The early part of the interpreting event is typically spent establishing what claim the client wants to or can make, whether it is a new claim or there is a claim in process. If the latter the task is to establish what stage the claim is at. If there is a claim to be made, it will typically be made on-line with the advocate completing the form on a laptop, asking questions which are translated by the Klára the interpreter in the familiar three participant structure of mediated interaction.

# So what do you need help with? (1)

- K tak s čím chcete pomoci? [K so, what do you need to help with?]
- L Nó... mně sa... ja som robila. Chcela som ísť na sociálku, vlastne na podporu, ale že prišol papier, **P forty-five**, nikdo mi to nevedel vypísať, ani ja to neviem, no a do [...] jsem to vypisala a ani som to neodeslala a zastavili mi to, že mám [Well... I... I worked. I wanted to go to the benefit office, actually to the jobseekers' allowance, but I received a paper, the **P forty-five**, and no-one knew how to fill it in for me, and I don't know that either, well and [...] I filled it in, I haven't even sent it out and they stopped it because
- K **jobseekers**
- L ano [yes]

# So what do you need help with? (2)

- K vy jste so vo to, jste se přihlásila a pak vám to zastavili [you have, you have applied for it, and then they stopped it]
- L ano [yes]
- K a máte ty dopisy tady? [and do you have the letters here?]
- L ano [yes]
- K right, this lady used to work, she worked and then her job stopped, so she wanted to sign on, she started to sign at the jobcentre, claiming jobseekers' allowance, then she received P45 and I don't know whether she said she had to fill in some forms, she did not know how to fill it in properly, and then [...] jobseekers has been stopped. So she would like the help. With the jobseekers. And I asked her about the letter, if she had any paperwork on her.

# Transcontextual dimensions of the interpreting event: Phoning the helpline

Hi this is M, I'm calling from a charity in Leeds called Migrant Counsel, we support clients whose first language is not English.

*M gets through. She explains the situation based on the letter L gave her giving them her National Insurance Number, name, date of birth*

M is she single or married?

K ste vdaná [K are you married]

L single

(L understands before Klára's translation)

K single

M single

*M what day did she sign on? Which jobcentre? Right... so would that be online? She puts the phone down.*

M So, they said that because she failed to attend so we'll have to do another claim for her online. [...] again.

# Mohomadou needs a registration card

L you want (.) a **card**?

M (I' ho fat) pa- passaport [I have done a passport]

L ok let me just

M **si** ((beep)) fai la carta **si** [do the card yes]

L would you like a registration card for the UK

GT: *Vuoi una scheda di registrazione per il Regno Unito* ((beep)) [would you like to have a UK registration form ]

M si, my (like) erm residente

L ( ) resident

M (uh-huh)

L you jobseeker

M job- jobseeker si

L ah perfect

M jobseeker

L no problem lovely

M job- jobseeker

# Google translate as an actant

- L ok so I will try and explain for you ok. You can ( ) (2.0) ((beep)) you can make an application for a residence card in the UK **but** you have been jobseeking here for a very long time and that can cause problems
- GT é possibile presentare una domanda di carta di soggiorno nel Regno Unito ma se restate ricerca di (.) lavoro qui per un tempo molto lungo e che possono causare problemi
- [it is possible to make (*present* )an application for a residence card in the UK but if you keep jobseeking here for a very long time and that they can cause problems ]
- ((beep))

# Brought along documentation: hard copies of air tickets as evidence of time spent in the UK

M no my my go back erm Italia

L Ita- oh you go back?

M yes you go back Italia I come back erm

L aha:: ok a::h

M I come here back ok I come here back erm ventisette ((papers rustling)) (2.0) one second

L that's ok

M one second one second L ah more tickets let's see

(M questo [this] L ok

M I come back (Italia)

L so you come back ah in so you went M si (fifteen day)

L and then you come back in

M si L and

M come back in (you) go back Italia

L and so and then when did you come back to UK

M ( )fifteen fifteen day

L fifteen day

M si

# Light dawns: Baynham & Lee (2019)

