

BAAL 2019 Creative Inquiry and Applied Linguistics Colloquium:

Broadening the horizons beyond language

Art education as communicative repertoire:

Questions for creativity in applied linguistics

Louise Atkinson (artist-researcher) & Jessica Bradley (University of Sheffield)

Abstract

*Collaboration and co-production with creative practitioners at different stages of the research process are increasing across Applied Linguistics. **But what would a shared theory of creativity with Applied Linguistics look like in the context of co-produced research?** In this paper, we use our experiences of **research** and **public engagement** in formal and informal educational settings to explore the idea of **art education as communicative repertoire**.*

*This idea foregrounds and builds on our existing knowledge of **artmaking** with groups of participants to support non-linear processes of **visualising research**, and uses examples from projects stemming from research in **language and communication** - '**LangScape Curators**' and '**Multilingual Streets**' - which focus on young people's understandings of everyday multilingual practices using arts-based methods to synthesise and analyse linguistic landscape data (Bradley et al., 2018).*

*This use of creative methods aims to reflect **dynamic multilingual processes** through which participants draw from their communicative repertoires to communicate and make meaning. Although situated primarily at the intersection of Applied Linguistics and Modern Languages, we argue that our work also has important implications for the field of **arts education**. In theorising arts education through collaborative work within Applied Linguistics, we expand beyond this bricolage of methods towards a new **hybrid methodology**.*

*In so doing, we demonstrate new opportunities for developing and exploring research questions with participants, while **productively problematising the idea of co-production**.*

*Our use of creative inquiry in Applied Linguistics also extends to the ways in which traditional research outputs can be performed and disseminated through artistic products. **Finally, we set out some tentative points for how this creative turn might continue to develop, both methodologically and theoretically.***

Bradley, J., Moore, E., Simpson, J. & Atkinson, L. 2018. Translanguaging space and creative activity: Theorising collaborative arts-based learning. Language and Intercultural Communication, 18(1), pp.54-73.

Introduction

(LA) My name is Louise Atkinson. I'm an artist-researcher and my research is concerned with critical heritage exploring relationships between people and place through visual arts and socially engaged practice.

(JB) I am Jessica Bradley, I'm lecturer in literacies at the University of Sheffield and I'm interested in language and communication in the context of arts practice and working with young people.

Thank you to Marta Nitecka Barche and Dobrochna Futro for convening this colloquium, which is the AILA Network in Applied Linguistics colloquium. This is our third creative inquiry colloquium in at BAAL, with our first being the invited colloquium at BAAL2017 (see Bradley and Harvey, 2019 in the newly published edited book from that conference). The network seeks to provide a space for researchers and artists working collaboratively on areas related to applied linguistics.

Lou Harvey and I have started to think about how we might categorise and understand this diverse body of work which we might call 'creative inquiry and applied linguistics', while being conscious that much of this research falls across and between categories, and also moves as it develops. We conceptualised it into 3 broad categories, '*with, into, and through*' the arts, using examples from the 2017 colloquium and wider research to exemplify and also to interrogate and critique.

In our paper today we continue this critique using examples from a current research project, Multilingual Streets: Translating and Curating the Linguistic Landscape. This research takes linguistic landscapes as a starting point for exploring young people's engagement with language diversity. Creative practice is embedded in the research design, which we see as being at the intersection of language and the arts.

Context

(JB) We have been working collaboratively over a number of years, starting with outreach and widening participation work for the University of Leeds, where I (JB) worked in educational engagement in Fine Art and languages prior to my PhD and when Louise was doctoral researcher in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies. We

developed a small-scale project, LangScape Curators, based on ethnographic approaches to the linguistic landscape, through which we worked with young people to explore their understandings of everyday multilingualism. We trained the young people in 'ethnographic methods', using work including by Jan Blommaert, and the Translation and Translanguaging project for which I (JB) was doctoral researcher as a starting point. We then explored these research experiences through creative practice, including collage, creative writing and zine-making. You can read more about this process in a couple of publications listed at the end of the slides.

This extended and grew into Multilingual Streets, for which we have received funding from the AHRC's OWRI project to continue to work with young people in Sheffield and in Manchester.

More broadly this project exemplifies the research that Louise and I have been undertaking as a shared intellectual process.

Engaging with the histories and complexities of art practice in the context of collaborations with applied linguistics

You cannot simply put something new into a place. You have to absorb what you see around you, what exists on the land, and then use that knowledge along with contemporary thinking to interpret what you see (Tadao Ando)

(JB) Our paper stems from our shared concern that is both ethical and theoretical. That is, that although we can celebrate what might be considered a 'creative' turn, opening up and broadening out 'applied linguistics' to include insights and perspectives from wider disciplines, engaging with arts practitioners, we must also pay attention to the risk of reductivism and of 'atheoretical' approaches. This reductivism does not lie in the use of images and art processes in research, but in the way that the histories of these practices may not be incorporated or considered when choosing a particular media or genre to use within research in applied linguistics.

Applied Linguistics is inherently interdisciplinary. We research, to paraphrase Chris Brumfit, real-life problems of which language is a central concern. These real-life problems don't restrict themselves to the language classroom, or to education. As we have seen in the

Visual Representations of Multilingualism competition, and as we heard from Linda Persson, Elina Karadzhova and Yasmin Nicholas on Thursday during the artist q+a, artists also research and engage with real-life problems of which language is a central concern.

There are, clearly, a set of methods for researching real-life problems and language that are associated with Applied Linguistics. These are broad-ranging and diverse. They are also interdisciplinary. We can find shared connections across, for example, social anthropology, sociology, history, geography, modern languages, education and urban studies. They have long, complex and highly political histories (approaches drawing from anthropology and ethnography being clear examples, with some highly problematic foundations). Likewise, artists may draw from these disciplines, but they are also influenced and informed by the histories of material and media development, as well as dominant themes which arise from within image-making itself. For example, the Impressionists' use of ready-mixed paints in a tube enabled them to paint plein-air for the first time. Therefore we can think of Impressionism, in many ways, as developed from the introduction of new material technologies.

(LA) The impact of technology on the production and dissemination of art is also addressed in the *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production* (1936). Here, Walter Benjamin talks about how development in photography led to images of artworks being made available to wider audiences on an unprecedented scale. We no longer need to go to the 'art', we can view it and access it wherever we are and wherever we might have access to these images. He also believed that the artwork had an aura that the image couldn't replicate. These ideas are subsequently picked up by Barthes (e.g. *Camera Lucida*, 1980), who considers the photograph as a referent to the 'real' object, with the meaning and the image 'laminated' together.

We have been considering these theories within the context of the Visual Representations of Multilingualism exhibition, for which images of artworks were submitted. In some cases these were made as documentary images of larger immersive projects, where the artist is faced with the paradox of how to disseminate their work to a wider audience while, at the same time, not being completely able to capture the spirit of the artwork in its totality. This is highlighted in the example of Linda Persson's work in the exhibition and on Thursday she spoke of the experience of the community coming together in 47 degree heat to celebrate

the lighting of their works produced over a 2 year engagement period, all of which is not signified in the final photograph.

This also aligns to, for example, the 'writing culture' of anthropology (in the work of Clifford and Marcus, 1986; see also Pink, 2006) in which the fieldwork is flattened out into a simplified narrative form, for the purposes of dissemination and comprehension by audiences. These challenges ironically led to the incorporation of the visual within the presentation of ethnographic practice (for example, in the work of Sarah Pink). In later Linguistic Landscapes research we see the field extending multimodally and creatively to incorporate the sensory and the embodied (for example, Alastair Pennycook and 'smellscape', 2015).

(JB) The so-called 'co-productive' turn in research leads us again into a different paradigm. We are encouraged, by funders, to work in an inter (or trans) disciplinary way. Creative arts labs and small pots of funding are made available for researchers to spark collaborations with arts practitioners and cultural institutions. These are often explicitly tied to the 'impact' agenda, therefore suggesting that the artist's role in this is to 'disseminate' or 'communicate' complex research findings to 'the public'. This can lead to an assumption that the artworks, and by association the artist, is a bridge or mediating tool between the complex academic world and the 'real world'. However, there are many examples of researchers who are approaching this critically and productively in collaboration with artists to understand the complex nature of the processes involved in art practice and how these may link with questions within other academic disciplines. Taking Walter Benjamin's seminal piece, Kate Pahl and Steve Pool (2015) critique the 'instrumentalisation' that any kind of collaboration might bring. Likewise, the Connected Communities programme of research sought to find spaces for the open discussion of the complexities of 'co-production' (see Pool, 2018). It is therefore important to consider how we understand the role of art, and the role of the artist, in co-produced and collaborative research and, often, to advocate for structures which allow us to collaborate ethically and non-reductively.

As we have seen and heard on Thursday, many artists engage with themes of language, communication, language trauma, language loss, languages as heritage, and language as 'inbetween'. They use methods and approaches that draw from long-standing historical and political traditions in both art and linguistics. The artist speaks for their work, they have the

agency. In many ways, they are the only one who understands the particular choices they have made, drawing on the rich histories of art and their own personal experiences.

(LA) We are concerned about the potential risks of using ‘art’ in an overly simplistic, uncritical, decontextualized way to ‘visualise non-linear processes of meaning making in language’ given that the processes of artmaking are also imbued within long social and political global histories, particularly in relation to colonialism.

So our challenge, as artists and linguists working together, is to address the implications of exploring ‘heritage’ and ‘identity’, and therefore ‘language’, through artmaking and the ways in which this incorporates and critiques modernities in both local and global contexts.

Image-making is a political act. When Australia was originally colonised, images were made to document, and therefore ‘capture’ (in both senses) the landscapes. These landscapes were part of a British imaginary. They could be described as speaking to a colonial idea of what Australia was and could be for the new settlers. Often the indigenous people living in these landscapes were erased, or used as passive framing devices (Hoorn, 2014). These images were presented as depictions of the landscape rather than as propaganda, therefore suggesting an element of veracity. Similarly, literary scholar Tom Lynch describes what he calls the ideological concept of the ‘nothing but’ construction in the context of settler-colonial literature (2014). This speaks to a desire by those colonising to validate their actions. For example, Joseph Lycett, a forger (and then illustrator and artist) was sent to Australia and created images of the Australian landscape, which are seen to inform and inspire later artists (Taylor, 1992). Jeanette Hoorn states:

In Lycett’s ‘Views in Australia’ Europeans are seen to be in harmony with a fertile land, a land which has been ordered by them and in which they are able to experience leisure. (Hoorn, 2014).

By not paying attention to the ways that images work, there is the potential to unwittingly reproduce these violences. However, art is also able to disrupt these deeply entrenched and traumatic historical violences, as Laura Fisher argues, with the art/ethnography binary now working to shift power.

Indeed, the very realm of 'Art', and the very identity of 'Artist' have come to be politicized and treated as sites of Indigenous activism and advocacy in the Aboriginal art world'. (Fisher, 2012:252).

(JB) This brings us to the research we want to present today and our main question of *what would a shared theory of creativity with Applied Linguistics look like in the context of co-produced research?*

Multilingual Streets as a space for collaborative theory building

(JB) Multilingual Streets takes as its starting point and focus the 'Linguistic Landscape'. Through a series of research workshops, underpinned by theories of collaborative ethnography and participatory research (e.g. Lassiter, 2005; Bell & Pahl, 2017) young people work to research the landscapes of different areas of the city through using observation, walking, drawing, photography, interviews and fieldnotes. They then explore their 'data' through a series of creative workshops, led by artists. The project takes place in Sheffield and Manchester, and today we will talk about the Manchester workshops.

In June and July this year we worked with over 160 Year 9 pupils (age 13-14) to explore the area of Rusholme, just a mile south of where we are now. We worked with the University of Manchester, a local secondary school for boys and The Whitworth Gallery. The vast majority of the young people we are working with speak a number of languages, with many having complex migration trajectories. The focus of our research with the young people in 'language', using 'linguistic landscapes' as a way in and because it allows us to extend beyond what might be taught in a modern languages classroom about 'language' and 'multilingualism'. We introduced art education into programme in the following ways:

- (LA) We incorporated the manual collection of scripts, signs and images, framing these as 'drawing' rather than 'writing' to encourage the collection of unfamiliar scripts by concentrating on letter forms. This took place during a fieldwork 'walk' around Rusholme during which the young people were using methods from ethnographic linguistic landscaping.
- We embedded opportunities for the young people to not just 'use' creative methods but to explore and reflect on how art embodies and disseminates the research undertaken in new ways.

- We used non-traditional art materials, including tape and coloured vinyl to disrupt the young people's ideas of how art is made.
- We made art in the gallery setting - in The Whitworth Gallery - allowing the young people to become exposed to other artworks and techniques, situating their practices within the context of the collection.
- We are also incorporating the young people's research into artistic products, for example through digital vector images, which can then be scaled to any size and presented as a zine or as a large collaborative banner for display in the gallery. We are also exploring how we could reinsert these into the context of the linguistic landscape, for example as a billboard or series of lamp-post banners.

(JB) Working in this way enables us to foreground the possibilities of linguistic landscapes, ethnography and collaborative research, through engaging with arts practice and art history. We see the affordances of this in terms of going beyond the idea of the arts informing language education or creative methods serving as a tool for language pedagogy. Instead, we are able to disrupt what has the potential to be an instrumental way of working to consider how language-focused research can inform and theorise arts education. In this way it becomes non-linear, an iterative process, and dialogic. But this is only possible through working collaboratively and through having spaces for this kind of disruptive and productive research.

(LA) Our project is still in its infancy and this is one of the first opportunities we have had to expand on our ideas of using the artworks beyond a representation of what the pupils have learned or as a process for generating data. So we are bringing it back into the realm of art (the gallery). We see possibilities for expansion in terms of linking the linguistic landscapes research and the artworks produced by the young people more directly to gallery collections. This also then allows for an exploration of art history as social history by the young people, in relation to their own cultural experiences and migration trajectories. Those familiar with the UK education system will know that art history, as with many creative subjects, is increasingly marginalised. This work enables us to engage across the curriculum with art and creativity as a method for addressing broader questions.

So we are working towards the following as we continue our Multilingual Streets project and work with young people and cultural institutions in Sheffield and Manchester:

- Explicitly incorporating objects from the collection, especially those with a shared heritage of the languages spoken and collected (we are doing this for an ESRC-sponsored public engagement event around the Visual Representations of Multilingualism exhibition in November 2019, working with Sheffield Museums and linking up with the MakeY project, an early years literacies project led by Jackie Marsh).
- Finding more time / space for teaching and learning about the histories of specific media / genre used, for example with collage as historically subversive / disruptive as opposed to solely 'accessible' (second phase project over a longer period of time and working with art teachers).
- Allowing more opportunities to experiment with different art forms and upskilling in new technologies.

Implications for (art) education (and applied linguistics)

(JB) So, in conclusion, we want to now consider the implications of applied linguistics-based research which engages collaboratively with arts practice and arts history.

- First, it provides opportunities for interdisciplinary and collaborative practice with young people, disrupting disciplinary boundaries between languages and the arts.
- Second, it explores how art processes function as research, introducing young pupil to the concept of art practice as research.
- Third, it allows young people to investigate how artists' work is contextualised within an artistic tradition.
- Fourth, it foregrounds the affordances of the arts, for example in understanding more about how art links to other subjects and forms of visual culture ie graphic design, architecture.

The linguistic landscape provides the stimulus for this.

The implications for art education through creating a shared theory of creativity and applied linguistics are inherent in the ways that art practice is used to both generate and embody research findings, representing both the process and outcomes of research questions.

Through approaching art at all levels as a tool for problem solving, artmaking is presented and understood as operating as a form of research rather than purely for communication,

dissemination or impact. These ideas also presuppose a synthesising and analysing of embodied, tacit, and learned knowledges (Atkinson, 2019).

The implications for the diverse field of applied linguistics can be understood through the contribution methodologically to the study of linguistic landscapes, through the bringing together of different voices and lived experiences of the young people, which allows us to understand young people's understandings of multilingualism in ways that cannot be elicited through more traditional methods such as interviews.

A shared theory encourages interdisciplinary and / or collaborative practice, but at a level beyond bricolage, whereby both disciplines are theorised equally and transformed by the other, as opposed to the risk of uncritical borrowing and decontextualisation (see Bradley and Atkinson, 2020).

Thank you for listening.

Project links

British Association for Applied Linguistics 'Visual Representations of Multilingualism' competition and exhibition: <https://www.baal.org.uk/2019/06/28/4163/> and <https://medium.com/soereseach/winners-announced-for-the-visual-representations-of-multilingualism-competition-801e8f66f3d4>.

Multilingual Streets: Translating and Curating the Linguistic Landscape (PI Jessica Bradley, AHRC/OWRI): <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/education/research/projects/multilingualstreets>

Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities (PI Angela Creese, AHRC): www.tlang.org.uk

References

Atkinson, L. 2019. *Situating Practices Exhibition*. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield.

Barthes, R. 1980. *Camera Lucida*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Bell, D.M. & Pahl, K. 2017. Co-production: Towards a utopian approach. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 21(1), pp. 105-117.

Benjamin, W. 1936/2008. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production*, translated by J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin Books)

Bradley, J. & Atkinson, L. (2019, forthcoming). Translanguaging and bricolage: Meaning making and collaborative ethnography in community arts. In E. Moore, J. Bradley & J. Simpson (Eds). *Translanguaging as transformation: The collaborative construction of new linguistic realities*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Bradley, J. & Harvey, L. forthcoming, 2019. Creative Inquiry in Applied Linguistics: Language, Communication and the Arts. In C. Wright, L. Harvey & J. Simpson (eds.) *Voices and Practices in Applied Linguistics*. York: White Rose Publishing.

Bradley J, Moore E, Simpson J & Atkinson L (2018) Translanguaging space and creative activity : theorising collaborative arts-based learning. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 18(1), 54-73.

Clifford, J. & Marcus, G. 1986. *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fisher, L. 2012. The Art/Ethnography Binary: Post-colonial tensions within the field of Australian Aboriginal Art. *Cultural Sociology*, 6(2), pp. 251-270.

Hoorn, J. 2014. Joseph Lycett: the pastoral landscape in early colonial Australia. *Art Bulletin of Victoria*, 26. [Online]. Available from: https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/journal_edition/edition-26/. [Last accessed 4 September 2019].

Lassiter, L.E. 2005. *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lynch, T. 2014. "Nothing but land": Women's Narratives, Gardens, and the Settler-Colonial Imaginary in the US West and Australian Outback. *Western American Literature*, 48(4), pp.374-399.

Pennycook, A. 2015. Making scents of the landscape. *Linguistic Landscape*, 1(3), pp.191-212.

Pink, S. 2006. *The Future of Visual Anthropology: Engaging the Senses*. London: Routledge.

Pool, S. 2018. *Everything and nothing is up for grabs: Using artistic methods within participatory research*. Bristol: Connected Communities Foundation Series.

Pool, S. & Pahl, K. 2015. The work of art in the age of mechanical co-production. In O'Brian, D. & Matthews, P. (Eds), *After Urban Regeneration: Communities, Policy and Place*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 79-94.

Taylor, K. 1992. A symbolic Australian landscape: Images in writing and painting. *Landscape Journal*, (11) 2, pp.127-143.