

ARTICLE

Ethnography and Modern Languages

Naomi Wells¹, Charles Forsdick², Jessica Bradley³, Charles Burdett⁴, Jennifer Burns⁵, Marion Demossier⁶, Margaret Hills de Zárate⁷, Saskia Huc-Hepher⁸, Shirley Jordan⁹, Thea Pitman¹⁰ and Georgia Wall⁵

¹ School of Advanced Study, University of London, GB

² University of Liverpool, GB

³ Leeds Trinity University, GB

⁴ Durham University, GB

⁵ University of Warwick, GB

⁶ University of Southampton, GB

⁷ Queen Margaret University, GB

⁸ University of Westminster, GB

⁹ Newcastle University, GB

¹⁰ University of Leeds, GB

Corresponding author: Naomi Wells (naomi.wells@sas.ac.uk)

While rarely explicitly recognized in our disciplinary frameworks, the openness and curiosity on which Modern Languages in the UK is founded are, in many ways, ethnographic impulses. Ethnographic theories and practices can be transformative in relation to the undergraduate curriculum, providing an unparalleled model for experiential and holistic approaches to language and cultural learning. As a form of emplaced and embodied knowledge production, ethnography promotes greater reflexivity on our geographical and historical locations as researchers, and on the languages and cultures through which we engage. An ethnographic sensitivity encourages an openness to less hierarchical and hegemonic forms of knowledge, particularly when consciously seeking to invert the traditional colonial ethnographic project and envision instead more participatory and collaborative models of engagement. Modern Languages scholars are at the same time ideally placed to challenge a monolingual mindset and an insensitivity to language-related questions in existing ethnographic research located in cognate disciplines. For Modern Languages to embrace ethnography with credibility, we propose a series of recommendations to mobilize these new research and professional agendas.¹

¹ In order to ensure transparency in the development of this document, it arose from a Translating Cultures and Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community (School of Advanced Study) workshop hosted at the Institute of Modern Languages Research in November 2017 and the ideas within are consequently indebted to all those who contributed to the day (see Wells for details of all of the speakers at the event, in addition to F. Carpenedo, B. Spadaro and G. Wall who took detailed notes). An initial document was subsequently drafted by N. Wells and C. Forsdick, and circulated to all speakers and attendees for further comment. The authors listed alphabetically here are those who contributed with valuable additional responses, suggestions and comments and who subsequently were actively consulted and involved in producing the final version.

Introduction

There is not simply one corner of Modern Languages that may be seen as “ethnographic”. Far from being restricted to a quarantined space in our disciplinary configurations, ethnography has long played a catalytic and even definitional role in the study of languages and cultures, not least in informing the outsider perspective – *le regard de l'étranger* or *Außenseiterperspektive* – on which the field often depends.² Although there is no explicit reference to ethnography in key documents such as the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) benchmarking statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies the openness and curiosity on which Modern Languages is founded are, in many ways, ethnographic impulses. It is important, however, to distinguish between the intersection of ethnography and Modern Languages, an important point of cross-disciplinary rendez-vous, and a more widespread ethnographic sensitivity by which Modern Languages is informed. At the same time, there is a need to recognize disciplinary counterflows, as Modern Languages – with its critique of linguistic indifference and advocacy for greater sensitivity to language – may be seen to feed new debates in ethnography itself.

As Modern Languages reflects on the need for disciplinary coherence and renewal, ethnographic theories and practices have a transformative potential in relation to how we conceptualize our approaches to languages and cultures in research and teaching across Higher Education and beyond. Equally, at a time when Modern Languages urgently needs to articulate more visibly its identity and rationale, providing not least a clearer sense of what Mary Louise Pratt has called a “public idea about language” which goes beyond an instrumental focus on language skills, ethnographic theory and practice can allow us to more explicitly interrogate and communicate what we know and do. There is now an opportunity to revisit and reassert the centrality of efforts over the past three decades to understand the role of the ethnographic in Modern Languages. With the AHRC-funded “Translating Cultures” theme and the Open World Research Initiative (AHRC) setting new agendas in the field, the moment is propitious for such a reassessment. In response to recent debates and discussions on the subject, we propose the following as ways in which an engagement with ethnographic practices and theories can be transformative in relation to how we approach Modern Languages teaching, research and wider engagement, as well as how such approaches can be more effectively supported within and across institutions.

1. Ethnography and the Undergraduate Curriculum

The transformative potential of ethnographic practices and theories in relation to the undergraduate curriculum has been highlighted across a series of projects, most notably the ESRC-funded Language Learners as Ethnographers project from the 1990s (Roberts et al.) and the more recent HEA-funded Ethnographic Encounters project (University of Southampton). The legacy of these projects, including specifically designed teaching materials delivered to Modern Languages departments across the UK, provides an underexploited wealth of experiences and resources, and a much-needed model for effectively equipping students with the intercultural and cross-language competencies and sensitivities that lie at the core of Modern Languages study. While many of the competencies and skills developed through such research are already latent within the Modern Languages curriculum, a more explicit incorporation of ethnographic theory and practice heightens students' awareness and ability to communicate what they know and do already. In common with anthropologists, Modern Languages

² See Kelly. It is arguable that this issue is foundational to Modern Languages in a recognizable modern form. The Leathes Report of 1918 was one of the first calls for the field to be staffed by specialists trained in the UK. On the importance of this report, see Bayley and Wygant. Its impact was also discussed at a recent AHRC/British Academy event (“The Leathes report at 100: reassessing a vision for languages”, 25 May 2018).

students are engaged in the “translation of cultural language” (Leach 142), aiming to learn not just how to speak or understand isolated words or sentences, but to negotiate translated worlds of thought and meaning (Asad, “Cultural Translation”; Jordan, “Ethnographic Encounters”). Language learning can be understood as a conscious orientation towards the words and modes of thought of others (Harvey), with ethnographic approaches allowing students to reflect more explicitly on what it means to inhabit and negotiate the border territories of languages and cultures.

As a search for “meaning in context” rather than objective “truths” (Wall 16), in ethnographic research students must draw on and develop their skills of observing, listening, decoding and writing. Through these skills they are able to make connections between more textual or classroom-based studies of grammar, translation, film or literature, for example, and the lived experiences and social, cultural and linguistic practices of individuals embedded within wider communities and social structures (Roberts et al. 79–80). With a focus on language as practised rather than “owned” by specific nation-states, the experiential learning experience of ethnographic research allows students to see themselves as resourceful speakers able to draw strategically and creatively on their linguistic repertoires in response to the multilingual environments in which they live, study and work (García and Li). Equally, through its emphasis on language as performed in context, ethnography draws students’ attention to language as an embodied social practice which is interwoven with other forms of non-verbal, visual and sensory practices and experiences (Finnegan; Pennycook, “Translanguaging”; Taylor). Ethnographic research thus provides a model for holistically integrating language and cultural learning, while at the same time encouraging a more profound understanding of culture, not as a set of listed customs or facts about a country or people, but as a more complex and elusive “system of meanings which informs who we are and what we think and do” (Demossier et al. [16]).

In line with current efforts to “transnationalize” the Modern Languages curriculum (Burdett; *Transnationalizing Modern Languages*), the aim of ethnographic research is not to seek out “typical” cases which can be used to generalize about whole national or ethnic communities, but to identify instead “theoretically ‘telling’ cases” (Rampton et al. 16). Through ethnography, students are encouraged to reflect on and value the singularity of individual experiences and repertoires and to understand what totalizing attempts to define a whole “national” language, culture or community may neglect or obscure (Jordan, “Writing the Other” 48). In this sense, ethnography can be understood as counter-hegemonic, in that it seeks to dismantle generalizations and to construct new understandings which differ from established assumptions (Blommaert 7; Creese et al. 128). It can draw attention to and challenge ways in which essentialized views of difference and otherness are constructed through everyday social, linguistic and cultural practices (see, for example, Kleinman). Ethnography can thus engender a critical understanding of the world where students live, and in its socially and politically engaged forms (Conteh) can encourage students to view themselves as vital actors in a world in which questions of cultural and linguistic difference and mediation are central to global issues and conflicts.

Reconceptualized as field researchers, students can develop a powerful sense of ownership over original research conducted as a form of fieldwork both locally and abroad. The Year Abroad, in particular, offers an environment that can closely resemble the intersubjective experiences and encounters of ethnographic fieldwork, particularly when students are encouraged and motivated to engage closely with local cultures and communities. Rather than a “gap year” pursuit or an ideologically questionable search for a more “authentic” cultural or linguistic experience, the Year Abroad should be understood as valuing emplaced and embodied forms of language and cultural learning which are less easily replicated in

the student's home context. Equally, given the urgent and ongoing need to communicate the centrality of the Year Abroad to the Modern Languages programme and to ensure it is embedded within "a solid intellectual project" (Demossier et al. [5]), ethnographic projects are an ideal opportunity to make more visible and explicit the experiences and competencies developed and gained. These encompass a much broader set of cognitive and affective competencies that language learners aim to acquire and practice, which go beyond an instrumental focus on language skills or viewing the learner as merely an "unsuccessful imitator of a native speaker" (Roberts et al. 239).

In ethnography, the position of "learner" is understood as not a weakness but as central to the process of knowledge gathering (Blommaert; Fabian). This conscious stance as a "learner" is also connected to forms of reflexivity and self-scrutiny, which can help promote empathetic understandings of both the self and others, highlighting the affective competencies that conscious ethnographic practices can engender (Jordan, "Ethnographic Encounters" 107). In particular, through its aim to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange (Mehan), ethnography can encourage students to critically examine and make strange their own cultural practices and interpretative systems, particularly when forms of "home ethnography" are formally incorporated into the curriculum. In sum, ethnography "involves the whole person" (Jordan, "Writing the Other" 41), providing an unparalleled model for experiential and holistic language and cultural learning which prepares students for the vital task of mediating between worlds of meaning, thought and practice (Demossier et al.).

2. Ethnography as a Transformative and Transdisciplinary Research Praxis

While ethnography (and in particular fieldwork-based research) is often reduced merely to a method, when understood as a broader perspective and practice (Blommaert; Blommaert and Jie) it can be a transformative praxis in relation to how we understand our own positionality as researchers, teachers and learners. Ethnography is a unique form of transdisciplinary and hybrid knowledge production which confronts complexity and challenges knowledge fragmentation and disciplinary silos. This transdisciplinarity derives from a focus on the context-specific negotiation of knowledge and intersubjectivity (Lawrence; Madden), which requires researchers to interrogate and understand how our own experiences and characteristics shape our interactions and understandings.

The emplaced and embodied encounters and experiences that define ethnographic research thus require us to place our own biographies and bodies into critical dialogue (Puri), which for Modern Languages scholars can encourage greater reflexivity on our geographical and historical locations, and on the languages and cultures through which we engage.³ More than those in many other disciplines, Modern Linguists have a particularly embodied and voiced relationship to their objects of study and to the ways in which they approach these. While remaining acutely aware of our geographical, linguistic and cultural moorings in the UK, the aim for both learners and researchers to experience a level of embodied "immersion" in the languages and cultures we study speaks to our hybrid and shifting stance as both insider and outsider which underlies ethnographic research (Mullings). By intentionally occupying this border territory of "inbetweenness", we are encouraged to reflect not only on the language and culture of study, but also on our own linguistic and cultural worlds, and our practices of mediation and translation.

Modern Linguists thus operate transculturally as "professional strangers" (Agar), privileging certain forms of comparativism in their analyses of culture and language. The history of

³ In relation to French Studies, see, for example, Forsdick and Milne for partly autobiographical reflections on the insights generated by the (ethnographic) distance of Modern Linguists trained in the UK.

Modern Languages in the English-speaking world has, for instance, a unique configuration and remains quite separate from disciplinary developments in Europe. Work conducted by US-based researchers Susan Carol Rogers and Laurence Wylie in rural France had an influential and reciprocal role in shaping ethnographic practice in France itself, impacting in this way on “anthropology at home” as well in the society studied.⁴ Equally, ethnographic engagement permits a searching reflection on the relationship of Modern Languages to place and time. Although the subfields of Modern Languages historically have often been shaped by implicit monolingualism (Gramling) and methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Schiller), ethnography suggests alternative approaches, allowing more nuanced understandings of the differing scales and interrelationships of the local and the transnational. Modern Languages has regularly adopted methods and forms of experimental fieldwork – *flânerie*, microspeciation (Cronin, *Expanding World*), microhistory, “thick description” (Geertz) – which are indebted to ethnography. Such methods also highlight the importance of close attention to place and the concrete spaces in and through which people move, live and interact. Through its focus on locally situated practices, an ethnographic sensitivity reminds us that language learning is about acquiring the skills to “speak locally”; not by “passing as a native speaker” but by understanding how our ability to speak and act is dependent on a critical understanding of the specific context and associated genres, styles and discourses (Pennycook, *Unexpected Places* 100).

At the same time, while ethnography allows us to reflect more explicitly on language as a form of embodied practice and knowledge through which we engage, it can also contribute to a decentring of conventional understandings of language as we consider how – in phenomena such as translanguaging – it intersects with other embodied practices and modes (Blackledge and Creese; Pennycook, “Translanguaging”; Rymes). Despite common external perceptions that Modern Languages specialists “only focus on words”, visual and, increasingly, material culture are central to the curriculum and our research. Ethnographic approaches, particularly those that emphasize the sensory (Pink), encourage a quality of looking, listening, tasting, smelling and touching that expands the forms of close reading on which Modern Languages has traditionally relied, simultaneously suggesting an emphasis on temporality that privileges slowness as a mode of knowledge (Orr). Such approaches also open up possibilities for creativity, associated with imaginative ethnography (*Centre for Imaginative Ethnography*) and the novel forms of engagement with the everyday outlined by ethnographically informed authors such as Georges Perec (Phillips).

Ethnographic sensitivity has long been central to the study of literary texts in Modern Languages, ranging from Early Modern and Enlightenment material (Montaigne, Montesquieu) to the work of modern and contemporary authors (Dadié, Deledda, N. Ginzburg, C. Levi, Segalen, Perec, Verga), and revealing the extent to which ethnography extends beyond *le regard de l'étranger* cited at the opening of this article and intersects with debates between literature and anthropology.⁵ Such an approach has also underpinned the rapid emergence of travel writing as a legitimate area for teaching and research in the field (Forsdick, *Travel*; Lindsay; Pitman). Textual approaches such as close reading encourage a similar receptiveness and close engagement, while literary and ethnographic approaches share an emphasis on representations and narratives that “betray[s] the blind spots of many a macro-narrative”

⁴ On ‘reciprocal anthropology’ and the role of ‘outside observers’ in anthropological practice, see Raulin and Rogers.

⁵ This list is not intended to be exhaustive and it intentionally references largely canonical authors recognizable as belonging to the traditional Modern Languages curriculum in order to highlight continuities alongside our proposals for future transformations of the discipline. We acknowledge in particular the dominance of French, and to a lesser extent Italian, authors which reflects both the areas of expertise of many of the authors of this piece, but in the French case also an undeniably strong tradition of dialogue between literature and ethnography as explored in Debaene.

(Castillo and Puri 8). This is not, however, to propose a simplistic “world/society as text” view of ethnography, nor to attempt to collapse one into the other, ignoring the critical and productive tensions between the two in relation to how they approach the representation and interpretation of humankind – as suggested in literary representations of ethnography such as Borges’s short story “El etnógrafo”.⁶ At the same time, such tensions have in the past and present often been reduced to territorial disputes (Debaene), constructing unproductive oppositions within and across the Humanities and Social Sciences. In this sense, ethnography is not intended to displace Literary or Cultural Studies within Modern Languages, but rather to suggest that such an engagement can encourage us to rethink how we approach and bridge the divisions between canonical and more “everyday” forms of cultural practice and production. While the Cultural Studies turn in Modern Languages broadened the study of cultural production, most notably in relation to film studies,⁷ it remains primarily limited to more easily exportable forms of print and film rather than more ephemeral forms of performance which require us to travel to them (Puri 40). Ethnographic approaches can challenge the continued schism between literary and oral traditions (Taylor), and a model of language and culture centred on written texts rather than the full range and entanglements of written, oral, visual and multisensory forms (Finnegan).

A greater emphasis on the “ordinariness” of culture (Williams) allows for further reflection on how cultural texts are connected to specific places and embedded within everyday practices. Such an approach provides an opportunity to return more meaningfully to the social and political dimensions of Cultural Studies as it emerged most notably in the work of Stuart Hall (Hall et al.), but which is in danger of being diluted to merely the study of cultural texts. As Hall recognized, there remains in Cultural Studies an irresolvable tension between theoretical and political questions, and a need to avoid “substituting intellectual work for politics” (Hall 274). At a time, however, when the impact agenda and the Global Challenges Research Fund ask us to engage with the major social and political challenges of our time, a bridging of ethnographic and Cultural Studies theory and practice has the potential to go beyond reductionist or instrumental approaches. Sharing “an ontological commitment to human beings as cultural creatures” (Demossier et al. [16]), ethnographic approaches can provide those with expertise on forms of cultural production and representation with models of meaningful and collaborative interventions “in a world in which it would make some difference” (Hall 274).

A more expansive definition of cultural production is also necessitated by technological developments and the growth of digital culture (Appadurai; Taylor and Pitman). The evolving methods and current debates surrounding forms of digital and internet ethnography (Miller and Slater; Pink et al.), or netnography (Kozinets), encourage meaningful and richly contextualized modes of engagement with forms of digital culture. At the same time, they are an underexplored area for Modern Languages scholars who are ideally placed to develop approaches to the digital that are more sensitive to questions of linguistic, cultural and geographical heterogeneity (Pitman and Taylor).⁸ More widely, while Modern Languages can undoubtedly learn from other disciplines where ethnographic research has a more established presence, we have an equally important contribution to make, particularly in relation to challenging both a monolingual mindset and a lack of sensitivity to language-related questions.

⁶ Krebs suggests that this and another of Borges’s stories arose from his adversarial encounters with the anthropologist Alfred Métraux. At the same time, Krebs highlights how in practice Borges’s and Métraux’s writings sat in productive dialogue alongside each other in the Argentine literary journal *Sur*. He also notes that Métraux brought fiction and poetry with him on his ethnographic journeys to help him frame and process his observations.

⁷ See, for example, the development of Italian Studies in the UK as traced in Brook et al., or changes to the pedagogical canon in Spanish degrees analysed in Davis.

⁸ See, for example, Holmes and Huc-Hepher for examples of Modern Languages research on digital culture that draw on ethnographic theory and methods.

Even in research on multilingualism, where ethnographic approaches are common, Piller highlights the absence of citations to work in languages other than English and suggests that non-language specific linguistics risks equating “language” with “English”. Equally, while anthropology has paid attention to the power of words in writing ethnographies (Clifford and Marcus), attention to movements across languages has been “sporadic and fragmented” (Jordan, “Ethnographic Encounters” 100). There have been more recent attempts to make visible language-related issues, such as the use of translators or language-learning experiences in anthropological research and writing (see for example Gibb and Danero Iglesias; Tremlett). However, Modern Languages has remained largely invisible and seemingly failed to capitalize on the opportunity to share our own unique expertise on the subjects of working across multiple languages in the analysis of cultural texts and materials.⁹

Equally, our commitment to “knowing languages and knowing the world through language” (Pratt 112) and to crossing first hand “the language wall” (Anderson 131), rather than relying on intermediaries to do the language-related labour of translation and mediation, makes us ideally suited to developing rich forms of embodied knowledge which entail close collaborations with those who identify with the languages and cultures on and with which we research. Research such as this in collective teams of researchers (in parallel to common practice in Linguistics) might indeed be a factor of differentiation between Modern Languages and ethnography.¹⁰ When confronted with a potentially overwhelming assemblage of textual, spoken and visual materials that constitute the “data” of ethnographic research and which require a bricolage of approaches (Blommaert and Jie; Rampton et al.), Modern Languages researchers are uniquely suited to drawing on and remaining open to a wide range of techniques and methods in their analyses. As interdisciplinarity comes increasingly to the fore in ethnographic and wider research agendas, Modern Languages researchers can make a leading contribution, trained as they are in moving with relative ease, for example, “from language learning to ... the close reading of Zola to contemporary discussions of ethnicity” (Demossier et al. [12]). While the “bricoleur” identity that defines Modern Linguists is frequently still felt and perceived as a weakness through its lack of translatability to other disciplinary areas and academic contexts, ethnographic research highlights the profound and wide-ranging forms of transdisciplinary knowledge that Modern Languages researchers are uniquely positioned to lead in developing and advancing.

3. Ethnographic Ethics, Engagement and Decolonizing Modern Languages

Ethnographic models of research productively blur the boundaries between academics and wider publics, by placing teachers and researchers into closer intersubjective encounters which allow for the mutual and reciprocal sharing of expertise in the collaborative process of knowledge production (Lassiter). In this sense, ethnography is outgoing and consistent with the current emphasis on creating meaningful bridges between academia and the rest of the world. Bringing an ethnographic sensitivity to these engagements can encourage a greater humility and receptivity to less hierarchical and canonical forms of knowledge, and allow us to envision more participatory and collaborative models of engagement, both with those communities we research and in relation to our wider societal impact. Ethnography thus

⁹ While not necessarily focused specifically on ethnography, the AHRC Listening Zones project does, however, offer a model for bringing languages research to bear on development work and for highlighting the need for greater attention to language issues within NGOs (University of Reading).

¹⁰ Anthropologists often work on their own in the field rather than as part of a team, except in the case of pluridisciplinary teams in the French context in the 1960s and 1970s. For an example of these collective undertakings, see the *enquête pluridisciplinaire de Pont-Croix*, a major project in the commune of Plouzévet in Finistère, Brittany, which has attracted significant attention in Modern Languages (see Forsdick, “Edgar Morin”, “Revisiting Plouzévet”; Rigby).

requires us to reflect on the products of our research in relation to how we write about (and potentially how we write with) those we study, and how we graphically represent the multi-sensory engagements of ethnographic research (O'Dell and Willim). This can also encourage a greater creativity in relation to how we might reimagine the objects – and traditional outputs – of academic research to incorporate the visual, the audible and the more broadly sensory, for instance through artistic and creative collaborations that go beyond authoritative textual representations and have the potential to engage wider publics.¹¹

Modern Languages has long been associated with a “chronic extroversion” (Cronin, *Across the Lines*), through an isolated focus on a specific “elsewhere” often confined to a single national territory. This has contributed to our relative invisibility in domestic contexts, and a failure to reflect explicitly on the entanglements between the *here* and *there* in both how and what we research. In this sense, the ethnographic work of “translating cultures” (Rubel and Rosman) can allow us to see our own cultures as objects of curiosity and our immediate multilingual environments as opportunities to envision new forms of local engagement. Equally, the ethnographic focus on local and enduring engagements with communities encourages us to challenge globalizing discourses, with knowledge of multiple languages understood not as a form of rootlessness or detachment, but rather as linguistic and cultural resources for building connections and embedding us within specific local environments and communities, both in the UK and abroad. An ethically driven ethnography also brings to the fore important debates about whether we seek to enrich both ourselves and our students with emotional skills, and particularly empathetic understandings, as a conscious dimension of practice.

At the same time, ethnographic research carries undeniable associations with the colonial project, finding its origins in the unequal power relations between the West and the Global South, which are particularly salient for areas of Modern Languages research such as Latin American or Francophone Studies. As Asad established, it was colonial power structures that first made anthropological forms of study possible and, despite a professed “political neutrality”, in practice the knowledge produced was readily exploited to reinforce inequalities (*The Colonial Encounter*). In this sense, any engagement with ethnographic practices and theories must also engage with postcolonial and decolonial critiques that have informed recent developments in anthropology and related fields (Chabram; Clifford; Gonzalez) and which also allow an opportunity to further develop Modern Languages' own critiques of its colonial and nationalist legacies, manifested not least in the field's residual whiteness. This involves an awareness of the importance of other minoritized languages (including creole, indigenous and community languages) with which traditional “modern” languages co-exist, and an openness to indigenous and other forms of knowledge and methods traditionally excluded from our academic spaces.

Seeking to invert the traditional colonial ethnographic project requires conscious attention to the ways in which processes of cultural translation are “enmeshed in conditions of power” and asymmetrical relations between people, languages and modes of thought (Asad, “Cultural Translation” 163). In particular, a democratic approach to ethnographic knowledge production must be a collaborative, two-way process (Shah 47), consciously seeking to avoid colonial processes that “see knowledge as something to be extracted and applied”, while detaching that knowledge from the people, struggles and contexts out of which it emerged (Noxolo 342–3). Participatory approaches and action research, for example, engage with local wisdom and traditions in establishing both the methods and outcomes of research, allowing groups and individuals to define their own understandings of and approaches to the global and local challenges they face (Naanyu et al.). At the same time, the greater emphasis on

¹¹ See, for example, the work of Bradley et al. which combines ethnographic and collaborative arts-based learning.

reflexivity and subjectivity in ethnographic research highlights how researchers must engage with their own historical position in relation to questions of race, gender, nationality and power, which must be addressed more visibly across Modern Languages as we reflect on how, why and to whom we teach and research specific languages and cultures within our own contexts of study (Phipps and Gonzalez).

4. Credibility and Institutional Support

As we reflect on new models of engagement and collaboration, ethnographic research must be informed and supported by rigorous and context-appropriate models of ethical guidance for those engaging in such research. While fieldwork and digital research influenced by ethnographic approaches have become more widespread among Early Career Researchers working in Modern Languages, researchers and supervisors within the discipline lack access to appropriate training and support for those managing the complex relationships such research involves.¹² Greater structural support, accessible and appropriate guidelines, and most importantly forums for discussion of specific ethical conflicts and challenges would ensure ethnographic research in Modern Languages is viewed both internally and externally as equally valid and rigorous, and give researchers the confidence as well as emotional and practical support needed to conduct ethical and meaningful fieldwork-based research. While, as emphasized across this paper, many of the competencies and perspectives associated with an ethnographic sensitivity are already latent in the curriculum and our research, and consequently can be incorporated with relative ease, more in-depth and sustained forms of training and professional development are crucial if the discipline is to embrace ethnography with credibility and authority. While other disciplines, particularly in the social sciences and evidently anthropology, are more advanced in offering and providing such training, this can also be an opportunity for knowledge exchange in which our own expertise in working and translating across multiple languages can be a valuable tool of genuine interdisciplinary dialogue.

Potentially more challenging is to ensure sustained institutional support and training for teaching ethnography at undergraduate level, given the commitment required from those involved in undergraduate teaching who may not have the time and resources to accommodate these additional demands. Agreement at an institutional and departmental level will be required to invest in holistic, protracted and serious training for such staff, the value and necessity of which this article has aimed to communicate. Equally, there is a need to ensure that the value and distinctive demands of ethnographic research are communicated at an institutional level, and that departments are responsive and adaptive to its different temporalities and demands. While ethnographic approaches can manifest themselves through intensive but short-term engagements with the cultures we study (Pink and Morgan), extended or regular periods of travel abroad need to be recognized as a vital component of ethnographic research projects at all levels, while those assessing proposals and the outcomes of research need to be aware of the distinct research design of ethnographic projects, which allow for the unpredictability and responsiveness of fieldwork-based research.

Recommendations

In order to consolidate further and put into practice the above, we propose the following concrete next steps for both ourselves and colleagues across Modern Languages. These are addressed in particular to subject associations, including the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML), representative organizations such as the Institute of Modern Languages

¹² For example, in the field of linguistic ethnography Copland and Creese, and Tagg et al. offer models for talking openly about the ethical and emotional challenges faced during fieldwork, and the importance of team and/or supervisor support in navigating such challenges.

Research (IMLR) and other bodies including QAA. Equally, they will require heads of schools and departments of Modern Languages to liaise closely with UCML and the IMLR in order to ensure the necessary bridging of national and local actions:

- A major landmark conference, and associated publications, which will develop the ideas and proposals within this document to interrogate further and make visible the role of ethnographic theory and practice in Modern Languages research and teaching, and also encourage closer dialogue between Modern Languages and ethnography.
- The wider circulation of teaching resources, in particular those created through the Language Learners as Ethnographers project (Jordan and Roberts),¹³ which should also be updated to respond to the contemporary Modern Languages context and recent technological developments to incorporate digitally influenced ethnographic approaches. These resources will be directed at all of those involved in teaching and curriculum design, whether primarily on language- or culture-focused modules, in order to promote more coherent and holistic thinking about the Modern Languages curriculum and the vital role of the Year Abroad within it.
- A co-ordinated combination of national workshops, primarily at the IMLR, alongside local institutional training courses for those who do or will teach ethnography at undergraduate levels, which is recognized as professional development and supported locally by Modern Languages departments through the provision of appropriate resources and dedicated staff time.
- The development of ethical guidelines and examples of best practice for all researchers who engage in forms of fieldwork or work with living human subjects and which are specific to Modern Languages. Informed by an ethically driven ethnographic sensitivity, these will focus on ethics as an ongoing process;¹⁴ while not intended to replace institutional requirements, they will allow Modern Languages researchers to engage more critically in responding to and shaping how these are implemented. This emphasis on linguistic sensitivity is likely to have wider resonance in questions of ethical research.
- Additional Modern Languages training workshops, courses and forums at local and national levels for all researchers engaged in fieldwork or other ethnographically informed projects, as well as those involved in supervising such research, in order to overcome potential discrepancies between the methods deployed by postgraduate students and the expertise of their supervisors.
- The explicit incorporation of references to an ethnographic sensitivity in future documents that guide our discipline, such as the QAA benchmarking statement, to formalize and make more visible this latent but vital component within the Modern Languages curriculum.
- In order to deliver these outcomes, we propose the establishment of a forum or special interest group which would maintain momentum and put into practice these recommendations, and would incorporate researcher, teacher and student representatives. In this respect, we suggest that Modern Languages in the UK would benefit more widely from the establishment of cross-language groups, which would serve similar purposes to the US-based Modern Language Association's established forums (MLA) in promoting activities and mobilizing new research and professional agendas in specific areas of priority and concern.

¹³ These materials are currently freely available on the University of Southampton's "Ethnographic Encounters" website.

¹⁴ See, for example, the Association of Internet Researchers' ethical guidelines (Markham and Buchanan) which avoid prescriptivism to focus instead on the critical questions researchers should ask in designing and conducting internet research.

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