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Abstract

Dell Hathaway Hymes, linguistic anthropologist and educational visionary extraordinaire, passed away in November 2009, leaving behind a voluminous scholarship and inspirational legacy in the study of language and inequality, ethnography, sociolinguistics, Native American ethnopoetics, and education. This essay provides a brief account of Hymes's life and scholarly contributions, especially his early and enduring influence in the anthropology of education; and goes on to comment briefly on this AEQ set of essays honoring Hymes.

Keywords

Dell Hymes, anthropology of education, ethnography, social justice, ethnography in education, educational linguistics, ethnography and social justice, communicative competence, verbal repertoire, ethnographic monitoring, ethnography of communication, ethnopoetics

Disciplines

Anthropological Linguistics and Sociolinguistics | Education | Educational Leadership | Higher Education | Higher Education and Teaching | Linguistic Anthropology | Scholarship of Teaching and Learning | Social and Cultural Anthropology

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Dell H. Hymes: his scholarship and legacy in anthropology and education

Dell Hathaway Hymes, linguistic anthropologist and educational visionary extraordinaire, passed away in November 2009, leaving behind a voluminous scholarship and inspirational legacy in the study of language and inequality, ethnography, sociolinguistics, and Native American ethnopoetics. Education is one of the arenas in which Hymes brought his scholarship and politics of advocacy to bear in the world, perhaps most visibly through his deanship of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education (1975–1987), but also through the scope and depth of his writings on linguistics and ethnography in education. Hymes was an early leader in the anthropology of education, serving as president of the Council on Anthropology and Education (1977-78),ⁱ and his work remains foundational to the themes and pursuits of the field. In this special set of essays honoring his scholarship and legacy, we hope to provide a glimpse of Hymes' profound and enduring influence on educational anthropology.

Since his passing, Hymes' life and work have been warmly and eloquently remembered in obituaries by eminent colleagues across the many disciplines his prolific writings touched, including anthropology (Darnell 2011), folklore (Mills 2011), linguistics (Silverstein 2010), and sociolinguistics (Blommaert 2010). *Language in Society*, the journal Hymes founded in 1972 and edited for the next two decades, honored his passing with an *in memoriam* including a brief intellectual sketch (Sherzer, Johnstone & Marcellino 2010), a set of

reminiscences by ten early *Language in Society* authors, now prominent sociolinguists (Johnstone 2010), and a reprinting of Hymes' own field-defining introduction to the first issue of the journal (Hymes 1972a). Themes across these chronicles of a scholarly life are Hymes' visionary foresight, his formidable intellectual capacity and ample intellectual generosity, his vigorous and iconic interdisciplinarity, his voluminous and intense correspondence with colleagues and students, and his deeply ethical commitment to addressing real and critical problems of language in society. Important to these scholars – and equally so to me and the authors herein-- is to recognize the thorough and deep, historical and contextual grounding of Hymes' ideas and writings on the one hand, and on the other, the profound and pervasive, though often unacknowledged or implicit, influence his ideas and writings have had and continue to have on contemporary work in anthropology, folklore, linguistics, sociolinguistics – and education.

Hymes' enormous oeuvre encompasses many major scholarly volumes, both edited field-defining collections (Hymes 1964, 1969, 1971; Cazden, John & Hymes 1972; Gumperz & Hymes 1964, 1972) and the five collections of his own reprinted works (1974, 1980b, 1981b, 1996a, 2003); all this in addition to his hundreds, nigh on a thousand, published, reprinted, and translated articles, book chapters and reviews, and his twenty-one year founding editorship of *Language in Society* (1972-1992), aptly described by Silverstein as 'a virtual seminar in which his contributing authors spoke to and through him to their readership' (Silverstein 2010: 937). Hymes' thinking shaped and was shaped by the emergence of sociolinguistics in the U.S., an efflorescence that also included Labov's variationism, Fishman's and Ferguson's sociology of language, and Gumperz' and Goffman's

social interactionism. With beginnings conventionally traced to a seminar convened by Charles Ferguson at the 1964 Linguistic Society of America Summer Institute at Indiana University in Bloomington, the intense interaction and interplay of ideas, face-to-face dialogue, research, and writing in the 1960s-70s-80s among these and other scholars engaged in analysis of the intersections/co-occurrences/relationships between communicative and social behaviors and contexts laid the groundwork for the rich contributions younger scholars have continued to make in the decades since.

Dell Hymes was born in Portland, Oregon on 7 June 1927 and grew up there, earning his undergraduate degree in literature and anthropology at Reed College in 1950, after a two-year hiatus of military service in (South) Korea. Completing a Ph.D. in linguistics at Indiana University in 1955, followed by five-year stints --and rapid ascendance to full professor-- at Harvard and Berkeley respectively, he accepted a position in Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania in 1965, whence he continued his five-year pattern, adding appointments to Penn's Folklore and Folklife Department in 1970 and the deanship at Penn's Graduate School of Education in 1975. In connection with the seeming regularity of his academic moves, Hymes once reflected that five was "the pattern number for the Chinook" (Hymes 1980a: 209, cited by Darnell 2011:192), a patterning not without significance for him given his deep and abiding interest in Native American ethnopoetics and long-term ethnographic work with Native American languages and communities of the US Northwest.

Fortunately for Penn's Graduate School of Education and the field of anthropology and education, however, his deanship at GSE broke the five-year pattern; Hymes led GSE for 12 years, leaving an indelible mark by the time he stepped down to move to the University of Virginia in 1987 as Commonwealth Professor of Anthropology and English, retiring in 1998. His wife Virginia Hymes (née Dolsch) survives him, as do their four children, five grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. Also a linguist specializing in Northwest Native American languages (V. Hymes 1987), Virginia was Dell's lifetime companion in family and work, teaching and advising undergraduate and graduate students in the ethnography of communication and Native American ethnopoetics at both Penn and the University of Virginia; her contributions to the field of anthropology were recognized in a session in her honor at the 2009 American Anthropological Association meetings (Danziger and King 2009).

Legend goes that at his first meeting with the Penn Graduate School of Education faculty in spring 1975 before his appointment as dean, Hymes announced his intention to develop two academic emphases under his deanship, namely educational linguistics and the ethnography of education. In the ensuing years, primarily through the inauguration and evolution of academic programs in Educational Linguistics and in Education, Culture, and Society, as well as the founding of the interdisciplinary Center for Urban Ethnography and the annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum, there emerged at GSE "an environment favorable to interests in language and anthropology/ethnography, involving a variety of people, some there only for a while" (Hymes, personal communication, 26 October 1998; see also Hornberger 2001).

By the time I became Hymes's junior colleague in 1985 toward the end of his tenure as dean, ethnography and linguistics had taken firm root at GSE in scholarly, programmatic, and advocacy-oriented endeavors that continue to the present. Not least among Penn GSE's activities in anthropology and education have been the *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* editorial terms of Frederick Erickson (1986-1988) and currently Nancy Hornberger (2009-2013) and a team of associate editors drawn heavily from Penn GSE – my faculty colleagues Kathleen Hall and Stanton Wortham, former students Angela Creese and Ellen Skilton-Sylvester, and our 'honorary' Penn colleague (my former dissertation adviser) Richard Ruiz of the University of Arizona. As Hymes's colleague and sometime student sitting in on his classes, inheritor of Hymesian endeavors at GSE, and above all grateful reader of his prolific and inspirational scholarship, I am honored and awed to oversee and edit this small collection of profoundly heartfelt and scholarly explorations of his enormous contributions to anthropology and education.ⁱⁱ

The essays extract from the deep and rich vein of Hymes' scholarship to take up some of his enduring concepts: ethnographic monitoring, 'concrete, yet comparative, cumulative, yet critical' ethnographies of communication (Hymes 1996a: 63), communicative competence, pidginization and children's verbal repertoires, ethnopoetics, ethnography and social justice. All are concerned to demonstrate the relevance and clairvoyance of Hymes' ideas to the anthropological study of schooling and learning; all are careful to excavate the historical, intellectual, and contextual grounding of often misunderstood or oversimplified Hymesian concepts; and all offer a model and implicit call for researchers to take a similarly

systemic approach to Hymes' full body of work and to the uses of Hymesian concepts in research today.

The authors represent an intergenerational perspective on Hymes, their acquaintance and/or collaboration with Hymes emerging stepwise across the decades. Courtney Cazden was Hymes' contemporary and coeditor in the 1960s-70s; Shirley Brice Heath and Perry Gilmore worked closely with him at GSE in the 1970s-80s; James Collins and Teresa McCarty had occasion to meet Hymes at a conference or two in the 1980s-90s but knew him mainly through his writings first encountered in their graduate days. At the other end of the scale of decades, in the 1990s, Rodney Hopson found himself fortunate to be mentored in his Ph.D. research by Dell at the University of Virginia; Jan Blommaert's first meeting with Dell came in 1998 when he chaired Hymes' plenary at the International Pragmatics Conference in Reims, France, though he had begun voraciously reading his writings years before as an undergraduate (Blommaert 2010); and Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor tells us herein of her first meeting with Hymes, "the father of her doctoral program," at the American Anthropological Association meetings in 1999. Jef Van der Aa missed the opportunity to meet Hymes in person but holds dear the 25-page Hymesian epistle sent in 2002 in response to his own 10-page paper; he alone among the contributors here has mined the treasure of Hymes' unpublished professional correspondence and papers housed at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, among which, poignantly, he found his own 2002 correspondence with Hymes.

In the first essay, *Ethnographic monitoring: Hymes' unfinished business in educational research*, Jef Van der Aa and Jan Blommaert write from a perspective across the Atlantic and at a time of revived interest in Hymes' work among a new generation of scholars. They remind us of the substance and import of Hymes' (1980b) volume of ethnolinguistic essays on language in education, highlighting in particular his proposals for a sustainable long-term program of ethnography in education that would be *cumulative* at the micro level of ethnopoetic analyses of classroom and home narratives of teachers, children, and parents; *cooperative* at the meso level of collaborative and participatory ethnographic monitoring; and *comparative* at the macro level of an educational ethnology across contexts.

They reference Hymes' (1981a) 800-page unpublished report to the National Institute of Education on the program of urban ethnographic research carried out in Philadelphia schools by a GSE team of colleagues and graduate students under Hymes' direction; they describe the three-step process and 'anthropological logic' (Hymes 1981a: 10-13) of ethnographic monitoring and highlight the importance of the intricate web of relationships and democratic production and sharing of knowledge therein. Drawing on Van der Aa's recent ethnographic research on the sociolinguistic construction of Caribbean nationalisms in Barbados and Jamaica, they exemplify the three-step ethnographic monitoring process in a description and analysis of one Barbadian child's narrative about Independence Day, arguing from this case (and from Hymes' work) that "ethnographic monitoring is the basis for analyzing voice in educational discourse: voice as an opportunity for learners and as a target for education, but also as an obstacle and constraint for many individuals and groups."

As Blommaert has written elsewhere, ethnography as Hymes understands and writes about it is far from the all-too-commonly encountered and “absurdly reductionist” equation with field work, participant observation, narrative description, or even more simplistically with interview. Hymes belongs instead to an anthropological tradition in which ethnography is understood as a descriptive theory, an “approach that [is] theoretical because it [provides] description in specific, methodologically and epistemologically grounded ways” (Blommaert 2009: 262). Further, Hymes calls for an ethnological orientation to complement ethnographic description. He proposes that an emphasis on ethnological analysis that is comparative across space, cumulative across time, and cooperative between analyst and practitioner, would serve ethnographers, schooling, and constructive change well (Hymes 1980b: 119–125).

Teresa McCarty, James Collins, and Rodney Hopson, in *Dell Hymes and the new language policy studies – update from an underdeveloped country*, pick up the theme of a “concrete, yet comparative, cumulative, yet critical” social study of language (Hymes 1996a: 63), offering a tour de force essay on the new language policy studies, instantiated in cases from Native American language education in the southwestern U.S., schooling for Korean and Mexican migrant students in upstate New York, and schooling decisions and applications of English-only language policy in pre- and post-apartheid Namibia, southern Africa. They frame their exploration around Hymes’ classic *Report from an underdeveloped country: Toward linguistic competence in the United States*, a lecture originally delivered in Amsterdam in 1975 and published in successively revised versions in 1976, 1983, and 1996b. Reminding

us of Hymes' questions, slightly modified here and answered severally in their exhaustive and insightful accounts of the three cases: What counts as a language in each case? What counts as a language problem? What counts as proper language use? What counts as a contribution to language policy? , they adapt and answer a compelling version of his fifth question: What will count in changing what counts as a contemporary solution to linguistically structured inequalities?

Their essay hearkens back for me to my own early encounter with the scope of Hymes' vision for a multilevel ethnography in education encompassing policy as well as practice, in the following doctoral preliminary examination question Hymes composed for our Educational Linguistics Ph.D. students in the early 1980s:

Language planning is a subject that is sometimes associated with the sociology of language, rather than with sociolinguistics. In other words, it is sometimes thought of as concerned with the “macro-sociological” sphere, the level of government, politics and policy, and the like, and not with the “micro-sociological” sphere, the level of face-to-face interaction. The ethnography of speaking is sometimes associated primarily with this latter sphere.

One of the major concerns of social theory at the present time is the relationship between these two spheres and ways in which they can be integrated. Discuss how the ethnography of speaking might contribute to the integration of these two levels in regard to problems of language planning.

Cite and evaluate studies which have sought to do this.

This question, which remains in the active repertoire of questions given to our students today, poses a role for ethnography in language policy and formulates an agenda for research that was well ahead of its time but which has gathered increasing momentum in recent years (Canagarajah 2005; Freeman 1998; Hornberger 1988, 1996; Hornberger and Johnson 2007; Johnson 2007; McCarty 2011; Ramanathan 2005; Ramanathan and Morgan 2007). Picking up this thread, McCarty, Collins, and Hopson here make an eloquent case for a Hymesian critical ethnographic language policy studies, an approach that constitutes a “significant step forward in unseating the linguistic inequities about which Hymes wrote so prolifically throughout his life.”

Likewise revisiting an early Hymesian proposal, Courtney Cazden, in *Dell Hymes' construct of 'communicative competence,'* provides a historical context for Hymes' formulation of the

notion of communicative competence (Hymes 1972b), suggesting that his ideas were a response not only to the theoretical notion of a Chomskyan ideal linguistic competence, but also – importantly for AEQ readers and the anthropology of education – to the Civil Rights era climate of educational policy concern around the language of educationally disadvantaged children. Cazden goes on to muse on two dimensions of communicative competence, individual capability vs. systemic potential, and appropriateness. She reminds us that Hymes believed that “material conditions for language socialization can be so impoverished that the monolingual or bilingual development of individual communicative competence may be constrained,” that individual capability in a language and systemic potential of the language are not one and the same thing; and she highlights the difference between individual *repertoire* and community *reservoir* as a way to distinguish these, arguing (perhaps controversially) that deficit and difference are better understood as complementary rather than oppositional terms. On appropriateness: Cazden emphatically corrects the all-too-common misinterpretation of appropriateness as “only the ability to respond in a pre-existing context.” She points out that, on the contrary, Hymes “affirms the importance of human ability to create contexts through language” and she closes with the stirring example of Seal’s daughter’s “breakthrough into performance” (Hymes 1981b) as an instance of just such an emergent competence.

Perry Gilmore picks up the thread of children’s emergent and creative communicative competence, complemented by Hymes’ insights on processes of pidginization and creolization, in *We call it “our language”: A children’s Swahili pidgin transforms social and symbolic order on a remote hillside in up-country Kenya*, her moving and evocative, closely

detailed and richly contextualized ethnographic case study of a “Swahili pidgin language created more than three decades ago on an isolated hillside in Up-country Kenya ... by two young five year old boys” -- her son Colin and his Samburu friend, Sadiki. Analyzing the origins, maintenance, change and loss of their pidgin language through the lens of intersecting, multilayered theories of identity, ideology, language socialization and the ethnography of language policy, Gilmore demonstrates the boys’ lexical and grammatical creativity, their perpetual negotiations of meaning and sometime miscommunications, and the ways their inventive communicative competence transcended inequities of power, race, and class in a context otherwise weighed down by an oppressive English colonial history and overwhelming African poverty. She argues that her story celebrates the language and lives of the two boys, but also “the language capacities of all children and their potential for communicative brilliance” and that it is education’s limitations, and not children’s, that hold us back from creating successful programs for bilingual education, English language learners, and minority language speakers.

Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor also evokes the communicative brilliance of children in a context of poverty and oppression – in this case, through her award-winning poem capturing experiences with Puerto Rican learners in North Philadelphia. In *When poetry became ethnography and other flying pig tales in honor of Dell Hymes*, Cahnmann-Taylor reflects self-critically on the role and potential of ethnographic poetry to be at the center, rather than periphery, of ethnographic work, and on Hymes’ profound influence on her thinking about this question. She recalls her 1999 certainty that her poem, *Driving through North Philly* (reprinted here), better captured the essence of her ethnographic research in bilingual

Philadelphia schools than her scholarly writings; and she recounts her initial disappointment when, at the American Anthropological Association meetings that year, she heard Hymes firmly reject the notion that creative writings might someday replace prose as central representations of ethnography. Her account traces the evolution of both her interactions with Hymes around their shared practice of ethnographic poetry and her growing appreciation, à la Hymes, of the need for aspiring ethnographic poets both to study and practice the art of traditional ethnography AND to apprentice in the craft of poetry. Her essay, like the others herein, models the value of building off a holistic understanding of the full body of work of earlier scholars while self-reflectively considering one's own growing body of work.

Shirley Brice Heath, in *New love, long love: Keeping social justice and ethnography of education in mind*, similarly engages self-reflectively with her own and Hymes' ideas, their work at GSE during the 1970s-80s, and their ongoing correspondence and debates around the "role of anthropology in the study of schooling as distinct from the study of learning." Heath argues that though she and others were even then persuaded that the structures and institutions of formal schooling were inimical both to the work of anthropologists and to any sort of fundamental change, Hymes was and remained passionate about the role of anthropologists in moving social justice along in public school contexts and his influence was such that most anthropologists of education trained in those years took schools and classrooms as their primary fieldsites.

Documenting the intensity of Hymes' 'new passion' to bring ethnography to education in public schools, Heath recounts and reflects on his recruiting her to GSE's faculty early in his deanship on the basis of her training in linguistics and anthropology and her work in the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi and as teacher and preacher in Black schools and churches of South Carolina; his tireless initiatives involving her and other faculty colleagues in tutoring programs in the basement of GSE, short-term focused master's degree programs for teachers, and teaching classes on site at Philadelphia schools, among other outreach efforts to the public schools; their joint launching of the annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum that continues to the present day; and his conviction and enactment of the generativity of theories and methods of disciplines beyond anthropology, linguistics, and education, through his recruitment of a multi-disciplinary faculty and insistence that GSE students take most of their courses outside GSE. Reflecting also on fallibilities of Hymes' 'new love', Heath closes by drawing from the example of his 'long love' for Native American ethnopoetics to highlight "the staying power of the comprehensiveness that comes in the long loves of one's academic life." She admonishes ethnographers of education to take care, as Hymes did, to know the history of our field and to sustain strong interest in disciplines beyond our own, lest we "know only so far" (Hymes 2003).

Indeed, it is our hope that these essays and their authors' deep engagement with the rich vein of Hymes' work will contribute toward correcting what has been perhaps an unwitting weakening of educational anthropology through use of memorable Hymesian terms or concepts merely to label and describe, with little or no understanding of the grounding of these terms. Communicative competence, the ethnography of communication, ways of

speaking, and others, have too often become merely labels that educators and educational researchers pass off as "theories" of language development, interaction, and social practices based only on short-term observations of schools and classrooms. Hymes never intended these labels to substitute for theories, and he distanced himself in the final years of his career from work that showed little understanding of language acquisition and learning or the position of ethnography within the history of linguistics and of anthropology. Reflected in the essays here are instead long-term language-grounded studies of language in use and thoughtful explorations of the historical context of Hymes' intellectual contributions to critical ethnographies of schools (Heath, personal communication, 27 March 2011).

Language inequality is an enduring theme of Hymes's work (1980c, 1996a) and his vision of the role of language in achieving – and denying – social justice in and out of schools shines through clearly in all of the essays. I am reminded of his 1991 lecture on "Inequality in language: Taking for granted," delivered at GSE as the first annual Nessa Wolfson Colloquium in honor of his former student and colleague. Hymes reminded listeners of the ways in which, despite the potential equality of all languages, differences in language and language use become a basis for social discrimination and actual inequality. He affirmed that while educational anthropologists and linguists may take these insights for granted after a quarter-century of sociolinguistic and anthropological linguistic scholarship, we nevertheless still have our work cut out in raising critical language awareness in education and society more broadly. In a typically Hymesian phrase: "We must never take for granted that what we take for granted is known to others" (Hymes 1992: 3; revised version in Hymes 1996a).

Though Hymes was himself not an ethnographer of schooling, his advocacy for such work, and for ethnography as both democratic and counterhegemonic, was immensely powerful. He saw ethnography as democratic in that it “entails trust and confidence, ... requires some narrative accounting, and ... is an extension of a universal form of personal knowledge” (Hymes 1996a: 14); and counterhegemonic in that it has the capacity to construct an alternative discourse on social uses of language and social dimensions of meaningful behavior and in that it seeks to describe and explain, rather than reduce and simplify, the messiness and complexity of social activity (Blommaert 2009: 266-268).

In his writings, and in his leadership of Penn’s Graduate School of Education, Hymes proposed not only a vision but a set of ways of doing ethnography in education — from ethnographic monitoring and ethnography of communication to ethnopoetics of oral narrative and ethnography of language policy — that have inspired and informed researchers for a generation and more. Penn GSE’s Ethnography in Education Research Forum, now celebrating its 33rd consecutive year, is a concrete instantiation of both the vision and the doing. Ethnography as theory and perspective, as description and analysis of messy and complex social activity, as counterhegemonic and democratic, accessible to expert and novice alike, and its companion ethnology as comparative, cumulative, and cooperative, are visible and annually renewed in the Ethnography Forum. Notably, and with remarkable continuity across its annual convening under a succession of three GSE faculty (David Smith, 1980-85; Frederick Erickson, 1986-1999; Nancy Hornberger, 2000-present), the Forum has from its beginnings maintained social justice in education as its core focus,

participation of educational practitioners as integral to its mission, an ethos of welcome to novice as well as expert ethnographers, a dedicated grappling with the messiness of data analysis and interpretation as its signature session strand, and comparative-cumulative-cooperative ethnological analysis as its motive for convening (see Hornberger 2002 for a brief history of the Forum). The Forum and the thousands of Forum-goers who have presented and participated over the years are an enduring legacy of Hymes' vision for anthropology and education.

Early in his career, Hymes called upon those of us "for whom 'the way things are' is not reason enough for the way things are" to reinvent anthropology, asking of anthropology what we ask of ourselves — "responsiveness, critical awareness, ethical concern, human relevance, a clear connection between what is to be done and the interests of mankind" (1969: 7). Forty years on and more, it is clear that Hymes's scholarship and political advocacy have in no small measure led the way in that task — with a social justice impact reaching beyond anthropology to educational policy and practice and, far more importantly, to the lives and well-being of countless learners and teachers, individuals and communities around the world.

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ⁱThis in addition to his “quadruple-crown” presidencies of the American Folklore Society (1973 and 1974), Linguistic Society of America (1982), American Anthropological Association (1983), and the American Association for Applied Linguistics (1986-1987).

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