Nexus Analysis: Background and Prospects

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Taking social action as its primary object of inquiry, nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon 2004) traces the historical and socio-cultural trajectories of people, discourses, and physical spaces across scales to investigate how they converge at specific moments in time. Braiding together the strands of discourse studies, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology, nexus analysis provides a meta-methodology for integrating theoretical concepts and methodological tools from these traditions in order to facilitate the kind of multi-dimensional inquiry that the contemporary sociolinguistics of globalization and multilingualism called for.

Against this backdrop, we take up three key questions: (1) What is theoretically and methodologically unique to nexus analysis? (2) How is it an “ethnographic methodological strategy” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 9) ideally suited for gathering and analyzing data that are multilingual, multitemporal, and multimodal (e.g., Al Zidjaly, 2006; Hult, 2010; Pietikäinen, 2010)? (3) What are the prospects for methodological applications of nexus analysis?

We begin by presenting an overview of the development of nexus analysis as a methodological framework, drawing attention to the intellectual traditions from which it evolves. Next, we present the central concepts of nexus analysis (e.g., 'nexus of practice', 'interaction order', 'historical body', 'discourses in place') and the research stages (i.e., engaging, navigating, and changing the nexus of practice) to demonstrate how they guide the development of a nexus study: from identifying the social action and its tripartite elements, to considering the types of questions to ask, to selecting the appropriate methods for data collection and concepts for data analysis. In presenting aspects of nexus analysis, we draw on our own work (e.g., Hult, 2010; Compton, 2012) to illustrate concepts and their applications. We conclude with an introduction to the other papers in the colloquium, which represent the kinds of topics and contexts for which nexus analysis can fruitfully be used.

Keywords: sociolinguistic scales, linguistic ethnography, Discourse.