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### **Investigating Voice in a City Market**

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# **Investigating Voice in a City Market**

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**Abstract:** This paper presents analysis of communicative interactions in the context of a busy city market in the United Kingdom. The analysis is of small stories, or narratives embedded in everyday interaction. The study adopts Hymes' ethnopoetics approach, previously applied to folk stories and high-stakes interviews. The paper reviews existing research which has considered the notion of 'voice'. The empirical example draws on a large, multi-site linguistic ethnography which investigates communication in different domains in four UK cities. This particular example focuses on audio-recorded interactions between a migrant Chinese butcher and a Chinese customer, and between the butcher and his English colleague. The analysis reveals that ethnopoetics, little used in analysis of quotidian speech, has considerable potential for understanding voice in contemporary settings.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Markets are places where we encounter difference. More than any other city spaces, they define human engagement with difference, with different people, different clothes, different goods, and different ways of speaking (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). The market-place has historically been the centre of all that is unofficial, it remains with the people. In the market-place "a special kind of speech was heard, almost a language of its own" (Bakhtin 1994: 213). Markets offer "an ideal setting to explore the relationship between economy and society, especially when we consider the ways that these markets reflect, but also shape, the nature and meaning of social and cultural diversity" (Hiebert, Rath & Vertovec 2015: 16). They entail encounters between people, frequently across lines of social and cultural difference. For some people street markets are the

primary means by which they encounter people from other backgrounds. Watson (2009a: 1577) argues that markets represent a neglected site of social connections and interaction in cities, which have been subject to limited analysis to date. Watson (2009b) argues that the sociocultural context of markets warrants textured investigation to make sense of how encounters across difference occur productively or antagonistically. In her study of urban markets in the UK she explores the potential of markets as public spaces where multiple forms of sociality are enacted. Hiebert et al (2015) ask whether the “spatial concentration of diversity” (p.17) in a market-place inevitably contributes to cosmopolitan attitudes and identities. They argue that diversity shapes markets, and markets shape diversity. Markets also contribute to the configuration of social life. They reflect the basic sociocultural and socio-economic diversity of local areas, bringing together people into a public arena who might otherwise remain apart. This happens, say Hiebert et al, in settings that are both relatively controlled through ‘rules of engagement’, and also highly adaptive and dynamic. Markets offer particularly rich seams for social research because they “exemplify the global process of space-time compression, juxtaposing people with backgrounds from distant places and distinct cultures together in the same place” (Hiebert et al 2015: 17). They also offer sites at which voice come plainly into view.

## **VOICE**

Voice is the capacity to make oneself understood in one’s own terms, to produce meanings under conditions of empowerment (Blommaert 2009). Whilst we all have a voice when we talk, we need to know that our voice matters, that our voice has legitimacy, that it is taken up by the other party involved in the communicative act, and that therefore it becomes recognized as valid currency for the trading taking place in the communicative interaction at hand (Blommaert,

Spotti, and van der Aa, forthcoming). At the same time, voice is affected by the social values attributed to certain linguistic resources (Blommaert 2005). This does not merely mean that we should pay attention to whether ‘Cantonese’ is more highly regarded in certain contexts than ‘Mandarin’, or whether ‘English’ is attributed greater value than ‘Spanish’ (although these are important questions in themselves). Rather, we should interpret the meanings of voice in terms of the social worlds and histories of discourse, rather than in terms of formal systems, such as ‘languages’, which ‘can veil actual speakers, uses, and contexts’ (Bailey 2012: 502). We therefore propose an analytic perspective which takes linguistic diversity to be constitutive of, and constituted by, social diversity. A focus on voice directs attention to the diverse processes through which social identities are represented, performed, transformed, evaluated, and contested (Keane 1999).

To understand voice we need to consider how the ways in which linguistic resources are deployed index distinctions between people. Madsen (2014) notes that rather than looking for instances of people speaking different ‘languages’, we should pay attention to how language use involves various socio-ideological languages, codes, and voices. Lähteenmaki (2010: 26) finds Bakhtin’s notion of ‘heteroglossia’ useful in understanding voice, as it accounts for “the social, functional, generic, and dialectological variation within a language”. That is, stratification and diversity within a language derive from its social nature, reflecting the social and ideological differentiation in a society. We are therefore less interested in how different language-forms vary according to their linguistic features than in the stratification of a common language. Not all ways of speaking have equal value in all times and spaces, and linguistic differences within languages, as much as between languages, ‘are quickly, and quite systematically, translated into inequalities between speakers’ (Blommaert 2005: 71). Abandoning a structural notion of

language compels us to replace it with the ethnographic concept of voice, which refers to the ways in which people deploy their resources in communicative practice (Blommaert 2010).

In this paper we adopt some of the analytical principles developed by Hymes in relation to Native American myths and tales - narratives which acted as “ways of thinking, ways of making sense of the world” (2003: x). However, the narratives we consider are not features of folklore, but are fleeting, and enmeshed in the quotidian speech of the urban market. We propose to focus not on formal narrative, but on everyday storytelling. Analysis of ‘small stories’ focuses on the minutiae, the fine-grain of narrative (Georgakopoulou 2007). Small stories are small when compared to the pages of transcript of interview narratives (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008). They can be about very recent or still unfolding events, thus immediately reworking slices of experience and arising out of a need to share what has just happened. Analysis of narrative as talk-in-interaction allows us to view narrative in context – not as separate from everyday, vernacular communication, but as a part of it. Often such narratives are co-constructed, and are contingent on the social interaction going on around them. Narrative can thus be viewed as talk-in-interaction which arises in, or is prompted by, the ongoing course of an interactional occasion. We are interested in the social actions / functions that narratives perform in the lives of people, and how people use stories in everyday, mundane situations (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008). In analysis of small stories we remain alert to the fleeting moments of a ‘narrative orientation’ in social interactions.

A neglected approach to understanding voice in everyday narrative discourse is that of ‘Applied Ethnopoetics’. In his analysis of Native American narrative, Hymes (1981) adopted a method for reviving and restoring oral traditions. Hymes claimed that such an approach to narrative “will add to understanding of language itself and contribute to the many fields of

inquiry for which the use of language in telling stories is a part” (2003: viii). Hymes (1981) insisted that we must work to make visible and audible something more than is evident on first hearing. Ethnopoetics, he said, ‘helps us to see more of what is there’ (Hymes 1996: 182). Whereas representing narrative as prose tends to hide its characteristic form, ethnopoetic analysis unearths the underlying poetic structure that is the essence of narrative (Hornberger 2009: 349). Attention to the poetic structure of narrative can challenge received assumptions about the nature of language and the ways that individuals engage in and use language. That is, ethnopoetic analysis can challenge ‘narrative inequality’ and recognize ‘voice’ (Webster and Kroskrity 2013).

Blommaert (2009: 268) argues that applied ethnopoetics addresses the main issue in ethnography: to describe (and reconstruct) languages not in the sense of stable, closed, and internally homogeneous units characterizing parts of mankind, but as ordered complexes of genres, styles, registers, and forms of use: languages as repertoires. To Hymes, the essence of narrative—what makes it poetic—is an implicit level of structure: stories are organized in lines, verses, and stanzas, connected by a grammar of narration (a set of formal features identifying and connecting parts of the story) and by implicit organizational patterns. Ethnopoetics revolves around a conception of narrative primarily organized in terms of formal and aesthetic — ‘poetic’ — patterns, not in terms of content or thematic patterns (Blommaert 2006a). Narrative is viewed as a form of action, of performance, and the meanings it generates are effects of performance. For Hymes narrative is a central mode of language use, in which cognitive, emotional, affective, cultural, social and aesthetic aspects combine (Blommaert 2006b).

Ethnopoetics is about reconstructing the aesthetic functions of narratives. Blommaert (2009: 271) argues that functional reconstruction of narrative is about *voice*. Hymes (2003) drew

on the work of Jakobson (1960), adopting the term ‘equivalence’ to describe recurrent features in the organization of a narrative. Narratives, seen from an ethnopoetics perspective, are organized in ‘equivalent’ lines and groups of lines (verses, stanzas), and the organization of lines in narratives is an implicit patterning that creates narrative effect. Hymes refers to ‘intonation contours’ as structures which organize lines. Verses may be signalled by a grammatical feature such as reported speech in a narrative, or turns at talk. Repetition of words, phrases, or grammatical structures may also mark equivalence. Having established equivalent units it is possible to identify ‘succession’, in which ‘successive units give shape to action’ (Hymes 2003: 304). Hymes’ approach is one in which narrative is re-organised through attention to prosodic features, syntactic features, morpho-grammatical features, phonetic features, and lexico-syntactic features (Blommaert 2006a). Lines then combine into larger units, verses and stanzas, and again equivalence is the formal principle that identifies such units. A transition from one unit to another can be marked by a shift in intonation or prosody, a change in the dominant particles used for marking lines, a change in verb tense, or a lexical change. Hymes argued that artistic patterns in narrative such as parallel structures, rhythmic repetitions and lexical oppositions indicates a high level of formal skills and sophistication (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012). A failure to treat narrative in this way is to treat everyday speech as ‘the country cousin to the citified sophistication of deliberately composed prose’ (Collins 2009: 335).

Blommaert (2006a: 181) argues that ethnopoetics “offers opportunities for analyzing *voice*” (emphasis in original), and that this approach could be used for the analysis not only of traditional folk narratives, but also of narratives in institutional contexts such as police interviews, courtroom hearings, and asylum interviews. He proposes that there is room for exploring ‘applied’ topics for ethnopoetic analysis — for taking it beyond the study of folkloric

oral tradition and into other spaces where narrative matters: ‘It would be a great pity if a powerful analytic tool such as ethnopoetics would remain under-used because of it stereotypically being pinned on a small set of particular analytic objects.’ (Blommaert 2006b: 268). Blommaert (2006a) suggests that when people are required to produce narrative accounts, inequalities in command over (socio)linguistic, communicative, and narrative resources come into play. He demonstrates that in institutional encounters marked by inequality, stories which are received as, or deemed to be, unclear may have serious consequences for individuals. He argues, however, that an approach which acknowledges the poetics of narrative structure has potential to reveal that speakers may have a well-developed narrative competence, even when their stories appear to be hesitant, error-strewn, and lacking fluency. Blommaert (2009:271) points out that Hymesian ethnopoetics is a political project. The effort of reconstruction is inspired by an acute awareness of inequality and a desire for equity. Because many individuals never have the opportunity to narrate in their chosen ‘voice’, ethnopoetics supplies a critical resource for examining the gulf between linguistic and narrative potential, on the one hand, and the reality of actual practice on the other. For Hymes, ‘narrative inequality’ derives from the fact that certain ways of speaking, certain ways of telling a narrative are dismissed and marginalized (Webster and Kroskrity 2013). Reconstructing the functions of narratives is a politics of recognition which starts from a restoration of disempowered people as bearers and producers of valuable culture, over which they themselves have control: for Hymes recognizing one’s language means recognizing one’s specific ways of speaking - one’s voice.

Sarangi (2009: 240) suggests that everyday narrative voices—irrespective of the content matter— constitute a form of empowerment as we appreciate the role of the listener in the production of situated performances in culture-specific ways. He proposes that it becomes

imperative to consider an alternative format to represent narrative data to aid sophisticated analysis. Samuels (2013) expressed concern that highlighting narrative performance and verbal art may neglect the analysis of everyday verbal sociability. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) note that there have been few studies which have applied Hymesian ethnopoetics to everyday speech, and suggest that structures of equivalence are present not only in traditional oral storytelling, but also in quotidian communicative interaction. They conclude that ‘ethnopoetics can be productively applied and extended to a variety of ordinary and institutional contexts for the analysis of narrative’ (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: 43). By attending to implicit, indexical patterns in narratives applied ethnopoetics creates different criteria for assessing the validity of stories, because it reconstructs a different voice (Blommaert 2006a). Ultimately, what ethnopoetics does is to show voice, to visualize the particular ways — often different from norms — in which subjects produce meanings (Blommaert 2006b). Collins (2009: 334) points out that Hymes’ analysis offers evidence of a richness of everyday storytelling that calls into question received dichotomies between speaking and writing, as well as the common contrast between narrative as “mere anecdote” and analytic thought. In Hymes’ analyses of both Amerindian and English narratives, he argues that to represent narrative as prose is to lose sight of its characteristic form, and to ignore this form is to misconstrue the nature of narrative and ‘to lose sight of a common human potential’. Webster and Kroskrity (2013) propose that Hymes’ notion of ‘voice’ is a creative as well as a political accomplishment. It is concerned with individual narrators who can voice cultural, linguistic, and rhetorical preferences in their verbal art. Ultimately, what ethnopoetics does is to show voice, to visualize the particular ways in which subjects produce meanings. Ethnopoetics ‘can enhance respect for an appreciation of the voices of others’ (Hymes 1996: 219). Such an approach re-articulates the voices of those whose speech

in the language of the narrative is heavily accented, hesitant, or lacking confidence. In so doing it has potential to transform how we understand voice.

## **VOICE IN A CITY MARKET**

The example we present in this paper is an interaction between a customer and market traders on a butcher's stall in Birmingham, England, recorded in November 2014. The research was conducted as part of a four-year project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, 'Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities'. The multi-site ethnographic project is directed by Author2. The overall aim of the project is to investigate how people communicate when they bring different histories, biographies, and trajectories to interaction. In the part of the research presented here Author1 and bilingual researcher Author3 were observing communicative interactions at a market stall owned by a Chinese couple, Kang Chen and Meiyang Chew. The empirical research in the market began on 1st September 2014, and ended on December 19th 2014. During that time Author3 visited the stall twice a week, and Author1 once a week (always while Author3 was also observing). They wrote thirty sets of field notes, running to more than 104,000 words. After five weeks of observation they fitted small digital voice-recording devices to the butchers and recorded interactions at and around the stall during their observational visits. In addition to Kang Chen and Meiyang Chew, they also audio-recorded two of the assistant butchers on several occasions. One of the assistants, Yiran, was a Chinese student working part-time on the stall. The other, Bradley, was English, and a long-term member of the staff team. In all they audio-recorded 35 hours of workplace interactions. They also video-recorded one three-hour session at the stall. They interviewed the key participants, and Author3 audio-recorded

other informal conversations with them. They interviewed eighteen of the other stall-holders in the market. They took 300 photographs inside the market hall, and a further 120 in the surrounding neighbourhood. They also asked Kang Chen and Meiyang Chew to audio-record themselves at home in their domestic setting with their family. They had three very young children, and Meiyang Chew's parents were visiting them from Malaysia at the time of the research. In all they audio-recorded 47 hours of family and domestic interactions. In addition the researchers asked the couple to send them examples of their online and social media communications. Kang Chen audio-recorded some of his regular QQ conversations with his mother in Fujian. The couple also copied for the research team 550 WeChat messages from their mobile phones. In this paper we do not comment on the domestic / family audio-recordings, the social media and online material, or the photographs, due to constraints of space. Subsequent to the data collection period Author3 transcribed the audio-recorded material, and the research team met for two hours each week to discuss transcripts and field notes. They generated reports on analysis of the field notes, audio-recordings, interviews, and social and digital media material. Kang Chen and Meiyang Chew are a couple with three young children. Kang Chen said he was originally from Changle in Fujian, in the South of China. He had relatives in the UK, and arrived in 2001. He said he met Meiyang Chew in 2006, when they were both working in a take-away restaurant. Kang Chen talked about his eagerness to travel, which he attributed to 'the inspiration you gained from your village folks'. He said the stories told by villagers who had travelled made him want to follow in their footsteps. Kang Chen said his experience since migrating to the UK had been mixed, and that although there were good financial reasons to live and work abroad, 'the stress and struggle is just too much, while life in your village is like living in heaven'. He said he could never be as comfortable in the UK as being 'in your own country speaking your

own language'. Meiyen Chew was from Furong, Malaysia, and said her family had moved to Malaysia from China when China was invaded by Japan in the 1930s. Meiyen Chew had come to the UK with her sister when she was eighteen. Another sister was already living in the UK with her boyfriend, and they 'often told us how wonderful it was here, as you go shopping and everything else, especially you earn big money here'. She said she came to the UK on a two-year student visa to study English, and while doing her studies had found a part-time job in a Chinese take-away.

It was immediately evident to the research team that a significant feature of the communicative repertoires of both market traders and their customers was the deployment of gesture. Rymes (2014) adopts the term 'communicative repertoire' to refer to the collection of ways individuals use language and other means of communication to function effectively in the multiple communities in which they participate. Repertoire can include not only multiple languages, dialects, and registers in the institutionally defined sense, but also gesture, dress, and posture. Customers would regularly point to the cut of meat they wished to purchase. Customers used physical gestures to order their meat – a man touched his own tongue when he wanted ox tongue; a man pointed to his own head when he wanted to buy pig's head. Another man widened and narrowed his arms repeatedly, as if pulling a piece of elastic, to request pig's small intestine. Traders and customers held up fingers to indicate numbers, quantities, or prices; they raised their thumbs to indicate assent; elaborate mimes represented chickens or pigs. Gesture, mime, and physical performance were part of the spatial repertoire (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015) of the market hall. However, this deployment of the corporeal voice, of gesture as repertoire, was not always equally available to all.

Author3 wrote the following field note as part of her description of activity in the market:

A Chinese woman in her sixties walks up to Kang Chen, asking him where she can buy mutton. I realise she doesn't speak/read any English at all, otherwise she would have spotted the stall herself. Kang Chen stretches out his body above the counter trying to direct the woman to the mutton stall. The Chinese woman is still confused about where to find the right stall, as Kang Chen's Mandarin isn't very easy to understand, with his strong Fujian accent

At the time of this observation Kang Chen was wearing a digital voice recorder, so we were later able to listen to his interaction with the 'Chinese woman' (FC):

1 FC 哎,老板儿; 哎,老板儿,你那个有羊肉卖? 不知道唉.

< hi boss, boss, do you sell lamb? I don't know where to find it >

2 KC 没有.

< no, we don't >

他们几家都有羊肉卖,你看一下,那个比较红的那些,跟牛肉很像的,红的那些; 你直走,走到最后面那一家,那种有中东人面孔那家,到那家卖羊肉,那家会新鲜一点. 啊?就是这条路直着走,靠那边,啊,就是你看过去,

我是中国人脸孔嘛“阿渣”人啊,印度人啊,不是这家,是最后那家,

< there are quite a few shops sell it, you have a look, it looks quite red, like beef, go straight down to the end of the aisle you will see one, its owner has a mid-east Asian face, go and buy your mutton there, his is

fresher, eh, just straight down the aisle, at the other side, eh, the other side,  
if you look, like I look Chinese, a Cha, or Indian, not that one, that one at  
the end >

3 FC 就叫 Inder 啊, 啊, 谢谢

< it's called Inder ay ay thanks >

The Chinese woman approached Kang Chen because she viewed him as a potential source of help and advice. Kang Chen is the only Mandarin-speaking butcher in the market, and the woman approaches him because she is not familiar with the layout of the stalls. We saw on a number of occasions that Chinese customers would approach the butcher for help and advice about the market, and, on occasion, about other matters such as housing and welfare services. In this brief interaction Kang Chen is typically helpful, pointing to the meat stall along the aisle, where the woman will be able to buy lamb. He recommends one stall in particular, where the stall-holders are of Pakistani heritage. In pointing out the stall Kang Chen refers to its owner with 'a mid-east Asian face', and nominates him as a 'Cha'. This is a discriminatory term used among some overseas Chinese to refer to people of Indian or Pakistani nationality / ethnicity. Wessendorf (2010, 2014) notes that differences of origin, language, religion, and so on may be acknowledged as a point of connection. Here the reference to the stall-holder with 'a mid-east Asian face', and the nomination 'Cha' may do more than represent the mutton butcher negatively, perhaps also aligning Kang Chen with the Chinese woman, as Kang Chen positions them as sharing the same (albeit discriminatory) values. However, Author3's field note observes that following the conversation the Chinese woman still appeared somewhat confused by Kang Chen's directions, as his Mandarin was characterized by a strong Fujian accent. The Chinese

woman encounters the diversification of diversity in the markets, where it is not possible to straightforwardly predict the range and limits of speakers' repertoires. Kang Chen is able to deploy linguistic resources including Mandarin, Cantonese, English, and Fuzhounese. But this does not mean that communication is necessarily straightforward for speakers of these languages, as Kang Chen's Fujian accent can be difficult to disentangle for those unfamiliar with it.

Seven minutes later the woman returned to Kang Chen's stall, apparently in some consternation following her encounter with the mutton butcher. Again Author3's field notes describe the ensuing scene:

I saw the Chinese woman come back to the counter. She spoke to KC, her hands patting her leg as she did so. KC looked at her curiously, and laughed out loud at what she told him

When the Chinese woman returned to the stall she was indicating something with her hand, tapping one of her thighs with the open palm of her hand. This seemed to be a source of amusement for Kang Chen. The conversation between Kang Chen and the woman was audio-recorded:

1 FC 我费了好大的力气买的，也不知道这个是不是羊肉 我费了好大的力气买的，也不知道这个是不是羊肉

< it took me so much effort to buy this, I'm still not sure if this is mutton,  
it took me so much energy to buy it, I'm still not sure if it's mutton >

2 KC 啊？这个是羊肉来的，是羊肉来的。你费什么力气？你买东西么你费  
什么力气？

< ah? this is lamb, this is it, what effort did it cost you? you were just there  
shopping, what strength would you need to do that? >

3 FC 这说不来呀 听不懂嘛我想说我就要那个腿儿

< I don't know how to say it and I don't understand them, right, I wanted  
to say I want to buy leg of lamb >

4 KC 是羊肉来的，是羊肉，是羊肉来的。你是不是在最后那一家买的？

< yeah, it's lamb, did you buy it from the one at the end of the aisle? >

5 FC 是的，是的，我说那个羊脑袋呢不要，我要它身上那个肉 可他听不  
懂 我说不要那个脑袋

< yes, yes, I said I didn't want the sheep's head, I wanted the meat on its  
body, but he didn't get it, I said I didn't want the sheep's head >

6 BJ [to another customer:] right, boss?

7 FC 我说我要身上那个肉，要身上那个肉，哎呀，费了好大的劲儿，你知  
道！你这里没有羊肉卖嘛？

< I said I wanted the meat from the sheep's body, the meat on its body, oh my! what an effort, you know (.) don't you sell mutton here? >

8 KC 啊？没有 我写那边，但我这里没有，看，不够位置，不够位置，不够位置放

< ah? no my sign says so but I don't sell it look not enough space I don't have enough space for it not enough space to lay out the meat >

9 FC 哦

< oh >

10 KC 用身体语言，用身体语言呢。他以为你叫他看你漂不漂亮呢！哈哈  
哈

< using your body language using body language, he thought you were asking him if you were pretty or not hahahaha >

11 FC 我说是那个身上的肉

< I said it was the meat from its body that I wanted >

12 KC 是嘛！人家不会听嘛 你说你要身上的肉嘛，我知道你说你要的是羊肉嘛，简单直接帮你一指就知道了。你说要身上的肉，人家以为 哈哈  
哈哈 漂亮吗 漂亮，漂亮！

< exactly! he can't understand that, right? you said you wanted the meat from its body (.) I know you said you want the meat from the body, easy,

and I would have just pointed at it for you and you would know (.) you said you wanted the meat from the body he would have thought hahaha am I pretty pretty! you are dead gorgeous! hahahaha! >

13 [to BJ:] she's say, you get lamb meat, she see the lamb head over there, being sold by the Asian men, you got, you got any, any, any, say Chinese yea language, and she go lamb I want here, I want here! I say is it somebody say, like, I'm I'm any pretty? like that, hahaha!

14 BJ hahaha

15 KC yeah? If you know how to say it, you just say any goat, lamb meat? yeah? that, that, that easy!

In her story about her attempts to buy lamb from the mutton stall the customer narrates herself as powerless, and as voiceless. At the same time her narrating self is uncertain, and lacking confidence that her efforts have been successful: < I'm still not sure if this is mutton >.

Busch (2015) argues that changing location and language can be experienced as a hardship or as a source of ongoing emotional stress. She adds that the experience that one's own linguistic repertoire no longer 'fits' is one that not only occurs in extreme situations, but is shared by all speakers when experiencing dislocation. Bauman (2013) notes that while personhood is a situated communicative accomplishment, it is also a site of struggle in the face of forces that would constrain or suppress or silence or denigrate its voice. Here the Chinese woman tells a story in which she has had to expend considerable effort in attempting to buy lamb. In the woman's account she had gone to the mutton stall and seen a sheep head, and, finding herself lacking voice to ask for lamb from the leg of the animal, had indicated her own leg. The Chinese woman's narrated self is represented as voiceless, through explicit

metacomments on her attempts to speak: ‘I don’t know how to say it’, ‘I wanted to say I want to buy leg of lamb’. She also refers to her failure to understand the butcher: ‘I don’t understand them’, and to the butcher’s failure to understand her: ‘he didn’t get it, I said I didn’t want the sheep’s head’. She also points out the frustration of her narrated self, saying ‘I wanted to say I want to buy leg of lamb’. Despite the description of her voicelessness in the interaction with the mutton butcher, throughout the narrative the woman’s character is ascribed both an internal voice, and a voice in the interaction. The woman as narrator says the narrated woman ‘wanted to say I want to buy leg of lamb’, offering an insight into her frustration that she was not able to make herself understood. At the same time, however, the Chinese-woman-as-narrator deploys a ‘verb of saying’ (Wortham and Reyes 2015) to introduce the voice of the character of the Chinese woman, at turns 5, 7, and 11: ‘I said I didn’t want the sheep’s head, I wanted the meat on its body’, ‘I said I wanted the meat from the sheep’s body’, ‘I said it was the meat from its body that I wanted’. This kind of repetition is a form of ‘equivalence’, which structures the narrative. Although the Chinese woman as narrator does not make it explicit in her story that her narrated self is speaking Mandarin to the British-Pakistani butcher, Kang Chen understands this very well: ‘he can’t understand that, right?’. The narrated woman remains powerless and voiceless, and her narrating self (Wortham 2001) remains frustrated, and a little indignant.

Author3’s field note indicates that as she tells her story to Kang Chen the customer’s ‘hands [are] patting her leg’. The woman-as-narrator tells a story in which her narrated self deploys resources which are integral to the spatial repertoire of the market, gesturing to her own leg in her attempt to buy a leg of lamb. As we have seen, this feature of the market is both common, and frequently a source of convivial and successful commercial interactions. However, in this case the bodily gesture reaps no reward. The Chinese woman appears to have successfully

purchased the lamb she wanted, but there is a cost to her dignity. Her narrating self feels disconcerted and frustrated, and her narrated self is discomfited and confused by the sales interaction. Busch (2015) proposes that discomfort or confusion ensues if one suddenly finds oneself not in a familiar chamber, but in an unknown space, and one becomes aware that one's linguistic repertoire does not (completely) 'fit'. This appears to be the case here, as the woman-as-narrator repeatedly tells the same story - that she wanted the meat from the body and not the head - and the woman as character repeatedly experiences incomprehension and voicelessness. Busch (2015) points out that a feeling often mentioned in biographies in connection with multilingualism is that of shame, arising because one has used a 'wrong' word, a 'wrong' tone, or is speaking with a 'wrong', out-of-place accent: 'This is often described as feeling as though everyone is looking at you, or wishing the earth would swallow you up'. The purchase of the lamb carries a cost to the Chinese woman's pride, and this does not appear to be due only to the mismatch of comprehensible languages involved in the interaction.

The woman's experience of the sales encounter is at least partly constituted through relations of gender. Throughout our time in the markets we observed that an important dimension of the spatial repertoire of the environment was the performance of masculinity. This was most clearly evident in the part of the market devoted to meat sales, where a large majority of the butchers were men. In fact Kang Chen's wife was a rare example of a woman butcher in the market. The stall to which Kang Chen directed the Chinese woman was staffed exclusively by men. The public performance of masculinity was often evident in the 'shout-outs' of butchers as they advertised their wares to potential customers. The performance of masculinity was also characteristic of 'back-stage' comments and jokes. A further social category of significance in the Chinese woman's narrative is that of age. Although the woman makes no reference to her

age, Author3's field notes categorise her as 'A Chinese woman in her sixties'. This metacomment offers an important context for the ensuing narrative. The interaction may have had a different emotional outcome – for better or worse – if the woman had been forty years younger. On this same day Author3 had a brief conversation with the Chinese woman, and recorded it in her field note diary. The woman said she was in the UK temporarily to support her grand-daughter, who was at medical school. She came regularly to visit, having brought up her grand-daughter herself:

Each time when she's here she will cook three meals for her grand-daughter, inviting her two other house mates to share the meals. They were studying in the same class with her grand-daughter and she hopes her Chinese dishes will gain extra help for her grand-daughter while she's away.

The Chinese woman's motives for her determination to buy a particular cut of meat become clearer in this context.

The Chinese-woman-as-narrator is not the only narrator in this interaction, however. Kang Chen recontextualises and re-tells her story on three occasions: twice to the Chinese woman herself (turns 10 and 12), and once to his assistant, Bradley (13). Furthermore, he makes an evaluative metacomment on his third narrative, at turn15. In his first version of the story, at turn 10, Kang Chen says: 'using your body language, using body language, he thought you were asking him if you were pretty or not, hahahaha'. He shows little sympathy for the narrated character of the Chinese woman, introducing a new voice (that of the mutton butcher) to the story that has until now been at most hinted at. He mocks the woman for 'using body language'

in her attempts to communicate, despite, as we have seen, his own awareness and practice of the spatial repertoire of the market. His new story line introduces the voice of the mutton butcher, hitherto a character characterized by silence. Kang Chen's version of the narrative ventriloquates him (Wortham and Reyes 2015), giving him voice (in the form of 'thought', and certainly voice in the literary sense in which Bakhtin developed the notion). The ventriloquated voice of the mutton butcher performs the kind of masculinity which characterizes the market: 'he thought you were asking him if you were pretty'. The narrated character of Kang Chen aligns with the narrated character of the mutton butcher, and both position themselves as mocking the character of the Chinese woman. Such a narrative can be analysed in terms of the relations of the narrator to the narrated characters, and in terms of the relations of the narrator to the interlocutor or audience of the story (Wortham and Reyes 2015). Here Kang Chen positions himself in a particular way through his re-contextualisation of the story (Georgakopoulou 2007), deploying the narrative as a resource to ridicule the woman and align himself with the mutton butcher.

Kang Chen's second re-telling of the story shows a modicum of support for the Chinese woman, but concludes with the same kind of mockery. Kang Chen takes up the customer's successive pleas ('I wanted the meat on its body') by repeating the same construction three times. We can see this clearly if we follow Hymes' proposal to view narrative in lines of equivalence, beginning each of three verses (2, 3, and 4) with the same structure:

1       人家不会听嘛  
          he can't understand that, right

2       你说你要身上的肉嘛

you said you wanted the meat from its body

我明白

I know

3 你说你要的是羊肉嘛! 简单

you said you wanted the meat from the body! easy

直接帮你一指就知道了

I would have just simply pointed at it and you would know

4 你说你要身上的肉

you said you wanted the meat from the body

人家还以为, 哈哈哈哈哈

he would have thought - hahahaha

5 漂亮吗

am I pretty

漂亮·漂亮, 哈哈哈哈哈

pretty! you are dead gorgeous! hahaha

Kang Chen criticizes the narrated woman for failing to realise that the mutton butcher would not be able to understand her request, which she made in Mandarin. In this second re-telling of the story Kang Chen recontextualises not only the narrative, but the Chinese woman's words,

holding them up for evaluation through repetition. On four occasions in her brief narrative the woman had said that she wanted the ‘meat from the body’. Kang Chen reiterates her story by repeating (versions of) ‘meat from the body’ three times. Here parody is at work (Bakhtin 1984), as Kang Chen creates a verbal representation of the Chinese woman’s words, and deploys them as a resource for mockery. In verse 3 Kang Chen draws the woman’s attention to the normative repertoire of the market, ‘I would have just simply pointed at it and you would know’. Gesture, the common order of discourse in this space, was deployed by the woman, but deployed wrongly. Kang Chen’s view is that instead of ‘using body language’ the woman should have pointed to the meat she wanted to buy. In verse 5 ‘am I pretty’ is multivoiced, as it represents (at minimum) the voice of (i) the Chinese woman as character, (ii) the ironic / mocking voice of the mutton butcher, and (iii) the parodic voice of Kang Chen. In addition it is the voice of Kang Chen in the narrating event as he retells the story to the Chinese woman in the present interaction. Furthermore, ‘you are dead gorgeous!’ is multi-voiced, representing the narrated ironic voice of the mutton butcher, and aligning with the narrating ironic voice of Kang Chen.

Kang Chen’s third re-telling of the story is delivered to his assistant, Bradley, as soon as the Chinese woman leaves the scene. This version of the story is told in ‘English’. At first sight this is ‘a story told with minimal linguistic resources’ (Blommaert 2006a: 182). Kang Chen’s English is heavily accented, and somewhat hesitant. However, Kang Chen performs a narrative which includes the voices of the Chinese woman as narrator, the Chinese woman as character, himself as character, and the mutton butcher as character. Following Moore (2009), we can rearrange the narrative to highlight ethnopoetic principles of verse analysis. This requires some initial decision-making. First, we introduced line breaks based on prosody. We are grateful to our colleague in the research team, Zhu Hua, for pointing out that the prosodic patterns correspond

closely to Chinese speech. We have reorganised the narrative according to these “intonation contours” (Hymes 2003: 304). We can also represent the narrative by pursuing the principle of ‘equivalence’, developed by Hymes (2003), following Jakobson (1960). As we have seen, Hymes proposes that in addition to intonation contours, verses may be signalled by a grammatical feature, such as the quotative. That is, reported speech in a narrative signals a new verse: ‘Turns at talk seem always to count as verses’ (Hymes 2003: 304). The principle of equivalence implies a text that is a sequence of units which give shape to action. We can see the verses in Kang’s narrative by attending not only to intonation contours, but also to reported speech:

- 1            she’s say you get lamb meat
  
- 2            she see the lamb head over there  
              being sold by the Asian men
  
- 3            you got you got any any any  
              say Chinese yea language  
              and she go lamb  
              I want here I want here
  
- 4            I say is it somebody say like  
              I’m I’m any pretty

Collins (2009: 341) reminds us that the circumstances and contingencies of the telling of the story are crucial features of narrative, and that somewhere between a “narrative view of life” and a recognizable narrative (ethno)poetics there lies a narrative praxis, which we need our best ethnographic and discourse analytic tools to understand. Moore (2013) points out that the boundary between performer and ‘audience’ may in some circumstances be permeable and up for negotiation, unlike in the stereotypical narrating event of the traditional folk tale. We therefore need an approach to the poetic structure of narrative which responds to the contingencies of the narrating event as well as the narrated event. We focus on how poetic structures in discourse not only emerge in contexts of verbal interaction, but also help to (re)shape those contexts in particular ways (Moore 2013). Separating out the interlocutory speech of the ethnographic encounter, the narrative discourse that recounts the characters’ actions, and the direct discourse of the *dramatis personae* while preserving the linear unfolding of the event reveals important things about how storytelling is accomplished (Bauman 2013). When Kang Chen re-told the Chinese woman’s story he accomplished a parodic evaluation through the deployment of equivalent structures based on repetition and ironic reported speech. In doing so he transformed his fleeting relationship with the woman. Now Kang Chen re-tells the story to his friend and colleague, Bradley, in an *ad hoc* narrative which is not straightforwardly comprehensible without access to the other versions, but which creates a short drama, and includes a cautionary tale. He transforms the interaction of the narrating event through the deployment of humour, again structured through ironic reported speech.

Blommaert and Dong Jie (2010: 76) point out that even though the language may be simple and plain, and despite apparent ‘errors’ in the language, stories can be complex and well-executed. Hymes (2003: 112) notes that in some traditional oral storytelling traditions narrative is ‘built on quoted speech ironically deployed’. Kang Chen’s story is built on the quoted speech of the woman, ironically reproduced, as he verbally represents and ridicules her words. The beginning of the story, ‘she’s say you get lamb meat’, refers to the Chinese woman’s initial approach to Kang Chen, asking him whether he sells lamb (this is clearly the case if we interpret ‘get’ as ‘got’). The next section of the story (verse 2) takes us to a different scene, the interaction between the Chinese woman and the mutton butcher, as she approaches his stall and sees a lamb head. Kang Chen provides context, categorizing the traders as ‘Asian men’. In verse 3 Kang Chen’s narrative gives the Chinese woman voice, deploying ventriloquation as a resource. In his English version of the story Kang Chen foregoes a verb of saying in this line, creating immediacy in the storytelling. Kang Chen-as-narrator makes an evaluative metacomment on the Chinese woman as character, pointing out that she was speaking Chinese to a stall-holder who had no comprehension of that language. This line becomes clearer if we insert the elided ‘in’ before ‘Chinese’. Kang Chen continues to voice the woman’s character, but now in a way that sets up the joke, as he says ‘I want here’, to relate that the woman had attempted to communicate her wish to buy leg of lamb by indicating her own leg with her hand. In verse 4 Kang Chen-as-narrator represents the voice of Kang Chen-as-character. He recontextualises his own joke, repeating it for the benefit of his audience, Bradley. There is more than one layer in play here, as Kang Chen-as-narrator-in-the-present voices Kang Chen-as-character interacting with the Chinese woman as both narrator and character. As in the Mandarin version of the story mockingly told to the Chinese woman, ‘I’m any pretty’ is multivoiced, representing the voice of

the Chinese woman as character, the ironic voice of the mutton butcher ('somebody'), and the parodic voice of Kang Chen. It is also the voice of Kang Chen in the narrating event as he retells the story to Bradley. Analysing Kang Chen's narrative in sections based on Hymes' approach to ethnopoetics allows us to see what at first sight looks like a disjointed and barely comprehensible account as a highly structured piece of impromptu storytelling.

Ethnopoetics transcends the typical range of perceived 'meaningful' features of stories by acknowledging the poetic structure of narrative (Blommaert 2006a). Just as Habiba's story in Blommaert's (2006a) study is characterized by problems with linguistic-communicative competence, so Kang Chen's story is on first hearing incoherent, disjointed, and fragmented. However, just as Habiba demonstrated a well-developed narrative competence, so ethnopoetic analysis reveals that Kang Chen's impromptu narrative is highly structured, and is presented as a mini-drama. To adapt Blommaert's analysis, detecting this narrative competence and exposing it as a dimension of meaningful communicative behaviour produces another version of Kang Chen's story told in a different voice: a more accessible, more comprehensible version. This is a judgment based on implicit, indexical patterns, not on explicit denotational and syntactic ones.

Bradley responds with laughter, which may either indicate that he has understood the funny story, or that he understands that laughter is an appropriate response. He offers no further comment. Kang Chen, on the other hand, gives a final evaluative coda: 'If you know how to say it, you just say any goat, lamb meat? yeah? that, that, that easy!'. In relating his second re-telling of the story Kang Chen had said to the Chinese woman that she should have pointed at the meat she wanted to buy. In doing so he was (in between mocking comments) educating her in the ways of the market's spatial repertoire. Here, in her absence, he proposes that the most basic knowledge of English is enough to get by in the market. At the same time the narrating event of

the interaction with Bradley unites the two butchers in one more joke at their customers' expense (Wortham and Reyes 2015).

## CONCLUSION

In the superdiverse space of Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market we saw that elaborate performance, including gesture and mime, was a feature of the spatial repertoire of the marketplace, as people with different proficiencies in different languages entertained themselves and each other. However, we also saw that this process was not always a straightforward experience for all concerned. When a Chinese customer found herself without the linguistic capital to engage communicatively with traders she fell back on gesture, but was constrained by powerful norms relating to ideologies of gender and age, and experienced an everyday interaction as a loss of dignity. For her, 'voice' was not easy to find in the indoor market. We also saw that an *ad hoc* narrative told by the customer and retold by the butcher in Mandarin and then in English turned out to be a multi-layered, highly-structured, and darkly humorous cautionary tale. We found that attention to the poetic structure of everyday narrative reconstructs and recovers its meaning and its value. Bauman (2013) applauds the political motivations for amplifying the voices of those who have struggled against the forces that would silence or ignore them. At the same time, he urges us not to forget that the voices of the speech players and verbal artists celebrated by ethnopoetics are speakers who use their voices to accomplish things in the world. Their stories are not decontextualized texts. The context of the narrative interaction reported in this paper includes the age and gender of the Chinese woman, and her status as a visitor to the UK. She is not familiar with the norms of the market, and she suffers for her 'freshy' status. The context

also includes the market, and its orders of discourse, which encourage and permit not only gesture and mime as part of the spatial repertoire, but also mockery, and laughter at others' expense. The context of the interaction includes the relationship between the butcher, originally from Fujian, and his assistant from Birmingham. The colleagues regularly entertained themselves and each other with metacommentary on their customers following a sales interaction. All of these features of the context play into our understanding of the narratives of the Chinese woman and the butcher. Paying close attention to the poetic structure of these narratives brings into focus both the narrating voices of the storytellers, and the narrated voices of the characters in the stories. Analysis which acknowledges equivalence in narrative reveals Kang Chen's apparently incoherent narrative as highly structured, and sophisticated in its deployment of voice. It gives shape to action (Hymes 2003: 304), as the dynamics of the narrative become evident through repeated structures. Of course ethnopoetics has limitations - no amount of attention to the poetic structure of everyday speech will recover the dignity of the Chinese woman in her attempts to purchase lamb. What ethnopoetics provides is an understanding of voice, and of the reasons why voice is an object and instrument of power with potential to include as well as to exclude (Blommaert 2009: 272). There are clear implications for analysis of narrative in everyday discourse. The application of ethnopoetics has value beyond analysis of traditional folk stories, and beyond narrative in institutional settings. Attention to the poetic structure of everyday narrative offers potential for new understandings of voice in quotidian speech.

## NOTE

### *Transcription conventions:*

(xxxx)	unclear speech
!	animated tone or exclamation
(.)	a brief interval within an utterance
(2)	a brief interval within an utterance, in seconds
[word]	paralinguistic features and situational descriptions
< >	English translation of speech in ‘Mandarin’

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