LSSI Placements Scheme: Social Audit of a Community Interest Company: ToastLoveCoffee (TLC)

End of Placement Progress Report

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Thesis title: Translation and Translanguaging in Production and Performance in Community Arts; AHRC-funded TLANG project: Translation and Translanguaging: Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities

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LSSI Placements Scheme: Social Audit of a Community Interest Company: ToastLoveCoffee (TLC)

End of Placement Progress Report

1. Outline of placement

For this placement, I worked alongside Anna Dyson, the director, and committee of a newly formed community interest company, ToastLoveCoffee (TLC), based in the Harehills area to the north-east of the city of Leeds. I had been involved with the organisation in a voluntary capacity since September 2014. The placement started in February 2015 and finished officially in July 2015. However, my involvement with the initiative continues.

Initially framed as an information gathering project on the users of the cafe, the placement evolved to become a social audit to fit the requirements of the organisation. The focus of the report was developed through close engagement with the organisation’s activities, as were the scope and breadth. The methodology, which drew elements from linguistic ethnography and from participatory action research, enabled an ongoing dialogue as regards the needs of the organisation and its potential future direction.

The social audit itself is still in progress due to ongoing data collection and will be delivered during the Autumn. This social audit will be in two parts:

- A short summary in a visual presentational style which can be sent out as part of the current fundraising campaign;
- A longer, comprehensive document based on the whole placement, which will include all the interview data that has been collected as an appendix.

This report contains a brief description of the work that has been carried out and sets out a summary of the placement. A more detailed report is set out within the social audit itself.
1.1. Introduction: ToastLoveCoffee (TLC)

This section gives a short summary of TLC in terms of its location, its frequency, its network, the director’s motivations for starting it and its funding sources.

1.1.1. Where: location

TLC is a social enterprise pop-up cafe, which during 2014-15, operated out of ‘The Hub’ on Hovingham Avenue in Harehills. Gipton and Harehills, a ‘super-diverse’ ward (cf. Vertovec, 2006), has a history of immigration and could exemplify a ‘layered immigrant space’ (Blommaert, 2010:7). It also has the highest percentage of residents born outside the UK who have moved during the last decade of all Leeds wards (34.2%) and 88.8% of Harehills residents in one Super Output Area are from BME groups (Callaghan, TLang ward profile, 2015: 2).

Gipton and Harehills is the most deprived ward in Leeds, with, according to the TLang ward profile summary of the 2010 Super Output Area index, 3,170 children under 16 (40.6%) living in poverty and, within Leeds, the ward has the highest unemployment figures (Callaghan, 2015: 10).

‘The Hub’ is a small portacabin from which a number of initiatives operate for the local community. A local charity, CATCH (Community Action to Change Harehills) which was set up by local residents in conjunction with Leeds City Council and West Yorkshire Police runs youth groups from the building, including a girls only session. The Welcome Group, a drop in session for advice and advocacy for the Roma community also used the building as a base (TLang case study 1). In July 2015, the building was taken back by the primary school next door, Hovingham Primary School, to accommodate its growing pupil cohort.

At the time of writing this document, TLC is still awaiting a new venue, which it is hoped will be ready by the end of the year. It is envisaged that the Hovingham Avenue location will be retained and a new building will be a permanent base for CATCH and for TLC. TLC helped with the setting up of a ‘pay as you feel cafe’ at Richmond Hill Primary School, and one of the regular TLC team is assisting each week.

1.1.2. When: frequency

TLC started out on Wednesday mornings between 10am and 12noon offering coffee, tea, toast and cakes on a ‘Pay As You Feel’ basis. In April 2015, it started to open for an additional morning, on Tuesdays.

1.1.3. Who: network

The cafe is part of the Real Junk Food Project (https://www.facebook.com/TheRealJunkFoodProject), a Leeds-based organisation which works to intercept food and distribute it among its network of pay as you feel
cafes and restaurants, combating food waste and food poverty. It is also linked with Together for Peace (http://www.t4p.org.uk), CATCH and City of Sanctuary, Leeds (https://leeds.cityofsanctuary.org).

The network of individuals and organisations involved with setting up the organisation initially is explored within the main report.

1.1.4. Why: motivations

The motivations for the social enterprise are explored in more detail within the main report. Anna Dyson, TLC director’s motivations to start the cafe are also set out in two short films which have been commissioned about the project. One, made as part of the Faces, Spaces, Places project, funded by the ESRC as an experimental pilot project and led by a researcher from Durham University in partnership with the Near Neighbours fund and a second, made as part of the crowdfunder campaign.

’I ideologically did not want it to be a charity that people come to… because I think there is a difference there. So it’s a community interest company and that’s basically the story, we’ve been running since September, thanks to the support of the Near Neighbours grant.

(AD, interview with SS, 13/11/2014)

1.1.5. How: funding

TLC is funded by a number of sources including the Church Urban Fund, Leeds Grant Group, the School for Social Entrepreneurs and through donations. There is a current crowdfunder campaign to raise more funds for a new unit to be brought over to the site for the cafe to have as its base. (http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/toastlovecoffee-community-cafe/)

2. Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the project was to gather information and data over the course of the placement which could then be drawn on to produce a detailed social audit. The objective of the placement was to produce this document in two forms: a short version for the public, and a longer detailed version for the organisation itself to draw on in the future.

2.1. The social audit

According to documentation produced by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (document dated March 2013), requirements for a social audit of a community interest company are as follows:
- Details of what the CIC has done to benefit the community;
- Details of how it has consulted its stakeholders on its activities;
- Details of dividends declared (or proposed) on shares and performance related interest paid and their compliance with the capping rules;
- Information on the transfer of assets to another locked body or otherwise at less than market value for the benefit of the community.

This report attends to the first two of these requirements, with the focus being mainly on producing an account and analysis of what TLC has done to benefit the local community in which it is located and which it aims to serve. This will include information about how ‘community’ is defined in this case.

A summary of the steering committee meetings as well as interim meetings and more informal conversations will also be set out and analysed. A report of the year 2014-2015 will then be provided.

The DBIS documentation also states that

‘a CIC’s activities may not, in all circumstances, amount to providing goods or services. The activities may, for example, be awareness raising of a particular issue. It is also possible that, whilst continuing to meet the community interest test, the activities of a CIC may change and CICs will need to review their position each year.’ (p.5)

2.2. The social audit for TLC

Therefore, in summary, this social audit sets out a documentary record of the previous year’s activities as gained through the research activities and through the organisation’s documentation and records, as well as provisional recommendations for the following year. The social audit allows for the organisation to have a permanent record of this year’s activities. TLC benefits from the production of this document by an independent researcher who has an in-depth knowledge of the workings of the organisation as well as a developing research-based knowledge of the area.

3. Methodology

I opted to undertake this placement as an individual who had already become involved with the organisation as a volunteer. I was therefore embedded within the enterprise to a certain extent and known to the other volunteers and to the customers. Wills (2012) offered a useful starting point for how this kind of participation would work through her research with London Citizens. I also drew from Gibson-Graham’s work on ‘performative practices’ within research (2008). My presence within the organisation offered me a unique positioning, as I was well enough established for the customers and volunteers to speak to me about their experiences, and I was not an unknown
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‘researcher’. It did raise a number of challenges, however, which are discussed in part 6 of this summary.

As a doctoral researcher attached to the TLang project (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tlang/index.aspx) I also bring knowledge and understanding from my involvement with the research investigations that are being carried out by the Leeds-based research team. Although my own doctoral research has moved away from this particular geographical location, I am able to draw on my experiences thus far with the research into translanguaging and superdiversity that is being conducted in and around Harehills for this report. I am also able to utilise emerging data and ongoing analysis to inform my broader knowledge of this location and the activities taking place within it. This could form a useful example of how impact and engagement work can lead from research projects and how the two practices can be mutually informative.

For my own doctoral research I have adopted a linguistic ethnographic approach (see, for example, Copland and Creese, 2015; Blommaert and Jie, 2010). I have taken elements from this approach into the methodology for this placement, for example the use of participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork, and the analysis of interview data. The main difference methodologically between this placement and my main fieldwork has been in terms of the level of participation. In order to work within an organisation of this kind (pop-up, grass roots, reliant on volunteers) an approach that was integrative was important, both in terms of having a sense of contribution to the venture (it is a setting in which everyone contributes and in which a willingness to contribute is endemic, as demonstrated in the interview data) and in terms of being able to gain a detailed understanding of what is happening at any one time. For this, I drew from the Participatory Action Research toolkits, developed by researchers at the Durham University as well as studies which developed and implemented these approaches. More detail on the methodology is given in the final report.

The methods I employed were as follows:

- Participant observation
- Semi-structured interviews
- Recordings of meetings
- Analysis of documentation pertaining to the organisation

4. Summary of findings
The findings can be grouped into the following sections:

- Identification and understanding of what ‘community’ means for TLC
- Identification of motivations for participation in the initiative
  - For volunteers
  - For customers
5. Learning outcomes

The learning outcomes can be grouped into two categories: those for the organisation and those for me as a researcher.

For the organisation, the learning outcomes are around participation and community – how they can continue to engage with those at whom the project is targeted and how they can build the cafe community further, making the best use of the resources they have to hand. There is also the opportunity to explore the different perspectives on having a researcher embedded within the organisation and the positive and negative aspects of this. Additionally, the connection to the university can be reflected on by all parties. These are discussed in the main report.

As a new researcher coming from a background in university engagement and outreach, this experience has been extremely informative for me. I have been able to explore participatory action research methodologies and methods, as well as implement different kinds of social research methods, including interviewing, in a setting outside that of my own fieldwork. The two sites (TLC and a community arts organisation), which differ greatly, have complemented each other and enabled me to understand more about how different methodologies can be employed across diverse settings. This has developed my own skills as a researcher, as well as my confidence. I am interested in exploring further the application of research methods of these kinds as well as collaborative projects and endeavours. The process of working in partnership with the organisation in order to produce a piece of work that is both useful and needed has been an enriching and educational experience.

I am extremely grateful to TLC for their support and encouragement with this, as well as for being an inspirational and exciting initiative, to the TLang team for the work which has continued to shape this report and to the LSSI for funding it.

6. Challenges encountered

A number of challenges were encountered during the process of the placement.
- This is a fledgling project aiming to serve a diverse and deprived area, as detailed previously in the document. As a researcher, I was keen to ensure that my presence did not detract from the main purpose of the venture. I had a number of questions regarding the official nature of a research project with participant consent forms and the formalised nature of questionnaires: ‘Would the customers want to participate if they thought it was being researched? Even if I could explain it well to potential participants, if the venture is to provide a safe and comfortable space for people within the community, how would it feel if it was an ‘official research site’ with paperwork, information sheets and consent forms? (JB research notes, January 2015)’

For example, when considering the interviews I wanted to undertake, I needed to wait for a number of months until I believed myself to be embedded within the organisation, before approaching fellow volunteers and cafe customers to ask for an interview.

- This led to an additional consideration: that of the complexity of being a participant-observer. I wanted to maintain certain principles of research of this kind, as defined as ‘long-term and open-ended commitment, generous attentiveness, relational depth, and sensitivity to contact’ (Ingold, 2014: 384). I took the approach of volunteering within the cafe space. This involved pouring coffee, serving cake, washing up, and, of course, talking to and getting to know customers. My understanding of the cafe space developed during my time volunteering and I would not have been able to have the same experience without taking this particular approach to the project. But equally, I was keen that the customers and other volunteers did not see my presence there as being with the purpose of information gathering, rather a ‘correspondence’ (390) with the people involved, the space, and its purpose.

- On a practical level, the interviews were sometimes difficult to facilitate. The cafe was situated within a small portacabin, and, once a number of customers were talking, it could be difficult to hear the recordings. This sometimes necessitated conducting the interviews away from the cafe space, including in the reception area and outside.

- Other researchers were present within the organisation. We were all keen to ensure that the initiative was not ‘over-researched’. This ‘research community’ within the project gradually became a strength in terms of the different projects taking place. Our collaboration and communication enabled us to be sure we did not, for example, conduct too many interviews with customers. We were also able to share our reflections on the time we spent there and the experiences we had. We met up regularly and were able to consider aspects of our research,
including ethics. Although our work was in different areas, we recognised the value of learning from each other.

7. References


Web resources:

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