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Using archives to conduct collaborative research on language and region

Fiona Douglas (University of Leeds)

Introduction

This chapter describes the innovative approach to dialect study that underpins the *Language, History, Place* project: a research, teaching and public engagement initiative that brings together materials from an existing language and cultural heritage archive, the *Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture* (*LAVC*), with real-life objects in the museum setting. The chapter explores the substantial research opportunities and benefits offered by reuniting tangible with intangible heritage; it discusses the intellectual and methodological challenges associated with trying to reuse archive data for purposes not originally envisaged, and investigates the possibility of augmenting the archive by inviting visitors to contribute their own linguistic heritage through various enactive engagement activities. What is and is not possible, defensible, or allowable within the parameters of publicly engaged sociolinguistic research? Is it possible to collect useful language research data using such methods, whilst at the same time significantly enriching museum collections and providing an enhanced, enjoyable and stimulating visitor experience? Must historical archives such as the *LAVC* remain closed, completed repositories or can they be open, dynamic resources that we reuse, reframe, and repurpose, and to which new materials are added?

The LAVC: an historic archive

The *Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture* is a unique multimedia archive collection relating to the study of dialect and folk life in England. It is derived from two main sources: materials from the *Survey of English Dialects* (*SED*) developed by Harold Orton and Eugen Dieth during the 1950s and 1960s (see Orton and Dieth 1971; Sanderson and Widdowson 1987;

Upton *et al.*1994; Upton and Widdowson 2013), and materials from the former Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies (*IDFLS*). Following the closure of the *IDFLS* in 1983, the *SED* and *IDFLS* archives were rather neglected, before being relocated to the University of Leeds Brotherton Library's Special Collections in the early 1990s. A successful bid to the AHRB's Resource Enhancement scheme in 2002, designed to make the collections 'accessible to researchers and ensure their long term preservation' (University of Leeds 2014), facilitated the development of a detailed catalogue for the renamed *Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture* collection (Wiltshire and Jenner 2005), and the digitisation of an extensive range of sound recordings. A tantalising sample of 23 digitised photographs and 16 audio files was made available on the project website (University of Leeds 2014) in order to indicate the types of material held in the archive.

The *LAVC* contains all the materials associated with the *Survey of English Dialects*, both published and unpublished, including nine subject-specific 'books' containing the responses to the Survey's 1,300 questions (administered in 313 locations), all the fieldworkers' notebooks (a fascinating record of sociolinguistic research from a previous era before audio recordings in the field were routine), word maps showing dialect isoglosses, the Basic and Incidental Materials, and a series of photographs commissioned as part of the Survey and taken by the renowned ethnographical photographer Werner Kissling. With advances in audio technology, it became increasingly possible to capture recordings in the field, and so some of the original locations and contributors were later revisited, and a series of informal conversations on home, farm, and working life recorded as a complement to the original Survey materials until the early 1970s. The *LAVC* also contains the outputs from the *IDFLS*, also based at the University of Leeds which, originally under the direction of Stewart Sanderson, operated from 1964 until the early 1980s. In all, the archive comprises some 2,000 photographs, over 900 audio recordings, more than 220 student theses and

dissertations, myriad research papers, newspaper cuttings, administrative records, Survey and Institute correspondence, all collected over a period of thirty years and providing exceptional insights into language, culture, and everyday life in twentieth-century England.

Unquestionably, the *LAVC* is a marvellous and exciting collection; but despite the 2002-2005 project's cataloguing of the archive, and its digitisation of the sound recordings (some of which are available via the British Library's sound archive website (British Library a), the collection remains locked away in Special Collections – safely preserved but largely inaccessible to, and unused by, the communities from which its rich dialect and cultural materials were collected. Visitors can of course make appointments to consult them, and the *LAVC* catalogue has made it possible to map the scope of the archive, and to locate specific resources. But realistically, only bona-fide academic researchers, or determined and motivated individual members of the public, are ever likely to access it. Consequently, the archive is underused and underpublicised, a fate that befalls all too many of our important collections. Its status has thus diminished over time and, like many other such resources, although carefully preserved, it is in danger of becoming a historical artefact and linguistic reliquary[i].

The *Language, History, Place* project: an archive reborn

The *Language, History, Place* project seeks to breathe new life into the *LAVC* by using the archive as a catalyst for new research and teaching activities, coupled with public engagement initiatives, within the communities from which the archive materials originally came. The project embraces the NCCPE's[ii] (2014) definition of public engagement as: 'the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit'. The project is based on a

partnership, established in 2009, between the School of English at the University of Leeds, the Brotherton Library's Special Collections, and three Yorkshire museums: the Dales Countryside Museum in Hawes, the Ryedale Folk Museum in Hutton-le-Hole, and the Shibden Hall Folk Museum outside Halifax. To date, project activities have been a six-month MLA[iii]-funded pilot (2010), and various undergraduate student research opportunities: a research scholarship (2010), the *Language, Identity and Community* option module (2011 onwards), and final year dissertations (2014).

The museums are located in different parts of Yorkshire, and each seeks to reflect the area's local culture and heritage. Though different in character, governance, and funding structures, all have vernacular culture or folk life[iv] collections centred on traditional ways of life and everyday objects that might once have been found in the home, on the farm, or in a craftsman's workshop. Whereas the museum collections and displays focus on 'tangible heritage' as manifested by historical artefacts, the *LAVC* contains complementary and contemporaneous 'intangible heritage'[v] materials with especial strengths in 'oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage' (UNESCO 2003). Many folk museums, including the three Yorkshire partners, have their origins in the post-war period, especially during the 1950s and early 1960s[vi], when vernacular culture collections were often assembled in response to the perceived threats of increased industrialisation (Smith 2012). The *SED* and *IDFLS* were busy collecting 'genuine' dialect from older 'ordinary' people in mainly rural locations, with a view to preserving it for future generations before it was irrevocably changed by increased social and geographical mobility; simultaneously, the folk life museums were gathering the everyday objects that were rapidly becoming, or were already, obsolete and in danger of being lost forever.

The *Language, History, Place* project aims to open up the very substantial archives of the *LAVC* to much wider audiences by marrying digitised copies of archive materials with the

physical artefacts to which they relate within these museums, and hence returning them to the local community context. Not only does this enrich the museums' displays and enhance the visitor experience, it also puts these resources back into the communities whence they came, upholding Wolfram's (1993) *principle of linguistic gratuity*. (See also Wolfram *et al.* 2008; Wolfram 2010; Wolfram 2012). To date, use of the *LAVC* has been largely restricted to the academic community. But given its cultural, historic and linguistic importance, it is not only desirable, but ethically responsible, to ensure that its resources are made accessible to a wider and lay audience. After all, these materials were collected from local communities. It is their voices that speak on the audio recordings, their pronunciations, and their words for everyday objects that were collected and analysed, their customs, beliefs and ways of life that are documented by the extensive photographic and folk life collections. By locking these resources up in academic repositories, treating them as artefacts of a bygone age, and separating them from the way of life they describe and their communities of origin, we lose much of their vital energy and significance.

By marrying the *LAVC*'s language and other resources to the museums' physical artefacts, we have the opportunity to unlock meaning and reawaken connections. Language has the power to connect us with places and history, and with remote or unfamiliar cultural heritage. There is something powerfully evocative about hearing voices from the past, or learning about the unfamiliar words people used for everyday objects of a bygone age, that connects us to the original community; as Anderson (1991: 145) says: 'nothing connects us affectively to the dead more than language'. Voices from the past may be in the form of dialect recordings, such as those from the *LAVC*, or oral history recordings, held in museums, libraries, or oral history archives; both can provide valuable data for the sociolinguist (e.g. Moore's *Scilly Voices* project (2010) and Maguire's (2014) *Dialect of the Holy Island of Lindisfarne* (*DHIL*) corpus (see chapters X and X in this volume), and Leach's (2014) work

with Stoke-on-Trent museums on *Voices of the Potteries*). Miller (2008) argues for everyday objects as an important means by which people connect with both the past and human relationships; 'the "past" is embodied and commodified in the things that people buy and use' (Shove *et al.* 2009: 7). By reuniting tangible and intangible heritage, bringing together the language, stories, voices, and visual representations of the past with the physical objects they describe, and doing so within the communities whence they originated, both the *LAVC* and museum collections gain new meaning and salience. To quote one of the museum directors: 'your language resources will make our objects sing'.

Enactive engagement in the museum contact zone

Museums have much in common with academic archives: both are safe places for the long-term storage, curation and preservation of historical collections, and both are loci of trusted knowledge and institutional authority; but unless carefully managed and reinvigorated, each runs the risk of having collections that become static and moribund. In the case of the partner folk life museums, their fascinating collections of everyday objects from the past represent earlier ways of life that grow increasingly remote from visitors' experience with each passing year. Smith (2012: 56) argues that such museums face significant problems as the passage of time results in artefacts becoming 'divorced from the intangible cultural heritage that gave them significance'.

As is often the case in folk life museums, objects are displayed as they might have been found in situ, not locked away in glass cases and given scholarly labels; reconstructed rooms and workshops are presented as though the person had just stepped out for a moment leaving their tools or everyday objects behind them. Despite these naturalised settings, folk life museums have to work hard to make their collections relevant and meaningful to present-day audiences. Because there is little traditional written interpretation in the form of labels,

visitors are required to have 'cultural competence'[vii] - i.e. to have a cultural, historical, cognitive, and sensory competence that enables them to experience the display in a way that is understandable, stimulating and satisfying. In short, without detailed interpretative labels attached to each object, people need to be able to draw on their own 'funds of knowledge' (González *et al.* 2005) to help them make sense of the artefacts. 'Funds of knowledge' are acquired on the basis of lived experience, and may be particular to family or local life. An important cultural resource, they are often passed down the generations, but can be damaged or lost by cultural or temporal dislocation (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg 2005).

When originally established in the 1950s and 60s, folk life museums could rely on some of their visitors being able to recognise objects from their childhood, bringing their own life experiences to bear on interpreting the displays. With time, however, fewer and fewer visitors can be expected to make sense of objects that represent a culture of which they have little or no direct experience; in short, their 'funds of knowledge' have been lost, and they are disconnected from the past and its associated cultural heritage. Craftsmen's tools used by blacksmiths, coopers, saddlers and wheelwrights; commonplace objects associated with domestic routines such as dairying and laundry; implements from rural life, farming and agriculture – all of this tangible heritage can mean little to the present-day museum visitor. The objects themselves, though interesting, are seldom especially beautiful or valuable; these are the bits and pieces of everyday life from a bygone era, not aesthetically prized, and it would be easy to dismiss them as dull and uninteresting, 'a pile of rusty old stuff'. This situation presents significant challenges to the museums: how can they best engage with visitors who do not have the requisite cultural competence and for whom the objects displayed and ways of life represented are remote, unfamiliar, and difficult to relate to?

One powerful means of doing so is via 'enactive engagement' (Hooper-Greenhill 1994), which some would argue is essential in folk life and living museums. Enactive

engagement is 'the opportunity … for visitors to participate themselves, and become part of the exhibition experience, rather than act as passive bystanders', and it harnesses the potential of the 'nostalgic memories that visitors share and may transmit to one another', to others and to staff, the evocative power of stories that have been passed down the generations (Wilks and Kelly 2008: 132-5). In so doing, visitors are helping to generate meaning, and the whole experience becomes a 'collective activity' with both personal and interpersonal significance. Whereas individuals can transmit their memories simply by talking about them first-hand, Halbwachs (1925) argued that a community's 'social' or 'collective' memory is more disconnected from original events. Importantly for the *Language, History, Place* project, story-telling, objects, and a sense of place can help to remake these connections (Halbwachs 1925; Connerton 1989; Fentress and Wickham 1992; Feld and Basso 1996; Winter 2009; Crane 2011). Crucially, social memory is 'an active and ongoing process' (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 3), so by offering visitors these opportunities, it is possible to maintain a dynamic dialogue between past and present.

Clifford (1997) conceptualises museums as 'contact zones'[viii], places of 'encounter', with permeable walls, where communities, cultures, and museum interact, intersect, and influence each other. Though the theory has since been challenged (most especially by the work of Bennett (1998), see also Dibley (2005)), reworked and revisited (Macdonald 2002; Boast 2011; Onciul 2013; Schorch 2013), it remains an influential, pervasive, and productive concept (Peers and Brown 2003; Crooke 2007). The 2011 conference, *Revisiting the Contact Zone: Museums, Theory, Practice*, established it as significant for ongoing debates. The contact zone's emphases on dialogic encounter and the role of the visitor (Witcomb 2003; Mason 2011) have particular importance for the *Language, History, Place* project. The Leeds project's partner museums are places where meanings and significations can be negotiated and co-created by encounters between visitors, staff, space, objects and ideas (Hennes 2010).

Peers and Brown (2003: 4) argue that artefacts function as 'contact zones', both as 'sources of knowledge' and as 'catalysts for new relationships – both within and between … communities'. This dialogic dynamism is also characteristic of intangible cultural heritage, which UNESCO (2003) characterises as being 'transmitted from generation to generation', 'constantly recreated by communities' and providing them with 'a sense of identity and continuity'. It represents both past 'inherited traditions' and 'contemporary urban and rural practices in which diverse cultural groups take part' (UNESCO 2014).

Visitors bring to the contact zone their own ideas, funds of knowledge, narratives, memories, and cultural heritage; in so doing, they create new meanings, new ideas, and new intersections. Crucially for the *Language, History, Place* project, they also bring their own linguistic heritage, identities, and practices; this gives them a way in to interpreting unfamiliar cultural heritage (e.g. by hearing voices from the past which bring the museum objects to life), and also means they have something valuable to contribute within the contact zone.

So, the project goes beyond reuniting tangible and intangible heritage, important though that is. The purpose is not just to make the *LAVC*'s existing academic research data and cultural resources available to museum communities and to the wider public through the enrichment of museum displays (both physical and virtual/online exhibitions) by combination with museum artefacts; it also aims to use these resources as a stimulus, creating a range of public engagement opportunities that both enhance the visitor experience and enable us to collect new present-day language data from visitors. By harnessing the potential of enactive engagement within the museum context, we can help visitors to (re)connect with a sense of themselves, their heritage, their history, their language, and their sense of place and identity. The experience is participatory in the fullest sense, given that the visitors are invited to share

their present-day language with us, for the benefit of other visitors, the museums and their displays, and the ongoing research project.

With time, as the gap widens between the objects displayed in these museums and the cultural competence of visitors, and as funds of knowledge are lost (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (2005), this type of activity is likely to increase in importance. In many cases, they are what we might term 'privileged encounters' - privileged because they occur within that specific space owing to the convergence of particular circumstances, social actors, and stimuli. In other words, without the co-presence in the museum space of people and objects, we are unlikely to glean many of these stories, and the associated language practice. Without the museum context to reunite tangible and intangible heritage, many of these conversations would never happen, and the discovery of a shared cultural inheritance and distinctive linguistic practice would be lost to researchers and visitors forever.

Transformative encounters for all

Hennes (2010) emphasises the potentially transformative importance of these encounters in the museum context. By focusing attention on the objects in front of them, by spending time engaging with and thinking about the ideas and stories presented, visitors may discover things they have repressed or not yet realised. By making sense of the exhibition, they may also be trying to make sense of themselves in relation to it. By giving to the process, they gain from it. There are obvious benefits such as a more enjoyable and memorable museum visit, because one has taken part in something meaningful rather than simply consuming the thoughts or narratives of others. There may also be educational benefits, given that activities can be designed to inform as well as to engage. If other visitors are simultaneously engaged in the same activity, then as a group they may begin to uncover shared ideas, narratives, and cultural or linguistic heritage. Even where visitors have no immediate connection to the

objects and ideas presented, they are still likely to be discussing and reacting to what they see, hear, and experience within the museum space. If invited to consider thematic topics such as *home life* or domestic objects as well as history and place, everyone has an opportunity to contribute and to have their contribution valued. (See Pahl and Roswell 2010; Pahl and Pollard 2010; Pahl 2012.) In this way, even visitors with no geographical or cultural links to the museum's artefacts can become involved with what is on offer. Properly managed, enactive engagement is an inclusive rather than exclusive experience.

Language research in the museum

The *Language, History, Place* project's emphasis on language gives all visitors a point of entry, regardless of background or education, because it is something that most of us use daily, to which we can easily relate, and to which we can all contribute. Language is an important part of our identities: it says much about who we are, where we come from, what we value. It gives us a sense of place and of history. Language also connects us to others within the community in the present-day, so it has a horizontal as well as vertical reach: 'there is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests' (Anderson 1991: 145). It is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive: inclusive because it gives us a sense of belonging; exclusive because it underlines difference. Both sides of the coin offer enactive engagement opportunities; familiarity stimulates discussion around similarities to visitors' own varieties; difference often prompts them to supply their own words, sayings, and pronunciations. Most people are very willing to discuss their language use and that of others, their linguistic likes and dislikes, favourite words and accents, and generally they enjoy doing so. Thoughtfully harnessed, all of this can provide valuable data for language research, as well as enhancing the visitor experience and museum displays. All we have to do is collect it; but how best to do so? What are the opportunities and challenges of gathering

language data in this context, and how do we address issues of comparability with earlier datasets such as those of the *LAVC*?

Challenges, opportunities and comparability

In most types of research involving the collection or analysis of sociolinguistic material, data integrity and robustness are usually deemed essential, and researchers will go to considerable lengths to preselect data samples, control variables, and ensure consistency. What does this mean for the reuse of legacy archive data in sociolinguistic research alongside the collection of new, present-day language data from museum visitors?

Firstly, there is the question of how best to reconcile the existing and new datasets so as to ensure comparability. What were the data collection protocols for the original studies, and which parameters should inform the new data collection strategies? How can comparability across two different datasets, collected for different purposes across different time periods, and according to different conventions, be achieved? Other sociolinguistic research projects which reuse and augment legacy data have faced similar issues, e.g. the *Diachronic Electronic Corpus of Tyneside English* (DECTE)[ix] (Beal 2009; Corrigan *et al.* 2012; Beal and Corrigan 2013). Secondly, there is the question of the extent to which it is possible to add to the archive by using self-selecting contributors whilst still maintaining representativeness. Thirdly, there is the matter of the logistical and methodological mechanics of collecting language data from museum visitors.

Traditional dialectology, of which the *SED* is a good example, was largely concerned with tracing connections between dialect and older forms of the language, so it had a strong historical dimension. Although such work is valuable, and provides useful historical comparisons for present-day language researchers, it has been criticised for being unrepresentative, most especially because it offers only limited information about variability

within individual speech communities, as in most cases only a few and the 'best' dialect speakers were selected for inclusion (Chambers and Trudgill 1998; Foulkes & Docherty 2007). Representativeness was never its aim, and *SED* data collection methods favoured older, predominantly male, speakers from rural communities in the belief that they would best represent the 'pure' dialect forms of the past. The *Language, History, Place* project does not seek to be a present-day *SED*. Influential and significant as it was and still is, the *SED* is not without its flaws. The questionnaire format is both expensive and time-consuming to administer, and it yields data with its own idiosyncrasies and problems. *SED* participants were selected, not on the basis of being a representative sample of the overall population, but according to the rather dubious criterion of the state of their dentition:

> The informants themselves were *predominantly natives from rural communities*, with preference being given to those who had spent *little or no time away from their home village, to males* (who were less inclined to correct their speech) and to those who were intelligent and *had a good set of teeth (!)*. (University of Leeds 2014) [my emphases]

Unless the present-day data collection activities were to reproduce the *SED* methodologies and sampling regime, absolute data comparability cannot be guaranteed. But, as already discussed, working within the museum context via interactive public engagement activities, it is not desirable to exclude swathes of visitors on the basis of their social/cultural background, geographical origins, age, or indeed on the state of their teeth! To what extent, then, is it possible to undertake useful sociolinguistic analysis if you are not in a position to select and control the sample?

Many sociolinguistic studies aim to have fixed proportions of specific age-groups, genders, socioeconomic profiles and so on. (See chapters on methodology in Mallinson *et al.* 2013; Schilling 2013.) Whilst such controls seem to promise more reliable data, they may unwittingly skew the final results. There are many advantages in collecting language from a self-selecting volunteer sample, rather than from a preselected and conservative group like the NORMs favoured by the *SED* and other traditional dialect surveys. By inviting everyone to participate, we are gaining an insight into the range of visitor profiles. Self-selection offers its own brand of representativeness, though like all museum work, we need to be aware of potential lacunae in socioeconomic profiles. If we operated with predetermined categories based on regional and social demographic criteria, we might find they do not readily suit visitor profiles. By not excluding visitors from beyond the museum's geographical area, and by not setting predetermined sociolinguistic criteria, we not only ensure a more inclusive visitor experience, but are likely to gain a richer and less restricted dataset. By asking visitors to submit non-intrusive accompanying metadata information (e.g. their and their parents' place of origin and residence; an indication of age range; other social and demographic data) whilst contributing their own language to the project, we can build the collection from the bottom up rather than by the top-down approach usually favoured in sociolinguistic studies. We can augment the dataset as necessary by running event days, putting out special appeals, and experimenting with online crowdsourcing collection methods. So we have the potential to explore both synchronic and diachronic comparisons with existing and new archive data. And because the project welcomes linguistic contributions from all visitors, not just those who recognise or share the dialect varieties exhibited, or who fit predetermined sociolinguistic categories, everyone can share in the experience.

The museums likewise are keen that we research actual language use in all its rich variety as evidenced across the range of their visitors. They are not looking to preserve a

community or its language in aspic, or to build exhibitions and experiences that focus only on times past. The Dales Countryside Museum, for example, is interested in current life in the Dales, which is not only about rural farming communities, but also includes the rich variety of individuals who currently live, work, and visit there. It encompasses both those with longstanding family connections to the area, and those with no family links to the Dales who may have moved there more recently, some of whom may fully or partially work from home in non-traditional Dales occupations such as finance, PR, web design, and also day-trippers and holidaymakers. In short, they are interested in both locals and incomers, or *off-cumdens* as the latter are known in Yorkshire. Ultimately, museums want to relate to their audiences, whoever they may be.

It is well known that elicitation techniques can have a major impact on the type and quality of data collected. The Observer's Paradox remains a bugbear for all who try to collect language data, and eliciting casual or naturalistic language often seems to be the holy grail of sociolinguistic studies, especially for those investigating 'non-standard' or 'dialect' usage. Both individual and group data collection approaches have been used by others harnessing the opportunities offered by public engagement. The British Museum's 2010 *Evolving English* exhibition used a mock telephone booth to collect language data from respondents reading aloud from *Mr Tickle* or a short word list (British Library b). In 2005, *BBC Voices* took a variety of approaches in its attempt to obtain a snapshot of language use at the start of the 21st century, and combined audio-recorded group interactions with individual voluntary website elicited responses to the project's thematically structured spidergrams[x] (Elmes 2013; Robinson *et al.* 2013).

Where does all of this leave us? There is clearly no one ideal method of collecting dialect data, and so the *Language, History, Place* project tests different methods of enactive engagement and data elicitation, and uses both individual and group data collection strategies,

to see which are the most effective in the museum context. It is hoped that collecting language data as part of a museum visit that is both enabling and enjoyable for participants makes much more feasible the eliciting of good and perhaps even naturalistic data. Visitors are likely to be relaxed and enjoying themselves. The context is fairly informal, and sharing one's words or pronunciations for things may seem much less threatening or odd in that context than it would within a traditional academic research environment where people may feel they need to be on their best linguistic behaviour. Researcher observation suggests that, when presented with even basic *LAVC* stimuli in the museum such as photographs, audio recordings, word maps etc., visitors often spontaneously begin to discuss and reminisce with each other, and that process of interaction yields much richer and less self-conscious linguistic data than responses to targeted questions within a controlled environment.

Activities tested by the *Language, History, Place* project to date, within the context of the pilot study and the undergraduate research opportunities, which enable students to carry out primary research and public engagement activities within the museum context, have been multifarious, have yielded rich research data, and have been warmly welcomed by the partner museums and their visitors. We have used a variety of stimulus materials from the *LAVC* to elicit present-day language from museum visitors, and set up recording stations on site, inviting people to come along and share their memories and language with us. The community links offered by the museums, both via their physical location and their extensive networks of museum friends and volunteers, present exciting and unique opportunities. By collaborating with visitors and volunteers, we have seen that encounters with artefacts and voices from the past within the museum contact zone yield new experiences and insights, and we have been able to make links between past and present. For example, we interviewed someone who remembers the original visits made to her father by Kissling and the *SED* researchers; some fifty years on, she was able to shed new light on *SED* fieldwork and

photographs. Students have made an educational film about dialect for one of the museums, drawing on the first-hand experience of one of the volunteers (now 84 years old) who remembers World War II evacuees arriving in the village and their bewilderment on first encountering the local dialect variety. We have also carried out mini surveys where visitors have been invited to 'post' their words in the dialect letter-box. Visitors have responded enthusiastically to all of these invitations, and valuable and diverse language data has been collected in a relatively brief period. The results have been analysed and compared with existing research data (past and present), and students have written up as their work as academic essays and as accounts for lay audiences, with the latter being displayed both in the museum and online via museum blogs. In this way, students learned to work between the academic and museum environments, 'translating' their research for different audiences. Even activities that superficially may have seemed like 'just a bit of fun' such as the dialect-informed *Call my Bluff* game run at a museum open day have revealed the public's appetite and enthusiasm for all things language-related. (Although primarily aimed at children, we soon found that adult visitors were keen to take part in guessing which dialect words were real and which were bluffs.) All of these activities can yield rich language data, and in ways that have benefits for all concerned.

The legacy of privileged linguistic encounters

And so, the *Language, History, Place* project invites visitors to make a lasting contribution to both the museums and research partners, and, by extension, to the communities within which the museums are situated. By taking part in these activities, visitors contribute their language, stories, and cultural heritage to the project for the benefit of other visitors, themselves, the museums, and academic researchers. Nowadays many museums have interactive displays which encourage visitors to tell their own stories, or contribute their thoughts to a visual

display; but all too often such activities, whilst fulfilling for visitors during their actual visit, lack legacy value. After a brief period on display, such contributions are all too often discarded or, if retained, put into storage or the museum archive. Simon (2010: 15) talks about the problem of 'broken feedback loops' where individuals who have contributed to participatory museum activities do not 'see their work integrated in a timely, attractive, respectful way', and she stresses the need for museums to think carefully about the scaffolding, parameters, flexibility, and 'rewards' for visitor participation. In short – contributing should count.

Further to the benefits of enactive engagement already cited, this project offers additional advantages that are linked to the focus on language and its often overlooked capacity for ensuring social inclusion. One consequence of these transformative encounters is powerful validation of the importance of the language varieties that people bring with them. One is all too familiar with situations where individuals have been told and believe that the language they use is 'slang', or somehow inferior to more prestigious standard forms. Even by labelling a variety as 'non-standard' or 'dialect', we immediately invoke, intentionally or otherwise, ideological presuppositions about value, desirability, and appropriateness. The *Language, History, Place* project makes no value judgements about linguistic varieties. It is not looking only for *correct*, *proper*, or *standard* varieties. Nor, unlike the *SED*, is it looking only for *conservative*, *good*, *broad*, or *traditional* dialect or carefully choosing a pre-selected group of 'dialect informants'. All contributions are valued equally, and for those visitors who may have previously felt or been told that their variety is non-standard, or somehow 'substandard', there is a validating effect in having that language seen as worthy of collection, public display, and further study. Helping visitors to discover and celebrate their individual linguistic practice and recognise its place within a larger linguistic heritage has long-lasting benefits that extend well beyond the life of any project.

By harnessing the potential of enactive engagement for dialect research within the museum, as researchers we stand to gain new knowledge, and perhaps to uncover novel, unforeseen research avenues. By enabling serendipitous, as well as planned, encounters within the museum contact zone, we open up the archive, and ourselves, to fresh insights. By encouraging the public to engage with, contribute to, and have a sense of ownership in, the archive, we democratise access to these rich cultural resources. But crowdsourcing and self-selecting data collection methodologies mean we also have to relinquish some of the control. We may even have to go as far as modifying our traditional scholarly notions of *authority* and *the expert.* By allowing so-called *non-experts* or *lay-persons* to help us reframe the archive through their encounters with it, things may get messy, or beyond our control, but this is healthy. There are undoubtedly significant implications attached to throwing open the archive doors to all, but to continue concentrating our efforts on simply preserving it and keeping most people out will bring more serious consequences, including potentially the death of the archive. Rebirthing the archive is tricky, but ultimately it can mean fresh beginnings for our carefully garnered and conserved precious resources. Our existing archives and repositories have the potential to be reanimated and reframed, to become living, culturally significant resources that bring forth new, and perhaps unforeseen, research and public engagement benefits. Each encounter with the archive has the potential to change it. As researchers and custodians, it is our responsibility to enable these transformative archival interventions, to breathe new vitality into our archives, and so secure their future.

By inviting visitors to share their language with us, and by respecting them as co-creators and co-curators of knowledge, we can make this an empowering encounter for all concerned. Visitors' contributions are a valuable and rich resource, and will help to shape our understanding of language use (and indeed museum visitor patterns and behaviour) in the 21st century. By asking visitors to share their linguistic heritage, we can ensure that their

contributions will feed into the research, archive, and museum collections of the future. By contributing their language to the project, visitors have the opportunity to discover more about themselves, more about their cultural heritage, and to have their linguistic heritage valued, studied, and preserved. By:

- collaborating with local museums, communities, and members of the public;
- engaging in proper dialogue with them;
- embedding our ongoing research in their collections, collective memories, and individual funds of knowledge;
- ensuring that they share ownership in the data we collect,

we can keep the doors to the *Language, History, Place* archive open and its walls permeable. To attain that would be to achieve enactive engagement and linguistic research at their very best: empowering, inclusive, meaningful, and with lasting legacies.

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[i] See Kendall (2013) for a useful overview on managing data preservation and access to linguistic data after projects have expired, and Corti and Thompson (2006) for discussion of how best to reuse, rework, and reanalyse different types of archived qualitative data.

[ii] The UK's National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement.

[iii] The former Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

[iv] Both terms seem patronising to modern ears, but see Wilks and Kelly (2008). Essentially, the focus in both is on traditional ways of life, and the associated tangible and intangible heritage. (See note v.)

[v] UNESCO (2003) defines intangible heritage as 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage'.

[vi] The same period heralded the launch of the Society for Folk Life Studies, in 1961, and the launch of the *Folk Life* journal, in 1963 (Mastoris 2012).

[vii] Their discussion of 'cultural competence' is borrowed from McIntosh and Prentice (1999: 591).

[viii] Clifford adapts the term from Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) work on literacy and writing within the multilingual classroom. For Pratt (1992: 7), the contact zone is 'an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separate by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect'.

[ix] DECTE is comprised of the existing *Newcastle Corpus of Tyneside English* (NECTE1) dating from c. 1979, and NECTE2 'an ongoing collection of interviews conducted in the North East of England since 2007' (Varieng 2011); see also NECTE (2007) and Allen *et al.* (2007).

[x] This methodology borrowed from earlier work on the *Survey of Regional English (SURE)* (Llamas 1999). 1999; Kerswill *et al.* 1999).