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Linguistic ethnographic perspectives on working-class children's speech: challenging discourses of deficit

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Introduction

In February 2013 it was widely reported in national newspapers that the head teacher of a primary school in Teesside, north-east England, had banned the use of spoken Teesside dialect forms in the classroom and written to her pupils' parents to ask that they do the same at home (e.g. Williams 2013). The stated reason for this move was the need to give the working-class pupils involved the best possible chance of educational (and later career) success, which for this head teacher meant eradicating eleven 'incorrect' words, phrases and pronunciations from the children's speech (represented in Figure 1 below). This story was of particular interest to me because I happen to be a native of Teesside – one who uses all eleven of these 'problem' features – and I have also conducted research on children's language in this area. As such, I was especially infuriated by the inaccuracies and flawed assumptions evident in this head teacher's letter to parents (and the media reporting of it) and troubled by the potential damage these might cause to young working-class children. I responded publicly in an article published in *The Independent* (Snell 2013a), but it was of course impossible to do justice to the issue in the less than 600 words afforded to me. In this chapter I pick up on some of the points addressed in this article, as well as the issues and questions that were raised in the debate surrounding it.

The Teesside story is by no means unique. Similar reports have emerged based on the actions of schools elsewhere in the UK, including Essex, Sheffield, the Black Country, and London (where ethnicity and related prejudices enter the fray). Indeed, the issue of dialect prejudice in

education has a long history, both in the UK and elsewhere. Sociolinguists have been fighting this kind of prejudice since the 1960s; yet negative and uninformed views remain. In this chapter I consider what a linguistic ethnographic approach might be able to add to the long tradition of sociolinguistic work in this area. This approach aims (1) to understand the meanings children invest in their use of local dialect forms, and (2) to highlight the social and ideological embedding of teachers' responses to it.

Figure 1: Letter sent to parents of pupils at Sacred Heart Primary School in Teesside

If you hear your child saying the following phrases or words in the left hand column please correct to the phrase or word in the right hand column. I'm sure if we tackle this problem together we will make progress.

Incorrect	Correct
I **done** that	This should be, I **have done** that or I **did** that
I **seen** that	This should be, I **have seen** that or I **saw** that
Yous	The word you is NEVER plural e.g. we should say, "**You** lot come here!"
Dropping the 'th'	"School finishes at **free** fifteen," should be, "School finishes at **three** fifteen."
Gizit ere	Please **give** me **it**
I **Dunno**	This should be. I **don't know**
It's **nowt**	This should be, **it's nothing**
Letta, **butta** etc	**Letter**, **butter**, etc
Your	Your later should be, **you're** late (You're is the shortened version of you are)
Werk, **shert** etc	I will wear my **shirt** for **work**
He was **sat** there	He was **sitting** there

(The original letter can be seen in Williams 2013)

Traditional sociolinguistic responses to dialect prejudice

Sociolinguists believe that negative attitudes towards non-standard speech reflect social rather than linguistic value judgements (Trudgill 1975, 28). Beginning in the 1960s, they sought to counter these 'subjective' value judgements with 'objective' linguistic facts. This was the approach taken by William Labov in his defence of Black English Vernacular in the US. In 'The Logic of Nonstandard English' (1969) he addressed misunderstandings about the relationship between concept formation on the one hand, and dialect differences on the other, in order to challenge those who argued that the language of Black children lacked the means necessary for logical thought. In the UK, Peter Trudgill responded to concerns about the use of regional dialects in the classroom by writing a book on dialect variation for teachers. The book aimed to bring linguistic concepts and research to bear on educational issues related to language, and in particular to help teachers understand the grammatical structure of regional varieties of British English (Trudgill 1975).

Labov and Trudgill were seminal figures in the emergence of a sub-field of sociolinguistics that has come to be known as variationist sociolinguistics. Variationist sociolinguists focus on variation in dialects and examine how this variation is structured. They have shown that linguistic difference has regularity and can be explained. Scholars in this field have been central figures in the fight against dialect prejudice. Speaking from a position of 'scholarly and scientific detachment' (Labov 1982, 166), variationist sociolinguists have been able to show that the grammar of non-standard dialects is not wrong, lazy or inferior; it is simply *different* to 'Standard English' and should therefore be respected. Some of these researchers have worked directly with teachers and teacher trainers and have designed curriculum materials on language variation for use in the classroom (see Cheshire 2005 for a review).

The argument that the grammar of regional dialects is simply different from (but equal to) Standard English can be applied to the letter written by the head teacher of Sacred Heart Primary. For example, the letter warns against the use of 'yous' because 'you is NEVER

plural'. This information is misleading. In Standard English 'you' is the pronominal form used for both second person singular *and* plural. In fact, historically 'you' was the plural form while 'thou' was singular. Many languages still differentiate between second person singular and plural address (e.g. 'tu' and 'vous' in French). Standard English no longer makes this distinction, but many other dialects of the UK (e.g. Glasgow, Liverpool, and Newcastle), as well as Irish English, use 'yous' to fill the gap (Hickey 2003). US English has also developed similar strategies, using forms such as 'y'all' (Crystal 2004, 449) and 'yinz' (Johnstone et al. 2006). It would appear, then, that 'yous' is part of a wider global tendency to innovate within the pronominal system. It allows speakers to disambiguate between singular and plural address in spoken interaction, and is therefore a useful addition to the grammar of the local dialect.

I made this point (amongst others) in the article I wrote for *The Independent*. While most readers were supportive, others raised objections. The following comment was posted to the online version of the article:

> This article is, to use the author's words, unhelpful and damaging, and is typical of an academic's view. So you are a native of Teesside and still use the 'problem' words and phrases? Well that's all well and good, but not everyone can be a lecturer at King's College. Teesside is amongst the most deprived areas in the UK and as such most of the kids in school here today will find their lives defined by trying to get and hold onto jobs. You may find the words 'Gizit' and 'Yous' to be perfectly acceptable but few employers will agree with you. I can assure you that the historic use of 'you' as a plural of 'thou' will be utterly lost on the small business owner who just wants to find decent staff for the shop floor. I can only pray that the Carol Walkers [the head teacher of Sacred Heart Primary] of the world are given heed and that the Russell Group academics poke their heads into the real world from time to time.

(Tom Carney, comment posted to *The Independent* website on 10th February 2013)

This comment highlights a valid point. Linguists may be able to prove objectively that stigmatised dialects of English, like Teesside English, are linguistically equal to other varieties (including 'Standard English'), but teachers, parents and pupils know very well that these varieties are not *socially* equal. As Bourdieu (1977, 652) pointed out some time ago, this means that '[a]rguments about the relative value of different languages [or language varieties] cannot be settled in linguistic terms'. While sociolinguists have long recognised this fact, we may have failed to account for it adequately within our responses to discourses of linguistic deficit. This has left us open to being accused of living in an 'ivory tower', unaffected by the 'real' world.

Tom Carney's comment also raises a second relevant point: if local dialect forms incur such heavy social sanctions, not just within schools but within the workplace too, why do speakers continue to use them? Addressing these related issues – (1) how we (as researchers) might more effectively challenge dialect prejudice, and (2) why non-standard varieties persist in the face of this prejudice – requires more than a descriptive linguistic analysis of standard versus non-standard grammar. In the rest of the chapter I aim to show how adopting a linguistic ethnographic perspective is helping me to address these issues, and further, how this has led to more general shifts in my research practices. In doing so, I draw upon an ethnographic study of language variation in two social class differentiated primary schools in Teesside. I begin in the next section with a brief account of this study.

Background to study

Between November 2005 and January 2007 I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in two Teesside primary schools. These schools were chosen deliberately to highlight a social

contrast. Ironstone Primary was situated in a lower-working-class area of Teesside, and Murrayfield Primary in a lower-middle-class area (all names used in this chapter are pseudonyms). These class designations were based on 2001 Census statistics (taking into account factors such as housing and levels of employment) and government measures of deprivation. Since the pupils were living in the areas immediately surrounding their schools, the two groups of children were broadly classified as 'lower working class' and 'lower middle class'. Through ethnographic fieldwork I began to understand how these demographic differences translated into actual experience.

I made weekly visits to the Year 4 (aged 8 to 9 years) classroom in both schools and participated in school life as a classroom helper. I followed the same children into Year 5 (aged 9 to 10 years). Throughout, I spent time with the children in the playground, chatting and playing games. As a result, I was able to develop some knowledge of the children's personalities, interests and friendships, and engage with their activities both inside and outside of the classroom. As a native of Teesside, I spoke with a familiar dialect and shared knowledge of the local area. I was thus closer to the children and the community I was studying than a researcher originating from outside of the area might have been (at the time I was a 25 year-old PhD student staying with family in Teesside, and thus not quite as removed from the experiences of children in Teesside as Tom Carney's comment implies).

After seven months of making weekly visits to the two schools, I began recording the children using a radio-microphone. This method meant that the children could move around freely while being recorded, participating as normal in their daily school activities. I was not necessarily (in fact not usually) a participant in the recorded interactions. This method produced a rich repository of children's spontaneous speech. The quantitative and interactional analyses presented in this chapter are based on 50 hours of radio-microphone recordings (25 hours from each school), collected when ten pupils from each school wore the

radio-microphone for half a day. These recordings were supported by the observations and field notes I made throughout 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork.

In the early stages I viewed ethnography as a method of data collection, a way of obtaining naturally occurring speech, or what Labov (1972) termed the 'vernacular' (which is still considered to be the 'holy grail' of variationist sociolinguistic study). I gradually realised, however, that it had a much bigger role to play. The accumulated experiences gained from participating in school activities combined to form the 'ethnographically informed lens' (Maybin 2006, 13) through which I could begin to understand the children's linguistic practices, not from a position of 'scholarly and scientific detachment' (Labov 1982, 166), but from the position of participant observer closely involved in the focal communities. This shift forced me to reflect on my own role in the research process. While the primary aim of the study was to understand the linguistic practices of these two groups of children, a secondary aim was to use these understandings to challenge misconceptions about working-class children's speech. This aim arose from my own experiences of growing up in a working-class community in Teesside. I therefore had a personal investment in the research from the beginning, and this further intensified as I developed close relationships with the children involved. I was aware of the possibility that this could bias my analyses, and in particular that it might lead me to romanticise the speech of the working-class participants (cf. Bourdieu's [1991, 53] criticisms of Labov). I sought to mitigate these risks by subjecting the data to rigorous and accountable analytic procedures (as demonstrated below). At the same time, however, I was aware that my background and experiences helped me to tune in to the activities, concerns and values that were important to the children I was studying, and to sustain positive relationships with them over time. I did not, therefore, aim to 'exorcise my subjectivity' but to 'manage it – to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome' (Peshkin 1988, 18).

Analysis: from variationist sociolinguistics to linguistic ethnography

When I began my analysis of the linguistic data I was situated quite firmly within the variationist sociolinguistic paradigm. In line with this approach, I identified linguistic variables and associated variants, and examined the social distribution of these variants across my data set. The linguistic variable is one of the most fundamental constructs in variationist sociolinguistics. Two or more forms are said to be variants of a linguistic variable if they have the same basic referential meaning and fulfil equivalent functions. One of the variables I investigated was the first person objective singular, which has two variants in Teesside: standard 'me' and non-standard 'us'. The non-standard variant is fifth in Sacred Heart's list of prohibited forms ('Gizit' is a condensed form of 'give us it'). The distribution of the two variants across the data set confirmed the familiar variationist finding (and lay perception) that working-class speakers use a greater frequency of non-standard variants than their middle-class counterparts (Table 1). I was struck, however, by the fact that neither group of children used singular 'us' very frequently. Even in working-class Ironstone Primary it occurred in only 16.9% of all tokens of the objective singular. Upon further investigation I found a possible explanation for this low relative frequency: the non-standard variant, singular 'us', occurred only in imperative clauses, such as 'Give us my shoe back'. In order to proceed with the analysis, therefore, I had to revise my definition of the linguistic variable from 'first person objective singular' to 'imperative with first person singular pronoun object'.

Table 1. First person objective singular by school

	Ironstone			Murrayfield		
	N	**%**		**N**	**%**	
me	285	83.1%		300	96.2%	
us	58	16.9%		12	3.8%	
	343			**312**		

Table 2: Imperatives with first person pronoun objects: comparison across schools

	Ironstone		Murrayfield	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Imperatives with 'me' e.g. 'Pass me it'	38	39.6%	26	76.5%
Imperatives with 'us' e.g. 'Give us my shoe back'	58	60.4%	8*	23.5%
	96		**34**	

***** This figure does not agree with Table 2, which shows 12 instances of singular 'us' in the Murrayfield Primary data. This is because 4 examples of singular 'us' occurred in direct repetitions within a single utterance (i.e. the same directive was repeated 4 times, with no variation, one after the other). Immediate repetitions like this were counted as just one token within my analysis of directives.

Table 2 shows the frequency with which children in both schools used imperatives with 'me' versus imperatives with 'us'. The difference between the two schools appears more marked here, and the use of singular 'us' is shown to be a more significant feature of the children's speech, especially in Ironstone Primary. While more accurately defined, however, this new variable and accompanying analysis still does not give a complete picture. Imperatives (whether with 'me' or 'us') are just one form of directive (i.e. the speech act issued by speakers in order to attempt to get their addressee(s) to do something). Table 3 lists a selection of grammatical forms that are typically recognised as fulfilling a directive function (e.g. by Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan 1977; Gordon and Ervin-Tripp 1984). It shows the frequency with which children in both schools used these different types of directive, and thus allows us to situate their use of imperatives with singular 'us' relative to the broad range of other possibilities available to them. At this point we have to give up on the notion of the

linguistic variable, however, because it is not possible to delimit the full range of potential options; and as we shall see, it is debatable to what extent the different options can be said to 'mean' the same thing.

Table 3: Children's directives: a comparison across schools

	Ironstone		Murrayfield	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Imperative with 1st person pronoun object – 'me' e.g. *Pass me it*	38	5.0%	26	3.3%
Imperative with 1st person pronoun object – 'us' e.g. *Give us my shoe back*	58	7.6%	8	1.0%
Other imperatives e.g. *Get off my shoe*	448	58.5%	447	57.2%
'Howay' *	41	5.4%	7	0.9%
1st person modal interrogatives e.g. *Can I have your rubber?*	55	7.2%	134	17.2%
2nd person modal interrogatives *e.g. Will you pass me my plan?*	30	3.9%	51	6.5%
3rd person modal interrogatives *e.g. Miss, can he have it?*	5	0.7%	3	0.4%
1st person expression of obligation e.g. *We have to go*	6	0.8%	4	0.5%
2nd person expression of obligation e.g. *You have to sit somewhere else*	28	3.7%	29	3.7%
1st person expression of need/want e.g. *Miss we need some felt tips*	42	5.5%	42	5.4%
2nd person expression of need/want e.g. *You need to write it in your book*	10	1.3%	18	2.3%
3rd person expression of need/want e.g. *Miss, Harry wants you*	5	0.7%	12	1.5%
TOTAL	**766**	**100%**	**781**	**100%**

***** Dialect feature specific to the north-east of England, which means something like 'come on'.

The high incidence of imperatives across both schools is in line with other studies of children's directives (e.g. Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan 1977). Imperatives function as commands. They imply the speaker's belief that their addressee will perform the action, and

do not allow that the addressee has any choice in the matter (Leech 1983, 109). In routine and cooperative activities among peers (like the kind of activities children typically participate in at school), this type of speech act is frequent and unremarkable. In other situations it has been pointed out that the use of commands may be considered 'face-threating' for the addressee, and thus risky for the speaker (Brown and Levinson 1987, 191). Other strategies are less direct (and thus less risky). For example, modal interrogatives are less direct because they frame the directive as a question (e.g. 'Can you pass me that book?'). This kind of 'conventionalized indirectness' (Brown and Levinson 1987, 70) is considered polite in English. Children in both schools used this strategy, especially with adults; but it was more frequent at Murrayfield Primary (Table 3).

The quantitative analysis represented in Table 3 demonstrates that both groups of children have an extended *repertoire* of directive forms, some considered 'standard', and others (like imperatives with singular 'us') considered 'non-standard'. The term 'repertoire' has circulated within sociolinguistics for several decades, being used to refer to the set of communicative resources that a speaker commands, together with knowledge of how to use those resources (see e.g. Gumperz 1986, 20-21; Hymes 1996, 33). Resources within a speaker's repertoire are associated not just with referential meaning, but also with non-referential or 'indexical' meanings and social values:

> The resources that enter into a repertoire are indexical resources, language materials that enable us to produce more than just linguistic meaning but to produce images of ourself, pointing interlocutors towards the frames in which we want our meanings to be put.
>
> (Blommaert and Backus 2012, 26)

The concept of indexical meaning can be traced back to the work of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, where it was used to refer to signs whose meaning is context-dependent (e.g. deictics such as 'this', 'that', 'here' and 'now'); but more recently the term has been used in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics to describe the processes through which linguistic forms acquire social (rather than referential) meaning. If a linguistic form (unit of grammar or discourse, word, phrase, pronunciation) regularly co-occurs with a particular attitude, way of dressing, social identity or activity, it may take on the meanings associated with these social phenomena and come to 'index' (i.e. evoke) these meanings in other contexts. For example, the use of the glottal stop for 't' in the middle and end of words in English is associated with urban working-class speech. Because of this, some UK politicians have adopted the glottal stop when making speeches in order to index meanings like 'informality' and 'lack of pretention', and to try to appear to be just like 'ordinary working people' (a phrase they often use). As this illustration indicates, a linguistic form does not have just one precise or fixed indexical meaning, but rather a range of related meanings, an 'indexical field' in Eckert's (2008, 454) terms. The particular meaning that is activated in a particular context of use will depend, amongst other things, on the perspective of the hearer and the other semiotic resources at play (Eckert 2008, 466). For example, if when talking to a group of factory workers a politician uses the glottal stop together with other linguistic features more characteristic of upper-middle class speech, while wearing an expensive suit, he or she may end up constructing an overall style that indexes meanings like 'inauthenticity' and 'condescension'.

Building on this notion of indexicality, I wanted to understand the range of potential meanings singular 'us' had for the children in my study. This would help me to explain, first, why they chose to use this form on some occasions but not others, and second, why they chose to use it at all, given that it is stigmatised by wider society, and in some cases, explicitly

prohibited by teachers. Other scholars have made tentative statements about the meaning of singular 'us', suggesting that it appears to be restricted to imperatives and may be used as a politeness device to soften the force of the request (e.g. Anderwald 2004, 178; Carter and McCarthy 2006, 382). While this explanation seems plausible – singular 'us' was restricted to imperatives in my data, occurring only as part of requests like 'Give us that book' – it is based on a rather static view of language in which the meaning of a linguistic form is seen to be fixed regardless of context of use. In line with Eckert (2008, 464), I proceeded instead on the assumption that '[p]articipation in discourse involves a continual interpretation of forms in context, an in-the-moment assigning of indexical values to linguistic forms' (Eckert 2008, 463). This meant extending my analysis beyond an exclusive focus on linguistic form and towards an analysis of language use in its full ethnographic context.

For each token of singular 'us' in the data set I went back to the original recording and transcribed in detail the interaction five minutes either side of the occurrence of singular 'us' (the remainder of the recordings had been transcribed very broadly i.e. without any detail on pauses, fillers, and hesitations or any paralinguistic information). I subjected each of these episodes to micro-ethnographic analysis. This involved listening repeatedly to the recording, moving through the interaction moment by moment, attending to how participants build up the interaction, and asking at each moment: What is happening here? How do we know? (Rampton 2006). I drew upon my fieldnotes to provide contextual information and visual detail about the event (e.g. the areas within the classroom/playground that the children inhabited during the interaction, the props and other artefacts involved). I also relied upon my fieldnotes for more general information about the changing status of the children's peer-relationships, their attitudes to school and to each other, their behaviour in and out of the classroom, and any other ethnographic detail that might prove consequential to my analyses. I used the transcripts as a workspace to record all of these observations and to work through

competing interpretations of participants' utterances, focusing in particular on their use of local dialect forms. Methodologically, this involved a shift away from variationist sociolinguistics to linguistic ethnography. While scholars working within the variationist tradition have certainly used ethnographic methods to inform their analyses of sociolinguistic variation (e.g. Labov 1963; Milroy 1987; Cheshire 1982; Eckert 2000; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Moore 2010) – and in doing so have contributed to theory and method in linguistic ethnography (e.g. Eckert's [2008] work on style has been particularly influential) – they have usually stopped short of analysing the use of linguistic variants in their discursive context (Coupland's early work [e.g. Coupland 1988] was an important exception; see also Kiesling 2009, Moore and Podesva 2009).

Micro-ethnographic analyses of all 66 examples of singular 'us' in the data set indicated that this form did not have a fixed meaning, but rather an indexical field comprising a constellation of meanings related broadly to issues of inclusion versus exclusion (such as in-group versus out-group, shared participation versus peripherality). By way of illustration, I share below my analysis of one episode involving the use of singular 'us'. I have selected this particular episode because it includes repeated occurrences of imperatives with singular 'us', and because Clare (who is wearing the radio-microphone) was the most prolific user of this form (22 of the 66 occurrences in the data set can be clearly attributed to Clare).

The interaction in Extract 1 took place during the lunch break at Ironstone Primary on 3rd November 2006 (see also Snell 2013b). Clare approaches a group of girls who are playing a game that involves stealing each other's shoes. She wants to join in with the fun, but the girls then steal Clare's shoe.

Extract 1: Clare's missing shoe

1	Jane:	*((chanting))* we got a boot
2		we got a boot
3		we got a boot
4		we got a boot
5	Clare:	she's got my shoe *((laughs while saying 'shoe'))*
6	Anon:	Clare's shoe
7		Clare's shoe
8	Inaudible:	*((Background noise – 3 seconds))*
9	Danielle:	kinky boots
10		kinky boots
11	Anon:	pass us it
12	Anon:	Clare's shoe
13		get off Gemma (xxxxx)
14	Inaudible:	*((Background noise – 3 seconds))*
15	Clare:	**give us it**
16	Anon:	Clare's shoe *((chanting))*
17		Clare's shoe
18		[Clare's shoe
19	Anon:	[(pass us it)
20		(3)
21	Clare:	**give us i::t** *((hyperarticulated /t/ release))*
22	Anon:	(I know I haven't got it)
23	Clare:	ROSIE
24		(2)
25		**Rosie give us i:t**
26		*((Background noise – 12 seconds))*
27	Anon:	get Clare's [feet
28	Clare:	**[Give us back my shoe**
29	Jane:	get Clare's feet
30		(2)
31	Anon:	get it get it
32	Joanne:	Danielle Danielle
33		get it *((laughing))*
34	Anon:	we've got one
35	Anon:	alright you may as well give (us) the other one
36	Gemma:	can I get that one?
37	Jane:	yeah lay down on the floor
38	Gemma:	yeah lay down (Clare xxxxxxx)
39	Julia:	(what's going on)
40	Tina:	because Clare's got one shoe on
41		*((Background noise and sound of children running – 17*

		seconds))
42	Clare:	he::lp
43		*((Sound of Clare running and making strained noises, perhaps grabbing for the shoe – 12 seconds))*
44	Clare:	**give us my shoe back** *((said with resignation))*
45	Tina:	she hasn't got her shoe (xxxxxxxxxxx)
46		(she's a) lucky woman
47	Clare:	Jane you- *((breathing heavily))*
48		(3)
49		**give us my shoe back**
50		(1)
51		**give us my ba::ck**
52		(1)
53		**give us my shoe ba:ck**
54	Danielle:	Clare I've got my shoes off
		I'm not com[plaining
55	Clare:	[I KNOW but my feet are freezing
56	Danielle:	[so are mine
57	Jane:	[so are hers (.) she's got tights on
58	Clare:	I HAVE
59	Danielle:	no you haven't
60		(1)
61		so my are thinner than yours
62		have you seen mine compared to yours Clare
63		mine are thinner

Clare appears to find herself in a difficult situation in this episode: it is a wet November day and she has an exposed foot because one of her shoes has been stolen by some of the other girls. Clare's situation is not unique, however. I was in the playground during the game and know that several other girls had also had their shoes taken. I documented in my fieldnotes that, generally speaking, spirits were high and the girls seemed to be having fun. It is evident from the recording that Clare's initial response is also positive, even jovial: she laughs through her utterance on line 5. Ten seconds later, however, when Clare makes an attempt to get her shoe back (line 15) there's a change in footing (Goffman 1981) to a more serious stance: this time there is no laughter and Clare's intonation is flat. It is not easy to decipher from the recording exactly what happened during this ten second period, but it seems that

Clare's shoe was being passed around (see e.g. lines 11-13) amidst chanting (lines 6-7, 9-10), and that Clare was being positioned by her peers as a non-participant (in addition to the teasing implicit in the chanting, notice the use of the third person in lines 6, 7, 12, and then later in lines 16-18, 27, 29). We might reasonably assume that all of this was frustrating for Clare, and perhaps also that her foot had started to get cold (see her later comment on line 55). It appears, then, that by line 15 Clare is no longer a willing participant sharing in the fun. When she makes a second request to retrieve the shoe on line 21, the stress on 'give', the lengthened vowel in 'it' and the final hyperarticulated /t/ index her sense of building frustration (stop release has commonly been found to index exasperation and sometimes anger [Eckert 2008: 469]).

Clare wants to get her shoe back and has available to her several options for formulating a directive, ranging from the standard direct command 'Give me my shoe back' to the indirect modal interrogative 'Can I have my shoe back?'. Clare uses both of these forms (and other alternatives) elsewhere in the data (see Snell 2013b for further analysis). On this occasion she chooses an imperative with singular 'us'. As noted earlier, one explanation for her choice is that singular 'us' softens the command. This explanation seems less plausible, however, when ethnographic data is taken into account. In an interview, the class teacher told me, somewhat euphemistically, that Clare 'falls in and out of friends with people a lot' (Interview, 29th January 2007), and this was certainly my impression of her too. My field notes are littered with references to Clare's arguments. Here are two examples:

Extract 2 (Fieldnotes, 20th October 2006):

> When I got back into the class, Helen, Clare and Caroline came in with the lunch boxes ... Helen was saying that Mrs Monk was going to sack Joanne and Danielle from their role as librarians and Clare was defending them. Clare and Helen seem to enjoy arguing! They're very confrontational with each other.

Extract 3 (Fieldnotes, 12th January 2007):

> The children had Mass first thing but I didn't go. I hung back in the classroom and had a chat with Mrs Trotter [the class Teaching Assistant] – she always knows the school gossip! … I discussed some of the children with Mrs Trotter ... She commented on the table of girls (Clare, Helen, Caroline and Rosie) and said that they're always arguing and bickering. Apparently, they play together outside of school and are always falling out. I noted that I've seen Clare and Helen arguing a lot, and she said that Clare would find an argument in an empty room!

My overall impression of Clare, then, was of a confident, outgoing girl who regularly courted confrontation and was not overly concerned with protecting the feelings (or in pragmatic terms, the 'face wants' [Brown and Levinson 1987]) of her interlocutors. In the episode presented in Extract 1, she appears frustrated and thus perhaps even less likely to be concerned with politeness. What does seem important in this episode is that the other girls position Clare as outside of their group, a target rather than a participant in the fun. Clare's use of singular 'us' may, then, be an attempt to appeal to some sense of group support or solidarity in response to her exclusion. These indexical meanings may derive in part from the fact that this form is a salient feature of the local dialect (salient enough to have become part of Sacred Heart's list). In addition, the important role of plural pronouns more generally in negotiating relationships of solidarity and power has been well documented (e.g. Brown and Gilman 1960; Head 1978).

On this occasion, Clare's strategy does not work, because the other girls reject her appeal to group solidarity. On line 45, Tina points to another girl who has a missing shoe, and later Danielle emphasises 'I've got my shoes off. I'm not complaining' (line 54), with the stress on

'my' indicating contrast (i.e. Danielle also has bare feet, but unlike Clare, she isn't complaining). These girls seem to be pointing out that there are other children in the same position as Clare who are making less fuss, and thus Clare's appeal to group support is futile. The interaction in this episode tells a different story. Danielle might have a missing shoe, but she is clearly still part of the in-group, which makes her position different from Clare's. Friends like Joanne are keen to include Danielle in the fun (line 32), and allies like Jane give her support when necessary (line 57). Clare, on the other hand, remains firmly on the periphery of this group throughout the interaction.

In summary, the participants in my study used singular 'us' exclusively in imperative clauses in order to form commands or requests like 'Rosie, give us it' and 'Let us talk through that'. Detailed analyses (of the kind demonstrated above) indicated that singular 'us' was used when these commands/requests occurred amidst negotiations related to issues of inclusion versus exclusion (i.e. who's in and who's out?), though the precise meanings attached to singular 'us' depended on the specific context of use. In these situations the imperatives were not necessarily 'face-threatening' (in Brown and Levinson's terms), but they were different to the many other 'standard' imperatives that cropped up elsewhere in the data as part of routine tasks and shared activities. In other words, imperatives with singular 'us' were able to do social work that the 'standard' options did not allow (see also Snell 2010 for discussion of possessive 'me').

Discussion: use-value and exchange value

On page 228, I asked why children in Teesside persist in using non-standard forms like singular 'us' despite their teachers' protestations and wider social prejudice. One answer, based on the analysis presented in this chapter, is that they do so (at least in part) because

these forms are interactionally very useful, indexing social meanings that are important to speakers. These forms have *use-value*, a particular worth to the speaker and to others in the community (Skeggs 2004). It is therefore unlikely that children will stop using such forms just because their teachers tell them to. This is why attempts to eradicate local dialect forms will not work, and rather than having the desired effect – to empower working-class children – they may have unintended negative consequences, damaging children's sense of self and discouraging their active participation in class discussion. We cannot simply dismiss such attempts as ill informed, however, because use-value is only part of the picture. We must also account for *exchange value*, the more abstract value linguistic forms carry beyond local contexts of use.

The notion of exchange has long been fundamental to ways of understanding social and economic relations (Skeggs 2004: 10). For Bourdieu (1977, 1991), exchange involved different forms of capital, and this has been a useful way of thinking about the relationship between language and power. Standard English and prestige accents (such as Received Pronunciation) are dominant or 'legitimate' ways of speaking in UK society. In Bourdieu's terms they have 'symbolic capital' because of their association with the economic and cultural power of those who use them. Symbolic capital can be transformed into real-life advantages. Speakers can 'cash in' (i.e. exchange) their prestigious language for formal educational qualifications and prestigious occupations, and thus for economic capital (Coupland 2007: 85). Teachers are aware of this fact. They recognise that non-standard forms such as 'Gizit' and 'yous' lack positive exchange value on the legitimate linguistic markets (education, public administration, national media, and so on), and thus they encourage children to replace these forms with more prestigious alternatives. Set against this background, negative responses to non-standard dialect at school appear reasonable, or at the very least, understandable. This is why there is some public support for the kind of action taken by

schools like Sacred Heart (this support is clear in the online comment from Tom Carney cited above). But attempts to ban local dialect forms reduce everything to exchange value. They ignore the fact that 'Gizit' and 'yous' have value beyond the exchange relations of the legitimate linguistic markets. One way to challenge dialect prejudice, then, might be to share with educational practitioners evidence of the local use-value of non-standard dialect forms. Linguistic ethnographers have developed a number of models for working with non-academic professionals (see Rampton, Maybin and Roberts, this volume, pp 37-44; there are also several specific case studies in this volume – see for example chapters by Bezemer and Lefstein & Israeli). One of these is the joint data session, where researchers and practitioners work together to analyse research data. In an educational context, this might involve sharing with teachers recordings of children's interactions (like that presented in Extract 1), thus giving them the opportunity to see working-class pupils' speech in new ways. Research data can be used to highlight the meanings and values attached to local dialect forms and to demonstrate that children are able to style-shift; that is, they can use 'standard' forms on some occasions and 'non-standard' forms on others.

Speech is always situated within specific contexts and interactions. What counts as 'standard' or 'acceptable' speech will change from one situation to the next, and over time, leaving considerable scope for variation (and disagreement) in any definition of 'spoken Standard English'. This is why I have argued elsewhere that rather than attempt to erase local dialect it is more appropriate to work on extending children's linguistic repertoires (Snell 2013b). This involves understanding and valuing children's use of local dialect forms (as described above), but at the same time, explaining that in some arenas (e.g. formal educational contexts and job interviews) these forms will be judged against 'standard' ways of speaking (valued as such solely through their association historically with powerful people in society) and may be stigmatised.

Conclusion

There is still a pressing need to respond to deficit accounts of working-class children's speech within educational contexts. In this chapter, I have considered what linguistic ethnography might be able to add to the strong tradition of sociolinguistic efforts to challenge dialect prejudice. In doing so, I have tracked my own trajectory away from a traditional approach to analysing language variation and towards a linguistic ethnographic approach. I should make clear, however, that in adopting a linguistic ethnographic perspective I am not arguing for a rejection of variationist sociolinguistics. As Rampton, Maybin and Roberts point out in Chapter 1 of this volume, 'paradigms don't have to be swallowed whole ... if one is careful and willing to separate findings and methods from the explanations and interpretations with which they are conventionally packaged'. For me this meant using quantitative analyses of language variation to uncover patterns in the data, without accepting the basic tenet of variationist sociolinguistics that 'standard' and 'non-standard' variants of a linguistic variable necessarily *mean* the same thing.

In my work on children's language in Teesside I have found the combination of quantitative variationist analyses and linguistic ethnographic micro-analyses very production. In this chapter, quantitative analyses of the frequency with which the children used different directive forms made it possible to locate their use of singular 'us' relative to the range of other options available to them, and highlighted the breadth of their linguistic repertoires. Linguistic ethnographic micro-analyses of the children's situated practice highlighted the local use-value of singular 'us', and thus shed light on the motivations behind children's continued use of this form despite pressure from their teachers to conform instead to prestige standards. Adopting a linguistic ethnographic perspective also prompted me to expand my

notion of context, embedding my analyses of the children's interactions within broader social, cultural and economic processes, thus acknowledging exchange value as well as local use-value.

Linguistic ethnography therefore contributes a new analysis to longstanding sociolinguistic efforts to challenge prejudice against non-standard dialects, one which may help teachers to better understand why non-standard forms persist and why attempts to ban them are unlikely to work; but the extent to which this analysis can have real impact in the high profile debate outlined in the introduction to this chapter is as yet unclear. Further research is required to consider how best to disseminate sociolinguistic knowledge outside of academia. We need to research the textual trajectories involved in these debates, especially in an era where online forums and social media give academics even less control over the meanings given to their words in the public domain (cf. Graddol and Swann 1988). Whose voice(s) succeed in carrying forward in debates on non-standard language? How, and in what form? These questions are part of the bigger picture of challenging dialect prejudice.

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Appendix:

Transcription notations include:

(text)	- Transcription uncertainty
(xxxxxxx)	- Indistinguishable speech
(.)	- Brief pause (less than one second)
(1)	- Longer pause (number indicates length to nearest whole second)
(( ))	- Description of prosody or non-verbal activity
[	- Overlapping talk or action
[	
<u>text</u>	- Emphasised relative to surrounding talk (underlined words)

te::xt - Stretched sounds
sh- - Word cut off
>text< - Speech delivered more rapidly than surrounding speech.
(hhh) - Audible out-breath