SOCIAL CLASS AND LANGUAGE

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1. Introduction

The relationship between language and social class has been a major concern in applied linguistics and in sociolinguistics (see Block 2013 for a review), in the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1996), in language attitudes research (e.g. Chakrania and Huang 2012, Huygens and Vaughan 1983, Lai 2010), in research on public debates about language (e.g. Bex and Watts 1999, Crowley 1989, Mugglestone 2003), and in education (see Collins 2009 for a review). It would be impossible to do justice to this range of research within a single article. Instead, this article follows one particular narrative in the development of class analysis within sociolinguistics. Focusing on language variation, it charts the progression from early survey studies, which assumed that class hierarchies determine linguistic behaviour, to more recent approaches, which emphasise social practice and speaker agency. This narrative is relevant to scholars interested in pragmatics because it demonstrates that an adequate sociolinguistic theory of language and social class has to engage with *language in use*, and thus with 'a pragmatic perspective' (Verschueren 1994, 2009).

2. Class as structure

Variationist sociolinguists have had a long-standing interest in the relationship between language and social class, cemented by William Labov's (1966) seminal New York City study. Labov's (1966) large-scale survey of the pronunciation patterns of residents of the Lower East Side of New York City established that language use correlates with social factors such as social class, age and gender. The sociolinguistic surveys conducted and inspired by Labov were based on the assumption that these social categories to some extent controlled individuals' linguistic behaviour (i.e. language use reflects existing social structure). These studies assigned participants to objective class categories (e.g. 'working-class', 'middle-class') using indices of socioeconomic status[1]. Some prioritised occupation (e.g. Macaulay 1977), while

others used a combined index taking into account factors such as income, housing and educational level, as well as occupation (e.g. Labov 1966, Trudgill 1974). The speech of the resulting social class groups was typically sampled through extended one-to-one interviews designed to elicit speech styles situated at various points along a continuum of formality, from the speakers' most informal 'casual' style, to their most formal self-conscious speech (the latter elicited through reading set passages and word lists, activities that require maximum attention to speech).

The patterns of social and stylistic stratification that emerged from early survey studies were remarkably consistent. These studies demonstrated that for stable sociolinguistic variables (that is, variables not undergoing language change, such as the pronunciation of ING in words like *running*) middle-class speakers used more 'standard' variants than their working-class counterparts (e.g. Labov 1966; Macaulay 1977; Trudgill 1974; Reid 1978; Wolfram 1969; for a general overview see Dodsworth 2010). Variationist researchers further differentiated between types of variables and levels of awareness. They discovered that some variables – sociolinguistic 'indicators' – have little or no social evaluation attached to them. Indicators vary with social stratification, but do not vary within the usage of individual speakers. Other variables – sociolinguistic 'markers' and 'stereotypes'[2] – carry greater social significance. One variant is generally considered to be more socially prestigious, while the other may be stigmatised, causing individual speakers to monitor (though not necessarily consciously) their own usage and to style-shift. Early studies found that all speakers followed the same general pattern with regards to this stylistic variation: speakers systematically increased their use of 'standard' variants (and decreased their use of 'non-standard' or 'vernacular' variants) as their perception of the formality of the situation increased. The same sociolinguistic variable could thus signal both social and stylistic stratification, making it difficult to distinguish "a casual salesman from a careful pipefitter" (Labov 1972: 240). This observation has been called the 'classic sociolinguistic finding':

> if a [linguistic] feature is found to be more common in the lower classes than in the upper classes, it will also be more common in the less formal than the most formal styles, with each social group occupying a similar position in each continuum.

<div align="right">(Romaine 1980: 228)</div>

Intra-speaker stylistic variation was theorised as being linked to inter-group variation, such that speakers modelled their most formal style on the speech behaviour of the group who ranked slightly higher in the social scale (see also Bell 1984: 151). Class stratification in society was thus replicated within speakers' own stylistic behaviour, lending testimony to Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) point that speakers' mundane actions bear the traces of wider social structure[3].

The consistent patterns of style-shifting identified in Labov's (1966) study led him to hypothesise that most New Yorkers agree on which variants are more prestigious, or have more status, since they use more of these variants in the most formal situations. He tested this hypothesis with a matched-guise experiment (Lambert 1967) designed to elicit his participants' overt evaluations of different samples of recorded speech. The New Yorkers gave consistent responses to the voices they heard, generally agreeing which features of the New York accent were stigmatised and which had high status, regardless of their class designation or their own use of these forms. In light of this evidence, Labov made a general statement about the social stratification of New York City: "New York City is a speech community, united by a common evaluation of the same variables which serve to differentiate the speakers" (Labov 1972: 106). In other words, while speakers located at different positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy use language differently, they do so in relation to a shared set of norms.

Nik Coupland found similar patterns of social and stylistic stratification in his study of a Cardiff travel agency (e.g. Coupland 1980, 1984, 1988). Like Labov, Coupland was initially interested in the sociolinguistic diversity of the city, but he wanted to avoid the constraints imposed by the traditional sociolinguistic interview. The travel agency provided a more 'natural setting' within which to examine the speech of people of many different social classes. He examined four phonological variables in the speech of 51 clients who were recorded talking to one of the sales assistants, Sue. These speakers were categorised into six social class groups based upon the Registrar General's Classification of Occupations (Registrar General 1970). The clients' use of more or less standard phonological variants patterned in the expected direction (i.e. those at the top of the occupational hierarchy used more 'standard' variants, while those towards the bottom used more 'vernacular' variants). Coupland became more interested in the speech of the sales assistant, however. He

analysed Sue's speech in four different contexts – 'casual', 'informal work-related', 'client' and 'telephone' – and noted the same kind of stylistic hierarchy as Labov and others had uncovered. The more formal client and telephone contexts were associated with Sue's most standard speech and the casual context (e.g. chatting to colleagues about non-work topics) was associated with Sue's most vernacular speech (Coupland 1980).

Coupland hypothesised that Sue's routine style shifting might become a resource in her dealings with clients. In a later analysis (Coupland 1984), he compared her speech with that of the client she was talking to during individual sales encounters and found that she altered her accent to match that of her interlocutor in line with the predictions of accommodation theory (Giles and Powesland 1975). This convergent accommodative behaviour was most marked when Sue addressed clients from a lower socioeconomic class; in such circumstances Sue's speech shifted towards less standard phonological variants. Coupland (1984) concluded that Sue's speech was almost as good an indicator of her clients' social class as their own speech (see also Bell 1984 and Coupland 2007: 73). As in Labov's study, Sue's style-shifting suggests a stratificational effect, "a matter of Sue 'living out' or putting into practice a part of the Cardiff community's class-related variation in her own speech repertoire" (Coupland 2007: 74). Again, then, large-scale class stratification appears to have been internalised by individual speakers (though Coupland's later reanalysis, which is discussed in section 4 below, suggests that this interpretation oversimplifies the social meanings of class that were carried through Sue's speech).

The variationist studies inspired by Labov highlighted the sociolinguistic stratification of speech communities. These studies were also crucial in advancing theories of language change (indeed the primary motivation for Labov's New York City study was to obtain insights into the mechanisms of linguistic change, as documented in Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968). Nevertheless, the Labovian approach to language and social class has been the subject of extensive criticism. I do not attempt to present a comprehensive account of these critiques here (but see e.g. Block 2013; Cameron 1990; Eckert 2012; Rickford 1986; Romaine 1984a). Most relevant to this chapter is the point that the early variationist enterprise has been characterised as primarily 'descriptivist', "most notable for its ability to generate facts about the distribution of linguistic forms in social environments" (Coupland 2001: 3),

but lacking in explanatory power. In order to progress from descriptive generalisations to explanations, sociolinguists need a satisfactory theory linking the 'linguistic' with the 'social' (in this case social class) (Cameron 1990). As Cameron (1990) argues, however, the fall-back position in traditional variationist work that 'language reflects society' is not adequate. To explain a speaker's use of a particular linguistic variable in relation to their membership of a particular social class category is to fall into what Cameron has called the 'correlational fallacy' – researchers allocate speakers to pre-defined social class categories and then explain their linguistic behaviour by appealing to these same categories (in effect, simply re-stating the correlation). The analyst might attempt to move beyond the correlational fallacy by stating that the speaker is using language to project a particular class identity. But how do we know that class is a relevant identity category for the speaker? And if it is, what kinds of meanings does it have for them? It is not possible to answer these questions using the methods developed by early variationist studies because these were not designed to "capture the meaningful social experience or projection of class" (Coupland 2007: 48, Hymes 1996: 73). What is required instead is a research design that allows the analyst to investigate the ways in which individual speakers negotiate and construct social identities (including class identities), and a theory that allows for the fact that language, as a social practice, is at least partly constitutive of those identities.

3. Class as practice

Practice theory (as articulated in the writings of Bourdieu 1977 and Giddens 1979) sets out "to conceptualize the *articulations* between the practices of social actors 'on the ground' and the big 'structures' and 'systems' that both constrain those practices and yet are ultimately susceptible to being transformed by them" (Ortner 2006: 2). This offers a promising approach in attempting to understand the relationship between language and social class. Penelope Eckert pioneered this approach within the field of variationist sociolinguistics (e.g. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, Eckert 2000). Eckert (2000: 3) explains that a theory of language variation as social practice sees speakers as *constituting* social categories and as actively *constructing* the social meaning of variation (Eckert 2000: 3). This approach is most clearly articulated in her ethnography of Belten High, a school in Detroit, USA.

Eckert spent two years interacting with students attending Belten High, both at school and in the local neighbourhoods, and in doing so she built up a picture of their friendship groupings, interests, values and attitudes (see Eckert 1989 for a full account of the ethnography). Using this ethnographic approach, she identified two oppositional 'communities of practice' (CoPs) (Lave and Wenger 1991): the 'jocks' and the 'burnouts'. These were groups of adolescents who interacted together on a regular basis, shared a common orientation to school, and had similar hopes and desires for their futures beyond education. In examining these local categories, Eckert was able to get at the local meaning of social class for adolescents at this school. Jocks engaged with the corporate life of the school by taking part in extra-curricular activities (e.g. varsity sports, school government and the school newspaper). These forms of participation prepared them for college and for their place in adult middle-class culture. The burnouts, on the other hand, were alienated from the school culture. They maintained strong neighbourhood ties and oriented their practices to the urban area. As a result, their social trajectory was geared towards gaining employment post-high school in the local urban area and participating in adult working-class culture.

The oppositional status of these CoPs was constructed via a range of symbolic practices, including territory, clothing, substance use, and importantly, language. Eckert's (2000) linguistic analysis focused on one syntactic variable, negative concord, and six phonological variables. As with earlier variationist studies, she considered how the adolescents' use of these variables correlated with macro-level social categories, such as class and gender, but she then opened out her analysis to investigate the implications of the adolescents' membership in the jock/burnout CoPs. Only negative concord showed significant correlation with social class (measured here in terms of the socioeconomic characteristics of speakers' parents). Adolescents from working-class backgrounds used the non-standard variant more frequently than their middle-class peers (as we might expect given that non-standard negation is highly stigmatised). Even here, however, the stronger statistical correlation was with CoP affiliation – burnouts used non-standard negation more frequently than jocks, and this was the case even where there was cross-over between social class and CoP membership (i.e. for working-class jocks and middle-class burnouts). There was no correlation between the adolescents' use of the vocalic variables and their parent's socioeconomic class. These variables were involved in the Northern Cities Chain

Shift (a series of changes affecting the vowels of the English spoken in the urban centres of the northern US states). The sound changes were ongoing in Detroit but were more advanced in the urban area than in the suburbs and thus contributed an 'urban' sound to speech. Eckert demonstrated that the burnouts led the jocks in the use of the advanced variants of these changes (the backing of (e) and (ʌ), and the raising of the nucleus of (ay)). She argues that the burnouts were more active than the jocks in participating in the Northern Cities Shift because they saw themselves as part of the developing urban landscape and were engaged in it.

Eckert's community of practice approach highlights the extent to which individuals use language to construct individual and group identities, and thus it emphasises speaker agency. The jocks and the burnouts created different meanings for the linguistic variables Eckert studied by virtue of the distinct practices that they participated in, and in combining these variables with other semiotic resources, they created their own distinct style. The burnouts, for example, demonstrated their anti-school, urban-oriented stance in their clothing (dark colours, rock concert t-shirts, leather jackets and wrist bands), in the spaces they occupied in the school (e.g. congregating in the smoking area, and refusing to use the cafeteria and other institutionally sanctioned areas) and in their use of non-standard grammar and urban variants of the late stages of the Northern Cities Shift. A practice perspective does not leave structure out of the picture, however. As Ahearn (2010) points out, "human actions are central [in practice theory], but they are never considered in isolation from the social structures that shape them". In Eckert's study we see how individuals' identities are shaped by their participation in different communities of practice – a 'meso' layer of social structure – but further, Eckert makes clear that individuals' access to and interest in different communities of practice is mediated by their place in wider society, as embodied in macro-level categories such as class, age, gender and ethnicity: "[t]he individual, thus, is not a lone ranger wobbling out there in the social matrix, but is tied into the social matrix through structured forms of engagement" (Eckert 2005:17). It is no coincidence that most of the jocks in Eckert's study came from a middle-class background and most burnouts from a working-class background. These adolescents constructed a peer-based sense of social class through the jock-burnout opposition.

In Eckert's work (and other CoP studies, e.g. Moore 2010) we see the importance of focusing on the social categories that make sense for participants rather than on abstract categories like social class[4]. Ultimately it is community of practice membership that has the biggest influence on these speakers' language use. The CoP approach also helps us to understand how these local categories are linked to wider social structure, and thus to explain the correlations uncovered in earlier variationist work. Eckert writes that "it is the collection of types of communities of practice at different places in society that ultimately constitutes the assemblage of practice that is viewed as class culture, ethnic culture, gender practice, etc." (Eckert 2000:39; see Eckert 2000: 163 for an account of why occupation, in particular, has shown the most robust correlations with language). These studies do not, therefore, negate the importance of social class; rather they try to move beyond the structural model of class evident in early variationist work by applying a more fluid notion of class as constituted through the day-to-day practices (including linguistics practices) that individuals engage in. As in early variationist work, however, the linguistic analysis is primarily quantitative, focusing on statistical correlations between linguistic variables and social categories, and thus not able to capture "the linguistic display of class consciousness in everyday interaction" (Rampton 2003)[5]. Nik Coupland and Ben Rampton have argued that this kind of analysis can usefully be complemented by more detailed interactional analysis of the way classed language is used in everyday communication (e.g. Coupland 2007, Rampton 2003, 2010a). In the next section I consider what an interactional approach can add to our understanding of the relationship between language and social class.

4. Class as 'meaning potential'

Coupland (2009: 312; 2007) argues that while social class "has its basis in social realities to do with authority, control, poverty and life chances […] meanings linked to class are also created in discourse". These meanings change over time and are a function of how language is locally contextualised. In his 2007 book on *Style*, Coupland reanalyses his travel agency data from this "active contextualisation perspective" (2007: 115). He focuses on one particular sequence of talk and examines how Sue's use of the phonological variables analysed in his earlier study (reported in section 2 of this article) index different meanings depending on the contextual frames

in play. His analysis reiterates the importance of social class within the 'socio-cultural frame' that is activated at the beginning of the extract when Sue is speaking to a tour operator on the telephone. In such professional transactions, it is plausible that Sue uses more standard phonological variants in order to project "a more middle-class persona of the sort that still tends to gain status in public and especially work-place discourse in Cardiff and many other mainly English-speaking cities" (2007: 118). Class as control *is* relevant in these public performances. Coupland suggests that it would be unconvincing, however, to try to read 'working class' meanings into Sue's speech when, just a few seconds later, she adopts a marked vernacular style during a discussion about dieting with her co-workers. He argues that in this move from public to private discourse, social class becomes irrelevant because it is noncontrastive among this group of women. What *is* relevant in this context is Sue's personal powerlessness in the face of a depressing diet. The same linguistic resources (e.g. h-dropping, flapped 't', consonant cluster reduction) are thus shown to have different meanings in the 'interpersonal frame' ('low personal competence and control') compared to the 'socio-cultural frame' (see also Coupland's [1985, 1988, 2001] analysis of Cardiff local-radio presenter, Frank Hennessy).

Coupland's key point is that we cannot assume that variation between 'standard' and 'vernacular' speech necessarily has direct class significance because the social meanings of variation are 'multi-valenced'. Instead, if we are interested in social class, we must ask:

> [W]hat linguistic resources (forms and associated potentials for meaning) are validated by the sociolinguistic structure of a particular community to the extent that they might become active in a discourse frame […] what socio-cultural values to do with social class do these resources indexically mark, and what stakes are there to play for in relation to them?

> (Coupland 2007: 113)

The shift in perspective is from class as structure to class as a resource for sociolinguistic styling. To explain this approach further I introduce some data from my research on language variation in two socially differentiated primary schools in Teesside, north-east England (Snell 2009).

Between November 2005 and January 2007 I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Ironstone Primary and Murrayfield Primary (all names are pseudonyms). These schools were chosen deliberately to highlight a social contrast: Ironstone Primary was situated in a predominantly lower-working-class area of Teesside, and Murrayfield Primary in a lower-middle-class area. 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' (Ironstone Primary) and 'lower middle class' (Murrayfield Primary). Through ethnographic fieldwork I began to understand how these demographic differences translated into actual experience (see Snell 2009 for more detail about the ethnography).

After seven months of making weekly visits to the schools and engaging in participant observation, I started to record the children using a radio-microphone. This allowed me to capture a broad range of their interactions throughout the school day, both inside and outside of the classroom. I analysed 25 hours of recordings from each school, focusing on grammatical and discoursal variation in the children's speech. One of the features I examined in detail was the salient local dialect form *howay*. This form is unique to the north-east of England. Referentially, it means something like 'come on', and it functions generally as a directive (e.g. *Howay, let's go*), but the precise meanings associated with *howay* are indeterminate (as will become clear in extract 1 below). In line with the variationist tradition, I began by examining the distribution of this form across the two schools and over a range of speaking contexts. This analysis revealed the same patterns of social and stylistic stratification highlighted by the survey studies reported in section 2. Children in Ironstone Primary used *howay* more frequently than those in Murrayfield Primary (42 occurrences in 25 hours of recordings made at Ironstone Primary, compared to only 7 in Murrayfield), and children in both schools used it exclusively in informal peer-group interaction (i.e. never during more formal classroom talk). *Howay* was thus linked to class in the sense of marking differences in frequencies of use between class-differentiated groups, but 'what socio-cultural values to do with social class' (if any) did *howay* 'indexically mark[6]' (Coupland 2007, cited above)? To answer this question I examined each occurrence of *howay* in its discursive context.

Interactional analyses of all 49 examples of *howay* in the data set indicated that this form did not have a fixed meaning, but rather a range of potential meanings (an 'indexical field' in Eckert's (2008) terms) related broadly to issues of authority, fair play and egalitarianism. These general meanings become more specific in local contexts of use. By way of illustration, I share below an extract from my analysis of one episode involving the repeated use of *howay* (for more detailed analysis see Snell 2012). It was recorded when nine-year old Robert was wearing the radio-microphone during a game of 'bulldog' in the Ironstone Primary playground. Bulldog is a 'tag-based' game common across England in which one or two players are selected to be the 'bulldogs' and must stand in the middle of the playground. The other players stand at one end of the playground and try to run to the other end without being caught by the bulldogs. If they are caught then they must also become bulldogs. During this activity, Robert repeatedly took stances of authority in relation to his peers as he tried to police the rules of the game. The local dialect term *howay* was one resource he drew upon in this endeavour – he used this form seven times during the fifteen-minute game (a much higher rate than any other speaker in the data set). Extract 1 occurs part way through the action. Robert is in a tricky situation because he is being unfairly 'marked' by the bulldog (i.e. the bulldog is standing very close to Robert with outstretched arms, ready to catch Robert if he tries to run).

Extract 1: A game of Bull Dog

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1    Robert:    howay you need to let u::s

2    Sam:       you need to let us out

3               (1.7)

4    Sam:       if I did that-

5               Hannah you're on

6    Hannah:    I know I am

7    Sam:       so you have to let us out

8    Robert:    you can't just stand there

9               (1.2)

10              you need to actu-

11              see what I mean
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12          Nathan's just ran

13          (2.7)

14  Robert:  no if you get me here then it doesn't count

15          coz you're just letting everyone go except for me

            .

            ((1 minute 55 seconds later))

            .

16  Robert:  howay you can't guard

17          ((Background noise – 3.7 seconds))

18  Robert:  someone at least-

19  Sam:     Andrew's at the top waiting for us

20  Robert:  where

21  Sam:     swear down just like stood [there

22  Robert:                              [CHRIS (0.6)
23          ARE YOU ON
24          (1.1)
25          CHRIS ARE YOU ON

26          ((Background noise – 5.2))

27  Robert:  aw we could have ran then

28  Sam:     I know yeah

29          (2.0)

30  Robert:  while they weren't looking
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Robert's utterance on line 1 is directed to the bulldog because that person is standing right in front of Robert and Sam, not giving them a fair chance to try to run. So the utterance means something like 'come on, you need to move out of the way and at least let us try'. Sam builds on Robert's utterance, repeating *you need to let us out* (line 2) and then *you have to let us out* (line 7), thus demonstrating alignment with Robert. Together they take a collaborative stance against their interlocutor, who is negatively evaluated as flouting the implicit rules and 'spirit' of the game. Robert goes on to explicate these rules in lines 8--15, and makes the authoritative judgement, *no if you get me here then it doesn't count coz you're just letting everyone go except*

for me (lines 14--15). Although fleeting, the stances of authority taken by Robert, and the way Sam aligns with him, reinforce the well-established peer-group hierarchy. Robert was a leader in the peer group, and in this episode we get a brief glimpse of the way his position was collaboratively constructed in interaction.

Around two minutes later, the same situation arises, and Robert again intervenes: *howay you can't guard* (line 16, meaning 'you can't stand in front of us'). The use of *howay* here, and elsewhere, marks a change in footing, defined as "a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (Goffman 1981: 128). There is a change in what Goffman (1981: 128) refers to as the "production format" of the utterance: Robert remains 'animator' and 'author' of his words, but now speaks on behalf of a wider moral authority (a change in the 'principal' of the utterance), in the name of 'we', not merely 'I'. Robert is appealing to a shared sense of what is considered right, fair, and acceptable within this game, and within the peer-group more generally, and *howay* encapsulates this appeal. So the meaning of *howay you can't guard* (line 16) is actually something like 'come on, don't stand guard over us; it's not fair*, and you know it'*. Elsewhere in the data, other speakers also used *howay* in this way, that is, to take stances of authority and to police the behaviour of interlocutors, often with an appeal to some shared sense of what is considered reasonable behaviour.

The speakers who used *howay* most often across *both* schools were the confident outgoing children who (like Robert) were most likely to take assertive and authoritative stances. The first point to note in relation to social class, then, is that the use of *howay* appears to subvert the conventional link between vernacular forms and lower social status. The Teesside data demonstrates that local dialect forms which have low status within the dominant sociolinguistic economy (as evidenced in the patterns uncovered by quantitative variationist analysis) can be used to *assert* status in local interactional use; indeed, it seems reasonable to assume that Robert was focusing on these local hierarchies rather than class hierarchies in the game of Bulldog. Nevertheless, the contexts in which *howay* emerged – which often involved an appeal to some sense of justice or appropriate behaviour – suggest a link, somewhere in its indexical history, with ideologies of working-class solidarity and

egalitarianism. Linguistic anthropological approaches to indexicality are useful in explaining this link.

Drawing upon research in pragmatics, linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics and ethnomethodology, Elinor Ochs (1996) describes how language has the capacity to index (i.e. evoke) a range of socio-cultural information, such as affective and epistemic stances, social acts (e.g. commands), and social identities (including roles, relationships and group identities). These different 'situational dimensions' are related to one another, Ochs argues, through a network of cultural associations, norms and expectations, which are shared by members of a community. She refers to these as "culturally constructed *valences*" (1996: 417). It is via these links or 'valences' that, in theory, any situational dimension can help to constitute the meaning of any other situational dimension. In relation to episode 1, for example, it is possible that components of the meaning of working class (= a social identity), such as toughness, egalitarianism and solidarity, help to constitute Robert's authority in relation to the local social and moral order (= epistemic stance) and his appeal to fair play in taking corrective action (= social act). Robert's stance is confrontational, but some more general sense of solidarity (derived from the association with working-class culture)[7] may serve to mitigate the potential face-threat and thus retain the spirit of camaraderie in the playground game (cf. Bucholtz's (2009) analysis of the Mexican American youth slang term *güey* and Kiesling's (2004) analysis of *dude*). The highly localised dialect form *howay* has acquired this 'indexical potential' through the "history of usage and cultural expectations surrounding that form" (Ochs 1996: 418). Included in this history is its association with Newcastle United Football club (a north-east team for whom the battle cry is *Howay the lads!*) and its appearance in novelty mugs, cards, T-shirts and key rings that celebrate the north-east dialect and culture, in particular working-class culture (in Agha's (2007) terms it has become an 'enregistered emblem' of north-east working-class identity). It is possible, then, that *howay* has taken on interactional meanings based in local ideologies about what it means to be working class in the north-east of England (cf. Eckert 2008: 462).

Social class meanings are part of the wider indexical valence of *howay* even though more immediate indexicalities of stance and act may be most relevant for speakers/hearers when they use/interpret this form in interaction (as in extract 1). It is in this sense that "'structure' [...] provides the resources for social action" (Coupland

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and Jaworski 2009: 8--9). Participants bring their social knowledge to bear in an interaction and must work out which of the range of potential meanings are relevant to the talk at hand:

> It is important to distinguish the range of situational dimensions that a form (set of forms) *potentially* indexes from the range of situational dimensions that a form (set of forms) *actually* indexes in a particular instance of use […] When a form is put to use in dialog, the range of situational dimensions that a particular form indirectly helps to constitute and index is configured in a particular way. Not all situational meanings are necessarily entailed.

(Ochs 1996: 418)

This act of differentiation occurs during the processes of 'active contextualisation' described above, and will depend (amongst other things) on the perspective of the hearer and the other semiotic resources at play (Eckert 2008: 466, Ochs 1996: 414). Innovative interactional use of a linguistic form/variety will add new associations to its indexical valence.

Several benefits accrue from the approach to language and social class articulated in this section. First, by focusing on interactional meanings we can try to explain why middle class speakers also occasionally use non-standard grammar and regionally marked lexis. When children at Murrayfield Primary used *howay* it seems unlikely that they were trying to project a working-class identity; rather they were indexing particular kinds of stance and act in interaction[8]. The next step is to consider why they did so less frequently than children at Ironstone Primary (e.g., were the social stances/acts indexed by *howay* less relevant to life at Murrayfield Primary?). This raises the issue that variability between social class groups is not simply a matter of linguistic form but is also related to the meanings and uses associated with linguistic forms (cf. Dines 1980, Lavandera 1978, Romaine 1984b). Future work on language and social class might usefully consider the possibility that individuals who differ from one another with respect to their socio-economic status do not simply use different linguistic forms *to mean the same thing* (a basic tenet of variationist sociolinguistics), but that they may also draw upon the resources of language variation *to do different things* (cf. Eckert 2008: 467). There is currently little research

in this area (though see Moore and Snell 2011 and Snell 2013 for tentative steps in that direction).

Second, the constitutive dimension of indexicality aligns with the fundamental principle of practice theory that individual actions are (at least partly) constitutive of wider social structure. Historical meanings related to class may help to constitute social acts and stances in interaction, but at the same time, working-class speakers who repeatedly take such stances are constructing a particular kind of working class identity (Snell 2010: 649, Ochs 1992). Speakers can use language in conventional ways to reinforce conventional class identities, or they can use language in innovative ways to reconstitute those identities. Connected to this point, the approach also helps us to understand how social class relates to other identity categories. Variationist studies have shown that the same linguistic variables stratify with multiple social categories (e.g. class, gender and ethnicity). This makes sense once we understand that linguistic variables do not index these demographic categories directly, but indirectly, through their association with the meanings, stances, acts and activities that constitute those categories (Eckert 2008: 455, Ochs 1992, 1996).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly (at least methodologically), if we understand class as being part of the indexical valence of linguistic forms/varieties, we can reintroduce class into our analyses without having to assume that class identities are a central preoccupation for speakers (Rampton 2006: 303). Ben Rampton makes this point convincingly in his ethnography of 'Central High', a multi-ethnic secondary school in London (Rampton 2006). The adolescents who participated in this study did not talk about class explicitly (in discussion it appeared to be much less of an issue for them than other kinds of social differentiation such as ethnicity and gender), nor was there any evidence that they used language in a direct way to project particular kinds of class identities, but Rampton demonstrates that an ingrained sense of class hierarchy structured their lives. His work provides a significant account of language and class, and therefore warrants a more detailed discussion.

Rampton (2006) recorded pupils at Central High both inside and outside of the classroom using a radio-microphone. A small-scale quantitative sociolinguistic analysis of the recorded speech revealed conventional patterns of sociolinguistic

stratification. Speakers became more 'standard' in their accent in more formal situations (that is, they moved towards Received Pronunciation (RP) and away from their London vernacular e.g. pronouncing word-initial <h> and avoiding the use of glottal stop for word-medial intervocalic <t>). This routinized style shifting indicated that these speakers (who were from both white and ethnic-minority backgrounds) had been socialised into wider patterns of British social stratification in speech. Rampton argues that this points to enduring processes of class reproduction. But when the adolescents spontaneously performed exaggerated 'posh' and 'Cockney' voices[9], there were glimpses of speaker agency too. These 'stylisations' occurred on average around once every 45 minutes in the data set. Rampton argues that they point to an active class consciousness among the young people, where 'class' is "a sensed social difference that people and groups produce in interaction, and there is struggle and negotiation around exactly who's up, who's down, who's in, who's out, and where the lines are drawn" (Rampton 2006: 274). He summarises the main meanings of stylised posh and Cockney as follows:

> A pattern emerges, then, in which vigour, passion and bodily laxity appear to be associated with Cockney, while physical weakness, distance, constraints and sexual inhibition are linked to posh. In fact, at an abstract level, this can easily be accommodated with a more general set of contrasts between mind and body, reason and emotion, high and low.

> (Rampton 2006: 342)

Rampton reminds us that the high-low/mind-body/reason-emotion binary has a long history in class-stratified western societies, and so again, we see that "'structure' … provides the resources for social action" (Coupland and Jaworski 2009: 8--9). The high-low 'cultural semantic' (Stallybrass and White 1996, in Rampton 2006: 343) circulated as meaning potential for the adolescents to make use of in response to their every-day concerns. When they felt a sense of injustice in their treatment at school, pupils used stylised 'posh' to caricature their teachers as upper class snobs. When negotiating the transition between school work and peer sociability, pupils used stylised posh or Cockney to construct a non-serious stance, and thus downplay their commitment to classroom tasks. Outside of teacher-pupil relations, the contrast

between the class-inflected styles became useful when playing with risqué sexual topics or managing changing and uncertain heterosexual relationships[10].

Rampton admits that there was little evidence that the adolescents were trying to liberate themselves from the social structuring of their everyday life, but in their stylisations they did make this structure "more conspicuous, exaggerating and elaborating evaluative differentiations that were otherwise normally treated as non-problematic in practical activity", and in doing so, they "denaturalised" class stratification (Rampton 2006: 363--354; 2011a: 1239, 1245--1246). On occasions they went further, demonstrating critical agency by actively disrupting the cultural semantic that links posh with high/mind/reason and Cockney with low/body/emotion. For example, when Hanif used stylised Cockney to 'vernacularise' school knowledge for his friends in order to encourage their participation in a curriculum task, he momentarily reworked the conventional equation of posh with high and Cockney with low by linking Cockney to a school orientation (Rampton 2006: 298--301, 306--308). Hanif also used 'quasi-Caribbean' for the same type of speech act, showing that "rather than allowing ethnicity to *replace* class as an axis of social differentiation in everyday activity, in their stylisations these youngsters could […] display their [functional] equivalence" (2006: 319; see Rampton 2010b, 2011a, 2011b for more detailed treatment of the complex convergence in indexical valence of traditional class and migrant ethnic styles). Rampton has used his analyses of stylised posh and Cockney to challenge claims about "the decline of class awareness" (Bradley 1996: 77, in Rampton 2006: 216) in late modernity. He has recently intensified this challenge by drawing upon his previous research on 'language crossing' in the speech of adolescents in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in the south Midlands of England[11]. Here, as at Central High, he finds evidence of sensitivity to the traditional dynamics of British social class (Rampton 2010b). Adolescents in both settings, he argues, used stylisation and crossing to position themselves in a multi-ethnic class society.

5. Conclusion

This overview has mapped one particular trajectory in the development of class analysis in sociolinguistics. Focusing on language variation, it began with the early

view that macro-level class structures determine linguistic behaviour, but then moved onto more recent approaches, which prioritise social practice and speaker agency, and have demonstrated that class meanings can become a resource for micro-level interactional and relational work. This mirrors a more general theoretical shift within sociolinguistics away from structural sociology to social action perspectives (Coupland 2001). This shift in theoretical orientation further necessitates a shift in methodological orientation, from large-scale surveys and quantitative analyses to local ethnographies and interactional analyses. Neither shift is absolute, however. An adequate analysis of language and social class requires an integrated approach which attends both to the regularities of sociolinguistic structure and to the meanings that are made in local contexts of talk (Coupland 2007). In Rampton's study, for example, the routinized style-shifting uncovered through quantitative analysis revealed that adolescents with different ethnic backgrounds had been socialised into wider patterns of British class stratification in speech. This was important background information for Rampton's account of the 'class consciousness' expressed through stylised posh and Cockney. The adolescents in Rampton's study were not always subordinated by an oppressive class structure, however. Micro-analysis of specific moments of stylisation revealed that speakers drew upon this structure to create local meanings and identities, and on occasions, confident pupils like Hanif subverted dominant class ideologies (compare also Robert's use of *howay* to assert authority and leadership). People *are* socialised into particular ways of speaking, and they *do* work with some sense of the wider social structure (which is why variationist research continues to uncover consistent patterns of social and stylistic stratification); but as the work reported in section 4 demonstrates, speakers can also be innovative in their language use, creatively reworking class meanings and putting them to use in local contexts.

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Notes

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[1] In doing so these studies largely ignored cultural dimensions of class, which many sociologists (following Bourdieu) now regard as central to class analysis (see Savage et al. 2013 for a recent attempt to incorporate a cultural dimension into a system of class categorisations).

[2] The difference between markers and stereotypes is in the level of speaker awareness. The social meanings attached to stereotypes are very well known and often attract overt social commentary. For example, 'h-dropping' is a stereotype in British English. It is highly stigmatized and subject to overt correction.

[3] Gender-related variation was also explained in class terms. When all other social factors are held constant, variationist studies found that women used more 'standard variants' than men. Hudson (1996: 195) describes this as the 'Sex/Prestige Pattern'. This finding was often explained in terms of women's greater sensitivity to class position and their awareness that 'standard' forms are associated with status and prestige. Men, on the other hand, were understood to be more concerned "with signalling group solidarity than with obtaining social status as this is more usually defined" (Trudgill 1972: 188).

[4] My focus in this section is on Eckert's work and on the community of practice approach, but it is important to acknowledge that this work was part of a gradual movement in the field towards using ethnography to uncover locally-meaningful categorisations; in particular, see Lesley Milroy and James Milroy's pioneering work on social networks (e.g. Milroy 1980, Milroy and Milroy 1992; see also Cheshire 1982).

[5] It should be noted that Eckert (2000: 280) does acknowledge that "sociolinguistic meaning is inseparable from the situations in which it is made" and thus that ethnographically sensitive discourse analysis has a role to play in understanding variation. The importance of discursive context is further highlighted in her later work (e.g. Eckert 2008) where she argues that variables are associated with a range of potential meanings (an 'indexical field'), and that specific meanings are activated in the situated use of a variable.

[6] 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. In addition to the work of Elinor Ochs (1992, 1996), which is discussed later in this section, see also Silverstein 1985, 2003.

[7] Language attitudes research has shown consistently over the last 40 years that non-standard/regionally marked speech tends to be rated low across the status dimension (for traits

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such as intelligence and competence) but high across the solidarity dimension (for traits such as friendliness and trustworthiness) (Giles and Powesland 1975, Labov 1972). The aural stimuli used in language attitudes research cannot capture the subtle nuances of meaning that are communicated via social stances and acts in face-to-face interaction (Garrett, Coupland and Williams 1999: 323); thus what participants are reacting to when they hear these recordings are the wider cultural ideologies associated with the recorded voices.

[8] It is possible, however, that a listener/overhearer/interlocutor might still associate class-based meanings with the speaker (Emma Moore, personal communication).

[9] 'Posh' refers to a marked RP style associated with British upper class and 'Cockney' to the London vernacular traditionally associated with the working classes.

[10] It is impossible to do justice to Rampton's meticulous interactional analyses in this short chapter. Readers are directed to the monograph where this dataset is treated in much more detail (Rampton 2006; see also Rampton 1995).

[11] This ethnographic research was conducted in the 1980s and involved following sixty white, black and Asian adolescents in playgrounds and youth clubs in one neighbourhood in the south Midlands of England (see Rampton 1995). In analysing these data Rampton focuses on language crossing, defined as "the use of Panjabi by young people of Anglo and Afro-Caribbean descent, the use of Creole by Anglos and Panjabis, and the use of stylised Indian English by all three" (Rampton 1995: xx).