

communities surrounding them. I began visits to the schools in October 2005 and initially spent half a day per week helping out in the Year 4 (i.e. 8-9 year olds) classrooms. I began making recordings in June 2006, at which point I extended my visits to one full day per week. I stayed with the same groups of students as they progressed from Year 4 to Year 5 (9-10 year olds) and continued making weekly visits to both schools until February 2007.

2.1.1 Comparison between schools

Murrayfield Roman Catholic Primary School is a Co-educational Voluntary Aided School in Bishopsgarth ward in the Stockton-on-Tees Local Education Authority (LEA). Murrayfield is larger than most primary schools in the area, with 287 pupils in the school between the ages of 3 and 11. Ironstone Roman Catholic Primary School is a Co-educational Voluntary Aided school in the Grangetown ward in Redcar and Cleveland LEA. The school is of average size for the area with 240 pupils. Unlike Murrayfield Primary, which has a 42-year history, Ironstone Primary is a recent addition to the LEA. The school was established in September 2000 following the amalgamation of Ironstone Infant and Junior Schools.

The report from a 2003 inspection of Murrayfield cites the following salient characteristics of the school:

The school has a stable community and pupil mobility is low. The percentage of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The school community is made up of children from a predominantly white European heritage...The overall attainment of pupils when they enter the school [at age three] is about what is expected in children who are three.

(OFSTED 2003a:3)

This description of Murrayfield Primary School can be compared with an equivalent paragraph taken from Ironstone Primary School's 2003 OFSTED report:

The school serves an area facing significant social and economic challenges and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is over three times the national average. Attainment on entry to the nursery is well below expectations.

(OFSTED 2003b:7)

These quotations clearly highlight the contrast between the 'stable community' of Murrayfield Primary's catchment area and the 'social and economic challenges' of the area where Ironstone Primary is situated. In particular, the marked difference between the two schools in the percentage of children entitled to free school meals (eligibility is based on parental income) gives an indication of the different social backgrounds from which these two sets of pupils come. It should not be thought that the absence of the expressions 'stable' and 'white European heritage' from the report on Ironstone Primary signal that Ironstone's children are more racially mixed or transient than Murrayfields: the Ironstone children are predominantly white Europeans and, as we will see later, come from a cohesive community.

The difference between the two areas is further illuminated by a comparison using 2001 Census data. Output areas were introduced as the smallest units of output for the 2001 Census. They were combined to form two layers of 'Super Output Areas' known as 'Lower Layer Super Output Areas' (LSOAs) and 'Middle Layer Super Output Areas' (MSOAs). Murrayfield Primary is captured within LSOA Stockton-on-Tees 015B, and Ironstone Primary is situated in LSOA Redcar and Cleveland 009C. Table 2.1 summarises some of the key census statistics for these

areas. Census data has been sourced from the Neighbourhood Statistics Service¹ (2001).

Table 2.1: 2001 Census Data (Neighbourhood Statistics 2001)

	Super Output Area Lower Layer			
	Stockton-on-Tees 015B		Redcar & Cleveland 009C	
	N	%	N	%
Total Number of Residents	1,673	-	1,422	-
Economically Active People Aged 16-74	1,156	-	931	-
Number of Households	713	-	486	-
Ethnic Minority Population	22	1.3%	14	1.0%
Unemployment Rate	39	3.4%	96	10.3%
Employed in managerial/professional occupations	139	23.1%	39	9.1%
16-74 year olds having no qualifications	389	33.7%	463	49.7%
Households owner occupied	532	74.6%	191	39.3%
Houses rented from Council	109	15.3%	226	46.5%
Households with 2 or more cars/vans	175	24.5%	48	9.9%
Households with > 0.5 persons per room	167	23.4%	262	53.9%
Households living in overcrowded conditions	14	2%	68	14%
Average size of household (people)	2.2	-	2.9	-
Position in Index of multiple deprivation (1 = most deprived, 32,482 = least deprived)	15,626		1,475	

An obvious measure of the status and character of an area is a breakdown of the population in terms of occupation. In Stockton-on-Tees 015B, 23.1% of workers are employed in managerial or professional occupations. This figure drops to 9.9% in Redcar & Cleveland 009C. This disparity is mirrored by levels of unemployment (3.4% in Stockton-on-Tees 015B compared to 10.3% in Redcar & Cleveland 009C). A further guide to the standing of an area can be found through its housing. In

¹ This service was launched in February 2001 by the Office for National Statistics in partnership with central and local Government.

general, an owner-occupied house affords more status than a rented one, and a privately rented one more status than one rented from the council. Table 2.1 shows that the majority of the population in Redcar & Cleveland 009C are living in rented accommodation and most of these homes are provided by the local authority. The higher rate of home-ownership in Stockton-on-Tees 015B correlates with the lower figures for occupancy per room and average size of household. All these factors are indicative of higher socio-economic status; the differences between these areas do not appear to be random.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) produces the housing datasets that are published (along with the census data) by the Neighbourhood Statistics Service. This information includes data on average house prices at ward level for 2001 (this data is not available at LSOA level). The average price of a semi-detached property in Grangetown in 2001 was only £23,379 while the same type of house in Bishopsgarth ward, Stockton-on-Tees, was worth almost three times as much (£62,479). To put these figures in context, the equivalent figure for the north-east region as a whole was £72,002. Unfortunately, the pace of change in the property market means that these figures are already obsolete. But commercial web-based information services (such as www.upmystreet.com) indicate a continuing divide between these two areas in terms of property value in the expected direction. I also gained interesting anecdotal evidence about property in the Grangetown area. One of the teaching assistants at Ironstone Primary, who was local to Grangetown (as were a number of the teaching assistants), was in the process of trying to sell her house during the fieldwork. She noted one day in the staffroom that it had been up for sale for a significant period of time but had received no offers. She remarked

that, despite the fact her house was in a ‘nice little close’, it was not selling because ‘Grangetown still has a stigma attached to it’.

The Indices of Deprivation 2004 are measures of deprivation provided for every Super Output Area in England. Separate Indices at SOA level are given for each of the seven domains of deprivation: Income, Employment, Health Deprivation and Disability, Education Skills and Training, Barriers to Housing and Services, Crime and the Living Environment. This allows all 32,482 SOAs to be ranked according to how deprived they are relative to each other. This information is then brought together into one overall Index of Multiple Deprivation (English Indices of Deprivation 2004). LSOA Stockton-on-Tees 015B was ranked 15,626 out of 32,482 (where 1 was the most deprived LSOA and 32,482 the least deprived). In stark contrast, LSOA Redcar & Cleveland 009C was ranked 1,475. So, while Murrayfield and Ironstone Primary do not constitute the opposite extremes of the socioeconomic continuum, there is clearly some social distance between them.

Despite the social challenges faced by Ironstone Primary (which contribute to the children’s level of performance upon entry being ‘well below expectations’ (OFSTED 2003b:7)), the school is extremely effective. Table 2.2 show a comparison between the schools based on the scores achieved in National Curriculum tests by pupils at the end of Year 6 (OFSTED 2003a; 2003b). When compared with similar schools, Ironstone Primary is rated ‘very high’ for mathematics and English and ‘well above average’ for science.

Table 2.2: Standards achieved at Ironstone and Murrayfield Primary

	Ironstone			Murrayfield		
	Compared with			Compared with		
	All schools	All schools	Similar schools	All schools	All schools	Similar schools
Performance in:	2001	2002	2002	2001	2002	2002
English	A	C	A*	A	A	A
Mathematics	A	B	A*	B	A	D
Science	A	C	A	A	A	D

Key: A* - very high; A – well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E well below average. Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of year 2.

The schools selected for data collection are therefore very similar in many respects: both are Roman Catholic Primary schools; neither has significant ethnic minority or migrant population; and both schools are well led by the head teacher and senior staff and as a result provide a learning environment in which all pupils can, and do, make good progress. The difference between the schools lies in the social and demographic characteristics of the areas which they serve, and by implication, in the social background of the pupils.

2.1.2 The schools as communities of practice

I had set out to compare and contrast the language practices of children from different social groups. The two schools were therefore not randomly selected; they were chosen deliberately to highlight a social contrast. This is the kind of judgement sampling that Reid (1978) adopted in his study of school children from three socially differentiated schools in Edinburgh. Based upon the census statistics and the knowledge I now have of the local communities, it would seem reasonable to suggest that Ironstone Primary is situated in a lower-working-class area, while

Murrayfield Primary is situated in a predominantly lower-middle-class area. The precise classifications are not important, however, because in this study I resist the temptation to label the children according to rigid social class categorisations. Milroy (1987b) points out that labels such as ‘working-class’ represent abstract social categories that do not necessarily figure, in any significant way, in individuals’ definitions of their own identity. There may be smaller scale categories to which these individuals feel they belong. When variationists use social class in survey studies it is merely a ‘proxy variable’ (Milroy 1987a:101) which covers distinctions in life-style, behaviour, values and attitudes as well as more measurable factors such as wealth, education and prestige. In this study, I attempt to ‘unpack’ some of the practices for which labels such as ‘working-class’ stand proxy. To do this, I focus on each school as a discrete community of practice. Of course, the socioeconomic background of the students has a significant influence on the primary school as a community of practice; each school-based community of practice is a product of the compromise reached between staff and students of how the school can adapt to the social situation within which it exists. Ironstone Primary and Murrayfield Primary therefore constitute quite distinct communities of practice due to the different social setting of the local community, even though they share elements as a result of being schools in the same wider urban area.

The school as a whole can be said to constitute a community of practice. The members of this community come together on a regular basis to engage in the shared enterprise of learning and progressing through the educational system. Within the school, each class/year group constitutes an embedded community of practice. Members of these communities come to share certain practices, modes of behaviour and values. The shared repertoire includes wearing the same uniform, reacting in

appropriate ways to symbols such as whistles and bells, sitting in a certain way in assembly, keeping to legitimate areas of the school grounds, and using particular techniques in class to get the teacher's attention (e.g. raising of hands), as well as a variety of shared linguistic practices, some of which will be investigated in this thesis. As the children participate in these communities, local identities such as attentive pupil, naughty student, class clown, friend, peer-group leader, dance partner, gossip, tell tale, and so on, become relevant at different times. Details about the Ironstone and Murrayfield Primary communities of practice, and the children who participated in them, will be highlighted at key points during the analysis. For now, I will present a brief sketch of each.

Both schools were proud of their association with the local church and, through it, the local community (a high proportion of Teesside's population are Roman Catholics -- something going back to the 19th century (Chase 1993)). Within Ironstone Primary, in particular, there was a strong sense that the school was an integral part of the local community. There was a definite feeling of belonging within the Ironstone Primary community of practice, which seemed to influence, and be influenced by, the wider Grangetown community. The annual school musical, for example, is a community affair that is held on two consecutive nights at the local community centre and is attended by the pupils' parents, siblings, neighbours and friends. There was also a definite consciousness within Ironstone Primary of events and situations occurring in the surrounding area. Unfortunately, these events and situations were sometimes of a negative nature. For example, I led a number of group discussions² with the children at Ironstone Primary and one of these was based on the children's journey from home to school. Most of the children lived within

² I recorded these discussions with a camcorder but this data was not analysed as part of the thesis.

walking distance of the school and made this journey by foot. In 3 of the 5 group discussions, the children mentioned a 'burned-out park'; this was clearly a salient feature of the local landscape, which many of them passed on their way to school. There was lots of speculation about who had been responsible for the fire and many of the children were greatly concerned about it. Discussion of spaces and events in the local area was regularly brought into the school sphere, and there were often significant events to discuss. For example, there were two murders in the Grangetown area of Middlesbrough during the period of the fieldwork. The second happened over the Christmas break (December 2006) when a young father of 2 Ironstone pupils was stabbed outside of the Ironstone Primary gates. When the children returned to school after Christmas, there was a lot of talk about this murder and how it was related to the earlier attack. One of the children, Rachel, even claimed to know where the knife for the second attack had been found. Members of the community talked to each other about these events. They swapped facts and opinions, but they also provided help and support to those who needed it. Post-fieldwork, the school itself became the victim of an arson attack. There was an overwhelming response from members of the Grangetown community, who worked together with the Ironstone Primary teachers to ensure that lessons could continue in the local church hall. Individuals approached local businesses, for instance, in order to secure vital materials for the pupils such as paper and pencils. This description of the issues faced by Ironstone Primary and by members of the local community has painted a rather bleak picture of the Grangetown area. There were also, of course, many positive events and activities to talk about. The children discussed events that were taking place in the area such as discos, parties and firework displays.

I am unable to give a similar account of the relationship between Murrayfield Primary and its surrounding community. This is not an analytic weakness, however, but rather a telling indication of the differences between these two communities of practice. The children at Murrayfield Primary did not talk to me about people, places and activities related to the local community, and there were certainly no events as significant as murder or arson to discuss. These children did occasionally tell me about some of the out-of-school activities they participated in, such as dance classes, but these were generally held outside of the immediate area and were attended by children from a number of different schools/areas. While Ironstone Primary is embedded in a cohesive community, Murrayfield Primary is part of a geographically (and probably socially) much wider community.

Returning to events *inside* the school, it quickly became clear to me that the children at Murrayfield Primary complied with the school's expectations of 'good' behaviour more than those at Ironstone Primary. After my first visit to Ironstone Primary, the entry in my fieldwork diary read: 'This class has a very different feel to Murrayfield; the kids are more boisterous and lively'. I was being rather euphemistic. After my second visit I noted: 'the class was again in complete disarray as the children did their DT [design technology] work'. Initially, I was struck by what I perceived as chaos (though later my perception changed). The classroom at Ironstone Primary was very different from the classroom schema that I held (a schema that Murrayfield Primary had reinforced). At Murrayfield, the teacher could generally hold the children's attention for extended periods. The children would raise their hands if they had a point to make and generally only spoke when acknowledged by the teacher. In contrast, the children at Ironstone Primary would often shout out in class and talk over the top of the teacher's voice. Ironstone

children would get up and wander around the classroom during lessons such as art or design-technology, inevitably ending up somewhere that they were not meant to be. They gave excuses for these transgressions (e.g. 'I'm just getting a ruler' or 'Billy stole my pen') but it seemed that they were simply grabbing opportunities in the classroom for informal social interaction. There were differences, then, between the two communities of practice in terms of the children's perception of their role within the classroom and in their attitudes to teacher/school authority. My experiences of the differences between Murrayfield and Ironstone Primary chime with Rampton's (2006:43) description of the conventional classroom discourse observed at Westpark, a secondary school in the prosperous suburbs, compared to the 'decentring of pedagogic authority' apparent at inner-city Central High.

The teachers at Ironstone Primary associated the children's 'bad' behaviour with their 'lack of maturity'. Perhaps we could say that these children were immature in that they had not yet developed a sense of what constitutes 'appropriate' social behaviour in the classroom. Or maybe these children were *more* mature than the children at Murrayfield Primary because they had a sense of their rights as individuals to express themselves, and did not feel restricted by the constraints that the school sought to place on them. Evans (2006) suggests that schools require children to learn middle-class practices, and that working class children are likely to resist the forces of legitimation that education represents.

When I began my visits to Ironstone Primary, I felt extremely uncomfortable in the classroom. The patterns of interaction I found there broke with my own generic expectations (Rampton 2006) and I was not sure how I could, or should, fit into this environment. This is where ethnography became key in 'making the strange familiar' (Roberts 2008). After several visits to Ironstone Primary, I began to tune

into the organisation of this community of practice and, as the weeks and months progressed, I earned my place within it. At Murrayfield Primary, in contrast, I had to work to ‘make the familiar strange’ (Roberts 2008). By this I mean that, even though the structure of this school was closer to my own experiences and expectations, I had to ensure that I did not take anything for granted and therefore miss important features of this community of practice. Ethnography overall was crucial in enabling me to gain some understanding of both communities of practice. It was only with this understanding that I became able to explain, with any degree of sensitivity, the differences in the children’s linguistic practices.

2.2. Fieldwork and methodology

2.2.1 Linguistic ethnography

Ethnography provides an alternative to the analyst-driven approach of the survey-style ‘first wave’ of variation studies. In ethnography, participant observation has a central role. Rather than testing hypotheses against predetermined categories, the researcher seeks to discover the social practices and processes of meaning-making that exist in a particular community: ‘while survey fieldwork focuses on filling in a sample, ethnographic fieldwork focuses on finding out what is worth sampling’ (Eckert 2000:69). My journey as an ethnographic researcher began several months before data collection. I entered the classroom in the first instance as a ‘helper’, someone who interacts with the children and assists them in classroom activities (e.g. arts and crafts, reading, and spelling). This initial step was important for a number of reasons. It enabled me to build bridges with the schools that would become my research sites. It gave me the chance to adjust to the environment of the school before data collection began. Perhaps most importantly, it gave me the

opportunity to form relationships with the children outside of the constraints of the research situation. I was able to interact with the children as a helper and a friend rather than as a researcher who was under pressure to make recordings. I tried to spend as much time as possible with the children during my weekly visits to school. I spent time with them in the playground, for example, chatting and playing games. I was therefore able to get to know the children's personalities, abilities, interests, relationships and friendship groups, and engage with their activities both inside and outside of the classroom. In short, I was able to observe informally 'the flow of social practice' (Maybin 2006:4) in the school. Ethnography, then, is not simply a method of data collection; it is a methodological stance that pervades the whole project. The accumulated experiences gained from participating in school activities combined to construct the 'ethnographically informed lens' (Maybin 2006:13) through which my analysis and interpretation of the linguistic data is presented.

One of the critical aspects of ethnographic research is the building of relationships with the people involved in the research process. For me this included children, teachers, head teachers and parents. Maintaining a positive relationship with these different groups can be a difficult balancing act. My research relied upon the good will of the head teacher and teaching staff; therefore, I had to be seen to be cooperating with them. I was conscious, however, that the children might distance themselves from me if I aligned myself too closely with the teachers and, in particular, with their authority. I wanted the children to feel that they could relax in my presence and talk to me in confidence. Eckert (2000) chose not to go into classrooms or use teachers as intermediaries in her research because she did not want to get caught up in the power hierarchies associated with being an adult in the school setting. In this context, the age gap between researcher and informant

represents a status difference which Eckert argues is potentially exaggerated if the researcher becomes an ally for the teacher and an authority-figure for the children. It is difficult, however, for a researcher in a primary school to adopt the same techniques that Eckert used in her study. Primary-age children are generally escorted to and from school by their parents and their movements in school are restricted. Primary schools have stringent policies regarding visitors; any participation in school life must be done with the full cooperation of the teaching staff. Forming a relationship with primary school children therefore inevitably involves spending some time in the classroom. I do not think that my role as an adult helper/classroom assistant was detrimental to my relationship with the children or to the research. There was little point in trying to become an honorary in-group member, as other researchers have done (e.g. Cheshire 1982a), because I am quite obviously in a different life stage³ to the children. My relationships with the children were set against the relationships that they had with other adults in the school. I was not a teacher, nor did I have any other fixed social role; I was just an adult who the children could chat to, include in their games if they wished, and go to for help with certain classroom tasks. There were a number of other individuals in the school who filled these ‘friendly adult’ roles (e.g. volunteers who help out in the library, on school trips, and in after-school clubs). I was struck by the children’s willingness (particularly in Ironstone Primary) to accept me almost immediately into their community of practice. My presence in the classroom became part of the children’s weekly routine. The children were glad of my help in the classroom and they also sought me out in the playground at break-time for gossip and games.

³ Although this might not be apparent to the children. One of the Murrayfield participants told me that her brother was about my age; he was 15.

Outside of the teacher-pupil dichotomy, forming relationships with children can be problematic if you allow yourself to be drawn into certain social allegiances to the exclusion of others. In Murrayfield, in particular, there was a group of outgoing girls who constantly demanded my attention. While this led to a good relationship with the girls in question, there was always the possibility that less gregarious children might be discouraged from approaching me. This is where my role as classroom assistant was extremely useful. I often took reading groups or led selected children in arts and crafts type activities in the classroom. I therefore gained exposure to all of the children in the class and was able to draw on these shared experiences when interacting with them in the playground.

2.2.2. Technology and fieldwork design

Choice of recording equipment is a crucial part of the data collection process. In this study, audio data was collected using radio-microphones. Year 4/5 children from both schools participated in the study by wearing the radio-microphone for half a day. The transmitter and lapel microphone were given to the child either first thing in the morning or at lunch time, and their interactions were recorded for a period of between 2 to 3 hours. The children were very excited about the radio-microphone; I tried to give each of them the opportunity to wear it, provided that they had a consent form signed by their parents (Section 2.2.3). In the end, I collected over 75 hours of data and analysed 50 hours of this data for the thesis. The sound files that were used for the analysis were selected before I had listened to any of the recordings. The selection was based on an assessment of the likelihood that the microphone would have picked up a wide range of interactions. For example, if a recording was made when there were lots of tests in the classroom, and hence not much talk, it was not included. I transcribed 25 hours of the data in full using the

transcription software *Transcriber* (Boudahmane et al.). With the remaining 25 hours, only those sections that were relevant to the analysis (i.e. that included examples of the linguistic features under investigation) were transcribed. The sound files used for analysis were created by 6 boys and 6 girls from each school who wore the radio-microphone. The voices of other children were captured as they interacted with the person wearing the radio-microphone, but only those children who had a signed consent form were included in the analysis. Overall, the analysis includes contributions from 15 Ironstone Primary pupils and 13 Murrayfield Primary pupils.

Maybin (2006) used radio-microphones in her study of the talk of 10-12 year old school children. She discusses her experience of researching children's talk across the school day in detail. In a note to Chapter 1, for example, she describes the advantages of using radio microphones: '[t]he use of a radio microphone was vital for capturing spontaneous talk, and for getting around what the sociolinguist William Labov calls the observer's paradox' (Maybin 2006:190). There has been a longstanding anxiety within sociolinguistics about the 'Observer's Paradox': 'the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation' (Labov 1972a:209). At the heart of the Observer's Paradox is the notion of the 'vernacular'. In Labovian sociolinguistics, the vernacular is the style in which minimum attention is paid to speech. Labov regards the vernacular as the most systematic speech style and hence the one which is of greatest interest to the linguist. Various techniques have been devised to reach past the Observer's Paradox 'to the structure that exists independently of the analyst' (Labov 1972a:62). From this positivist perspective, interaction between researcher

and researched is viewed as a source of potential contamination (Cameron et al. 1993:86). If we accept the legitimacy of this claim, data collected via ethnographic practices becomes problematic because, by its very nature, this data is *not* independent of the analyst. In line with Cameron et al., however, I would challenge the anxiety associated with the observer's paradox on the following basis:

If all human behaviour is social behaviour, then interaction between researcher and researched does not produce some anomalous form of communication peculiar to the research situation and misleading as to the nature of 'reality'. Rather such interaction instantiates *normal* communication in one of its forms.

(Cameron et al. 1993:87)

The goal of this study is to examine how language interacts with social factors in a dynamic two-way process. Interaction between researcher and researched is one particular instance of a constructed social reality, and hence it is as valid as any other form of speech. In Chapter 4, for example, I examine the types of directives that the children used with me (i.e. the researcher) in comparison with other adults in the school setting. This analysis reveals something interesting about the way that the children viewed my role in the community of practice and enhances our understanding of how they use language generally to construct their own and others' identities in interaction. Interaction between researcher and researched reflects only a small part of an informant's linguistic repertoire, however (as Rickford (1993) points out). Such data in my study, for example, could not be used to investigate how children behave linguistically when they are not in the presence of adults, nor how they behave within their own families. The benefit of the radio-microphone, then, is that it can capture a wide range of different interactions and hence a bigger picture of the participants' stylistic repertoire. Rampton (2004:6), who has made extensive use of radio-microphones for recording adolescents in the school setting, comments

that this technique ‘produces a very vivid picture of the very different experiences that individuals draw from a single event like a lesson’. In my data, for example, the radio-microphone was able to record the official teacher-pupil dialogue of whole-class teaching, while simultaneously capturing the hushed side-comments that the child wearing the microphone might make in response to this official dialogue.

The radio-microphone enabled the children to move around freely in recording sessions. I had to be nearby (at a distance where the receiver was still picking up the transmission) but did not have to be involved in the children’s conversations and could be out of sight (e.g. in a classroom while the children were in the playground). There were moments when the children were very clearly conscious of the radio-microphone, as for example, when they acted out the role of an ‘undercover cop’ reporting their movements ‘back to base’, burped the alphabet directly into the microphone, or used it to get my attention when I was not in the immediate vicinity. Such activities usually occurred in the first few minutes after a child had been given the radio-microphone or when a student from another year-group noticed the microphone and asked questions about it. Both situations occurred less frequently as the fieldwork progressed. A number of researchers (e.g. Milroy 1987a:89) have commented how participants tend to forget about the microphone. Overall, the children simply got on with their daily business.

A further advantage of data collected with radio-microphones is that it facilitates the study of ‘non-traditional’ linguistic variables. Labov (1972a:8) writes that the most useful variables for linguistic investigation are those which occur frequently. Phonological variables certainly occur with greater frequency than morphological and syntactic ones, particularly in a limited context such as the sociolinguistic interview, and hence tend to be the focus of attention in studies of linguistic

variation. Using radio-microphones to record participants yields an abundance of data for analysis and, therefore, makes the investigation of less frequently occurring linguistic features more feasible. Moreover, recordings made by radio-microphones can cover a wide range of speaking contexts, which further extends the range of features that can be studied. It would be practically impossible, for example, to study directives using conventional interview data because an interviewee is unlikely to issue requests or commands to their interviewer. If there were others present in the interview (e.g. in a group recording session), there would perhaps be an increased chance of occurrence, but it is unlikely that such data would yield sufficient examples for a meaningful analysis. Sociolinguists such as Eckert (2000; 2002; 2008) have emphasised the need to explore a range of linguistic features in the investigation of style. Radio-microphones can assist in this endeavour because they record a wide range of interactions.

The abundance of data produced by radio-microphone recordings requires of the researcher considerable time and effort in transcription and analysis. Such a method could be considered wasteful and extravagant. From a more optimistic perspective, however, the ‘extensive listening’ that is involved in transcription and analysis may be seen as ‘a process of ‘mediated’, repeated and repeatable, ethnographic observation’ which has the potential to yield ‘contrastive insights’ (Rampton 2006:32):

‘Contrastive insights’ [Hymes 1996] involve the apprehension of a disparity between the claims that prevailing discourses make about social life, and what you can see, hear and experience in social life as it actually seems to happen, and simply because it is not done as often as it might be in social and educational research, ‘trawling’ with radio-microphones can be an abundant source of such insights.

(Rampton 2006:32)

Rampton (2006:33) writes that the gap between official representations of classroom interaction and what he actually heard in his radio-microphone recordings was one of the ‘contrastive insights’ that motivated his analysis. Similarly, one of the ‘contrastive insights’ that influences this thesis is the difference between prevailing stereotypes about working-class children (as being less articulate or less mature than their middle-class counterparts or as having limited linguistic repertoires) and the creative use of language that was in evidence in the radio-microphone recordings of the Ironstone Primary participants.

The obvious disadvantage of using radio-microphones is that visual information is lost and this can make identification of the speaker difficult. This problem is compounded by the fact that recordings were unplanned (and therefore participants in the interaction were not known in advance). It was usually clear when the recorded voice was that of the child who was wearing the microphone, but when several other voices joined into a conversation, transcription became difficult. Voices that I was unable to identify were marked as ‘Anon’ in transcriptions and were not included in the analysis. A second disadvantage is that important contextual information that might be required for a full understanding of an utterance could be lost in spontaneous radio-microphone recordings. I was present in school during the recordings, however, and had the opportunity to make observations and take notes on speakers and relevant contextual factors.

There were also unforeseen (and unforeseeable) hazards to using a radio-microphone. A problem arose when I first used the radio-microphone at Murrayfield Primary, for example. Most of the children were in a school assembly but the teacher had allowed me to keep a group of girls back from the assembly to video-record a group discussion. When we had finished the discussion, I showed the girls

the radio-microphone and we began to experiment with it. Each of the girls took turns to wear the microphone. We made recordings as they moved around the classroom and then listened back to them. Unbeknown to us, however, the frequency that my radio-microphone was set to was the same as the frequency for the hand-held radio-microphone that the head teacher was using in assembly. The recordings that we were making with the radio-microphone were therefore broadcast through the speakers in the school hall to the assembled teachers and pupils. I was obviously extremely embarrassed about this and went to apologise to the head teacher at the first available opportunity. He did not seem to mind at all, however, telling me that the incident had enabled him to give the children a lesson on the workings of radio-microphones. He may not have been so charitable to a researcher who had been present in his school for only a few days/weeks and who was there for research purposes only – another reason why my role as classroom assistant was invaluable.

2.2.3. Ethical issues

This project was reviewed and cleared by the office of the Dean for Research in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Leeds. Before I began making any visits to school, I was CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checked; this is standard procedure for anyone fulfilling a role within a school which involves unsupervised access to children. The fieldwork itself was undertaken in line with the recommendations for good practice provided by BAAL (British Association for Applied Linguistics) (Rampton et al. 1994). Pupil and teacher participation in recordings was entirely voluntary. The nature and purpose of the project was explained to participants orally and on an information sheet that was given to the children's parents. Teachers and pupils alike expressed a positive attitude towards the project, and the children were keen to be involved. This enthusiasm accords with widespread experience that, in

many cultures, people like participating in linguistic research. Because the children were under sixteen, it was necessary to obtain the consent of parents or other adults acting in loco parentis. A consent form was sent to the parents or guardians of all potential participants (Appendix 1). The form gave an overview of the study and provided my contact details so that parents could get in touch with me to voice any concerns or queries they might have (though none did). Parents, teachers and pupils did, of course, have the opportunity to speak to me directly about the project during my weekly visits to school. The children were generally happy for the full range of their interactions to be recorded. The radio-microphone transmitters had a mute button, though, that the children controlled. Children wearing the transmitters therefore had the option to stop the recording at any time. I was visible in the vicinity and on hand to address any issues or concerns that might arise.

Research typically ‘produces or intensifies an unequal relationship between investigator and informants’ (Cameron et al. 1993:81). The ethical implications of this were intensified in my study because of the very asymmetrical relationship that already exists between children and adults. A number of measures were taken to ensure that any adverse effects of the uneven power relationship were mitigated (most of which have already been described): participation in the study was entirely voluntary and children were not under any pressure to take part; the children had the option to withdraw from the study at any time; the nature of the project was explained to the children and their parents; informed consent was obtained. Further, my research was conducted entirely in the school, a context that was very familiar to all of the informants. The participants were likely to feel more confident and in control in this situation than, for example, in an interview context in unfamiliar surroundings. It is not enough to simply follow standard procedures, however;

ethical considerations must be borne in mind throughout every stage of the fieldwork. The children who participated in the study viewed me primarily as a classroom helper, someone whom they knew and trusted. Such trust can have the effect of blurring the boundaries between overt and covert observation (Milroy 1987a:89-90). I therefore treated the information I received with a great deal of care (and will continue to do to so). The identity of all participants will remain confidential and the raw data will be kept securely and be available only to me.

Becker (1993:96) agrees that it is wise to be concerned about power differentials between researchers and subjects, but argues that it is unwise to assume that the differential is always in favour of the researcher: '[t]he part of the process the researcher controls is typically of little importance to the subject, whereas the part the subject controls may be of great importance to the researcher'. Cameron et al. (1993:89) agree that 'researchers are not always powerful in an unqualified way'. In my study, for example, I was heavily reliant on both teachers and pupils. The most obvious realisation of this is that without their full cooperation I would have been unable to conduct any research at all in this context. On a more subtle level, whenever I entered the staffroom, a classroom or the playground, I relied on teachers or pupils to include me in their groups. On the rare occasions that they did not, I remained an outsider in a socially precarious position.

As well as adhering to the ethical model outlined above, many social researchers feel a desire to help their informants. This places the researcher in the position of an advocate (Cameron et al. 1993). Researchers who work within the advocacy framework use the findings of their research to benefit the community in some way. This may involve validating the speech patterns of the community and providing research findings to informants and community members. Picking up on Cameron et

al.'s discussion of advocacy, Rickford (1993:130) states that we have to accept that the community might not care about the linguists' research findings but that 'THEY might be willing to empower or allow US to carry out our research in return for services which THEY need'. By volunteering as a helper at Murrayfield and Ironstone Primary, I was able to give these schools a service which was useful to them. In this way, I could give something back to the communities that acted as my research sites. My research can also be seen as validating the language of the children who took part in this study. In particular, the analysis of the speech of the Ironstone Primary participants counters some of the claims made about impoverished language use in working-class children.

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