Language Ideologies in the Classroom: From Research to Practical Intervention

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Outline



- Key question: How we can use linguistic ethnographic research to intervene practically in the educational domain?
 - O An example: the use in schools of 'standard' versus 'nonstandard' English
 - × Reflections on the role that linguists have typically played in UK educational debates
 - Some suggestions for how we might move forward
 - Discussion

Teesside school bans use of local dialect

Primary school tells parents to stop children using slang phrases as it is If you hear your child saying the following phrases or words in the left hand column please correct the other together we will receive the column together together we will receive the column together will receive the column together we will receive the column together will receive the co preventing them from learning

the phrase or word in the right hand column. I'm sure if we tackle this problem together we will r

Incorrect	
I done that	This should be 11
I seen that	This should be, I have done that or I did that
Yous	This should be, I have seen that or I saw that
Dropping the 'th'	The word you is NEVER plural e.g. we should say, "You lot come here!"
Gizit ere	"School finishes at free fifteen," should be, "School finishes at three fifteen." Please give me it
Dunno	This should be, I don't know
It's nowt	This should be, it's nothing
Letta, butta etc	Letter, butter etc
Your	Your late should be, you're late (You're is the shortened version of you are)
	I will wear my shirt for work.
Werk, shert etc	He was sitting there

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2273821/Middlesbrough-parents_clamp-localexpressions-home-children-learn-standard-English.html

Primary schools ban regional dialect/slang

Primary school tells parents to stop children using slang phrases as it is preventing them from learning 'standard' English icii illeracy and to improve their result

If you hear your child saying the following phrases or wor the phrase or word in the right hand column. I'm sur

Incorrect	
I done that	This state
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These dialect 'bans' are just one of the ways in which children's spoken language is being 'policed' (Cushing 2020) at

school

s become one of the first in the country to offer its pupils

pupils elocution lessons to lose their

q! Pupils Queen's

sroom 'to help

m lose their accents.

SHEED SPRINGS ACADEM 1



don, Essex has become one of the first in the country to offer its pupils Photo: PETER

Banned Words:

COZ AINT

LIKE BARE

EXTRA INNIT

YOU WOZ and WE WOZ

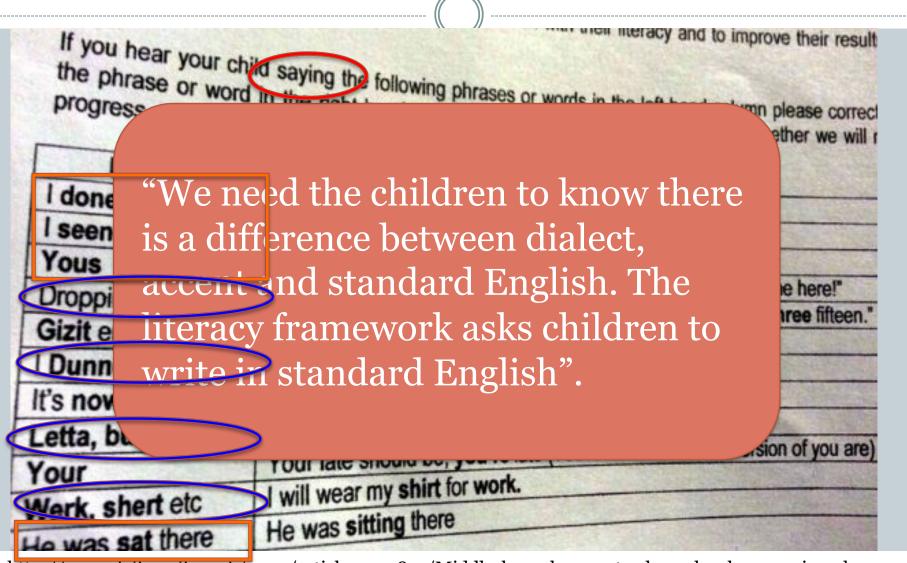
Beginning sentences with BASICALLY

Ending sentences with YEAH

- we are abing at coneq Lune.
- Recently we have asked each class teacher to write a list of the top ten most damaging phrases used by children in their class:
- "they was" instead of "they were"
- "I cor do that" instead of "I cant do that"
- "Ya" instead of "you"
- "gonna" instead of "going to"
- "woz" instead of "was" .
- "I day" instead of "I didn't"
- "I ain't" instead of "I haven't"
- "somefink" instead of "something"
- "It wor me" instead of "it wasn't me"
- "ay?" instead of "pardon?"



Teesside school bans use of local dialect



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Sociolinguistic responses to linguistic prejudice

- Labov's principle of error correction:
 - A scientist who becomes aware of a widespread idea or social practice with important consequences that is invalidated by his own data is obligated to bring this error to the attention of the widest possible audience (Labov 1982:172)
- Nonstandard dialects have a grammatical system that is as logical, coherent and rule-governed as Standard English

DIFFERENT BUT EQUAL (Labov 1969, 1972, 1982; Trudgill 1975)

- But...
 - Negative perceptions of nonstandard dialects persist despite around 50 years of sociolinguistic advocacy

Critique of PEC (Lewis 2018)

- Reconsider the theory of social change that underpins the PEC
- Relinquish Labov's (1982) quest for scientific 'objectivity'
- Adopt a language ideological approach

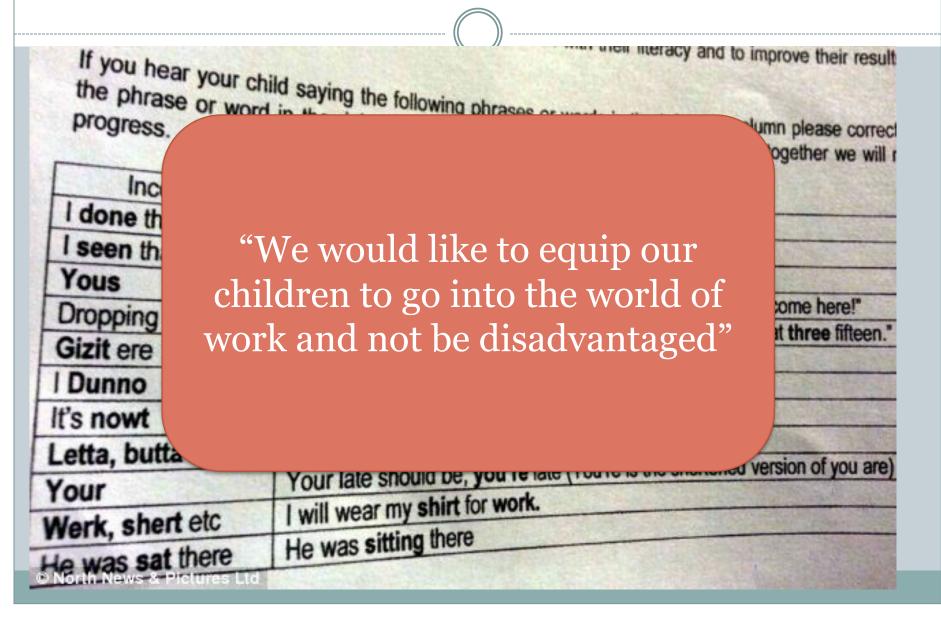
Relinquish claims for scientific 'objectivity'

- 'My discussion of this topic ... will be specifically linguistic: the word "ideology" will not appear in this paper' (Trudgill 1999: 118)
- '[I]t is not possible to demonstrate empirically that forms of language are either equal or unequal, or even that "some are more equal than others" purely as linguistic objects. A claim of this sort is ideological, just as the claims that are made against it are ideological, and it is unwise for linguists to make public claims about linguistic equality unless they are aware that such claims will be interpreted as ideological.

(J. Milroy 1999: 23; see also Snell, fc)

Language ideological approach

- We can only counter dangerous beliefs about language when we have understood how they are socially produced and accepted as convincing and effective (Woolard 1998:10)
- Language ideological approach can reveal and challenge the 'stock arguments' (Blommaert 1999:10) that have perpetuated standard language ideology and associated practices
 - Social mobility argument



'Messrs. Vickers Ltd., "find great difficulty in obtaining clerks who can speak and write English clearly and correctly, especially those aged from 15 to 16 years". Messrs. Lever Brothers Ltd., say "it is a great surprise and disappointment to us to find that our young employees are so hopelessly deficient in their command of English". Boots' Pure Drug Co say: "Teaching of English in the present day schools produces a very limited command of the English language"

(Newbolt 1921: 72, cited in Crowley 1989: 224)

- Spoken 'standard English' in England came to be defined, not in linguistic terms, but in terms of the social characteristics of a privileged group of speakers, as the language of 'the educated' and the 'civilised' (Crowley 2003:126)
 - o *Iconization* (Irvine & Gal 2000): 'standard' forms came to be understood as emblematic of intelligence, competence, eloquence and superior moral character (and 'nonstandard' dialect forms of the converse)
 - Erasure: facts inconsistent with the dominant ideology are rendered invisible

- The effect of this "access to standard English" argument is not likely to be to benefit the underprivileged, but to maintain the authority of the canon of correct English' (Milroy 1999: 21)
- Educational policies and prescriptions on 'standard English' function as 'gate-keeping mechanisms that reproduce both the experience and the social effect of stratification and inequality' (Gal 2016:459)

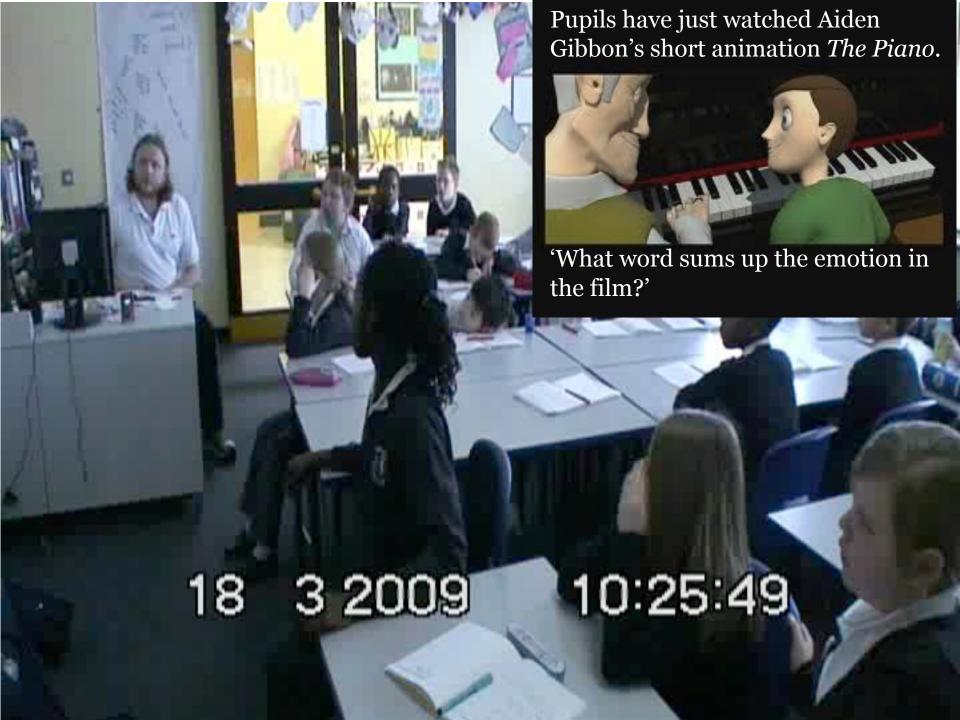
Critical Reflexivity

- 'Critical reflexivity can work to strategically examine how pursuit of objectivity, or any other disciplinary assumption, constrains contributions to social change' (Lewis 2018: 339)
 - o 'it seems linguists insisting on the logic or rulegovernedness of Black language practices could not simultaneously challenge the idea that language practices racialized as Black could be objectified by dominant institutions in a project of evaluating their worth' (Lewis 2018: 341)

Dialogic (or talk-intensive) pedagogies

- Dialogic pedagogies seek to 'exploit the power of talk to engage and shape children's thinking and learning' (Alexander 2008: 92)
- Growing evidence that dialogic approaches can improve educational outcomes for all children, and especially for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. Resnick, Asterhan & Clarke 2015; Alexander 2017)
 - Good quality classroom talk* is thus important to social mobility

(* Talk which stimulates thinking, makes thinking public, and refines thinking – see Lefstein & Snell 2014)



Oral corrections

```
Mr Robbins:
               put your hand up if you think he looks sad
                 ((Around 9 pupils raise their hands. After 5
                seconds Freddy joins in))
   Mr Robbins:
3
                Freddy why do you think he looks sad
                what makes him look sad
5
   Freddy:
                because he's-
6
                he ain't got a smile on his face
   Mr Robbins: ain't got a smile on [his face
                                      [((laughs))
   Asha:
                he (.) has (.) not got a smile on his face
   Freddy:
10
  Mr Robbins:
                Okay
```

Was this correction necessary?

Reticence and inarticulacy



• If low value is accorded to the speech of working-class and/or ethnic minority pupils in the classroom, these pupils may become less confident in oral expression and thus reluctant to contribute to whole class discussion'

(Snell 2013: 122; see also Godley et al. 2007)

Teachers' views and pedagogy



- Teachers' views can influence their perceptions of children's ability /what they expect from certain pupils, which can affect:
 - o the decisions they make in the classroom
 - how they interact with pupils
 - o the level of structure and control they apply

(Brophy & Good 1970; Black 2004; Cooper & Baron 1977; Good & Nichols 2001; Myhill 2002; Rist 1970; Snell & Lefstein 2018)

'Towards Dialogue' Study

- Teachers at 'Abbeyford Primary' were committed to dialogic pedagogy in theory, but in practice...
 - Well, it depends on the ability of the children. You've got two children who are quite bright and articulate, but you've got a lot of the class that are not. And asking them to take over, you wouldn't get the same sort of dialogic [teaching and learning] going on.
 - The conversation skills that they [the low ability pupils] need are just so far out of their rein.
 - o I think they're all capable. I think there are some that are obviously, you know, lower achievers, and I wouldn't expect certain things from them not that I tell them that but I try to keep my expectations realistic.
 - o If this was all about long-jumping, there'd be some kids who would be good at long-jumping and other kids who'd be useless. I mean, it's just, you know, distribution curve, isn't it? [...] Whatever you do, some people will be no good at long-jumping. I'm not saying that you don't try, but, for however long you do it, there'll be some people who just won't be able to.

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Ability and identity



"Unintelligent" or "Slow"

Social Class

Locally contextualised and adapted

Events of social identification

"Low achiever" and/or "Linguistically deprived child"

(Snell & Lefstein (2018), drawing on Wortham's (2006) framework)

Social class

"We have some children who have such limited la something from them is so difficult. And, to be fa trying to draw out an answer, you keep on with

'Language gap' (Avineri & Johnson 2016)

the class, so, I think that's a reservation, pecause you do nave some children-1 mean, obviously, nothing goes on at home, at all, and they really do struggle."

(Ms Anderton, 5th December 2008)

"The children come in with a very low baseline in this area, with the language skills. I mean, they've got other issues. You've got children coming into the infants with nappies on and things [...] And they may just like sitting in front of the television, not have the kind of talk going on. You notice that in their story writing, the language is very limited, so, they don't have the kind of richness of vocabulary and extended language that you can get in other kinds of areas. Not all children, I'll say that, but we have, kind of, a vast proportion of our children come in, and their English is quite poor."

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Socio-historical identity categories

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Events of social identification

See Snell & Lefstein 2018

Teacher comments on grammar and variation

- I would say that the grammar issues that we face in our school are exacerbated by the fact we're in south Leeds [a socio-economically deprived area] ... I feel like if we don't pick that up with children, we don't teach them the correct way to speak and the correct way to write we are disadvantaging them and I think that's really important so I am very much seen as the grammar police at school.
- I think it would depend on the cohort. So I've had some brighter children who got better results who I would have been more descriptivist with and would have been able to say "that's the kind of language that we would use in speech marks" and we would be able to have those kinds of conversations. Where I've had cohorts who have been less able and more immersed in "incorrect" grammar, then I would have been more prescriptive and said "no that's wrong", that's not the way that we're going to do it, because they wouldn't have been able to cope with "there's one rule for this and there's one rule for this".
- I've made that distinction between standard English and the way that they speak, because I don't want them to feel like they're wrong, but you know they need- they're gonna be competing against these people that have had this amazing education with these parents with these homes full of books and these like perfect Received Pronunciation accents.

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Conclusion

- It is unproductive to adopt a purely 'linguistic', non-ideological approach in debates about nonstandard English in education
- We need a critical, ideological perspective in order to understand and challenge the ways in which language is implicated in the gate-keeping encounters that routinely reproduce educational inequalities
- Teachers' views about about language *are* consequential, but these views are part of a network of more widely circulating ideologies
- 'Deficit' views about pupils' language and academic abilities are deeply ingrained 'within the professional culture of teaching' (Black 2007)
 - This needs to be tackled if we are to bring about the kind of pedagogic change 'that has the power to break the cycle of low demand/low performance too often experienced by children from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds" (Resnick, Asterhan and Clarke 2015: 3).
- Linguistic Ethnographic research has a role to play, but...

Some Questions



- How can we use linguistic ethnographic research to generate robust debate about implicit biases and the ideologies of class, race and gender that manifest in classroom interaction?
- How can we use linguistic ethnographic analyses to challenge teachers' assumptions without alienating them or casting them as oppressive villains?
- How do we speak to teachers in ways that they can relate to and find useful, while also remaining committed to nuanced theoretical accounts of complex linguistic practices and ideological processes?
- How can we provide descriptions and guidelines that are helpful for educational practitioners without reifying categories such as 'standard language' and associated power structures?
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