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'Addressing' language deficit: valuing children's variational repertories

David Hyatt, Hugh Escott and Robin Bone

Abstract

There is growing evidence that student contributions via classroom talk (oracy) are subject to social judgements premised on cultural evaluation of accent and dialect, with particular varieties often viewed in deficit terms and pathologised, both within and beyond the classroom. We reflect on a university–community project involving researchers working to support Greythorpe Junior School ('pseudonymised') to address the linguistic deficit position that a school inspection report had taken in relation to the use of local varieties of English in Greythorpe. The researchers used socio-linguistic frames (repertoire, accommodation and discourse attuning) to develop productive strategies for students and the school to take ownership of how to negotiate perspectives that diminish non-standard accents and dialects. We provide illustrations of the workshop conversations with children and teachers to highlight the sophisticated, lived, metalinguistic understandings of children and teachers in the school, through which this perception of language deficit was ultimately renegotiated. In illustrating this case, we draw into focus the ways in which academic, institutional, socio-linguistic knowledge is (by its descriptive nature) divorced from context and so is only of use if it can be owned by those who are facing linguistic inequalities.

Key words: repertoire, accommodation, language deficit, discourse attuning, oracy

Introduction

A group of Year 6 boys are talking to the lead researcher about how they use language. Their school is in a post-industrial area in the North of England. There is a 'problem' at the school with a lack of "imprecise spoken language". This framing comes from the body that inspects the school. The boys are in a workshop with an explicit focus on how they would speak in a range of contexts. This is part of a university research project that, in part, aims to challenge "deficit models of language". These workshops are part of a wider set of creative activities relating to how children and teachers in the school think about language. The boys are discussing how their authenticity is tied up with how they choose to speak. The boys are discussing what they think of talking 'posh' and 'normal' (all names are pseudonyms):

Researcher: "What would happen if you talked to your mates in a really posh accent, what would they think?"
Bailey: "they'd laugh"
Callum: "they'd think …"
Researcher: "they'd laugh would they?"
Callum: "and they'd think 'why aren't you acting normal?'"
Researcher: "Ok so you are talking about someone, who speaks a different language than English and they are just learning English"
Fred: "yeah, normal"
Joe: "if you talk normal, then they will know what accent you have, they will try to learn it the same"

Institutional, research and everyday ways of framing language intersect in the workshop context described above (and are further detailed throughout this paper). Official bodies that inspect language consider 'precision' or 'correctness'. Socio-linguistic researchers may explore 'non-standard' varieties of English and create nuanced distinctions between the way someone pronounces words (accent) and the combination of pronunciation, words (lexis) and structure (grammar) that make up varieties of English (dialects) (Trudgill, 1975). This conversation was framed in terms of talking 'posh' and 'normal', two distinctively un-nuanced terms for professional linguists. However, what the boys matter-of-factly describe when they discuss 'talking normally' are complex and significant ways of understanding how language use and variation are tied up with different ways of 'being'. They talk about creating affinity, being empathetic and building rapport. They discussed strategies that they felt related to what was appropriate behaviour and action in different contexts. In the wider workshop context, they discussed talking in different ways in order to "get on with people", "not making them upset or making them feel awkward" or 'impressing people'.

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Throughout this paper, we reflect on what it means for these framings to be privileged in a school context where researchers were involved in 'challenging' prescriptivist beliefs about language. What emerged for us was a repositioning of socio-linguistic knowledge in relation to non-linguists' understanding of language in the every day, in a context where professionals, working on behalf of an institution, were involved in challenging language ideologies. We also draw attention to talking about repertoire, as a productive means of creating debate about language variation, but which ultimately depends on the lived experience and pre-existing expertise, which non-linguists possess about language.

Language deficits, collaboration and Greythorpe

Debunking 'erroneous' views as both a widespread and contested idea in socio-linguistics. In 2013, Grainger and Jones explored the resurgence in UK educational policy and debate of the idea that "linguistic difference amounts to linguistic, cognitive and cultural deficit" (2013, p. 96). For Grainger and Jones, aligned with many others across the decades (Cameron, 2012; Labov, 1972; Peterson, 2019; Snell, 2013; Spencer et al., 2013; Trudgill, 1975), this deficit view of linguistic difference is nothing new, being a "resurgence of the socially intolerant deficit approach to children's language and communication which had been heavily criticised and, in the eyes of many, comprehensively debunked by leading socio-linguists in the 1960s and 1970s" (2013, p. 96). We acknowledge that these challenges to the hegemony of privileged forms of language, and struggles against the policing of standards, have a long history amongst socio-linguists and the teachers they have worked with in such attempts at resistance. Notable amongst these is the work of Britton (1970), Barnes (with Britton, Rosen and the London Association for the Teaching of English) (1971), theoretically grounded in the work of Vygotsky's (1962) seminal work on the relationship between thought and language.

In challenging these deficits, they recognise that academic arguments can only go so far, and researchers need to find ways to "make an impression on the ingrained patterns of socially stratified educational attainment which victim-blaming ideologies of 'deficit' help to reinforce" (Grainger and Jones, 2013, p. 97).

There are numerous questions and contentions relating to what is happening when socio-linguists attempt to bring about change through processes of 'debunking' or 'error correction'. For example, in a recent special edition of *Language in Society*, numerous prominent linguists reflected on, what a critique from Lewis (2018) frames as, "the widespread error correction approach", which "supposes that social change can be achieved when researchers share knowledge that they produce with the public or specific institutional authorities" (p. 325). Labov (2018) responds to Lewis's critique by drawing attention to the practical question of "raising reading levels in inner city schools" (p. 349), that "[d]enunciation does not necessarily increase information and understanding"(p. 349) and "making students fully aware of the difference between home and school language" can be met "with strong objections from teachers, parents, and educational administrators" (p. 348). Snell draws attention to public perceptions of 'elitist' academics 'disingenuously' or 'unhelpfully' intervening to "demonstrate that stigmatised dialects of English are linguistically 'equal' to other varieties" when "teachers, parents, and pupils know very well that these varieties are not SOCIALLY equal" (2018, p. 370). In responding to Lewis' critique, Rickford draws attention to how community perspectives are omitted from his consideration of how to address linguistic inequalities and that Lewis does not provide concrete steps and details about how to bring about change (2018, p. 366). In the 90s, Rickford made the case that "American quantitative sociolinguistics has drawn substantially on data from the African American speech community for its descriptive, theoretical, and methodological development, but has given relatively little in return" (1997, p. 161). Here then, 'correcting' erroneous beliefs about language is a core, and significantly contested, principle in socio-linguistic research, with associated practical challenges and complexities involved in impacting (Lawson and Sayers, 2016), 'non-linguists'/'lay-person's knowledge about language' (Rymes and Leone, 2014; Svendsen, 2018) in everyday contexts, and working ethically with communities.

Collaboration as a means through which to bring about change. The central issue Grainger and Jones discuss in exploration of linguistic deficits in the United Kingdom is what they see as "the exclusion of working-class and poorer families from the debate":

> *"The very people whose languages, minds, morals and parenting abilities are being described, evaluated, discussed, criticised and 'remedied' have no voice at all whether* in the academic research itself*, in the media discussions over newsworthy 'findings', in the professional teaching bodies or in the policy making circles: they are silenced and their interests are 'represented' by parties who are very 'interested' for their own purposes. It is surely a priority, therefore, to find ways and means by which the 'objects' of our research can become active subjects in the shaping and directing of a debate from which they have most to win and lose."* (Grainger and Jones, 2013, p. 98 – emphasis added)

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Grainger and Jones' points chime with Rickford's above about the exclusion of community perspectives on language from socio-linguistics. More recently, Cushing has drawn attention to the need for collaboration (with teaching professionals) in order to address linguistic inequalities. In exploring the dominance of standard language ideology in current educational policy, Cushing explicitly builds on work, such as Grainger and Jones', "which is challenging language ideologies within current education policy in England" (2021, p. 12). In his conclusion, Cushing proposes a potentially productive way to address these unequal language ideologies:

> *"Critical linguists collaborating with teachers in the unique context of their schools would be a useful activity in developing local-level policies which promote the use of speakers' whole linguistic repertoires rather than the simple 'grafting on' of standardised English, ensuring critical attention to the language ideological struggles which play out in staffrooms, corridors and classrooms."* (Cushing, 2021, pp. 13–14)

Whilst collaboration is here positioned as a means of bringing about social change, collaboration and the involvement of 'communities' in research are not free from the concerns about social change, elitism, denunciation, disingenuous involvement, unequal partnerships and practicalities discussed above in relation to error correction.

Recent developments in university community collaboration in the United Kingdom. The school project we describe in this article emerged as one strand of a larger project, called "Language as Talisman". The "Language as Talisman" project drew on a tradition of collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005) and was funded by the AHRC Connected Communities funding stream. This funding stream was influenced by the recent 'participatory turn' (Facer and Pahl, 2017) in social research and so aims to promote 'co-produced' (Bell and Pahl, 2017) research where participants play an active role in shaping and guiding research activity (please see Escott and Pahl, 2017, 2019, for analysis of co-produced data from this project). This means that research is done 'with' communities, rather than 'on' them (Facer and Enright, 2016). The overall aim of the larger project was to elicit conversations about language by positioning how people understand what they do with language as significant and potentially powerful. This was done to reduce, what Deborah Cameron describes as, the "vast gulf between what interests linguists about language and what seems to interest everyone else about it" (2012, p. x, preface) (for further information on the wider project and approach, see Pahl et al., 2013).

Participatory and collaborative methodologies are not new (see Facer and Enright, 2016, pp. 81–103), but the scale of the AHRC Connected Communities programme in the United Kingdom reflects that collaboration in this context is 'in vogue' both methodologically and politically, as well as in terms of the civic responsibilities of academics (Facer and Pahl, 2017, pp. 1–23). In investigating this programme of funding, and the wider 'participatory turn' in knowledge production, Facer and Enright draw attention to what they call the "fantasy of the 'community' and the 'university' " in order to consider the inchoate ideas that influence how researchers and communities view each other (2016, p. 3). They ask that these fantasies are taken seriously through "project teams reflecting on their own claims to authority" to consider "to what extent do university partners represent the only or most appropriate way of producing meaningful knowledge?", whilst recognising that this work is "necessarily unsettling and can be disruptive of existing identities" (Facer and Enright, 2016, p. 3).

Reflecting on collaboration. Against a backdrop of a 'resurgence' in perceptions of language deficits, debates about how socio-linguistic knowledge brings about change, collaboration and the 'participatory turn', in this article, we reflect on a collaboration between linguists and the unique context of Greythorpe school (name of school pseudonymised), in an attempt to consider what is involved in the collaborative work aiming to address linguistic inequalities in context. We do this, not to offer hard and fast answers to the numerous issues relating to error correction discussed above but in order to examine our investment in socio-linguistic claims to authority and to emphasise the position of community perspectives on language as the means through which change takes place. Whilst collaboration can be seen as means through which socio-linguists can 'make a change', it is a two-way process, and so we should also ask how might this work disrupt our disciplinary identities? In interrogating how we have positioned socio-linguistic knowledge as potentially "the only or most appropriate way of producing meaningful knowledge" (Facer and Enright, 2016, p. 3), we argue that one way in which researchers invested in socio-linguistics can be involved in 'making change' is by reframing socio-linguistic knowledge, authority and expertise as one framing of language that emerges from specific institutional settings. We describe our attempt to support a community, who were subject to a deficit discourse, in becoming "active subjects in the shaping and directing of a debate from which they have most to win and lose" (Grainger and Jones, 2013, p. 98). Furthermore, we attempt to foreground how language is understood by those who are using it, whilst also considering

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how they are situated in the material reality of everyday life.

Project context and background. The Greythorpe project strand we explore in this article involved a collaboration with Greythorpe Junior School (pseudonymised) in the North of England. We worked on this project as a co-investigator (Hyatt) and research assistant (Escott), in partnership with Greythorpe (Bone – deputy head teacher). This aspect of the project focused on addressing the linguistic deficit position that a school inspection report (undertaken by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)) had taken in relation to the use of local varieties of English in Greythorpe. Our aim was to support them in addressing this explicit language-deficit position, articulated by the UK body responsible for inspecting state schools, which had labelled the local varieties of English used in the classroom as 'inadequate'. Working in collaboration with the school, we helped to make visible the pupils' pre-existing complexes of resources and to aid the school in negotiating such negative assessments of their linguistic community. This was done through a process of co-inquiry (Armstrong and Banks, 2011) exploring the significance of repertoires and what it means to 'be accommodative' (Giles and Coupland, 1991) within the school community, carried out through a number of workshops and discursive activities.

Our aim, in discussing our work with Greythorpe, is to detail a case in which insights from academic knowledge were successfully integrated into a school-driven initiative, where the school's behavioural and language policy was changed to create a system, which aimed to avoid devaluing children's and teacher's linguistic proficiencies. However, in illustrating this case, we draw into focus the ways in which academic, institutional, socio-linguistic knowledge is (by its descriptive nature) divorced from context and so is only of use if it can be owned by those who are facing linguistic inequalities. Therefore, we argue that in order for research projects focused on linguistic inequality to have 'impact' or effect change, researcher expertise and knowledge needs to be reframed as simply *one way* of knowing about language, and everyday non-linguists' understandings of language need to be recognised as having significant currency in the negotiation of social life.

In essence, the school we worked with possessed the necessary expertise to integrate thinking about repertoire and accommodation into how they understood and promoted behaviour in their school community. This integration involved a significant shift in the framing of conversations about linguistic inequality, away from the standard/non-standard dichotomy. Through this process, we came to reflect on the ways in which terms such as Standard English and Non-Standard English are institutionally and academically situated and so are heavily ideologically loaded. The terms have a long history within the body of socio-linguistic research and specifically in terms of the history of development of standard forms (Fairclough, 1989) and of challenge to the hegemony of standard forms (Bex, 1999; Cushing, 2021; Grainger and Jones, 2013; Milroy and Milroy, 1985). These ideologies can obscure the living process of linguistic development, as well as the ways in which language is used to negotiate social life.

We are aware that we are providing an informal evaluation of the impact of our research collaboration here, partly due to the nature of this project (i.e. a collaborative research project rather than a school-wide educational intervention). We are also not positioning the 'learner voice' and 'playground voice' (the Outcomes of the Greythorpe Project section) as unproblematic utopian concepts for researchers. Our aim in this reflection is to draw attention to the expertise that the school possessed in their understanding of the positive behaviours and sense of community within which they could situate ideas about changes in ways of speaking and writing.

In the Project Context and Rationale section, we further outline the relevant context for the Greythorpe project, as well as explaining the rationale behind our collaborative process. In the Encouraging Talk about Variation in Language section, we begin by outlining a number of academic socio-linguistic approaches to framing variation in language, which the project team felt were productive in facilitating discussion, and then turn our attention to the ways in which a group of Year 5 and 6 children discussed variation in language. In the Outcomes of the Greythorpe Project section, we discuss how the school took ownership of ideas relating to accommodation and discourse attuning in order to rethink their school behaviour policy and to situate respect for, and recognition of, variation in language as core to their school community. In the Conclusion: The Institutionally Situated Nature of the Production of Linguistic Knowledge section, we reflect on our experiences of this project and its outcomes by exploring issues to do with the institutional nature of knowledge production and the capacity that researchers have to effect change. In this section, we also summarise the significance of the project process and school's response. We then situate the school's approach to embedding consideration for language in relation to everyday ways of being, and explore how they build a positive school community, as an example of a productive way forward in relation to efforts to address linguistic inequalities.

Project context and rationale

Language as Talisman

Timescale: February 2012 to November 2012
Community partners: *Town Name* Youth Service, Inspire *Town Name* (Literacy Charity), Local Junior School 1 and Local Junior School 2 (partner names anonymised)
Methods: Arts-based (film-making, creative writing, story telling, and arts and crafts) and ethnographic approach
Focus: Shared academic and community interest in how language can operate as a source of resilience

Specific Greythorpe context

Activities: Film-making, poetry workshops, craft activities, workshops explicitly focused on discussing language use, researchers as participant observers and collaborative meetings with teaching staff
Focus: How do young people in the school understand their own language use? How might the school respond to a negative assessment of local language use from Ofsted?

Greythorpe and Ofsted

Greythorpe Junior School is situated in a post-industrial town in the North of England. At the time of working with the school, they had been graded "inadequate – notice to improve" during an inspection in January 2012 by Ofsted. The nature of the collaboration between the project team and Greythorpe, as part of the wider Language as Talisman project, was motivated by the school's concern about how to address the way Ofsted judged spoken language in the school:

> *"Pupils are confident to engage in dialogue and answer teachers' questions. However, their communication skills overall are poor […] Their knowledge of how to pronounce sounds and then articulate and spell words is hindered by imprecise spoken language models offered by adults at times in lessons."* (Ofsted, 2012)

An explicit area for improvement for the school was "improving the precision of adults' modelling of spoken English" (Ofsted, 2012). Due to its location, many of the children that attended this school spoke with accents, dialects and languages particular to this area. Therefore, the 'imprecise' language models offered by adults referred to regional varieties of spoken English. In effect, the Ofsted report was making the school accountable for a way of speaking English that may be very different from the varieties used by pupils and teachers at the school, and also conflated speaking English 'correctly', with being able to write 'correctly', as part of a broader process of the policing of language in schools as described by Cushing (2020).

Whilst the language-deficit model that Ofsted adheres to in their inspection is widely seen as problematic in research literature, as Grainger and Jones (2013) and Cushing (2020) illustrate, and illustrating Ofsted's failure to recognise the significance of meaningful dialogue in classroom contexts and its centrality to learning, the teachers and children at Greythorpe still had to find ways of negotiating the 'inadequate' verdict in the report, particularly, the concerns about 'imprecise' spoken language and, more importantly, the language ideologies that are embedded within this deficit discourse. As part of the school leadership team, Bone was involved in responding to the Ofsted report. In this team, there was a recognition of the value of 'grammatically accurate' extended interactions between pupils and between pupils and adults. But there was also a sense that there was a criticism of the local dialect and accent. The leadership team saw the teaching and modelling of standard grammar as of the utmost importance as they felt it would aid and support the development of pupils' reading, whilst at the same time, they wanted to recognise the other 'voice' that existed in the school. This voice was part of the distinct dialect and accents that come from the community the school serves. Pupils themselves were familiar with these ways of speaking and placed significant value on them.

The school leadership team had already begun to problematise the overall language ideology informing the Ofsted judgement. On the one hand, we see that they are operating within prescriptive notions of accuracy and standards that have currency both within how Ofsted is considering the school's progress and within their own thinking as teachers and individuals. Our concern as researchers, then, was with finding ways in which to reframe conversations about language in order to move away from the prescriptive Standard Language ideology of the official report, whilst recognising that such beliefs are intimately tied up with the everyday negotiation of social life (and in this case educational success). At the same time, however, the school leadership team objected to the 'criticism' of local dialect and accent that was implied by the Ofsted report. Therefore, as a group, we wanted to find ways to recognise the significant value that pupils and teachers place on the 'other voice(s)' that they see as significant to their out-of-school and in-school communities.

Focus of the collaboration

What developed through this collaboration was a consideration of the metalanguages that Ofsted,

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researchers, the pupils and the school used to describe their understanding of language in use. Within educational norms, and discourses of attainment, children at Greythorpe, like in many other schools in the United Kingdom, were being constituted as 'inadequate' at speaking. We contend that the way children talk is a biographically inflected and embodied (Blommaert and Backus, 2011) aspect of their social identity. The labelling of these ways of speaking as inadequate is problematic for researchers. However, this labelling has significant value in individuals' lives due to their position within social structures where these beliefs have currency. There is a central tension that is involved in working to address the perception of language deficit a school like Greythorpe faced that relates to how to challenge unequal beliefs about language but also support individuals in negotiating these beliefs, as they will not disappear overnight. Clark characterises these issues as:

> *"Firstly, how to engage pupils with the discourses demanded by the school curriculum when such discourses may be very different from the ones they are used to at home and in the community; secondly, how to prepare them for the adult world beyond that of the school gates and their immediate locality, including access to further or higher education in ways that do not denigrate or disparage their home and linguistic backgrounds."* (Clark, 2013, p. 67)

Working with Greythorpe involved considering how to support children in negotiating school curriculum concerns that put them in a deficit position, whilst also encouraging them to value the ways of speaking that are of significance to them in other contexts.

Exploring this balancing of different ways of speaking, in terms of the benefits provided in different contexts, creates space for the potential renegotiation of social value. Focusing on this balance as a lived reality of variation in language also means that, as researchers, we take it seriously (Olsson, 2013) as something where individuals have much to gain or lose from not being able to negotiate different contexts, audiences and ways of being in social life. Grainger and Jones (2013) let out a joint sigh in response to what they saw as the resurgence of language-deficit beliefs and call for linguistic insights to inform discussion:

> *"So here we are again. It is time, once more, to confront the misconception that linguistic difference amounts to linguistic, cognitive and cultural deficit. Linguists and other scholars concerned with language have a particular responsibility, therefore, to try to ensure that current debates about language difference and variety are informed by insights and expertise from their own professional disciplines."* (Grainger and Jones, 2013)

Grainger and Jones (2013) focus more on the decisions of policy-makers, politicians and educational professionals, which are subject to their own political complexities. However, rather than exploring the top-down influence of policy, our focus is on a bottom-up trajectory, working with individuals in context to help them negotiate deficits in practice and inform school policy. We wish to resituate perceptions of language deficits as beliefs, which, although 'debunked', must be constantly problematised by non-linguists and linguists alike. Working in this way is aligned with the traditional enterprise of socio-linguistic critiques of prescriptivism but can involve a significant reassessment of the value of socio-linguistic knowledge and research processes.

In the Relevant Socio-linguistic Concepts and Ideas section, we explore the theoretical discussions of repertoire and accommodation to situate discourse attuning as a productive means through which to explore deficit models of English. In the Attending to the Challenges of Addressing a Language Deficit section, we reflect on workshop conversations with 9- to 11-year-old children, which are illustrative of the kinds of conversations we took part in within the school space, in order to explore how "ways of speaking" were fundamentally tied up with "ways of being" for these children. Then in the Outcomes of the Greythorpe Project section, we explore the ways in which the school took ownership of ideas relating to discourse attuning, through their consideration of the positive behaviours they wished to promote in the school community.

Encouraging talk about variation in language

Relevant socio-linguistic concepts and ideas

Correctionist to contrastivist. Part of the challenge that we are discussing involves renegotiating dominant metalinguistic framings and allowing for other relationships with variation in language to be privileged. Wheeler and Swords' (2001) work discusses one approach to undertaking this renegotiation in relation to their work on correctionist and contrastivist approaches to children's classroom talk in the United States. The correctionist stance, widely mirrored internationally in educational policy statements "diagnoses the child's home speech as *poor English* or *bad grammar* finding that the child does not know how to show plurality, possession, and tense, or the child *has problems* with these" (Wheeler and Swords, 2001, p. 2). Correctionist positioning holds Standard English as the only correct form which both marginalises and pathologises children's dialect forms of talk and, as such, excludes children who do not use 'Standard English'. This deficit with its metaphors of problem, mistake and omission, they contend, consigns the majority to being in error.

The correctionist stance is often implicitly enshrined in policy statements. This perspective positions children's talk as "forms of English" understood in relation to notions of 'Standard English'. The contrastivist approach notes that language comes in diverse varieties. It offers a "linguistically-informed model (which) recognizes that the student's home language is no more deficient in structure than the school language" (Wheeler and Swords, 2001, p. 7). The focus in a contrastivist approach is on exploring notions relating to the appropriate time, place, audience and purpose for different communicative acts. Wheeler and Swords (2001) argue that literacy, articulacy and understanding of Standard English can all be developed through means other than correcting students or negating their language use. The contrastivist model takes into account the potential disconnect between children's home language use and the language norms privileged in schools. This approach engages with the tensions between natural variation in language use and the social importance placed on individuals being able to engage with Standard English.

Ostensibly engaging with speaking and writing in different contexts, and for different audiences, was included in the government guidance around the time that we came to work with Greythorpe. UK statutory guidance explicitly highlights that children should:

> *"speak with confidence in a range of contexts, adapting their speech for a range of purposes and audiences."* (Department for Education and Employment/Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (DfEE/QCA), 2010)

> *"select and use appropriate registers for effective communication."* (Department for Education (DfE), 2014)

However, this focus can be seen to be more at the periphery of dominant discourses about language and, given the rise in the United Kingdom of spelling, punctuation and grammar testing in recent years (DfE, 2014), is seen as of less significance than thinking about accuracy and 'standards'. Within school systems and structures, 'effective' or 'adapted' use of language comes to be judged predominantly in terms of production, rather than in terms of confidence, purpose or context. The idea of a contrastivist approach, and curriculum concerns that draw attention to adapting speech for different audiences, purposes and registers, foreground the significant role that variation and difference play in communication. However, implementing an approach to language that values variation involves considering the purposes for changes in style in more detail.

Repertoire. The notion of repertoire, described by Gumperz (1986) as a fundamental concept of sociolinguistics, refers to the actual resources that a speaker has available. Repertoire provides an alternative way for teachers to think about linguistic competence where the benefits of a contrastivist approach can be acknowledged. The linguistic repertoire of a speech community includes all the linguistic varieties (registers, dialects, styles, accents, etc.), which exist in this community.

Blommaert and Backus (2011) draw attention to the 'unfinished' cumulative nature of language learning. They argue that knowledge of language is ultimately dependent on biography and that "knowledge of language can be compared to the size of shoes" as "shoes that fit perfectly at the age of twelve do not fit anymore at the age of thirty – both because of the development of one's body size and because of fashion, style and preference" (Blommaert and Backus, 2011, p. 9). Speaking with confidence in different contexts and registers, using different styles of speech is fundamentally tied to biography, as: "repertoires are biographically-organized complexes of resources, and they follow the rhythms of human lives" (Blommaert and Backus, 2011, p. 9). Recognising that the diverse ways in which individuals speak are core to their understanding of their identity, and provide productive means of negotiating social life, focuses on an individual's usage of language over an idealised abstract notion of 'correct' language. This also means that context is highly salient when making judgements about 'appropriateness'.

Accommodation theory. Accommodation theory had its origins in experimental contexts, though has more recently embraced epistemic shifts in social psychology to move away from these empiricist underpinnings (Giles and Coupland, 1991). As a result, recent work has allowed greater focus on "local socio-psychological processes relevant to particular instances" (Coupland, 2010, p. 24). On a basic level, accommodating involves changing the way one communicates in order to converge towards those that one has an affinity with (or that it is socially beneficial to be seen to have an affinity with) and diverging from those that one does not. Research in this area aims to account for the ways in which individuals show solidarity with, or disassociate from, other individuals or the social groups that they represent.

Convergence describes the ways in which individuals and groups reduce or change the phonological aspects of their speech, based on their perceptions of social context, to attempt to receive positive social benefits. Divergence, on the other hand, was "the term used to refer to how speakers may accentuate speech and non-verbal differences between themselves and others" (Coupland, 2010, p. 22). Accommodation provides a frame for thinking about how shifts in style, in terms of accent and dialect, provide socially beneficial or resistant strategies for negotiating social interaction. However, Coupland also draws attention to the ways in which individuals can achieve the same "affective results through strategies" (2010, p. 24) that do not necessarily involve shifts in style but do involve changes in speech behaviour.

Discourse attuning. Moving from speech accommodation theory to discourse attuning means that other dimensions of speech behaviour become salient in considering what it means to 'be accommodative' in different contexts. Volume of speech, topic choice, speed of speech, lack of speech, lack of adequate turn-taking, avoiding sounding overly familiar or patronising, disclosing too little or too much information, apologising and supporting others' contributions are just some of the dimensions through which 'being accommodative' can be played out. Thinking about accommodation initially involves thinking about style, whereas considering this process in relation to discourse attuning brings into consideration the behaviours that influence how individuals are seen to be 'accommodative'. Therefore, discourse attuning provides a framework for considering the myriad ways in which speakers make their talk interpretable, "facilitate or inhibit a partner's contribution to on-going talk" and control the rights or spaces afforded to them (Coupland, 2010, p. 25).

In relation to the Greythorpe project, we found discourse attuning conceptually valuable as it privileges individual agency and so provides a means of involving participants in considering how it is that they are agentive in their use of language. We sought to work with this concept, as opposed to 'code switching' as used by Wheeler and Swords (2001), the latter seeming to emphasise the 'code' or abstract linguistic model over the actual usage, and as such, discourse attuning seems more complementary to the agentive notion of repertoire with which we are working.

For Coupland (2010, p. 25), degrees of 'being accommodative' pervade social interaction. The work we undertook in Greythorpe did not methodologically share much similarity with research into accommodation or discourse attuning. What these areas of research did provide were productive ways of thinking about language, which supported the processes of co-inquiry and collaboration that we engaged in. For us then, thinking about attuning speech behaviours, in order to 'be accommodative', through changes in the styles of language used, involves thinking about how individuals understand and perceive the lived reality they are socially positioned within and how they employ the resources that are available to them to occupy a range of social categories.

Attending to the challenges of addressing a language deficit

Talking about variation in language. The overarching research project had received institutional ethical approval and informed consent for participation from parents and children. As one part of our work in Greythorpe, we undertook workshops with a group of 17 children from Years 5 and 6 (covering ages 9–10 and 10–11). The children were asked to think about a range of situations and to reflect on the ways in which they spoke or what kinds of things they would say in these contexts. In particular, they were asked to think about whether they would talk using a 'normal' or 'posh' accent/dialect and their reasons for doing so. We used these terms because of the currency that we had seen that they had with students and teachers and so worked to establish with them in the lead-in to the workshops that what they felt 'normal' referred to was their local regional accent and dialect and that their use of the term 'posh' referred to attempts to approximate socially prestigious ways of speaking associated with Received Pronunciation and/or Standard English, though we acknowledge the normative nature of this terminology.

The children considered a range of scenarios, first individually, then in pairs and finally as a whole group, as to how they would speak. Scenarios included:

- At home, with your parents or whoever looks after you
- At home, with your brothers or sisters
- In school, with your friends outside of lessons
- When you are outside of school with your friends
- In school, with your teacher
- In school, when an inspector comes to visit the class
- If you have to talk to someone who is not from this part of the country
- When you are in a job interview

The pupils were asked to discuss their thoughts on these situations. The range of contexts drew attention to contexts like the home or school where different styles of spoken language were required but also

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different behaviours. For example, talking to a teacher you are familiar with is different from how you may have to speak when an inspector visits. In developing this workshop, we had quite deliberately focused on different contexts and different relationships because of our engagement with research on discourse attuning, accommodation theory, repertoire and taking a contrastivist approach. What we were interested in exploring with the children is what they saw as the qualities of these interactions and how they themselves chose to make sense of them. In this sense, we focused on how individuals considered the ways in which they used different ways of speaking to attune to different contexts and behaviours. The major themes that emerged in these discussions related to authenticity, affinity, ways of being and the deficiting of certain accents, dialects and registers.

For example, the discussion in our opening vignette relates to 'being authentic' but also ways in which these boys understand and maintain notions of 'normality' in speech and behaviour. In thinking about when they used their 'normal' local accents, they responded that someone might talk in this way at home with their family, on the streets or in school. Different ways of talking were linked to different authentic stances. Talking in a 'posh' accent was discussed in terms of impressing people or trying to be someone that you are not, with the outcome perhaps of your friends laughing at you for behaving in an inauthentic manner.

Callum: "When people are on TV who are like, and then not themselves, they try to, be a bit posher and act a bit more professional"

Fred: "Because as Jack said, they try to impress people when they like um talked to them or anything, they try talking in a posh accent, but then when it comes to like, everybody in our like … your mates, you just talk normally like you would normally"

In talking about different contexts and interactions, the boys foreground the lived, embodied, ways of being (ontologies) associated with mobilising particular ways of speaking. In these examples, notions of authenticity are explored through consideration of the potential responses from different audiences.

However, at the same time, language-deficit orientations to framing their language in use were employed alongside these considerations of authenticity and affinity. For example, one participant in the group discussed how talking 'reight deep' might mean that others think that they are 'reight rough', which led to a discussion of whether the group felt that this was a fair assessment. 'Reight' (/reIt/) is a highly enregistered Yorkshire pronunciation (its counterpart in 'Standard English'/Received Pronunciation is /raIt/) being a pronunciation that has social and cultural value and visibility in spoken and written varieties of Yorkshire English (Escott, 2014, pp. 221–224). 'Being rough' implies that someone has a range of undesirable social qualities, like being violent, uncivilised or impolite. Ways of speaking and particular negative social qualities and behaviours are linked in this example. In this case, the assessment was opened up for the opportunity for reassessment in terms of what the group thought was fair. However, this is the same belief that underpins perceptions of language deficit; a way of speaking implies negative social qualities or an individual's lack of capacity.

We present these examples to resituate something quite fundamental in our consideration of language deficits; that variation in speaking, for different contexts, purposes and audiences, is central to the lived negotiation of social life. Regardless of the 'debunking' of theoretical or ideological stances that come from research findings, language and language deficits are not abstract; they are situated in the living of life in the every day. The school itself found conversations of this type useful as a means of working to develop an inclusive, non-judgemental strategy, to approach the children's understanding of language in use.

Outcomes of the Greythorpe project

Accommodation and school policy

Whilst recognising the importance of the Ofsted-promoted standard models of English to children's success, Greythorpe's senior team felt strongly about the ways of speaking that the pupils' valued, and which are heard within the school and community. Alongside the workshops, Greythorpe held a series of assemblies and staff frequently discussed accent and dialect with pupils. These activities were informed by discussions with the project team concerning accommodation, discourse attuning, taking a contrastivist approach and repertoire. Through these activities, Greythorpe developed what they came to call the 'learner voice' and the 'playground voice': one for use in the classroom and to be used in writing and the other a more informal code to be used on the playground, with friends, at home. Both these 'voices', the children were reminded, have equal value and importance, with an emphasis on being able to use both, identify differences and switch between the two. The 'learner voice' became an embedded part of practice at Greythorpe Junior School. In reflecting on his role in the school, Bone saw children drawing on this 'learner voice' and 'playground voice' as a framework to consider their language use and choices. Bone also felt it was of use in helping adults to recognise and

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value differences between the two 'codes'. This meant that pupils and staff were more comfortable celebrating local dialect, alongside the more formal teaching of 'precise' models of spoken and written language, with learners, adults and staff able to explore differences in language use depending on purpose and audience.

What children already valued and 'do' with language was made partially visible within school discourse. This also had to be carefully couched in ways that speak to school inspectors. Through these processes, the school worked to avoid positioning children's language as 'correct' and 'incorrect' and move to a more contrastivist approach, whilst supporting pupils' engagement with Standard English. Through collaboration with the project team, the school developed their own approach to the issue of 'imprecise' language models. The 'learner voice' was developed as an extension of the 'Learner Code', Greythorpe's whole school behaviour policy, in order to look at how to differentiate between different types of language use at the same time as celebrating the uniqueness of spoken English in a dialect or accent other than 'received pronunciation'. In order to mobilise the pre-existing ways of knowing and being that the children at Greythorpe possessed, teachers at the school worked to connect different styles of speaking and writing with different behaviours and different ways of being. The 'learner voice' associated Standard English ('talking posh'), appropriate classroom behaviour and the community values of Greythorpe, with the notion of 'being a learner'.

In the subsequent Ofsted inspection, Greythorpe was commended for their behavioural policies and school community:

> *"Pupils typically behave well and have a clear understanding of the behaviour code. They say they appreciate the orderly environment and feel safe in school. Parents and carers confirm that the school is a harmonious community. Everyone treats each other with respect. Adults provide strong role models for pupils."* (Ofsted, 2013, p. 4)

Here, it is interesting to see that, in terms of behaviour and community, the adults are positively assessed as role models, whereas previously, these same adults needed to improve "the precision of their modelling of spoken English". Pupils seeing teachers as relevant models of behaviour and members of a community they belong to is built on the respect and affinity developed between pupils, teachers and the school. Teachers speaking in the same or similar ways that the children do and that pupils may speak at home and out of school plays a role in building these positive relations, both through the sharing of cultural capital and through making the potentially new language environment of schooling accessible. Whilst it is clear that inspections work across various dimensions and criteria of school experience, the lack of potential connection between how people speak with behaviour and community is characteristic of correctionist models. In the sense that irrespective of the positive emotional, personal and group roles that ways of speaking hold, if they are viewed as 'incorrect' little or no value is ascribed to these roles. Language use and behaviour are intertwined in educational contexts, and it was the leveraging of the school's behaviour policy through which any attempts at introducing a contrastivist approach occurred.

Incorporating discourse attuning into attempts to encourage positive behaviour

Through the 'learner voice', developing one's repertoire and attuning one's linguistic behaviour to the discourse norms of classroom behaviour were embedded in the school's behavioural system, the 'Learner Code'. Whilst the 'Learner Code' foregrounded appropriate behaviour in playground and out-of-school contexts, it was made clear that in these contexts, it was entirely appropriate to use a 'playground voice'. Being a learner and speaking like a learner were explicitly linked, whereas the work of creating positive interpersonal relationships, as well as being a positive member of your community, could be undertaken through other ways of speaking, and was also positioned as of essential importance to school life.

Here, the school is explicitly associating ways of speaking with the particular type of school community that they wish to have. They promote positive inclusive school and social values through a focus on the contexts in which children find themselves and how they are expected to behave. In considering contexts, repertoires and what it means to 'be accommodative' in a wide range of areas that their pupils interact, Greythorpe worked to associate particular values with both specific stylistic resources and a range of positive behaviours. To some degree, the school has been involved in explicitly 'enregistering' their own registers. They brought together a range of indexical relationships and associated them with the register of the 'learner voice' and the 'playground voice'. Through this process, they worked to enculture their pupils into a Greythorpe social disposition and through this socialise them into the norms of educational discourses that the pupils and teachers are required to negotiate.

What we wish to highlight here is that this process involved the complex task of mediating between discourses that may pathologise children's speech and how children actually used language in negotiating social life, recognising that children's use of language is intrinsically interrelated to their developing understanding of the world and their learning, both in and beyond educational contexts. We participated in conversations relating to professional research metalinguistic framings of language in this school. However, the response to the official framing of language deficit came from the way that the children, teachers and school community, mobilised how they considered the ways that they spoke, in light of different kinds of behaviours that they valued. For example, actively participating in learning, helping others, representing the school in the community, being positive towards others (in what you say and how you physically interact with them), being organised, being punctual, taking responsibility and treating visitors with respect are all behaviours that the school 'Learner Code' seeks to promote. The only aspect of the school behaviour code in which using a 'learner voice' was explicitly required was in relation to the care in the presentation of written work, with the notion of the 'learner voice' itself reflecting care in how children were choosing to speak (i.e. shouting is not considered part of a 'learner voice'). The boy in the workshop who made the connection between speaking 'reight deep' with people perceiving you as 'reight rough' is on the one hand reflecting dominant language deficits, but also on the other, he is simply discussing variation in speech in terms of behaviours. Discourse attuning draws attention to how ways of speaking are associated with particular ways of behaving and that this is a central part of negotiating social life. However, the school community possessed knowledge about how they valued local language(s) and what behaviours they wished to encourage in their school, which means they were able to positively mobilise insights from research on discourse attuning. Managing behaviour is a central part of school life, and discourse attuning concerns how we vary the way we speak to behave in particular ways.

As a team, we were particularly struck by the complexities of positioning participants in workshops as experts in their own use of language and the way in which encouraging a positive school community, and behaviours, was the means through which the school chose to address the language deficit they were facing. What we took away from the conversations is both the complexity of the biographical, interpersonal and situated nature of participants' metalinguistic framings but also a consideration of the capacity, we have as researchers, to 'address' language deficits, when it is through situated understandings of language and community that the school ultimately 'addressed' their problems.

Conclusion: the institutionally situated nature of the production of linguistic knowledge

As a team, we were challenged by what emerged from conversations of this type, when considering how to support students and teachers in negotiating the language deficit they were facing. Fundamentally, the children's understandings of language were orientated towards different ways of behaving, and being, when using language to live social life in the present. To return to Grainger and Jones' concerns, we believe as researchers that "current debates about language difference and variety [should be] informed by insights and expertise" from our own disciplines (2013, p. 96). However, in doing this, we need to recognise the institutionally situated position of academic knowledge and consider the capacity that the professional disciplinary training of researchers has for addressing 'real-world' problems.

Institutionally situated socio-linguistic research provides rigorous, systematic and evidence-based metalinguistic framings, but these framings are not situated in the lives that individuals are living. Access to, and socialisation into, these framings is differentially distributed and requires successfully negotiating higher education institutions.

Grainger and Jones (2013, p. 96) trace a frustration amongst researchers that a debunked idea has resurfaced. But in a sense, it is perhaps only in the very particular space of academia where this idea can be seen to have been debunked. Attending to the ways in which individuals understand variation in language as embedded in their behaviours and working from these understandings to encourage the renegotiation of language deficits involves privileging non-linguists' metalinguistic framings as of more significance than professionally produced ones. Because the former are the framings that are employed to live life. The pervasiveness of beliefs that some forms of speaking are more 'correct', or 'better' than others, and the subsequent policing of others' language use that this leads to, means that these beliefs are lived and felt and have drastic material consequences. This meant that we have been challenged to take seriously the position of language deficits (even though they have been 'debunked') as lived and as having significant currency in how individuals are able to negotiate social life.

In this article, we have explored an attempt to develop an inclusive, tolerant, approach to children's language in a school, where voices other than 'Standard English' are not seen as of less value, or in need of development, but as central to the current and existing success of these children. We have explored how

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workshops and discussions that we have participated in have impacted how we come to view the role that researchers play in addressing language deficits. We have argued that this work involves the recognition of how metalinguistic framings of language are always tied up in the living of life. We have also considered how the situated nature of knowledge about language that the school community had was the means through which they were able to mobilise insights from linguistic research to address the language deficit within which they were positioned. We have discussed the institutionally situated, decontextualised nature of linguistic knowledge, and the fact that research training does not necessarily provide researchers with the capacity to address inequalities, as part of the reason why theoretically 'debunked' language deficits still have currency in everyday life. We have also drawn attention to how beliefs about language, and language and behaviour, are tied up with the living of life in the every day, with language deficits themselves being beliefs that are lived and play a part in the negotiation of everyday life.

At the same time, we have worked to outline that any 'successes' that have resulted from our co-inquiry process have been dependent on the everyday understandings of language, community and interaction situated in the school itself. As researchers, it is the school's renegotiation of the linguistic and meta-linguistic criteria by which their language policy and practices were evaluated, which has pointed to what we see as a direction forward in addressing the ways in which Standard English, and Standard Language ideology, currently dominate the educational landscape in the United Kingdom. Eliciting situated, everyday, metalinguistic framings of language in use, and understanding the ways in which language is tied up with affect, identity and community, for both researchers and participants/non-linguists, can support broader critical engagement and collaboration, whilst also providing a productive space to recognise how the negotiation of everyday social life involves the development of complex knowledge about how to use language to 'be' (an authentic, friendly and valued member of one's community).

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