Language ideology and the notion of construct resources: a case study of modern RP

Anne Fabricius and Janus Mortensen

Roskilde University, Denmark [1]

INTRODUCTION

Work is presently proceeding apace at widening the theoretical and empirical horizons of our understanding of the complexities of social meaning and its relation to language practice, and this concern has come to play a pivotal role in sociolinguistic research in recent years. Inspired by Silverstein's (1998, 2003) work on indexicality, scholars such as Johnstone et al. (2006), Eckert (2008), and Coupland (2007, 2010) have provided theoretical frameworks which enable us to approach the social meaning of linguistic variation anew. These approaches encourage us to understand the meaning of variation as a situated and dynamic *process*, not as a given and fixed *product* that can be predicted on the basis of macro categories such as social class and gender. Not least, these approaches have given renewed impetus to ongoing efforts to tackle the complex issue of language ideology, and it is this purpose we wish to pursue in the present chapter.

The chapter revisits the notion of *construct*, initially explored in Fabricius (2002), and defines the notion of the *construct resource* as a mediator between the domain of linguistic practice and emergent linguistic ideology. We define construct resources as ideological postulates about language variation and social meaning, which emerge historically and circulate in society. The notion of the construct resource is posited as an isolatable (and at the same time relational)

unit at the linguistic form/social meaning interface, above the level of the individual linguistic sign. It is located firmly within the domain of language ideology, but emergent in interaction and sometimes crystallized into metalinguistic talk. Thus, we argue that it can be fruitfully investigated by means of sociolinguistic interviews, in particular through close analyses of stretches of metalinguistic talk, i.e. talk about language varieties and language variation. We want to argue that construct resources literally 'say something' about the formulated but simultaneously fluid metalinguistic notions and norms of particular discourse communities and their members.

Empirically, the chapter focuses on the place of Received Pronunciation (RP) in the language ideological landscape of the UK. The data under study point to subtle changes in the social meaning that RP-flavoured voices have within the British sociolinguistic landscape, as well as metalinguistic awareness of RP within the complex late-modern UK (Rampton 2006). In particular, we suggest that the non-localizability of RP (cf. Agha 2003: 233, 2007: 191) has undergone and is presently undergoing transformation, as it seems to be increasingly associated with the South of England and dissociated from the North. This arguably lends support to Bucholtz and Skapoulli's claim that 'despite the much-touted disintegration of cultural, temporal, and spatial boundaries under globalization [citing Appadurai (1996) and Castells (2000)], locality retains both material and symbolic prominence in people's lives' (Bucholtz and Skapoulli 2009: 2). However, despite a greater sense of geographical anchoring, we also find evidence to suggest that RP is maintaining its status as a perceived (upper class) 'standard' in the sociolinguistic landscape of the UK, even if the social value of this 'standard' is constantly under negotiation, as pointed out by Mugglestone (2003) and Coupland (2010).

Outline

The chapter first provides a theoretical outline of the notion of the construct resource and presents a discussion of the theoretical framework it is developed within. We then make a case for the usefulness of sociolinguistic interviews as a method for accessing construct resources, and provide an analysis that illustrates the application of the method on a particular piece of data. We consider a brief stretch of talk extracted from an interview recorded in 2008 with a student at Cambridge University, as a response to the question 'Do you think that accents matter?' The analysis presents some of the ideological work surrounding mod-

ern RP in the Cambridge University context and helps us approach an understanding of the new 'sociolinguistic place' of RP in the UK. In the final section, we present the main conclusions we would like to draw on the basis of the chapter.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The notion of construct resources

In working with a concept like RP that is commonly considered to denominate 'a standard variety' it is crucial to operate with a systematic deconstruction of the very concept of 'a variety'. In the case of RP, Fabricius (2000) deconstructed a systematic ambiguity within the term RP into a first-approximation distinction between *constructed RP* (c-RP) and *native-RP* (n-RP). While we may not want to subscribe to all of the implications of this notion of an essentialised variety, the distinction was important in enabling the sociolinguistic investigation of upper-middle class speech in the first place, and was offered in that spirit:

> […] the term RP is ambiguous. It refers to what we have called 'constructed' RP (**c-RP**), a model of pronunciation as codified in pronunciation manuals and dictionaries used for various purposes, whether that be a standardized pronunciation for broadcasting, or a model to be imitated by foreign learners. It also refers to **n-RP**, the native speech of a small but economically affluent social class in Britain (the speech community within which most speakers of n-RP grow up; see Wells 1982: 301). (Fabricius 2000: 61)

By this definition, 'constructed' RP was used in a fairly narrow sense to refer to normative pronouncements about the linguistic form of RP, for instance through codification in dictionaries or descriptive manuals such as Gimson's *Pronunciation of English*. In Fabricius (2002: 358ff.) the notion of *construct* was taken up again, now as 'construct RP', and broadened to cover not only the linguistic form of RP but also concomitant norms and attitudes. To use a current term, it encompassed what is now being called the ideological *enregisterment* (Agha 2007: 185–188) of RP, through which RP has acquired a role as 'an emblem of speaker status linked to a specific scheme of cultural values' (Agha 2003: 231). Here, it is important to point out that while an enregistered variety or style certainly presupposes some sort of recognisable and recognised 'linguistic blueprint', it does not presuppose a comprehensive or explicit codification of the

type that we find in dictionaries. Thus, the enregistered variety, which we propose to call construct-RP, is an abstraction that can be highly underspecified in terms of linguistic description, while still being a recognisable and socially meaningful resource that language users draw on in discourse.

This deconstruction of the term RP highlights the fact that 'varieties' are ideological *constructs* as much as – or more than – they are assemblages of observed linguistic facts (including systematic variation). As such, a variety is not simply a descriptive label that refers to a clearly delineable linguistic system. The linguistic blueprint of a given variety may be more or less clear-cut, but the presence of a blueprint alone, no matter how homogenous it may be, does not make a variety. It takes a concomitant process of enregisterment, which is largely metalinguistic and ideological, to create a variety (cf. Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson 2006).

Because the establishment of the existence of a variety does not merely depend on the identification of a set of linguistic features, but also hinges on a perpetual metalinguistic postulation of the variety's existence, it will require a process of de-registerment to obliterate a variety even if its linguistic features disappear, for instance because speakers die. The history of RP provides an apt illustration of this. Over the years, several authors have proclaimed the imminent death of RP (most prominently in the debates on Estuary English in the 1990s; see http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/; see also a rebuttal in Trudgill 2002). However, the death of RP, as we see it, would have to entail not only the cessation of use of certain linguistic forms within the speech community but also the loss of a set of social values indexically associated with those linguistic forms. From our knowledge of linguistic change (Labov 2001), we assume that the process of losing traditional speech forms will be gradual and incremental. A similar gradual loss or metamorphosis of indexical values associated with forms of speech would then be a logical hypothesis, we would claim. In other words, we cannot write an obituary for RP unless both the traditional forms and their associated indexical meanings have completely disappeared from the social picture. Gradual change, in linguistic forms as well as in the associated social meaning of these forms is only to be expected. As Agha (2003: 232) points out, 'every register[2] exhibits various kinds of growth and decline, expansion or nar-

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[2] Agha (2003) uses the term 'register' to refer to a unity of linguistic form and indexical meaning, the product of a process of 'enregisterment'. Thus, RP is a register in Agha's terminology. As Eckert (2008: 456) points out, this use of the term 'register' does not accord with

rowing, change or stabilization along one or more dimensions of register organization'. Such has been the history of RP, and such will it continue to be.

A folk-linguistic construct-RP is, however, alive and well and exists as part of a larger sociolinguistic landscape in the UK which includes a number of other enregistered varieties which are all associated with their own sets of linguistic features and all carry particular sets of social meanings. Sedimented ideas about these constructs and their mutual relations, in the form of an ideological set of postulates about the nexus of language variation and social meaning, are what we propose to refer to as *construct resources*. Construct resources are historically contingent and synchronically dynamic in the sense that their content and relational arrangement is likely to vary across different (groups of) speakers, i.e. different members of a discourse community may, because of their personal histories, value particular ways of speaking differently and hence have slightly varying sets of beliefs about the language ideological landscape of their community. Thus, speakers who belong to the same abstract discourse community on any level (a social class, an ethnic group, a nation state) may in effect have quite divergent construct resources as a result of their position, in micro-social, cultural or geographical terms, in the community. Nevertheless, the diverging construct resources of various (groups of) speakers will sometimes exhibit a certain degree of overlap, for instance through a shared recognition and awareness of particularly salient styles of speaking. In this case we can speak of a socially-shared set of construct resources, and much language attitude research in the UK for example has shown the nation-wide spread of certain particular construct resources, which together can be said to constitute a language-ideological repertoire.

The construct resource and the notion of style

RP is often described as a 'variety', and this is also the term we have used above. However, given the difficulties involved in defining varieties (Hudson 1980: 21–72), and inspired by recent developments in sociolinguistic theories of style (Coupland 2007; Eckert 2008), we believe it is actually more useful to think of RP, and other so-called varieties, as sets of linguistic features that in conjunction add up to specific socially meaningful styles. By describing RP as a style rather than a variety, we can emphasise its dynamic and ideological nature.

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usual linguistic-theoretical practice, and *register* is therefore perhaps a slightly misleading term here.

The Half Moon Bay Style Collective has highlighted these and other pertinent aspects of the 'The Elements of Style' very succinctly:

> Styles always come from somewhere. They are steeped in **history**. What works as a stylistic move is something that has been **significant** in a community's past. So styles are **ideological**: people don't do stylistic work around issues that are trivial to them. They construct styles which reveal something about their historical **trajectories** and their beliefs about their **experiences** (Half Moon Bay Style Collective 2006, emphasis in original).

The established (and Establishment) enregisterment of RP makes it a very clear case of a style 'steeped in history', significant in the past in the speech community (even if it did not have the same significance for all speakers at any one time, cf. Coupland 2010), and a style that to this day carries heavy ideological weight, among other things as a purported 'standard', at least for some people in certain contexts.[3] As such, it is a style that most speakers who are familiar with the sociolinguistic landscape of the UK will be aware of (though they will not necessarily know it by the name of RP),[4] and it is a style they will be able to use as an interpretive frame, or reproduce, perhaps in fragments (as illustrated convincingly in Rampton 2006), through various means as a resource in interaction.

The style of RP is associated with a number of linguistic features (its linguistic blueprint) but the exact meaning of these features is not given *a priori*. As Eckert (2008) argues, the meaning of a given linguistic variable is not 'precise or fixed'; any individual variable should rather be conceptualized as harbouring an 'indexical field', i.e. 'a field of potential meanings' (2008: 455). Linguistic features work only *indirectly* to index social meaning; it is typically only through association with a particular style that they acquire their social meaning (Eckert 2008: 455–456; cf. Moore and Podesva 2009). This echoes Agha's point that 'cultural value is not a static property of things or people but a precipitate of sociohistorically locatable practices' (2003: 232), that is, a series of practices embedded in real-time, and accrued historically into a conglomerate that forms a value system.

Moreover, the social meaning of a particular linguistic feature will not only hinge on the style it is embedded in, but also on the discourse frame within

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[3] As in the Guardian newspaper's comment on Prince Charles' recent guest appearance on BBC Scotland as weatherman: 'The forecast was vile but the diction immaculate[…]'.
http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/may/10/charles-prince-weather-forecaster-bbc
[4] As Wells (1982) argues: 'Everyone in Britain has a mental image of RP, even though they may not refer to it by that name and even though the image may not be very accurate' (Wells 1982: 279).

which it is used, or the discourse frame it is interpreted in relation to. As Coupland argues, 'linguistic […] features and styles need to be contextually *primed* before sociolinguistic indexing happens' (Coupland 2007: 112). Coupland distinguishes three types of discourse framing, viz. macro-, meso-, and micro-level social frames. At the macro level, linguistic features can position speakers 'in relation to a pre-understood social ecology' (Coupland 2007: 113), including notions such as social class, ethnicity, age, gender and sexuality. The meso-level framing imbues linguistic features with meaning in relation to the genre of talk, for instance through indexing particular participant roles (such as interviewer vs. interviewee), while the micro-level concerns interpersonal relations and self- and other-positioning.

Discourse frames are multi-layered (or poly-embedded) in the sense that the use of a particular linguistic feature may relate to or activate meaning in relation to more than one frame at one and the same time. In the terms of Silverstein (2003), we can say that the meaning of a particular linguistic feature is not only anchored within the interaction itself on a moment-to-moment basis, it may also be anchored to an n order of indexicality, for instance the genre of the interaction and the participant roles associated with it, and an $n+1$ order of indexicality, for instance socio-cultural meaning linked with notions such as social class, gender, ethnicity and so on.

The process of linking a linguistic feature or a set of such features in a certain context to a particular social meaning on either of the three levels of discourse framing is essentially an ideological process; it is a symbolic interpretation which has become conventionalized as an indexical relation. The inverse process, of moving from a construct resource to a linguistic resource, could be understood as what Coupland calls 'stylisation' (2007: 149–154). As we will demonstrate in the analysis below, stylisation of this sort may feature quite prominently in metalinguistic talk in sociolinguistic interviews, and thus provide the analyst with one possible window on the composition of the interviewee's construct resources.

Styles do not exist in isolation; they are defined by their place in a system of styles, cf. Irvine's notion of 'style as a social semiosis of distinctiveness' (Irvine 2001: 23). Just as linguistic signs have to be constituted within a system, so linguistic resources will be embedded within stylistic systems, and stylistic systems themselves will be complex networks of relationships. Consequently, the style of RP will also only make sense within an overarching linguistic system of style within which it remains embedded. Thus, an important aspect of the construct

resource surrounding RP consists in specifying how this way of talking is positioned vis-à-vis other styles in any given discourse community.

In this connection, it is important to stress that styles do not have a fixed place in the system and a fixed social value or meaning; on the contrary, as Irvine (2001) points out, speakers' understandings of the social world and its semiotic resources are 'positioned, dependent in some measure on the participant's social position and point of view' (Irvine 2001: 22). This means that any attempt to access speakers' construct resources, their language-ideological repertoire, through metalinguistic talk must remain anchored in an ethnographic understanding of the context in which the interaction is being played out in order to be meaningful. Speakers see the world from a particular perspective, and it is this perspective on the world that is investigated through sociolinguistic interviews, rather than the world itself.

METHOD

In the following, we will present a method for accessing construct resources as they crystalize in discourse. In short, the method involves analysing metalinguistic talk produced by participants in sociolinguistic interviews. The method is exemplified through a case study of a stretch of talk obtained in a sociolinguistic interview with a young adult of upper-middle class background who was a student at Cambridge University in 2008. This student's interview is one of a corpus of more than 80 sociolinguistic interviews collected in 1997–1998 and 2008 at Cambridge University by the first author.[5] The majority of the students represented in the interview corpus are from private (public and independent, fee-paying) school backgrounds; many, though not all, were students of Modern and Medieval Languages. All in all, they were well placed to be representative of elite speakers and 'educated' attitudes to language, and the sociolinguistic interviews sought to explore this by bringing metalinguistic awareness to the foreground at the end of the interview. In 1997–1998 this was done by asking the question 'What do you think of accents on the BBC?' and in 2008 by asking 'Do

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[5] Being a speaker of Australian English based in Denmark, the interviewer was an outsider in linguistic, geographic as well as social terms in the Cambridge context and likely to be perceived as such by the interviewees. This has potentially been an important factor in shaping the discourse of the interviews.

you think that accents matter in the UK?'[6] The extent to which the interviewees were interested in this kind of metalinguistic work varied, but each individual interview nevertheless presents many opportunities for analytical insights. However, in the scope of the present chapter, we can only present singular examples. A fuller picture must await future research efforts.

Exploring language ideology and language attitudes

As argued above, we believe it is important to keep a kind of 'constant vigilance' not only on variation and change in linguistic form but also on the concomitant ebbs and flows in linguistic ideology. While it can be difficult to see points of stability within these processes, we believe that certain interactional moments may provide us with insights on how linguistic variation and its associated social meaning have become stabilized (however temporarily) through a process of 'precipitation' (cf. Agha 2003) or sedimentation in a discourse community. Explicit metalinguistic discourse is a manifest expression of the results of such sedimentation processes, and as such a rich resource for the study of language ideology. In the analysis section below, we seek to mine this resource by examining interactional details in a stretch of metalinguistic talk and attempt to see evidence of traditional perspectives on RP being maintained and reproduced and at the same time repackaged and negotiated anew.

Analysing sociolinguistic interviews is just one out of a number of possible empirical gateways to the study of language ideology and language attitudes. In recent years, the use of rigorously controlled experimental methods has proliferated, eminently illustrated by the work of Kristiansen (2001, 2009) as well as several contributions to this volume. Moving away from strict verbal guise techniques (see Garrett, Coupland and Williams 2003 for a methodological overview), some studies (e.g. Fabricius 2005, 2006) have mined responses to extended narratives in different voices for their information on language attitudes. Data can also be gleaned from naturally occurring contexts and analysed through the lens of linguistic landscapes (Landry and Bourhis 1997) or through analyses of mediated performances on television or radio (Coupland 2007). So what is the particular gain of the method suggested here? And what are its shortcomings?

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[6] These questions were deliberately asked at the *end* of the interviews. In the beginning of the interviews the heightened metalinguistic awareness which the questions generated would have been counterproductive.

Blessings and curses of an emic approach

The main benefit of the method presented here, we believe, is that it provides an emic perspective on language variation and social meaning in a given discourse community, i.e. it lets us approach an understanding of the way discourse community members themselves conceptualize the nature and role of language variation in their community. This is an important supplement to the perspective offered by experimental approaches to the study of language attitudes and language ideology. Such approaches are typically founded on preconceived notions about which 'languages', 'varieties' or 'styles' may be considered relevant in a particular context (*etic* frameworks), and these preconceptions will to some extent limit the scope of the investigation. This is clearly the case in studies such as those conducted by Kristiansen (2001, 2009) in which the selection of stimulus voices for speaker evaluation tests and the provision of fixed sets of variety labels for label ranking tests set up quite narrow frames for the respondents to operate within. Some studies in the same general area have adopted a less tightly controlled approach and tried to glean informants' own spontaneous qualitative responses to use as assessment parameters in scaled questionnaires (e.g. Maegaard 2005; see also general discussion of this approach in Garrett, Coupland and Williams 2003).

Taking our cue from folk linguistics (Preston 1998; Niedzielski and Preston 2003), we believe that listening to 'real people' and recording their views on language variation constitutes an important complementary method of investigation in studies of language ideology and language attitudes. Indeed, we would claim that unless *emic* information of this kind is collected from time to time, we are essentially not able to argue convincingly that the voices and labels we build experiments up around are in any sense grounded, i.e. relevant to the speakers whose ideological repertoires and sets of attitudes we are in the business of investigating.

In folk linguistics, experiments in which informants are asked to draw maps of dialect areas have proved fruitful for eliciting metalinguistic information of the kind we are interested in here (for an overview see Garrett 2010: 179–199). However, in the following we will show that a 'naked' interview question can in fact generate the same kind of rich data without necessarily imposing 'geographical space' as a pre-established frame within which to map the issue of language variation. Our method resembles the methodology employed by Niedzielski and Preston to elicit 'conversational data' (2003: 33–40) though we have opted for a

more controlled interview format by using almost exactly the same question in all interviews as the main trigger of metalinguistic talk.

Working with explicit talk about language variation and its social meaning does not relieve researchers from their jobs as analysts. On the contrary, it requires very close scrutiny of the data under study from the perspective of interactional moves as well as propositional content, to put the statements of the informants and the underlying presuppositions into perspective. Irvine (2001) has pointed out, that 'although participants are well-placed in some respects to offer a sociolinguistic analysis (since participation means close acquaintance with the system) …' their expressed opinions are also to be treated with a certain measure of caution because 'participation also means interestedness' (Irvine 2001: 24). However, like Irvine, we do not see this 'interestedness' as a problem *per se*. Quite on the contrary, interestedness is a basic condition of the very phenomenon we are investigating, and it is an aspect that can be brought clearly to the fore in the analysis of interview data, as we illustrate below.

The discourse analytical approach advocated in this chapter may at first glance seem less rigorous than the various kinds of experimental techniques exploited in several other studies in the present volume. However, we believe that a stark juxtaposition of 'discourse analytic methods' and 'experimental methods' is to some extent misguided. Both discourse analytical approaches and experimental approaches involve processes of data generation and data interpretation, and the rigorousness with which these processes are carried out depends as much on the researcher facilitating them as on the nature of the methods employed. All other things being equal, experimental methods can in certain ways be more tightly controlled than qualitative methods and thus perhaps produce 'cleaner' data, but we will argue that discourse analytical methods can also be employed stringently and thus generate robust findings, while perhaps producing 'neater' data for the explorative analyst. In the present chapter, we are only in a position to present a single case study, and this will necessarily impose certain limitations on the generalizability of the findings. However, we believe that the larger study which the case is part of will eventually be able to offer more general claims about the current place of RP in the sociolinguistic landscape of the UK, simply because the data has been collected in a principled manner and can therefore be marshalled collectively in building a coherent analysis. In short, the advantage of working with a systematic interview corpus is that it provides reasonably comparable materials which can stand together as evidence. Just as Xu (2010) argues that the systematicity of 'lab speech' makes it an indispensable

tool for testing hypotheses about the nature of speech, so we would like to argue that a controlled corpus of 'interview speech', composed by responses to what is arguably the 'same' question in similar although not identical settings (since the individuals present are partly different), can provide us with a data set from which we can extract a quite comprehensive picture of the prominent language ideologies of a particular discourse community.[7]

Finally, it is important to stress that the ideologies and attitudes that can be extracted by means of this method will tend to be conscious ones. If it is true that it is subconscious attitudes rather than conscious ones that constitute the driving forces behind linguistic change (as suggested by Kristiansen 2009), then we should not expect our method to be very powerful in predicting language change. Nevertheless, it will certainly be just as powerful as other methods, if not more powerful, in explaining the social meaning of language variation in a synchronic perspective, and this, we believe, also counts as a legitimate socio-linguistic enterprise.

ANALYSIS

The empirical setting

The Cambridge University context in which the recordings under study have been made is significant for the analysis of the data. Over the last few decades, 'widening participation in higher education' has been a central element of government educational policy in the UK. One of the intentions of this policy has been to bridge the deep divide in British secondary and tertiary education (from age 11) between the public and independent, fee-paying school sectors on the one hand and the state-funded government school system on the other.[8] As an effect of these efforts, Cambridge University today has a more mixed student population in terms of social background than it had earlier. One research question which we would like to pose in this connection, but which we can only address cursorily in the present chapter, is the extent to which the present composi-

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[7] This comparison between lab speech and interview data is admittedly somewhat mischievous (and we are not entirely sure that Xu would approve of it), but we actually think there is a certain degree of similarity between the two methods which is worth pointing out.

[8] The newly-passed (at time of writing) university fee rise will potentially have a dramatic negative effect on this process of widening participation in higher education in the UK.

tion of Cambridge's student population provides a levelling environment, in social as well as linguistic terms, or to what extent it, perhaps concomitantly, generates a heightened awareness of linguistic and social distinction. We suspect that it is as much the latter as the former, if not indeed more the latter.[9]

As far as social distinction is concerned, the case seems to be quite clear: class/socioeconomic background will out somehow. This is supported by anecdotal evidence gathered in the interview corpus from 2008, and also by the comment below by Patrick Barkham, a non-public-school Cambridge student in the mid-1990s, from an article in the Guardian from September 2010:[10]

> [...] we were quickly sorted by a subtle social apartheid. The gilded youths from the public schools already seemed to know their half of the university. For them, Cambridge was more of the same. [...] the public schools kids kept themselves to themselves and so did we. [...] We pretended to abhor [public school students], but were secretly envious of their poise and exclusivity [...].

To what extent is this kind of 'social apartheid' in the Cambridge context mirrored in language use and, in particular, in attitudes to linguistic variation among the student population? The analysis below throws some light on this question by showing how we can see evidence of traditional perspectives on RP and its relation to other styles of speaking in the UK being maintained and reproduced and at the same time repackaged and negotiated anew by the interviewee.

The interviewee (F07) is a 21-year-old female student at Cambridge University from a Southern upper-middle class background. Her parents are both university-educated in the UK, and before coming to Cambridge, she has attended private school and grammar school outside London. Her style of speaking can be described as modern RP, though she does not use this label herself to describe her style of speaking.

The analysis focuses on a small stretch of talk (1 minute and 50 seconds in total), which is presented in its entirety below. A note on the transcription conventions is included as an appendix at the end of the chapter.

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[9] For an interesting study on the sociolinguistic consequences of young adult mobility in the US educational system see Bigham's study (Bigham 2008) of Illinoisan speakers' dialect levelling as a result of moving to university.

[10] http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/mortarboard/2010/sep/09/cambridge-university-best-world

Interview segment

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 1   INT:   erm (0.3) one thing I've been wondering about do you think that
 2          accents matter in the UK
 3          (1.3)
 4   F07:   erm (1.1) er do I think that they matter
 5   INT:   yeah no well do you think that they matter for people
 6          out there in in in the UK ≈
 7   F07:   ≈ yes I ⌈I think they⌉ do ⌈I⌉ think they do
 8   INT:         ⌊mhm⌋          ⌊mhm⌋
 9   F07:   erm (0.4) I think sometimes one's one's own accent
10          erm (0.3) it (0.8) at least (0.6) erm (1.0)
11          erm (.) people I've met who come from the North (.)
12   INT:   ⌈hmmm⌉
13   F07:   ⌊erm⌋ they the- they tend to (0.4)
14          some of them seem to define themselves quite a lot by their a-
15          (0.3) by their accent and they're quite proud of it
16   INT:   ⌈hmmm⌉
17   F07:   ⌊erm⌋ especially people from Newcastle
18   INT:   mhm
19   F07:   erm (0.5) they they won't let me say Newcastle
20          it has to be Newcastle (0.4) and erm (1.1)
21          and yeah they're they're (0.9) I've found (.) they're quite
22          (0.3) proud of their local their ⌈local⌉ sayings and like
23   INT:                                    ⌊mhm⌋
24   F07:   erm ⌈and⌉ (0.3) various words for things
25   INT:       ⌊hm⌋
26   INT:   hmmm
27   F07:   erm (1.1) what else was I going to say (0.5)
28          er yes (0.4) and then they matter for (0.3) other people (0.3)
29          I- I think some people in the UK are prejudiced ⌈against⌉ ≈
30   INT:                                                    ⌊hmm⌋
31   F07:   ≈ certain certain accents
32   INT:   hmm
33   F07:   erm (0.9) I wouldn't say it was so much (0.7) erm (0.4)
34          Northern or Southern al- ⌈al- al-⌉ although there actually ≈
35   INT:                            ⌊no⌋
36   F07:   ≈ there is a bit of that yeah ⌈actually⌉ there is (.)
37   INT:                                 ⌊hmm⌋
38   INT:   hmm
39   F07:   erm (0.4) Northerners I've heard saying that Southerners are
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40   posh and ⌈ooh I had⌉ to speak all posh and Southern today and
41   INT: ⌊mhm⌋
42   INT: mhm
43   F07:   and this and (0.3) and then the sort of Northern accent working
44   class prejudice type
45   INT: ⌈hmm⌉
46   F07:   ⌊you kn-⌋ that that kind of thing
47   INT: hmm
48   F07:   erm (0.8) and then I know a few people who just (0.4) don't like
49   (0.6) Birmingham accents
50   F07:   for ⌈example⌉
51   INT: ⌊hmmm⌋
52   F07:   ⌈and they⌉ say ≈
53   INT: ⌊hmm⌋
54   F07:   ≈ ooh it makes you sound really thick if you speak with that accent
55   INT: hm
56   F07:   and
57   INT: hm
58   F07:   erm all Welsh accents irritate (0.3) some people and
59   INT: hmm (0.4)
60   F07:   erm (.) so (0.3)
61   ⌈yes that's a-⌉
62   INT: ⌊so the differences are⌋ around and do make a (.)
63   F07:   I think so I I think so

In our analysis of this segment, we would like to focus on two topics: geographical distinctions and their social value, and standard language ideology and accent prejudice.

Geographical distinctions and their social value

RP is posh and Southern

Agha (2003) argues that 'RP is a supra-local accent; it is enregistered in public awareness as indexical of speaker's class and level of education; it is valued precisely for effacing the geographic origins of speaker' (Agha 2003: 233). However, the interview data under study here suggests that this view may be in need of modification. Although she hesitates at first, the interviewee makes a clear distinction between Northern and Southern 'accents' (lines 33–36), and

furthermore argues that there is a link between 'Southern' and 'posh' (cf. lines 39–40):

33   F07:   erm (0.9) I wouldn't say it was so much (0.7) erm (0.4)

34   Northern or Southern al- ⌈al- al-⌉ although there actually ≈

35   INT: ⌊no⌋

36   F07:   ≈ there is a bit of that yeah ⌈actually⌉ there is (.)

37   INT: ⌊hmm⌋

38   INT: hmm

39   F07:   erm (0.4) Northerners I've heard saying that Southerners are

40   posh and ⌈ooh I had⌉ to speak all posh and Southern today and

41   INT: ⌊mhm⌋

The word 'posh' is used twice in line 40, and in both cases it is pronounced with a LOT vowel whose production involves a certain 'plumminess' which is a voice quality achieved by 'lowering the larynx and widening the oropharynx' (Wells 1982: 283).[11] Wells describes this sort of 'plumminess' as one of the features he resorts to when producing upper-crust RP 'for purposes of acting, demonstration or caricature' (Wells 1982: 283). We will argue that something similar is happening in line 40 where the interviewee, through the plummy LOT vowel, is arguably producing stylised RP.[12] By stylising 'posh' in this way, she quite effectively establishes an indexical link between a linguistic feature which is traditionally associated with the linguistic blueprint of RP (the plummy production of a vowel like LOT) and the ingrained social meaning of the adjective 'posh' (upper class). In effect, this amounts to an implicit claim that the particular style of speaking she performs, and which can be heard as RP though it remains unnamed, is straightforwardly associated with upper class values, completely in accord with Agha's analysis of RP.

However, in addition to linking RP to social class, she also uses the coordination of 'posh' and 'southern' in line 40 to indicate that there is a perceived link between RP styled voices and geographical location, i.e. the South. In the terminology of Eckert (2008), this indicates that the indexical field of a plummy voice

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[11] What the speaker produces here is clearly a LOT vowel, and not 'posh' pronounced with a GOAT vowel, sometimes written as 'powsh' in eye-dialect, a hyper-standardisation which is sometimes used to parody 'posh' speech. Thanks are due to Nikolas Coupland for pointing this contrast out to us.

[12] The 'ooh' which introduces the second 'posh' confirms its quotative, performative nature and also suggests an element of gossip.

quality, on the LOT vowel in this case, as part of a particular style, for this speaker involves not only a particular social value (upper class) but also a particular geographical anchoring (Southern).[13] It is worth noticing that the mentioning of geographical distinctions is not occasioned by a response to a specific question or task concerned with place (like in map tasks). Thus, it seems fair to conclude that a simple geographical distinction between North and South plays a rather prominent role in this interviewee's set of construct resources, even to the extent that what we, from a traditional descriptive perspective, would call RP and associate primarily with a non-localized class value, in her framing is labelled directly with reference to its perceived provenience, 'Southern', while obviously still being linked with class through the epithet 'posh'.

People from the North have dialect pride

In addition to placing RP styled features in the South and linking them with upper class values, the interviewee also demarcates and defines this inventory of linguistic resources by juxtaposing it with 'Northern' speech which is posited as the counterpart of 'Southern' (cf. lines 34–36 above). For this style, the interviewee also provides a stylized performance that serves to index the style and its speakers (line 20), i.e. 'people who come from the North':

```
 9  F07:   erm (0.4) I think sometimes one's one's own accent
10          erm (0.3) it (0.8) at least (0.6) erm (1.0)
11          erm (.) people I've met who come from the North (.)

12  INT:   ⌈hmmm⌉
13  F07:   ⌊erm⌋ they the- they tend to (0.4)
14          some of them seem to define themselves quite a lot by their a-
15          (0.3) by their accent and they're quite proud of it

16  INT:   ⌈hmmm⌉
17  F07:   ⌊erm⌋ especially people from Newcastle
18  INT:   mhm
19  F07:   erm (0.5) they they won't let me say Newcastle (((ɑː)))
20          it has to be Newcastle (((a))) (0.4) and erm (1.1)
21          and yeah they're they're (0.9) I've found (.) they're quite
22          (0.3) proud of their local their ⌈local⌉ sayings and like
23  INT:                                      ⌊mhm⌋
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[13] Nik Coupland has suggested (pc) that this geographical association for RP, which exists alongside class-based and ethnic indexical associations, is perhaps more generally 'South-East' for many people in the mainland UK.

'Newcastle' in line 20 is a clearly stylized/quotative performance that creates an indexical link between a particular way of speaking and a geographical location (the North generally or Newcastle more specifically). Compared to 'Newcastle' in line 19, 'Newcastle' in line 20 is produced with a changed stress pattern (emphatic stress is placed on the second syllable) and a slightly fronted vowel in the second syllable, compared to 'Newcastle' in line 19. The vowel is audibly less fronted than what we would expect to hear as a 'genuine' Newcastle variant but the interviewee nevertheless succeeds in making a point through the distinction between the two pronunciations. There is no explicit link between 'Northern' and social class in the extract, but the interviewee stresses that people from the North are 'quite proud of their accent', 'quite proud of their local sayings' and they protest when she tarnishes a salient word like 'Newcastle' with her Southern voice. The pride that people from the North take in their style of speaking seems in part to be based on it not being Southern, and perhaps, by extension, not being posh. Recall for instance the comment in line 39–40: 'Northerners I've heard saying that Southerners are posh'. By implication this seems to suggest that Northerners dissociate themselves from poshness, and thereby claim an identity that is not upper class. In line 43–44, the interviewee also alludes to 'the sort of Northern accent working class prejudice type' which seems to fit well with the general picture of the sociolinguistic landscape of the UK she is painting. In very simplified terms, she seems to be saying: Southern is posh and upper class, Northern is plain (but proud) and non-upper class.

In sum, our analysis of these two examples shows that the interviewee entertains a number of 'pragmatic presuppositions' (Caffi 2006) about the relation between language variation, social class and geographical location. In other words, her set of construct resources contains a number of rather pertinent taken-for-granted links between linguistic features/styles of speaking and macro-level social meanings. In an interview setting like the one analysed here, linguistic features and their indexical values are described in the abstract, which means that the interaction provides us with a concentrated product of the meaning-making processes that are constantly taking place at micro-, meso- and macro-levels in interaction. The picture we get of the interviewee's construct resources using this method may to some extent be hyperbolic and most certainly partial. Nevertheless, we suggest here that the assumptions we tease out must play a role in the worldview of the interviewee, and have a no less real presence in the discourse community she is a part of (a claim we make even though we cannot ultimately delimitate the community she belongs or orients to, and which indeed

might be a fusion of quite local sociolinguistic ecosystem that obtains in the Cambridge context and a broader system that extends beyond it).[14] As we will argue below, the pragmatic presuppositions illustrated above are nested within a larger ideological structure that accords special status to the perceived 'standard' (RP) and to some extent downgrades other ways of speaking.

Language ideology and accent prejudice

'Really thick' or 'posh'

Language variation has quite profound social consequences in the UK. The existence of accent prejudice has been attested in several studies (Giles 1970; Bishop, Coupland and Garrett 2005), and despite a recent upsurge in the presence of 'non-standard' voices in the media and other traditional strongholds of RP, it seems fair to say that certain stereotyped ways of evaluating particular styles of speaking still form an ingrained part of the language ideological landscape in the UK. This claim is supported by our interviewee who explicitly acknowledges the existence of accent prejudice in lines 29–31:

```
27  F07:   erm (1.1) what else was I going to say (0.5)
28         er yes (0.4) and then they matter for (0.3) other people (0.3)
29         I- I think some people in the UK are prejudiced ⌈against⌉
30  INT:                                                 ⌊hmm⌋
31  F07:   certain certain accents
32  INT:   hmm
```

From line 48 onwards, she proceeds to offer 'Birmingham accents' and 'all Welsh accents' as two possible objects of scorn.

```
48  F07:   erm (0.8) and then I know a few people who just (0.4) don't like
49         (0.6) Birmingham accents
50  F07:   for ⌈example⌉
51  INT:       ⌊hmmm⌋
52  F07:   ⌈and they⌉ say ≈
53  INT:   ⌊hmm⌋
```

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[14] When working with qualitative interviews where meaning making constitutes a joint enterprise between interviewer and interviewee, it is always a challenge to gauge to what extent the interviewee is perhaps simply 'voicing what the interviewer wants to hear'. However, in this case, even if she were, it would only strengthen our case that sedimented construct resources exist, and that speakers expect to be able to draw on them to create meaning in interaction.

54   F07:   ≈ ooh it makes you sound really thick if you speak with that accent
55   INT: hm
56   F07:   and
57   INT: hm
58   F07:   erm all Welsh accents irritate (0.3) some people and
59   INT: hmm (0.4)

The fact that she gives special mention to Birmingham accents is in complete accordance with the findings reported in Coupland and Bishop (2007) where the conceptual label of 'Birmingham' English attracted the poorest ratings both in terms of social attractiveness and prestige in an online survey of 5010 UK informants' reactions to 34 accents of English (Coupland and Bishop 2007: 79). In the same survey, 'Welsh' English accents occupied a middle position in terms of both social attractiveness and prestige, while 'Cardiff' English was ranked very low on both dimensions (24th in terms of social attractiveness and 25th in terms of prestige). The congruity between our informant's spontaneous responses and the survey findings reported in Coupland and Bishop (2007) suggests that the responses offered by the interviewee are not simply made up on the spot. They rather seem to be drawn from a socially shared, historically constructed repertoire of sedimented attitudes to language variation in the UK, i.e. a shared set of pre-judgements which we would see as the attitudinal side of salient construct resources, the other being the particular linguistic features associated with these labels (see also Coupland 2007: 103–104).

In the traditional hierarchy, the style of speaking we have referred to as RP typically comes in at the very top, both in terms of social attractiveness and prestige, though sometimes under different names, e.g. 'Standard English' or 'The Queen's English' as in Coupland and Bishop (2007). However, it is interesting to note that while non-Southern styles of speaking are quite consistently and quite unambiguously presented by our interviewee as accents that are negatively evaluated in the community (except by the 'native' speakers), the evaluation of 'Southern English' seems less clear-cut.

The interviewee does not explicitly disparage her own Southern style: It is not her accent, but other people's accent that will 'make you sound really thick'. Her own accent is 'posh' ('Northerners I've heard saying that Southerners are posh and ooh I had to speak all posh and Southern today'), but the exact social value of this epithet can be variable under different circumstances. On the one hand it carries middle/upper class connotations and is thus arguably, by exten-

sion, linked to some sort of prestige, mostly socioeconomic, as we said above. However, as Coupland has recently argued, drawing on the work of Mugglestone (2003), it seems that '[t]he attribution 'posh' entails a certain lack of respect for a 'high' dialect/accent variety' (Coupland 2010: 138). He further argues that in the post-modern era,

> Older indexical orders, such as Establishment SLI [Standard Language Ideology], have given way to newer ones, where posh speakers are quite commonly laid open to ridicule, and under some circumstances start to feel 'insecure', where the social meaning of voice is less determinate, and where backing social class winners and losers is not the only game in town. (Coupland 2010: 138)

The fact that our interviewee introduces an RP flavoured voice through a stylized performance of what can best be construed as mocking of that very style ('ooh I had to speak all posh and Southern today') seems to lend support to this analysis. RP-styled voices may be indexically linked with middle/upper-class values (as argued above), but that does not mean that they are automatically positively evaluated in the social setting. This, we think, represents a renegotiation of the social meaning traditionally attached to RP, an ongoing change in the composition of the repertoire of construct resources.

Accent prejudice is off the record

One of the most striking features of the interview is the way the interviewee positions herself vis-à-vis the matter under discussion, i.e. how she negotiates her role as an interviewee and her interestedness as a member of the discourse community. She consistently speaks through the voice of others and/or distances herself from the points she makes by means of epistemic stance marking. In the following five examples we have italicised some of the various linguistic means she uses to achieve this effect:

i)   29   *I- I think some* people in the UK are prejudiced ⌈against⌉ ≈
     30   INT: ⌊hmm⌋
     31   F07:   ≈ certain certain accents

ii) 39   F07:   erm (0.4) Northerners *I've heard* saying that Southerners are
     40   posh and ⌈ooh I had⌉ to speak all posh and Southern today and

iii) 48   F07:   erm (0.8) and then *I know a few people* who just (0.4)
     49   don't like (0.6) Birmingham accents

     50   for ⌈example⌉
     51   INT: ⌊hmmm⌋
     52   F07:   ⌈and *they*⌉ say ≈
     53   INT: ⌊hmm⌋
     54   F07:   ≈ ooh it makes you sound really thick if you speak with that accent

iv) 62   INT: so the differences are around and do make a (.)
    63   F07:   *I think so I I think so*

Arguably what we see here is how the interviewee is struggling to fulfil her ex-pected role in the interview situation as an informant without exposing her own attitudes, and without making too strong general claims about the role of accents in the UK. The examples show that she is quite willing to share her knowledge on the topic under discussion, but she delivers it in a style that is distinctly *off record*. We suggest that this may indicate that expounding on accent prejudices is not something she considers *comme il faut,* in this particular social setting, speaking from her social position.

The interviewee's difficulty in negotiating an acceptable position for herself is in fact salient from the very beginning of the analysed sequence:

1   INT: ahh (0.3) one thing I've been wondering about do you think that
2   accents matter in the UK
3   (1.3)
4   F07:   erm (1.1) er do I think that they matter
5   INT: yeah no well do you think that they matter for people
6   out there in in in the UK ≈
7   F07:   ≈ yes I ⌈I think they⌉ do ⌈I⌉ think they do
8   INT: ⌊mhm⌋   ⌊mhm⌋

This extract exhibits considerable hesitation on the part of the interviewee: The interviewer's opening question in line 1–2 is initially met with 1.3 seconds of silence, then follows another 1.1 seconds of silence encapsulated by 'erm' and 'er', before the interviewee finally poses the question back to the interviewer in line 4, 'do I think that they matter?' (with phrasal stress on 'matter'). We take the interviewee's hesitation here to indicate that the question posed in lines 1–2 is to some extent troubling for her, and she may thus be heard to produce what Pomerantz (1984) calls a dispreferred response by not answering the question.

Of course, it may be that she simply does not understand the question, but we suggest that the data allows for an alternative interpretation. In her reformulation of the question in lines 5–6, the interviewer explicitly moves the focus away from the interviewee's *personal* evaluation of whether accents matter in the UK and turns it into a more general question of whether accents matter to *people* (unspecified) in the UK. Even though lines 5 and 6 thus only constitute a small change compared to the original question in lines 1–2, the reformulation effectively seems to remove the source of the interactional trouble, which is evidenced by the interviewee's immediate take up of the new question in line 7 which is actually latched onto the interviewee's utterance.

To some extent, this initial exchange frames the ensuing discourse and could thus in part be said to explain the particular detached stance which the interviewee adopts in the rest of the segment. However, we think that the off-record nature of the talk is more deeply seated than that. In fact, we want to argue that for this interviewee accent prejudice, although clearly recognized as part of social reality, is not something that should be explicitly talked about, or something that one should admit to embracing, at least not in a semi-official context like that of an interview with a researcher. Interestingly, this stance differs markedly from the kind of stance adopted by some of Niedzielski and Preston's informants in the US context who quite liberally share their negative views on various varieties of American English, particularly Southern styles and African American Vernacular English, and the people who speak this way (Niedzielski and Preston 2003: 98–102, 127–132, 138). While this kind of public disparaging of others' voices may certainly once also have been tenable in the UK context, it no longer seems to be, at least not for a young female RP speaker at Cambridge University who participates in a sociolinguistic interview.

CONCLUSION

Through this chapter we have established an empirical and theoretical hold on the – potentially changing – ideological positions surrounding the concept of accent in the UK.

On the basis of our case study data, we have pointed to what we see as an emerging dissolution of the indexical links between RP, poshness/prestige and non-localizability. Thus, we have challenged Agha's claim that non-localisability remains central to the enregisterment of (modern) RP, in that we want to con-

front the notion that 'RP is a supra-local accent…valued precisely for effacing the geographic origins of speaker' (Agha 2003: 233). In this challenge we see a small-scale local reflection of the trend that has been noticed by others (such as Bucholtz and Skapoulli 2009): the re-emergence of localness as a virtue in the face of globalization. We see reflexes in our interview data of the dissolution of the automatic link between a certain class and non-regional position on the one hand and universal prestige and social attractiveness on the other. Prestige and social attractiveness are just as easily linked with 'place and authenticity', as evidenced by expressed pride in linguistic regional origins. Thus, in line with Coupland (2010) we believe that in the UK context '[…] there are reasons to suppose that the conventional class-based sociolinguistic conceptualisation of 'standard' and 'non-standard' speech is becoming out-dated' (Coupland 2010: 138) and perhaps replaced by a conceptualisation that, as one of its central features, accords greater relevance to geographical place (North vs. South) than social class. Other interview examples from the larger interview corpus we have drawn on here that support Coupland's (2010) description of the changing fate of RP will be examined in future research. Future research will hopefully also be able to ascertain whether the inappropriateness of accent prejudice (as no longer something that an individual might own up to, but as a continuing possibility as something one ascribes to others) that we have argued is present in our case material is part of a more general trend.

Furthermore, we have argued that a theoretical conceptualization of the ebbs and flows in linguistic ideology is an important counterpart to the work that is being done on variation and change in linguistic form. We argue that this enterprise can be aided by introducing the notion of the construct resource, defined as an ideological postulate about language variation and social meaning that emerges historically and circulates in society, into contemporary sociolinguistic thinking. Construct resources are located firmly within the domain of language ideology, but emergent in interaction and sometimes, as illustrated in the analysis above, crystallized into evaluative metalinguistic talk. Thus, we have shown that they can be fruitfully investigated by means of sociolinguistic interviews, in particular through close analyses of stretches of metalinguistic talk, i.e. talk about language varieties and language variation. We have demonstrated that construct resources literally 'say something' about the formulated but simultaneously fluid metalinguistic notions and norms of particular discourse communities and their members. For that reason we believe that they should be studied as an important window on the way real people make sense of their social world.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

⌈ ⌉   Overlap between two or more speakers, upper brackets for the first

⌊ ⌋   speaker, lower brackets for the second speaker

≈   Continued turn after overlap, same speaker

≈   Latching, one speaker to another (no detectable pause between utter-
            ances)

xxx   Unintelligible word or phrase

(0.3)   Pause, length measured in seconds

(.)   Pause, less than 0.2 seconds

((text))   Comments made by the researcher

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