An identity transformation? Social class, language prejudice and the erasure of multilingual capital in higher education[1]

Siân Preece

Introduction

> The fact is, when two or more languages come together, two or more peoples have come together and the result is always about power and identity (Morgan 2002: 12).

Recent decades have witnessed a steep rise in the numbers of students enrolled in post-compulsory education. Despite disparities between low and high-income countries[2], tertiary education has grown rapidly across the globe (UIS 2015). Increases in participation have resulted in the massification of the system, including higher education. In England (the location of the case study for this chapter), the number of university students rose from 44,500 in the mid 1960s to over 3 million in 2012, with the number of institutions offering higher education programmes increasing substantially in the same period (Whitty, Hayton and Tang 2015).

Increased participation in higher education has been driven in part by government policies on widening participation (WP). WP is focused on changing ratios so that universities recruit a higher proportion of students from societal groups who are under

represented in the sector. WP has led to a more diverse student population, with many more women, ethnic minorities and mature students than previously. However, there has been less progress in the sector when it comes to social class, which is assessed using the NS-SEC (National Statistics Socio-economic Classification) categorisation of occupation[3] (see Block 2014: 57-8). The ongoing under representation of working-class students in higher education was highlighted in a recent review, which found that working-class students only accounted for 33.3% of young full-time undergraduate students in English universities (Whitty, Hayton and Tang 2015). So, it seems that class continues to 'count' (Wright 2013 [2001]) when it comes to higher education. Following David Block's (2014, this volume) call for applied linguists to pay closer attention to class, classed identities are the focus of this chapter.

Drawing on Christopher Brumfit's (1995: 27) definition of applied linguistics as 'real-world problems in which language is a central issue', this chapter examines what happens to the identities of working-class linguistic minority students when their linguistic practices come into contact with those of the 'academic tribes' (Becher and Trowler 2001) that they seek to join. Illustrated with data from my study of the identities of multilingual undergraduate students on an academic writing programme in a university in London (Preece 2009a), I argue that learning the language and literacy practices of the academic community involves 'power and identity' (Morgan 2002: 12). In the case discussed in this chapter, institutional discourses framed linguistic diversity as a 'problem' to be fixed rather than 'resource' to be used. Informed by 'language-as-problem' (Ruiz 1984), the institution erased the multilingual capital in their midst and positioned those on the academic writing

programme as in need of English language remediation. This 'ascribed' identity (Blommaert 2006) troubled the participants' identities, as a person worthy of a place in higher education, by stigmatising their linguistic repertoires and categorising them as in danger of failure. This negative identity ascription was resisted by the adoption of other more powerful identities, not all of which were conducive to the scholarly enterprise (see Preece 2009a, b). These issues will be examined in the following sections following an overview of identity and social class informing the study.

Overview of theoretical perspectives

Identity

The view of identity put forward here is informed by poststructuralist literature (see Baxter this volume). I view identity as fluid and emergent and coming about as individuals negotiate 'subject positions' in discourses. I subscribe to Chris Weedon's (1997: 32) view of discursive subject positions as 'ways of being an individual', together with a Foucauldian view of discourse (Foucault 1974). Three points about identity are helpful for framing the discussion in this chapter. The first is the idea of identity as 'contextually situated' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 605); the context is viewed as a site of power that creates the conditions for particular identities to emerge. Identities are seen as encompassing temporary roles and stances arising from the ongoing interaction (or 'interactional positions') within the context along with locally situated cultural and broad social identity categories. The social relations in

the setting are perceived to create affordances for individuals to exercise some degree of agency over their identities.

The second point to highlight is the idea of identity as 'ideologically informed' (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 605). Bucholtz and Hall explain that over time interactional positions accrue ideological associations that are linked to local and social order identity categories. As they argue, 'once formed [these ideological associations] may shape who does what and how in interaction, though never in a deterministic fashion' (Bucholtz and Hall 2010: 21). From this we can surmise that an examination of the ongoing interaction about language in a particular context, such as an academic writing programme, will enable us to ascertain something about the values, norms and assumptions attached to particular language and literacy practices. This supposition is illustrated in Bonnie Urciuoli's (1996) study of working-class Puerto Ricans in New York. Urciuoli demonstrates how talk about language can be mapped onto classed, raced and gendered norms of what it is to be the 'ideologically unmarked American citizen, the white, Anglo, middle-class, English-speaking male to whom people routinely compare themselves and their kin' (*ibid.*: 138). Urciuoli argues that what her participants had to say about language pointed to their social stratification in American society as 'marked' (i.e. non normative) by their social class (as working-class), by race (as Puerto Ricans) and by language (as bilingual Spanish-English speakers).

Finally, it is important to highlight the view of identity as multidimensional and intersectional. Dimensions of identity consist of a range of identity inscriptions that are viewed as intersecting and shaping each other. Indeed, as David Block and Victor Corona argue (this volume), one of the challenges for language and identity researchers is to bring intersectionality to light in the analysis of their data. Urciuoli's (1996) study is a case in point. In the next section, an account of class as a dimension of identity will be given.

Social class

In *Social Class in Applied Linguistics*, Block (2014: 2) makes the case for the salience of class for 'those who wish to make sense of the social realities of twenty-first-century societies, and especially for those who wish to do so within the general realm of applied linguistics'. Block makes a compelling argument for considering a Marxist perspective on class 'whereby economic phenomena are seen as the bases of much of what goes on in our lives and our interactions with politics, cultural worlds and institutions like the legal system' (*ibid.*: 56). Following Block's argument, we cannot afford to ignore the economic foundations of the social order nor the way in which asymmetrical relations of class are enshrined in institutional settings.

Block points out how Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'capital' and 'habitus' have been key to conceptualising class as a lived experience as well as an economic phenomenon. Put simply, the 'field' is a social location in which asymmetrical relationships of class, gender and race are established. 'Capital' relates not only to

material wealth, but also 'cultural capital' (e.g. tastes, cultural commodities and institutional qualifications), 'social capital' (networks and groups memberships) and 'symbolic capital' (economic, cultural and social capital legitimated by the establishment) (Skeggs 2004; Block 2014). 'Habitus' refers to more permanent embodied cultural experience, or dispositions, such as ways of talking, tastes and so on that become integrated into an individual's psyche over time. Block argues that dispositions are 'backward looking', in that they are learned in social interactions in particular 'fields' and come to structure the habitus. Dispositions are also 'forward looking', in that they shape expectations of the future and influence an individual's actions.

In sum, class is a lived experience that has its roots in the economic base of society and an individual's position within the social order. Block (personal communication, 27 June 2015) puts forward a number of elements that applied linguists can use to index social class, categorising these into: sociocultural resources (e.g. occupation, education); behaviour (e.g. consumption patterns, styles of dressing, walking etc., pastimes); life conditions (e.g. type of neighbourhood) and spatial conditions (e.g. mobility, type of dwelling and proximity to others in daily activities). As we will see, these are helpful for considering class as a lived experience.

Having given an account of identity and social class, in the next section we come to the study.

Methodology

The participants in the study were 93 first-year undergraduate students (45 women and 48 men) who had been referred to an academic writing programme, set up to improve the prospects of WP students, on the basis of their results in an academic literacy screening administered to first-year undergraduates. Most came from working-class linguistic minority communities resident in London, with a high proportion of South Asian ancestry. The majority were aged 18-20; they had been born in the UK, or arrived at a young age, and had received all, or a substantial part, of their schooling in London. They had grown up in an linguistically diverse environment in which English was used along with one or more of the 350 languages in use among London's school children (Eversley *et al.* 2010).

The study was ethnographically oriented (Blommaert and Jie 2010; also see Creese and Blackledge this volume for an account of ethnography) and lasted two years. In year one I was both teacher and researcher. While teaching, I collected field notes of classroom proceedings, audio-recordings of classroom interaction, a questionnaire and information from official records. In year two, when I was no longer teaching the participants, I undertook two rounds of audio-recorded interviews to explore issues arising from the classroom data. All the data were collected in English and the audio-recordings were transcribed. I examined the data to see what stories the participants told each other and me about language in their everyday lives and in the academic community (see Preece 2006) and what could be inferred from these narratives about

the participants' identities. As Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004: 18) tell us, 'identity narratives' impose coherence on 'fragmented, decentered and shifting identities' arising in contexts of migration. For the participants there was not only the 'decentring ' of self associated with the family story of migration, but also with being the first generation of their family to enter higher education.

The data

Family backgrounds

Official records indicated that the participants came from humble origins and resided in deprived areas of London. Their parents were unemployed or in unskilled or low skilled jobs, which resulted in an official categorisation of lower socioeconomic status (HESA no date). All had attended state schools, mostly in inner-city London areas, with several experiencing interrupted education as a result of events around their family's application for asylum in the UK. After secondary school, the participants had attended vocational courses of study in further education or taken up paid employment. Very few had stayed at school post 16 to study for A-levels[4], the traditional route into higher education for students domiciled in the UK. The few that did were awarded low grades. Consequently, the participants mostly had non-traditional qualifications for university entry.

Linguistic repertoires

The participants' linguistic repertoires were typical of the working-class migrant communities in which they resided. Their repertoires encompassed languages and dialects from the Indian sub-continent (e.g. Tamil, Punjabi, Gujarati), Africa (e.g. Swahili), the Caribbean (e.g. Jamaican Creole) and the Middle East (e.g. Arabic) as well as English. Extract 1 typifies self-reports of language practices at home.

Extract 1

> [English] all the time. Punjabi I only speak with grandparents (Baldeep, questionnaire).

> Urdu is spoken with my parents only. I use English in almost every situation, in my studies, at work and at home (Kanwal, questionnaire).

As extract 1 illustrates, the participants reported using English along with heritage languages, the languages associated with their ancestral communities (Blackledge and Creese 2008), while at home. English was portrayed as the dominant language with heritage languages used in interactions with parents and elders. Extract 2 shows how the participants reported 'mixing' the languages in their repertoires.

Extract 2

> I sometimes find it difficult to explain what I'm trying to say in Punjabi so I
> therefore I mix it with English only because I'm not so fluent (Baldeep,
> questionnaire).

> The thing is I don't speak very well Punjabi. I tend to mix it with Urdu ... I
> don't know which is which so I just talk ...My sisters and brothers, we [speak]
> mixed, innit? (Tahir, Interview 1).

Creese and Blackledge (2011: 1197) have termed the mixing of languages 'flexible
bilingualism', which refers to 'the simultaneous use of different kinds of forms or
signs' in the linguistic repertoire of bi/multilingual individuals. Creese and
Blackledge point out that flexible bilingualism draws on 'translanguaging' (García
and Li Wei 2014) and 'heteroglossia' (Bakhtin 1986) and is rooted in notions of
'language-as-communicative-action' in which interaction reflects and shapes its
context of use (Creese and Blackledge 2011: 1198). Despite literature in applied
linguistics and sociolinguistics indicating that flexible bilingualism is the norm in
bi/multilingual settings, the participants were more inclined to frame this practice as a
language deficiency rather than a communicative resource.

The manner in which the participants portrayed their bi/multilingualism was
suggestive of an orientation to the dominant discourse of 'separate bilingualism'
(*ibid.*), in which languages are viewed as discrete and bounded cultural entities

attached to particular domains of use. Bilingual identity in this discourse has been

characterised as 'two monolinguals in one body' (Gravelle 1996: 11), in that

bilinguals are required to display high levels of proficiency in two languages and use

'one language only' and 'one language at a time' (Li Wei and Wu 2009). Given that

most of the participants had received little sustained education in their heritage

language(s), they were not in a position to conform to these norms.

The participants' linguistic repertoires also encompassed two varieties of English:

standard British English taught at school and the vernacular variety of English in use

in the Thames Estuary. This has been variously termed 'London English' (Harris

2006), 'Multicultural London English' (Cheshire *et al*. 2011) and 'post-estuary

English vernacular' (Block 2014), a variety that has emerged, for the most part, from

working-class areas of south London and the East End of London. It incorporates

linguistic features from Cockney (the dialect of English associated with traditional

white working-class East Enders) and linguistic items from the migrant communities

resident in south London and the East End, particularly those from the Caribbean and

South Asia (Cheshire *et al*. 2011). Table 23.1 gives examples of some of the

linguistic features of London English found in the classroom data.

Table 23. 1:   Linguistic features of London English

T-glottalling
Khaled: so you get like/ be*tt*er [beʔer]... English Dilip: yeah/ overall you'll be be*tt*er [beʔer]
TH fronting with /f/ used to replace /θ/ and /v/ to replace /δ/
'I ... *th*ink [fink] of myself as shy and quiet/ if there's group work obviously you have to work toge*th*er [to-gever]' (Dilip).
Past participle to replace some irregular past simple tenses
Vritti: I was like THIS CLOSE/ to ... sitting my Punjabi exams/ I can read and write the language Tahir: I didn't sit none of 'em/ I *done* French/ ain't *done* Punjabi
Ain't to replace negative present simple use of the verb 'be'
'you *ain't* stopped talking yet/ have you?' (Richard)
Double negatives in an utterance
'everyone says that's why I've been reading/ 'cos everyone's English will improve/ and I'm just thinking/ "okay" and it just *doesn't do* *nothing*' (Seema)
Innit to replace standard tag questions
'[Let's] see if we can do ... the er question, *innit*?' (Lalit)

Studies of schools in urban settings of the UK demonstrate that school students are

well aware of the differential status of standard and vernacular English, with many

denoting this relationship as a 'posh-slang' binary (see Rampton 2006). As we will see in the following extracts, the 'posh-slang' binary continued to be of salience in higher education. In the first of these (extract 3), Tahir (aged 22, British Pakistani) is discussing his experiences of participating in the language and literacy practices of his discipline.

Extract 3

1. That [subject] is probably the one that we did the most reading on and … it

2. was really good quality English … they ain't using slang, they use proper

3. English so we had to write in [proper] English … so we used to spend most

4. of our time trying to revise the way they've written it and what they've

5. written … but it was hard, that was proper hard (Tahir, Interview 2).

In extract 3 Tahir depicts the English required for his studies as 'really good quality' and as 'proper' (line 2). The reference to quality and correctness indexes standardised English along with its prestigious status while the reference to 'slang' (line 2) hints at the stigmatisation of the vernacular. Tahir's use of pronouns is suggestive of asymmetric power relations. The 'we/ they' binary positions Tahir and his peers in opposition to expert users of standardised English (in this case the authors of scholarly texts) (lines 2-3). The use of 'so we had to' (line 3) shows Tahir's understanding of the power dynamics in higher education, in which students are expected to emulate high status language and literacy practices. Tahir's final comment (line 5) depicts the difficulty of reproducing these norms. By drawing on his

repertoire, Tahir graphically communicates his struggles, telling me that scholars

'*ain't* using slang' (line 2) and that he found it '*proper hard*' (line 5). Extracts 2 and 3

suggest how flexible bilingualism was Tahir's customary practice and indicate the

effort involved for Tahir in separating the codes in his repertoire (see Snell 2013).

There were some instances where the participants portrayed themselves as more

willing to conform to the norms for language/ dialect separation. As we will see, this

served to draw attention to social status. In extract 4, Leela (aged 19, British Asian),

Biba (aged 22, British Moroccan) and Awino (aged 32, Kenyan) are discussing how

code-switching between standard and vernacular English ('posh' and 'slang') has

helped them to form friendships in higher education.

Extract 4

L=Leela, A=Awino, B=Biba

1. L: when we came 'ere [to university] I mean/ if I saw a posh person I

2.   actually spoke posh with them/ but if I saw somebody who was happy

3.   with their slang/ I spoke slang with them and I think that's how you

4.   socialise with them

5. A: yeah

6. B: it's how you adapt to different people [that's what adapting is about

7. A: [yeah/ you've got to adapt/ yeah

8. L: yeah

9. B: adapting to different people an' their cultures y'know/ an' their

10.   backgrounds (classroom interaction).

Extract 4 shows how the participants portray themselves as switching between standard and vernacular English dependent on the social status of their peers. The conformity to 'separate bidialectalism' (Preece 2011) points to the asymmetrical social relations of higher education; the participants see their job as adapting to their interlocutors (lines 6-10), by switching to standard English with those that they perceive to be of higher social status. The interaction on this matter points to social class, with standard English denoting 'poshness' (i.e. doing being middle class) and the vernacular marking its users as 'not posh' (i.e. doing being working class). The utterance 'when I saw a posh person' (line 1) is indicative of how social class is inscribed on the body (Skeggs 2004) and manifested in bodily behaviours (see Block above) such as walking, gesture, dressing, grooming and so on.

Literacy practices

What the participants had to say about their preferences when it came to reading and writing was also indicative of how literacy practices are tied up with class. Figure 23.1 illustrates self-reports of reading of choice at home.

Figure 23.1 Reading of choice at home

Tabloid newspapers, particularly *The Sun*, were the participants' favoured choice of reading along with a variety of popular magazines. The participants also reported reading broadsheet newspapers, such as *The Times*. However, this finding probably resulted from the departmental requirement for undergraduates on the participants' degree programmes to read a broadsheet newspaper on a daily basis. It is questionable whether the participants genuinely read broadsheet newspapers out of choice. Very few reported reading novels, with those that did citing popular writers, such as Jeffrey Archer and John Grisham, as their preferred authors. No one reported reading literary fiction. Some reported reading religious texts, particularly the Bible and the Koran, while a few reported reading in heritage language(s). Some also stated that they read 'nothing' when left to their own devices.

The participants' taste for tabloid newspapers was examined further in the interviews. Extract 5 comes from an interview with Geet, (aged 19, British Asian).

Extract 5

1. I think the reason [I read *The Sun*] is because I have seen people around

2. me, they all read the same paper. So I think that is the reason, I have been

3. influenced as well. So I think he is reading that same paper, so I will read

4. the same paper as well. So I think that is the reason I read *The Sun* (Geet, interview 1).

This extract illustrates how Geet was socialised into the literacy practices of the working-class community in which he grew up. Geet starts by populating his social world with tabloid readers, particularly *Sun* readers (lines 1-2), and genders this world by referring to the 'people around [him]' as 'he' (line 3). Finally, he explains how his taste in tabloid newspapers arose from his desire to conform to the literacy practices of the men whom he identifies as his social equals (lines 3-4). Reading tabloid newspapers, such as *The Sun*, is a common practice in the social world of the participants and indexes how this world is classed. Mark Pursehouse's (2007) study of *Sun* readers, for example, found that tabloid newspapers remain a cultural signifier of working-class culture. His observation that archetypal readers of *The Sun* are constructed as 'male, young and "working class"' (*ibid.*: 298) resonates with Geet's

narrative on his disposition for *The Sun* and is indicative of how class and gender
interact in the construction of identity.

While expressing a preference for tabloid newspapers, very few of the participants
displayed any taste for the bookish practices that symbolise prestige in the academic
domain. An example of the lack of appetite for such practices comes in extract 6, in
which Seema (aged 19, British Asian), Maya (aged 19, British Asian) and Deena
(aged 20, Mauritian) are discussing their experiences of reading a set undergraduate
sociology textbook.

Extract 6

S=Seema, D=Deena, M=Maya

1 S I had to do a sociology module/ and the FUCKing/ reading/ text/

2   was SO HARD/ even the whole class said/ "we don't understand

3   what the hell the book's going on about/ we don't understand at

4   all"/ so everyone pulled out A-level books and was doing it/ but it

5   was sociology/ and he gave us like (1) the chapters were like/ THIS

6   BIG/ honestly like forty pages/ and he made us do two chapters/ and

7   everyone got the books/ and couldn't understand a word it was

8   saying/

9 D Yes

10 S just thought "fuck it"/ just leave/ just leave it (1.5) but other than

11   that/ it's cool

12 M yeah/ it's all right/ it's not bad (classroom interaction).

Seema starts by trashing the set text through the use of taboo language with raised volume (line 1) and then characterises the text as very difficult, achieved through the raised volume of 'so hard' (line 2); she claims her view is representative of her classmates by speaking in italics (lines 2-4). She goes on to cast the lecturer in a coercive role (lines 5-6) although the lecturer's demands to read two chapters of an undergraduate textbook do not seem particularly excessive. The reading is portrayed as alienating on the grounds of length (lines 5-6) and difficulty (lines 6-8). Seema's final statement (line 10) embodies her alienation and suggests that she would prefer to give up than struggle. The pause at this point followed by the statement that everything else is 'cool' (lines 10-11) may be a way of mitigating her distaste for academic literacy practices.

Extracts 5 and 6 point to the gulf in the reading tastes of the participants and the academic community. While a taste for tabloid newspapers and popular magazines is commonplace at home and among peers, once in the institutional space they are faced with a book culture. This disjuncture in dispositions points to habitus and is indicative of the classed gap that these participants had to traverse in higher education.

Final version accepted for publication

In the following section, we will consider what the data tell us about the ascribed and inhabited classed identities of the participants within the context of higher education.

Discussion

Social class as an ascribed identity

As mentioned, the participants were ascribed a classed identity on the basis of the NS-SEC categorisation of occupation. The NS-SEC classification conferred lower socioeconomic status, commonly referred to as working class. While ascribing class on the basis of occupation is a blunt instrument, Block (2014) points out that it has the 'advantage of clarity'. In particular, it enables the examination of inequalities between social groups in society.

The WP literature indicates that class continues to play a key role when it comes to inequality in higher education. In a recent overview, Geoff Whitty, Annette Hayton and Sarah Tang (2015) cite both quantitative inequalities (related to the under representation of working-class students in HE) and qualitative inequalities (referring to 'fair access' to different types of institution and degree programme). As they point out, qualitative inequalities are stark with (upper) middle-class students dominating elite institutions and working-class students clustered in less prestigious universities.

Despite overcoming barriers to accessing higher education, the participants encountered qualitative inequalities arising from their classed status. The participants' families lacked what Block refers to as sociocultural capital (see above) that assists in making informed choices about different types of higher education institutions and programmes of study; they also lacked the economic capital to fund the development of the type of cultural capital valued by elite universities. An example can be seen in the choices made at the end of compulsory schooling. The decision not to do A-levels constrained the participants' choice of higher education institutions to those that recognised vocational or access qualifications. These were primarily 'new' universities (former polytechnics granted university status in 1992) rather than elite higher education institutions, such as those in the Russell Group[5] and other 'old' (i.e. established prior to 1992) universities.

Additionally, the participants were enrolled on vocationally oriented programmes in subjects such as business studies and management. These programmes are marketed to prospective students on the basis of future employability, and, for WP students are considered to be a safer bet in terms of facilitating upward mobility for the family in British society than less utilitarian subjects, such as English literature, or vocationally oriented subjects deemed to be highbrow, such as law and medicine. Such decisions on educational trajectories appear highly unlikely in (upper) middle-class and professional families, in which going to university is viewed as a natural part of a child's biography and in which the family pays attention to the accumulation of cultural and social capital that will facilitate access to prestigious universities and high status subjects.

The decision to study close to home is also indicative of how spatial conditions – here involving mobility, type of dwelling and physical proximity to others (see Block above) index social class. While the cultural traditions of some ethnic minorities encourage enrolment in universities in close proximity to the family home (Farr 2001), it seems likely that the socioeconomic status of the family was a constraint on mobility. Staying at home enabled the participants to limit the financial burden of higher education for the family and to contribute to the family household by taking on paid employment and by acting as carers for siblings and family elders. As the family household was often cramped, several of the participants had no private space for study at home and had to compete for study resources with their school-aged siblings. Living at home also restricted the time that the participants spent participating in social and academic interactions on campus. More time spent on these may have been helpful for their transition into higher education and for their understanding of academic language and literacy practices.

Finally, the physical environment of the university, which bore similarities with Vaidehi Ramanathan's (2005) study of post-compulsory education in India, was also suggestive of the participants' classed ascription. In Ramanathan's study, working-class students were clustered in a vernacular-medium institution in a congested downtown location in a multi-storey building with no outdoor space apart from a car park and few student facilities. This was in marked contrast to the 'upper-middle-class' students, who attended an English-medium institution that was set in grounds in a leafy suburb with abundant facilities.

Physical differences were also evident between the institutional environment in which the participants were situated and that of one of the nearby Russell Group universities. While the predominantly (upper) middle-class students in the nearby Russell Group university had access to neoclassical buildings, tended grounds, state of the art facilities and a wide range of student amenities, the participants in my study were located in a utilitarian block situated on one of the most polluted roads in London. The only outdoor space on campus was a concrete quad with a few benches. Student facilities consisted of a basic canteen, a student bar and a library. The participants were routinely taught in large numbers in packed rooms, some with insufficient seating and desks. At the time of the study, there was major building work on site with scaffolding erected around the classrooms, on which building workers regularly appeared, and continual noise from building activity. To sum up, juxtaposing institutions in this way enables us to see how 'class-related aspects stand out sharply' (*ibid.*: 64) when it comes to accessing higher education. In the following section, we turn to the 'subjectively experienced cultural side' (Block 2014: 58) of class to consider how class as a lived experience played out in the participants' inhabited identities.

Social class as an inhabited identity

The participants brought the linguistic repertoires and literacy practices acquired in the working-class neighbourhoods in which they had been raised and still resided into higher education. Entering higher education meant crossing a classed boundary

between the working-class neighbourhoods of the East End of London, characterised

by superdiversity and heteroglossia, in which flexible bilingualism is the norm, and

the (upper) middle-class institutional space of higher education. In an English-

dominant setting, such as England, higher education is a monolingualised site in that

the multilingual capital embodied in the staff-student population is rarely

acknowledged. For the participants a transformation in identity was equated with

'poshness'. Learning to talk and act 'posh' involved struggling to separate the codes

in their linguistic repertoires into their constituent parts, in which English dialects and

heritage languages were kept separate and translanguaging was avoided. As Urciuoli

(1996) reminds us, as soon as a member of the working class seeks a path to

class mobility, the 'correctness' model of language surfaces, which, as she comments,

requires:

> the ability to negotiate the language required by status-oriented integration
>
> with metacommunicative success. People typify this communicative
>
> competence metalinguistically as "good English" … What … count[s] are the
>
> functions referable to dictionaries and grammars: the referential (being clear
>
> and exact) and the metalinguistic (knowing the rules and explaining them
>
> when tested)'.

A transformation in the participants' inhabited classed identities involved not only

conforming to the norms of 'separate bilingualism', but also struggling with the

bookish literacy practices of the academic community, for which they were ill-

prepared. Drawing on Tony Bennett *et al.*'s (2009) study of cultural capital and classed dispositions in the UK, the participants taste for tabloid newspapers and popular magazines points to a working-class habitus. Bennett *et al.* found that reading books was mainly restricted to 'urban, educated and cosmopolitan populations' (*ibid*.: 110) whereas newspapers and magazines had a much more widespread appeal. They argue that literacy tastes are indicative of classed dispositions with bookish reading tastes indexing a highbrow professional and middle-class habitus, while taste for tabloid and broadsheet newspapers allow for a broader cross-section of society to do 'identity-work of various kinds' related to social class and political affiliation (*ibid.*: 111).

When participating in the elite language and literacy practices of the academic community, the participants often appeared ambivalent. This was manifested in behaviour such as denigrating academic literacy practices (extract 6, also see Preece 2009a), making jokes about bookish practices (Preece 2009a, b, 2010) and displaying lack of interest in academic work (Preece 2009a, 2014). In many ways, this resonated with the 'laddish' identities described by Willis (1977), in his seminal study of working-class school pupils, as well as with a range of studies since Willis that have documented the negotiation of identities in educational settings with adolescents and young people. For the participants in the study, displaying ambivalence to the bookish practices of the academic community indexes the maintenance of a classed identity in which, as Block (2014: 61) points out:

> a lack of academic capital reflects a different kind of class habitus, one which confers onto individuals lower status and prestige in society as a whole while also conferring greater status and prestige in the working class cultures into which they are socialised.

However, it also seems likely that the participants' ambivalence was, in part, a way of managing social identities among peers in the face of an ascribed institutional identity as in need of English language 'remediation'. As Alan Wall (2006) comments, no learners, let alone university students, want to be thought of as 'remedial'. The ascription of a 'remedial' identity cast the academic writing programme as a site for 'fixing' the participants' language 'deficits' and a 'public admission of failure' (*ibid.*: xii). This was a difficult positioning for the participants to negotiate. While conforming involved accepting the stigma of the remedial label and the potential loss of face among peers, resistance involved occupying roles and stances which, as discussed elsewhere, were generally not conducive to the scholarly enterprise (Preece 2009a, b). Here class comes into the picture for, as discussed in the previous section, the participants had accrued less of the sort of cultural capital that would have created affordances for them to 'redeem the scholarly enterprise whilst maintaining the social need to orient to other forms of identity' (Benwell and Stokoe 2002: 450).

To summarise, there were particular challenges for the participants in inhabiting the 'posh' and 'bookish' identities on offer in higher education. The task was not made

any easier by the 'language prejudice' that they encountered in the institution, which labelled linguistic diversity and the practices of linguistic diversity, such as 'flexible bilingualism' (Creese and Blackledge 2011), as a problem to be fixed rather than an asset to be welcomed. This resulted in the ascription of a 'remedial' English language learner identity and the erasure of the participants' multilingual capital in the institution. The next section will outline some of the issues the study raises for applied linguistics.

Issues for applied linguistics

Bringing class into sharper focus illustrates its importance when it comes to considering the identities of 'migrants as bilinguals' (Block 2014: 126). Social class enables us to see the inequalities among members of linguistic minority communities in accessing higher education. It illustrates how the upwardly mobile middle-class narrative in WP is not easily achievable and requires considerable efforts to accomplish. Focusing on class as economically, as well as culturally, inscribed also enables us to make intra-group differentiations in the bi/multilingual cohort in higher education. This is important for bringing asymmetrical social relations to light among the bi/multilingual student population, for developing an understanding of whose bilingualism is valued and whose is not and for critiquing language prejudice and reification (see e.g. Ramanathan 2005; Vandrick 2011).

For working-class students from migrant communities to achieve the identity transformation on offer in higher education requires shifts not only in institutional culture, but also in institutional resources. This brings me to Nancy Fraser's (2000) call for identity to be viewed in terms of material economic issues in addition to 'cultural recognition'. Fraser argues that an overemphasis on cultural recognition not only risks imposing an essentialised group identity on individuals, but also fails to address the unequal allocation of resources between individuals in the social and economic sphere. To strengthen the link between the cultural world and the economic and social order in which identity is constituted, Fraser (*ibid.*: 113) argues for a 'status model' of identity. This involves examining institutional practices to discover which 'actors [are constituted] as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible - in other words, as less than full partners in social interaction' (*ibid.*) and taking appropriate action to redress status subordination. Fraser argues that the status model allows for two 'analytically distinct dimensions' of social justice: 'recognition' and 'distribution'. While recognition involves examining the impact of institutional practices on the status of different groups in the institution in relation to each other, distribution involves allocating resources to redress inequalities in status between groups and that facilitate full participation. In sum, the status model includes addressing both the cultural misrecognition of an individual's identity and the maldistribution of material resources that constrain an individual's participation on an equal footing with their peers in institutional practices. These claims appear pertinent for the kinds of identity studies undertaken by applied linguists and, as such, the 'status model' proposed by Fraser could prove fruitful for future language and identity studies.

Summary

This chapter presented the case of working-class undergraduate students from linguistic minority communities on an academic writing programme at a university in London. Following Block's (2014) call for applied linguists to attend more closely to social class, the data were examined to see how the participants were ascribed and inhabited classed identities. The ascription of classed identities enabled the examination of inequalities that the participants encountered from their social stratification in society, such as being clustered in a less prestigious higher education institution than many of their (upper) middle-class counterparts. The salience of social class as an inhabited identity was indexed by the construction of a 'posh-slang' binary to narrate experiences of higher education. Class was further indexed through the participants reading tastes and their ambivalence towards the type of bookish practices favoured by the academic community. While the institution devoted some resources to addressing social inequality, their efforts were misdirected by institutional language prejudice, in which it was assumed that the practices associated with linguistic diversity, particularly flexible bilingualism, were incorrect and in need of remediation. This rendered the multilingual capital of the participants as worthless and meant that no efforts were made to discern how this capital could be put to use as a bridge into disciplinary language and literacy practices. This constrained both the participants' efforts to participate in academic life and in their identity transformation as fully fledged undergraduate university students worthy of their place in higher education.

Final version accepted for publication

Further reading

Preece, S. (2009). *Posh talk: language and identity in higher education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (This book presents a fuller discussion of the study).

Preece, S. and Martin, P. (guest eds.) (2010). 'Special issue: Imagining higher education as a multilingual space', *Language and Education*, 24(1). (The articles in this special issue report on studies that examine bi/multilingual identities of migrant students in college and university education in English-dominant settings).

Block, D. (2014). *Social class in applied linguistics*. London: Routledge. (Essential reading for applied linguists interested in language and identity).

Kanno, Y. and Vandrick, S. (guest eds.) (2014). 'Special issue: Social class in language learning and teaching', *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 13(2). (The articles in this special issue examine social class as an identity inscription in various educational settings. There is also a helpful account of social class privilege and its impact on language learning).

The Multilingual University: the impact of linguistic diversity on higher education in English-dominant and English medium instructional contexts, ESRC seminar series 2014-2016, https://multilingualuniversity.wordpress.com. (An ESRC-funded seminar series examining the phenomenon of multilingualism in higher education in Anglophone settings and in EMI programmes in the non-Anglophone world).

Final version accepted for publication

References

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). The problem of speech genres, in C. Emerson and M. Holquist (eds.) *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin: University of Austin Press, pp. 60–101.

Baxter, J. (this volume). Positioning language and identity: poststructuralist perspectives, in S. Preece (ed.) *The Routledge handbook of language and identity*. London: Routledge, pp. x-xx.

Becher, T. and Trowler, P. (2001 [1989]). *Academic tribes and territories*. 2nd edn. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.

Bennett, T., Savage, M., Silva, E., Warde, A., Gayo-Cal, M. and Wright, D. (2009). *Culture, class, distinction*. London: Routledge.

Benwell, B. and Stokoe, E. (2002). 'Constructing discussion tasks in university tutorials: shifting dynamics and identities', *Discourse Studies*, 4(4): 429-453.

Blackledge, A. and Creese, A. (2008). 'Contesting "language" as "heritage": negotiation of identities in late modernity', *Applied Linguistics* 29(4): 533-554.

Block, D. (2014). *Social class in applied linguistics*. London: Routledge.

Block, D. (this volume). Class in language and identity research, in S. Preece (ed.). *The Routledge handbook of language and identity*. London: Routledge, pp. x-xx.

Final version accepted for publication

Block, D. and Corona, V. (this volume). Intersectionality in language and identity research, in S. Preece (ed.) *The Routledge handbook of language and identity*. London: Routledge, pp. <mark>x-xx</mark>.

Blommaert, J. (2006). Language policy and national identity, in T. Ricento (ed.) *Language policy: theory and method.* Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 238-254.

Blommaert, J. and Jie, D. (2010). *Ethnographic fieldwork: a beginner's guide*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Brumfit, C. J. (1995). Teacher professionalism and research, in G. Cook and B. Seidlhofer (eds.) *Principles and practice in applied linguistics: studies in honour of H. G. Widdowson*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. <mark>x-xx.</mark>

Bucholtz, M. and Hall, K. (2005). 'Identity and interaction: a sociocultural linguistic approach', *Discourse Studies*, 7: 585-614.

Bucholtz, M. and Hall, K. (2010). Locating language in identity, in C. Llamas and D. Watt (eds.) *Language and identities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 18-28.

Cheshire, J., Kerswill, P., Fox, S., and Torgersen, E. (2011). 'Contact, the feature pool and the speech community: the emergence of Multicultural London English', *Journal of Sociolinguistics,* 15: 151-196.

Creese, A. and Blackledge, A. (2011). 'Separate and flexible bilingualism in complementary schools: multiple language practices in interrelationship', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43: 1196-1208.

Final version accepted for publication

Creese, A. and Blackledge, A. (this volume). A linguistic ethnography of identity: adopting a heteroglossic frame, in S. Preece (ed.) *The Routledge handbook of language and identity*. London: Routledge, pp. x-xx

Eversley, J., Mehmedbegovic, D., Sanderson, A., Tinsley, T., vonAhn, M. and Wiggins, R. (2010). *Language capital: mapping the languages of London's school children.* London: CILT.

Farr, M. (2001). 'Home or away? A study of distance travelled to higher education 1994-1999', *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 3: 17-25.

Foucault, M. (1974). *The archaeology of knowledge*. London: Tavistock.

García, O. and Li Wei. (2014). *Translanguaging: language, bilingualism and education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gravelle, M. (1996). *Supporting bilingual learners in schools.* Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Fraser, N. (2000). 'Rethinking recognition', *New Left Review,* 3: 107-120.

Harris, R. (2006). *New ethnicities and language use*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

HESA (no date). *UKPIs: definitions*. Available at https://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2379#top

Li Wei, and Wu, C.-J. (2009). 'Polite Chinese children revisited: creativity and the use of codeswitching in the Chinese complementary school classroom', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism 12: 193–211.*

Final version accepted for publication

Morgan, M. (2002). *Language, discourse and power in African American culture.*
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Office for National Statistics (2010). *Soc 2010 volume 3: the National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC rebased on SOC2010)*. Available at
http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/soc2010/soc2010-volume-3-ns-sec--rebased-on-soc2010--user-manual/index.html?format=print

Pavlenko, A. and Blackledge, A. (2004). Introduction: new theoretical approaches to the study of negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts, in A. Pavlenko and A. Blackledge (eds.) *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 1-33.

Preece, S. (2006). British Asian undergraduates in London, in D. Block, *Multilingual identities in a global city: London stories*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 171-199.

Preece, S. (2009a). *Posh talk: language and identity in higher education*.
Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Preece, S. (2009b). 'A group of lads, innit?': performances of laddish masculinity in British higher education, in P. Pichler and E. Eppler (eds.) *Gender and spoken interaction.* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 115-138.

Preece, S. (2010). 'Multilingual identities in higher education: negotiating the "mother tongue", "posh" and "slang"', in *Language and Education*, 24(1): 21-40.

Final version accepted for publication

Preece, S. (2011). 'Universities in the Anglophone centre: sites of multilingualism', *Applied Linguistics Review* 2: 121-145.

Preece, S. (2014). '"They ain't using slang": working class students from linguistic minority communities in higher education', *Linguistics and Education*, doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2014.10.003

Pursehouse, M. (2007). Looking at '*The Sun*': into the nineties with a tabloid and its readers, in A. Biressi and H. Nunn (eds.) *The tabloid culture reader*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 287-302.

Ramanathan, V. (2005). *The English-vernacular divide: postcolonial language politics and practice*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Rampton, B. (2006). *Language in late modernity: interaction in an urban school*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ruiz, R. (1984). 'Orientations in language planning', *The Journal of the National Association for Bilingual Education* 8(2): 12-34.

Skeggs, B. (2004). *Class, self, culture*. London: Routledge.

Snell, J. (2013). 'Dialect, interaction and class positioning at school: from deficit to difference to repertoire', *Language and Education*, 27(2): 110-28.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2015). *Education: enrolment by type of institution*. Available at http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=130&lang=en.

Urciuoli, B. (1996). *Exposing prejudice: Puerto Rican experiences of language, race, and class*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Vandrick, S. (2011). 'Students of the new global elite', *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(1): 160-169.

Wall, A. (2006). Introduction, in S. Davies, D. Swinburne and G. Williams (eds.) *Writing matters.* The Royal Literary Fund Report on Student Writing in Higher Education, London, pp. xi-xv.

Weedon, C. (1997). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell.

Whitty, G., Hayton, A. and Tang, S. (2015). 'Who you know, what you know and knowing the ropes: a review of evidence about access to higher education institutions in England', *Review of Education* DOI: 10.1002/rev3.3038, pp. 1-41.

Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to labour: how working class kids get working class jobs*. London: Saxon House.

World Bank (2015). *Data. Country and lending groups*. Available at http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-and-lending-groups#Low_income

Wright, E.O. (2013 [2001]). Foundations of class analysis: a Marxist perspective, in S. Ferguson (ed.) *Race, gender, sexuality and social class: dimensions of inequality*. Los Angeles: Sage, pp. 104-114.

---

[1] This is a revised version of a paper given on 6 March 2015 as part of the ESRC-funded seminar series: 'The Multilingual University: The Impact of Linguistic

Diversity on Higher Education in English-dominant and English Medium

Instructional Contexts'. Further details of this seminar series can be found at

https://multilingualuniversity.wordpress.com

[2] The World Bank classifies countries into low-, lower-middle-, upper-middle- and

high-income economies. Low-income countries (Gross National Income $1,045 per

capita) include Bangladesh, Kenya and Zimbabwe. High-income economies ($12,746

or more per capita) include most of the EU, OECD members and countries such as

Russia, Saudi Arabia and South Korea (World Bank 2015).

[3] For students aged under 21, socioeconomic status is based on the occupation of the

parent (or carer) with the highest income. For students aged 21 and over,

socioeconomic status is based on the student's occupation (HESA no date).

[4] A-levels (advanced levels) are normally taken in the two years following

compulsory schooling. Elite universities normally require 3 A-levels at A grade, or A

and B grades.

[5] The Russell Group comprises 24 elite UK universities; no 'new' universities are

members of the Russell Group. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russell_Group and

http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk