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Editorial

LI WEI

The original idea for this new publication came out of the weekly seminar series which is jointly run between Birkbeck College and the Institute of Education, both of the University of London, and the annual Round Table whose organization also involves colleagues from other colleges of the University in the Bloomsbury area, especially the University College and the School of Oriental and African Studies. Given the quality and variety of the presentations at these events, we thought that it would be very nice to find an outlet for them to be published and read by a wider range of colleagues. Mouton de Gruyter enthusiastically supported the idea and we agreed to produce an annual publication under the title *The Bloomsbury Review of Applied Linguistics and Communication*. However, just as the papers for the inaugural issue were ready to be submitted to the publisher, the publishing giant, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, sent us a letter through its lawyers insisting that the word “Bloomsbury” had been trademarked and therefore could not be used in any publication that they did not own. Whilst we were flattered by the fact that our new and rather modest venture was noticed by such a major player in the publishing world (and the thought that a handful of publishing houses are trying to dominate the world never crossed our mind. Honest!), we had to find an alternative title and amend all the documents and publicity material that had already been registered. It has turned out that Bloomsbury Publishing Plc’s intervention was a blessing in disguise. The papers we had received were of a more global appeal than the name *Bloomsbury Review* would indicate. And as the experts in Mouton’s marketing department suggest, the simpler the title the better – hence the current title *Applied Linguistics Review*.

Applied Linguistics Review is a peer reviewed annual publication. It aims to serve as a testing ground for the articulation of original ideas and approaches in the study of real-world issues in which language plays a crucial role, by bringing together new empirical and theoretical research and critical reflections of current debates. As you can see in this inaugural issue, the issues dealt with in the

Review are wide ranging, covering aspects of the linguistic and communicative competence of the individual such as bilingualism and multilingualism, first or second language acquisition, literacy, language disorders, as well as language and communication related issues in and between societies such as linguistic discrimination, language conflict, communication in the workplace, language policy and language planning, and language ideology. One key difference between this publication and the other existing journals and annuals is that we encourage personal reflections on emerging issues and themes in applied linguistics as a broad, multidisciplinary field. We urge our contributors not to shy away from expressing their own opinions. And we make sure that the peer review process is thorough and constructive, and in the meantime allows the personality of the author to shine through the writing. We invite potential contributors to contact the Editors directly to discuss their ideas before submitting the papers. We are particularly interested in papers that not only report new research findings but also critically engage in current debates over theoretical and methodological issues in applied linguistics and communication generally and point to directions of future research.

Finally, readers of this volume will want to know what we mean by *applied linguistics* in the title. Here is our answer: applied linguistics is any attempt to work with language in a critical and reflective way, with the ultimate goal of understanding the role of language in the construction and expression of human sociality. We will try to elaborate on this through the contributions in future issues.

Birkbeck College, University of London
December 2009

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Social class and sociolinguistics¹

BEN RAMPTON

Abstract

This article makes the case for resuscitating social class as an issue in British applied and sociolinguistics. It begins with a sketch of the treatment of class in post-war social science in the UK, drawing out the implications for sociolinguistics. It then moves to a fuller review of how sociolinguistics has actually handled class, and considers Bernstein's work and its relationship to classic US research in the ethnography of communication, as well as the reasons from the 'retreat from social class' in discourse-oriented UK sociolinguistics from mid-1980s onwards. After that it offers a class-oriented reinterpretation of my earlier work on ethnolinguistic crossing and stylization, and it concludes with some suggestions for further research, stressing the need to develop interactional and ethnographic perspectives on class processes.

Keywords: Social class; sociolinguistics; interaction; crossing; ethnicity.

This article attempts to make the case for resuscitating social class as an issue in applied and sociolinguistics in Britain. Certainly, there is a great deal of contemporary work on discourse, culture, power and social inequality, but this generally focuses on gender, ethnicity and generation much more than class. And yes, in ordinary everyday activity, 'transportable' identities like class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and age are all blurred and interwoven with a considerable range of institutional and interactional identities (Zimmerman 1998), so that it is very much an analytic act separating class out from everything else. Even so, many many people – and not just academics – engage in this kind of analytic differentiation, and separating out 'class' has distinct implications. So for example, when migrant ethnicities are discussed in education, students' practices-and-dispositions are generally treated independently of the inherently stratifying

processes of schooling, and there is talk of eradicating inequality by closing the gap between school and ethnic culture, either making schools more hospitable, or tuning home cultures more to education. Class analyses are potentially more pessimistic. Social and cultural identities are defined inside mainstream processes of stratification, not outside, and instead of being overcome by cultural bridge-building, inequality and discrimination are treated as central to schooling itself.

So class isn't an inconsequential concept, and there are four parts in my argument that contemporary linguists need to give it more attention. I shall start with a sketch of how class has been treated in post-war British social science. This will be brief and very second hand, but there are still some significant implications for sociolinguistics. In the second part, I shall comment on how sociolinguistics itself has dealt with class. Here, Bernstein looms large, though my main point is that there is still a great deal of scope for ethnographic and interactional sociolinguistic analyses of class processes. The third section tries to illustrate this by turning to my own interactional sociolinguistic research and looking at ethno-linguistic crossing and stylization through the lens of social class. And then to end, I offer some suggestions for further work.

1. Class in post-war British social science and some implications for sociolinguistics

According to Mike Savage (2003, 2005, 2007), there have been three distinguishable 'waves' in the study of class in post-war Britain. The *first* dates from the mid-1950s to the mid-70s, and Savage associates it with figures like Halsey, Lockwood, Young, Hoggart, Williams, Willis, Thompson and Hobsbawm. The relationships between class consciousness, social stratification, community and family were of central interest in the first wave, and there was a lot of qualitative research, with, for example, in-depth interviews playing a major part in studies of community. In the *second* wave from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, Goldthorpe and Marshall were pre-eminent in British research on class, and this focused much more on the structural aspects of inequality. Statistical methods were used to link class with life-chances in health, housing, crime, education, etc., and class was simplified and operationalized as occupational employment.² Interest in class consciousness and solidarity declined (Savage 2003: 536), while over the same period, there was also a growing body of work asserting the 'demise of class' in late-modernity, a line of argument that Savage associates with Bauman, Lash and Giddens. In the *third* wave of work on British social class, starting in the early 1990s, researchers such as Skeggs,

Walkerdine, Lucy, Reay and Ball have contested these claims about the demise of class, and there has been a reaction against the reductive equation of class with occupation in survey work, turning from this to qualitative analysis of the cultural and psycho-social processes associated with class. The interest of the earlier generation in class identities and class identification has been revived with work on, for example, stigmatized working class identities and middle-class strategies in education markets, and the focus has also expanded beyond community, work, industrial relations to schooling, parenting, leisure and consumption.

From the vantage point of sociolinguistics, there are at least three things that stand out in this work.

First, even though it was pre-eminent in Savage's second wave, there is no need to confine our notion of class to a single indicator like occupation – after all, in a country with a long history of stratification like Britain's, 'class' can embrace a huge range of cultural and material processes, covering social differences in "family background, main source of income, place of residence, cultural tastes, ... political affiliations etc" (Abercrombie and Warde 2000: 145–146).

Next and much more suggestively, there are openings for sociolinguistics in the first and third wave interest in class identities and the 'meanings' of social class. In the first wave, both Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson were concerned with how class consciousness and experience were shaped in social activity. Thompson insisted that class needs to be studied "in the medium of *time* – that is, in action and reaction, change and conflict" (1978: 295–296), focusing on the articulation of a sense of solidarity or opposition in the struggle for resources in particular locations. 'Class' here means a sensed social difference that people and groups produce in interaction, and there is struggle and negotiation around exactly who's up, who's down, who's in, who's out, and where the lines are drawn. Material and cultural inequalities matter a great deal, but human agency still plays a vital part in class processes. So when analysts see people in better and worse, higher and lower positions, they need to look for the cultural practices that accomplish this, which is something that sociolinguists are potentially quite adept at. Williams also attended closely to the subjective side of social class, and was interested in how the experience of living in a stratified society works its way into "the fibres of the self", producing social instincts and tacit sensibilities that are shaped by "the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes" (1977: 110). This has been picked up in the third wave by feminist researchers such as Skeggs (1997) and Reay (1998) – Skeggs, for example, emphasises the role that "everyday negotiations of the mundane" play in the formation of classed subjectivities (1997: 167),³ and she explores the

implications in some long-term ethnography with working class women. So the second point to draw from Savage's overview is that if sociolinguists want to investigate class, we don't have to bind ourselves to large-scale comparisons of high- and low-placed social groups. In class societies, people carry class hierarchy around inside them, acting it out in the fine grain of ordinary life, and if we look closely enough, we may be able to pick it out in the conduct of just a few individuals.

Third, alongside the perspectival shifts that Savage describes, there have obviously also been fundamental changes in the economy, culture and society since the 1950s – de-industrialisation, the decline of traditional collectivism and the emergence of gender, race and ethnicity as political issues, globalization, marketization and the ascendance of the individual as consumer (Abercrombie and Warde 2000: 148). “The working class”, Savage suggests, is now “no longer a central reference point in British culture”, and the middle class has “become the class around which an increasing range of practices are regarded as universally ‘normal’, ‘good’ and ‘appropriate’” (2003: 536). But this doesn't mean that class no longer matters – instead, “there has been a fundamental re-working of class relationships [and this] affects the mode by which class is articulated, imagined and thought” (2007).

How far, we should ask, has sociolinguistics tuned into this kind of re-working? Indeed, how far has sociolinguistics contributed to its description? These are substantial questions, inviting consideration of some of the history of sociolinguistics itself, and I would like to try to respond, starting very briefly with Labovian variationism, turning to Bernstein and moving from there to ethnographic and interactional sociolinguistics.

2. Social class and sociolinguistics?

2.1. *Labovian variationism*

Variationists have probably had a longer and more enduring interest in social class than any other branch of sociolinguistics, and they certainly got off to a very good start. According to Savage (2003: 536), Bourdieu has been the most important theoretical influence on the most recent, post-1990s third wave of class-focused British social science, but in fact Bourdieu was using *Labov* to develop his notion of classed habitus⁴ back in the mid-1970s. Variationists have repeatedly shown that in class-stratified societies, society-wide speech variation is ‘echoed’ in the style variation of individuals – the patterns of accent difference that you can see when you compare class-groups-distributed-across-society-as-

a-whole are mirrored (more weakly) within the speech repertoire of individuals – and Bourdieu took this as impressive testimony to class reproduction, large-scale stratification being inscribed even into the apparently flexible conduct of individuals (Bourdieu 1991 [1977]: Part 1; Woolard 1985; Eckert 2000: 13).

But has variationist sociolinguistics in general lived up to its early promise in the analysis of class? In recent years, the link between Bourdieu and language variation has been renewed in Eckert's sociolinguistic ethnography of adolescents in the US. Taking up Bourdieurian practice theory, Eckert insists on seeing speakers as “agents in the continual construction and reproduction” of the language system, not just as its “incidental users” (2000: 43), and she also looks hard for the local meanings of social class, finding it in the polarization of school-enthusiastic ‘Jocks’ and disaffected ‘Burnouts’ and in the contrasting connections that adolescents make between on the one hand, local social activities and categories, and mainstream values on the other. Even so, Eckert's linguistic analyses are primarily statistical, and there are no detailed descriptions of classed language being used or developed in situated interaction (compare, e.g. Coupland 2007). More generally, as late as 1996 Hymes took the view that in variationist research, “class has entered sociolinguistic analysis as an indispensable parameter of change and statistical difference, but as a lived reality [it] has hardly begun to appear as a focus of inquiry in its own right” (1996: 73). The central and abiding interest is in variability and change in language itself; class tends to be defined occupationally, as in Savage's second wave; and classically anyway, variationists emphasize attitudes and prejudice in their explanations of linguistic inequality. In Hymes' encapsulation of the Labovian view of class, “[d]ifferential access to resources there might be, but so far as ability was concerned, class had no cost” (1996: 188).

Which brings us, of course, to Bernstein.

2.2. *Bernstein*

Bernstein's analysis of language and class starts with macro-social structure and the division of labor, moves into the institutional organization of family and education, homes in on interactional practices deemed critical in socialization, and from there looks for links to the communicative disposition of individuals and their impact on school achievement. In doing so, Bernstein spans most of the levels where researchers have located class processes – the economy, the community, occupations, families, activity, discourse, language, consciousness and school career.

In fact, Savage identifies Bernstein alongside Bourdieu as a major influence on the current wave in the British sociology of class (2003: 537), and Bernstein's

reputation has also substantially recovered among linguists over the last 10 to 15 years. With common ground in Halliday, critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis have always had a lot of time for Bernstein; Bernstein's critique of 'masking' and the concealment of power relations in progressive pedagogy feeds into Fairclough's account of the conversationalization of public discourse (e.g. 1995); and few can match Bernstein's magisterial overviews of changing trends both in social science and in higher education generally (e.g. 1996: Chs. 3 and 7). Yet in the UK at least,⁵ subsequent to the critique by linguists like Labov and Trudgill (cf. Atkinson 1985: Ch. 6), there has been very little active interest in Bernstein's analysis of class culture and language, in class "as a general position in society, which is also a tradition, with typical values [that have a bearing] on language use" (Collins 1988: 307). Bernstein's work on class, family socialization and its educational effects generally gets bracketed off as 'early Bernstein' and it is worth considering the reasons for this.

2.3. *Bracketing off 'early Bernstein'*

There are many things that could be said to explain the sequestration of early Bernstein. First, early Bernstein is very much the product of its time, the 1950s and 1960s. Gender is taken for granted (Collins 2000: 73); there is nothing on ethnicity; and the main lines of the theory are formulated prior to the development of sophisticated discourse analysis, in the absence of detailed naturalistic observation of either homes or classrooms (compare Wells 1981; Tizard et al. 1988; Edwards and Westgate 1987: 35). Second, there is a neglect of all the ideology, politics, resistance and reflexive self-differentiation that shapes and develops in the interaction across classes (Rosen 1972; compare, e.g. McDermott and Gospodinoff 1981, Collins 1988). Third, within the highly ambitious, multi-leveled panorama that is covered in Bernstein's argument, there is a great deal of scope for different specialists in this or that to zero in on particular details. And of course, fourth, from the late 1970s onwards, Bernstein himself shifted away from language and group culture to the social organization of educational discourse.

But in trying to explain the bracketing off of Bernstein's early work, I would like to dwell on his approach to knowledge production, and indeed his epistemology, it seems to me, also limits his contribution to our understanding of how class has changed in Britain.

2.4. *Bernstein's non-ethnographic epistemology*

In his paper on "Research and languages of description" (Bernstein 1996: 134–146), Bernstein distinguishes two kinds of analysis, differing in their degrees of abstraction. On the one hand, there is what he calls an 'external language of description' – the frameworks and procedures for classifying, comparing, contrasting, sorting and organizing the recordings and observations from field-work. And on the other, there is the 'internal language of description', which involves more abstract models attempting to capture the fundamental principles that structure the patterns identified in field data. There is a strong resemblance in this account to research in syntax, and Bernstein is very explicit about the influence that linguistics had on the shape his theorizing took (1996: 127; also, e.g. 1971: 173). He refers to his own theory as a "generating grammar" (e.g. 1996: 127), and is open about being more interested in the abstract generative principles than in the more concrete specifics of class (1996: 126), which is also obvious in the proliferating grids of multi-directional arrows in his work, as well as in skimpy caricatures of class types like the 'Millers' (1971: 177). In consequence, Bernstein's is very much a deductive, theory-driven account of class processes, and a great deal of effort goes into configuring data in ways that make it directly relevant to his theoretical models. Yes, the empirical descriptions can still exceed what the model anticipates (1996: 129, 138), but Bernstein doesn't have the discursive disposition of the novelist, and his methods of work are emphatically non-ethnographic.^{6,7}

This has several consequences for the account of class. First, one of ethnography's key characteristics is its commitment to taking a long hard look at empirical processes that are hard to understand within established frameworks, and so when people start asking "What is the working class today? What gender is it? What colour is it" (Gilroy 1987: 19), ethnography is a potentially rather important resource. In the 1950s and 1960s when everyone thought they more or less knew what class meant, Bernstein's thumb-nail character portraits and picture task elicitations might just about cover the lower-level empirical specifics of language and class, leaving him free to model the underlying dynamics, but this is far harder when the ground changes radically. When class identities become problematic, it is necessary to give much more attention to bottom-up description of the kind promoted in ethnography, and if that is what it would have taken – if what was needed was ethnography – then in the light of his stated methodological preferences, it is not surprising that Bernstein moved away from the work on language and group culture. Of course, Bernstein was just as aware as Savage of changes in how "class is articulated, imagined and thought", and he himself discusses the formation of identities in reorganising

capitalism (1996: 75–80). But these insights are highly schematic, delivered in what Gemma Moss has described as Bernstein’s ‘marmite’ prose; there is nothing on identity and language; and it would be very hard overall to count this later work as a specifically socio-linguistic contribution to understanding the reworkings of class.

Second—and focusing here on the bracketing off of early Bernstein—different positions on ethnography help to explain the ‘Bernstein / Brice Heath paradox’—the extraordinary contrast between, on the one hand, the general *condemnation* of Bernstein’s work on language and class, as opposed to the almost universal *celebration* of Shirley Brice Heath’s on the other.⁸

2.5. *Bernstein and Heath*

There is actually a great deal of overlap in the ground covered by Bernstein and Heath. They both start by contrasting communities and then follow the lines of influence from different kinds of family relationship to different kinds of interaction, producing different ways of taking meaning, resulting in different educational careers. Indeed, in their neglect of inter-group politics,⁹ they share a common weakness. And yet while the refutation of Bernstein helped to make Labov’s “Logic of Non-Standard English” (1969) one of the most anthologised sociolinguistic papers in the 1970s, Heath’s take on the issues that concern Bernstein—her ethnographic remix in “What no bedtime stories mean” (1982)—became one of the most famous papers of the 1980s.

From what I have already said, it should be clear that the issue of being ethnographic or not is far from being just a trivial methodological matter. Rather than having a few social types quickly flashed at us, Heath’s work describes people in all their individual and contextual particularity, and whereas Bernstein presents ‘critical socialising contexts’ programmatically, as a necessary link in the chain between role-systems and language development, Heath’s equivalent idea, ‘literacy event’, works as a sensitising construct, opening up a huge body of descriptive work documenting hitherto unimagined complexities in reading and writing (the New Literacy Studies). Heath’s empirical three-way community comparison escapes the dichotomisation that grips Bernstein’s thinking, and the balance between theory and empirical description is almost wholly reversed, with theory emerging inductively from data and scholarly abstractions like ‘cognitive style’ given only very subsidiary walk-on parts. And whereas Bernstein’s work seeks to disclose the rules and mechanisms that generate the patterns of conduct and achievement that schools are all too familiar with, Heath’s work bathes familiar classroom behaviours in new light, opening new dimensions and possibilities.

Maybe if the ethnography of communication had been fully invented when Bernstein did his work on language and class (cf. Bernstein 1975: 154, 156), or if he had been less attracted to models of knowledge production propounded in formal linguistics, we would have had something more like *Ways with Words* in England in the 1970s and 1980s. Certainly, whereas Bernstein simply left it as a rather ominous black box, contemporary combinations of ethnography, conversation analysis, pragmatics and the semiotics of indexicality can now delve deep into ‘restricted code’, going far beyond the analysis of explicit propositions into robust and detailed description of eloquent silence, strategic indirectness, and allusive nuance (see, e.g. Clark 2003). But in spite of this, it is important to recognise that Heath and Bernstein were working with a very similar ontological map of the different macro-, meso- and micro-levels of social process that sociolinguistics should try to bring together. Yes, in his drive to fit all the jigsaw pieces together, Bernstein rushed past the image printed on each piece, but Heath and Bernstein were still working on very much the same puzzle, and in fact one can also see roughly the same pieces in John Gumperz’s work on Crosstalk (Gumperz et al. 1979).

2.6. *Bernstein, Heath and Gumperz united in a wider interdisciplinary field*

Like Bernstein, Gumperz takes large scale social structural trends as the point of departure, pinpoints critical institutional encounters, and tries to show how unrecognised differences in the communicative dispositions of subordinate groups produce disadvantage in institutional environments, in spite of the participants’ good intentions. Within this, of course, there are substantial differences. Gumperz addresses racial discrimination in employment rather than class underachievement in education, and rather than mother-and-child interaction, the focus is on ‘gate-keeping’ interviews. In addition, the processes that Gumperz covers are much more limited, so his claims seem less speculative. Compared with the task of linking dialogue-at-home to achievement-at-school, it is relatively easy tying interactional practice to institutional outcome if all you’re trying to do is see how discourse in an interview affects the decision ten minutes after. Discussion of different communicative dispositions is also potentially more straightforward if these have developed in another language in another country. But despite such differences and the larger contrast between Bernstein’s epistemology and Gumperz’s affiliation with ethnography, there is a broad family resemblance in the sites, phenomena and processes that they are seeking to connect.

So overall, although the differences between Bernstein, Heath and Gumperz loom large for specialists in applied and sociolinguistics, when they are placed