

Institution: University of Sheffield
Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Dialect and Identity: Improving Teaching and Public Understanding
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Joan Beal's research on dialect and identity has had far-reaching educational impact. Her publications are widely used in other HEIs (both in the UK and abroad) and in secondary school teaching, with economic benefits for publishers. She has also influenced curriculum reform through her consultancy for AQA, the largest provider of academic qualifications for 14-19 year olds in the UK. Beyond education, her role as a media commentator and as a consultant for the British Library Sociolinguistics & Education department has led to greater public understanding of the significance, and persistence, of dialect as a means of constructing and expressing identity.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research is the body of work on dialect and identity conducted by Beal and doctoral students under her supervision from the time of her appointment at the University of Sheffield in 2001, initially as Senior Lecturer and Director of the National Centre for English Cultural Tradition (NATCECT) and, since 2005, as Professor of English Language.</p> <p>Much of Beal's research has focussed on the typology and description of regional dialects, past and present, and she has contributed significantly to research on dialect and identity, contradicting the prevailing rhetoric of dialect levelling and loss by providing historical and contemporary evidence for heightened awareness both of the potential loss of regionally/ locally distinctive dialect features and of the power of specific 'enregistered' or 'stereotypical' features to perform and express identity (see R3, R4, R5). Her research demonstrates that at times of accelerated social and geographical mobility, such as the late nineteenth century, dialect contact created an enhanced awareness of social and regional dialect differences and led both to levelling and loss of traditional dialects and to the creation of new dialects and identities in emerging towns and cities. This has provided a much-needed historical perspective to studies of variation and change in present-day English, challenging dominant accounts of the rise of 'Estuary English' and the assumed impending death of other regional dialects in the context of globalisation.</p> <p>As Director of NATCECT, Beal was responsible for curating and developing the Archives of Cultural Tradition until their transfer to the University's Special Collections in Western Bank Library in January 2009. This collection includes recordings of Sheffield dialect made in the early 1980s, approximately 18 hours of which Beal had transcribed with the aid of a £4,500 grant from the British Academy (2002). This material has since been used as a historical comparator to data on contemporary Sheffield dialect collected more recently by doctoral students under Beal's supervision, research which has shown the rapidity of some local dialect change.</p> <p>Beal's reputation as the leading expert on English dialects and especially those of the North of England has been consolidated in a number of publications. She wrote the chapter on dialects of the North of England in <i>Varieties of English</i> (2008), the definitive handbook of dialects of English (R6), and has published four books on English dialects: <i>English in Modern Times</i> (2004) is the first book dedicated to the history of English in this period; <i>Language and Region</i> (2006) is an introductory textbook for the study of dialects, designed for A-level students; <i>An Introduction to Regional Englishes</i> (2010) is a more advanced introduction designed for university students and researchers; and <i>Urban North-Eastern Englishes</i> (2012) is the first full account of urban dialects in the north-east of England. Beal's role in building this field of studies is illustrated by the fact that one of the co-authors of this last book (Burbano-Elizondo) is a former PhD student (completion 2008).</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research

- R1. Beal, J., L. Burbano-Elizondo and C. Llamas (2012), *Urban North-Eastern English*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- R2. Beal, J. (2010), *An Introduction to Regional Englishes: Dialect Variation in England*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- R3. Beal, J. (2009), 'Enregisterment, Commodification and Historical Context: "Geordie" versus "Sheffieldish"', *American Speech* 84 (2): 138-156. [Returned REF2014]
- R4. Beal, J. (2009), "'You're not from New York City, you're from Rotherham': dialect and identity in UK "Indie" Music", *Journal of English Linguistics* 37: 223-240.
- R5. Beal, J. (2004), *English in Modern Times 1700-1945*. London: Arnold. [Returned RAE2008]
- R6. Beal, J. (2006), *Language and Region*. London: Routledge.

All articles appeared in peer-reviewed journals; all books are published by academic presses which also institute policies of peer-review.

4. Details of the impact

Beal's research into the history of English in the Late Modern period (1700-1945) and into dialect and identity in the North of England has changed public understanding of the relationships between language development, identity and local dialect, and she is now regarded as a leading expert in this field. Her work with the collections in the Archives of Cultural Tradition established the reputation of the School of English at the University of Sheffield as a centre for the study of dialect and local identity, which has aided the dissemination and reach of her work.

Impact on education

One important area of impact has been on the teaching of English Language in schools. Knowledge of language change is part of the English Language curriculum in primary and secondary schools, and outputs from Beal's research have been extensively used by teachers and students. Beal's *Language and Region* [R6] is part of Routledge's 'Intertext' series, developed as text-books for A-level English language. It has been recommended by AQA in their Teacher Resource Bank [S3]. Beal's research is also acknowledged as an influence on the development of 'All Talk', a BT-sponsored resource for the spoken language component of GCSE English launched in 2011 [S4, S5]. In a downloadable reading list on this website, *Language and Region* is recommended as a key book to teachers. 'All Talk' went out to every maintained school in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (well over 4,000). This resource was short-listed for a 2012 Nominet Internet Award and, as of 31 July 2013, had 5,643 subscribed members. Beal's 2004 monograph *English in Modern Times* [R5] is also used to teach the component on language change for A-Level English language. As one of the senior examiners for AQA writes, '*Professor Beal's work on language and region, exemplified by her Intertext book on this topic, has been very supportive of 16-19 English Language study. Her work has offered school and college English departments some invaluable resources. It has also informed assessment work by examination boards: for example, A Level English Language examiners at AQA have drawn insights from her work in order to construct their examination papers*' [S2].

Beal's books, *Language and Region*, *Introduction to Regional Englishes*, *English in Modern Times*, and *The English Language* (2012), are also key texts for undergraduate courses, used in HEIs across the UK (e.g. Leeds, Manchester, Newcastle, Sussex, UCL) and Europe (including Bergen, Freiburg, Santiago de Compostela, Trento, Uppsala). As one reviewer commented of *Language and Region*, '*it brings the study of dialect in line with the global realities of the present day, and [...], in doing so, it exposes undergraduates to functions of dialect within popular culture, tourism and even marketing*'; the book is praised for being '*practical throughout, aiming at making students aware of the features, functions and uses of their own local dialect and even helping them take the first steps in research on the field*' (Juan Camilo Conde Silvestre, *Atlantis Journal*, 29.1, 2007).

Impact on educational policy

Beal's standing in the field, and the acknowledged importance of her work as teaching resources, led to her appointment in 2012 as a consultant to AQA on curriculum reform, reviewing the national content of the A-Level in English Language and working to improve transition planning between post-sixteen and undergraduate courses. Beal delivered the keynote address at AQA's stakeholder conference in September 2012. The Head of English at AQA [S1] acknowledges the impact on their policy of the insight that Beal provided into historical perceptions of – and approaches to – linguistic 'correctness', and to the teaching and assessment of grammar. This historicised context (which shows how grammatical rules are continually shifting and contested) has led to AQA rethinking how linguistic competency is assessed; in particular, they are committed to considering a candidate's ability to apply (rather than simply replicate) grammatical rules and to developing more progressive and creative ways of doing this (e.g. through disambiguation of different meanings).

Economic impact for publishers

Beal's books on language are written with a wide readership in mind and, as a result, have wide appeal. To 31 July 2013, *Language and Region* had, for example, sold over 1,440 copies in paperback.

Impact on public understanding of issues of language and identity

Research into dialect and identity is of considerable interest outside the academy, and Beal's public profile is evidence of her standing as a leading authority on dialect and identity in the UK. She was a member of the advisory panel for the British Library's 'Voices of the UK' project (2009-12), which makes publicly available significant amounts of data from a nationwide survey of spoken English since the 1950s, for non-specialist users as well as trained researchers. Beal played a crucial role in advising the curators of this project about the description, transcription, and interpretation of vernacular speech data. Material from 'Voices of the UK' archive, and interpretative information about it, featured prominently in the British Library's *Evolving English* exhibition (2010-11), the first exhibition to explore the English language in its national and international diversity. The British Library's Lead Curator for Sociolinguistics & Education [S8] acknowledges the way that Beal's contribution to the exhibition content ensured that the '*interpretation had credibility*'. The exhibition attracted 147,419 visitors (the third highest attendance ever for a British Library Exhibition, and the highest attendance for a winter show by a considerable margin). Beal also participated in the accompanying public events programme. Her public lecture 'Cuddy-wifters, cack-handers and coochies: a celebration of regional English' was sold out (attendance of 255) and attracted a very broad audience. It was also podcast, via the website (151,556 unique visitors) for the duration of the exhibition and was thus available to a worldwide audience.

Beal is regularly consulted by national and local radio to explicate issues of dialect and identity. Recent programmes include *Down off the Pedestals* (BBC Radio 4, 2011), in which Beal featured in conversation with the poet Simon Armitage about the nineteenth-century poet Samuel Laycock, who wrote in Lancashire dialect; this programme was also available on the BBC website as a podcast.

Beal's research has attracted attention in the local and national press, thus raising awareness of the importance of dialect to local identity and acting as a counterpoint to research and media coverage that emphasises the loss and levelling of dialects. The reach of Beal's research is further enabled by her accessible style and lack of pretension. For instance, Beal's 2009 article on the Arctic Monkeys, originally published in an academic, peer-reviewed journal (R4), was subsequently the subject of articles in the *Sheffield Star*, *Yorkshire Post* and *Independent* newspapers as well as featuring on Arctic Monkeys' fan forums: they quote her arguing, for instance, that '*If there's somebody as prominent as Alex Turner using a certain accent, it attracts attention [...] Nobody knew what it meant before, but thanks to them words like "mardy" are being used nationally*' [S9].

In April 2009, she was interviewed by Ben Leach of the *Telegraph* on the matter of whether a well-known singer (Cheryl Cole) should modify her accent in order to succeed in the USA [S10]. The story was picked up by local and national newspapers from the *Sunday Sun* in Newcastle to *The Sun*, *Telegraph*, *Metro*, and *The Scotsman*, as well as *The Herald* (Ireland). It was also the subject of comment on several fan websites who admired her defence of the singer/celebrity's Geordie accent.

In sum, against the grain of accepted narratives of centralisation, standardisation, and globalisation, Beal's work on dialect, accent, region, and identity has had these specific impacts: it has helped to sustain confidence in regional identities and ways of speaking, locally and nationally; it has shaped more responsive methods of assessing linguistic competence in public examinations; and it has increased public understanding of the inter-relationship between language and identity.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- S1. An email on file from the Head of AQA can corroborate Beal's impact on A-Level curriculum and assessment.
- S2. An email on file from a senior examiner for AQA examiner can corroborate Beal's impact on A-Level teaching and examination.
- S3. Listing of *Language and Region* at Teacher Resource Bank / GCE English Language A / Resources List / Version 1.0: <http://store.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/pdf/AQA-2700-W-TRB-RL.PDF>
- S4. Listing of *Language and Region* as a key resource on 'All Talk' and acknowledgement by the author of Beal's research as an influence: <http://tinyurl.com/ngw7yhq>
- S5. The Full English Educational Consultancy can corroborate impact of Beal's research on the development of 'All Talk' and subscription figures for the resource.
- S6. Review of *An Introduction to Regional Englishes* <http://tinyurl.com/km94l4k>
- S7. Review of *Language and Region* <http://tinyurl.com/mkk2eac>
- S8. An email on file from the British Library's Lead Curator for Sociolinguistics & Education can corroborate Beal's impact on 'Voices of the UK' and *Evolving English*.
- S9. Article in *Sheffield Star*: <http://tinyurl.com/lxd2j76>
- S10. Article in *Telegraph*: <http://tinyurl.com/q5vc7wj>