

<p>Institution: University of Leeds</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 29: English Language and Literature</p>
<p>Title of case study: The BBC ‘Voices’ Projects: Transforming the public and professional understanding of the nation’s speech</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study describes a unique collaboration between Professor Clive Upton and researchers at the University of Leeds, the BBC and the British Library (BL), examining language variation. As a result of a programme assembling and researching the largest recorded archive of dialects and speech patterns assembled in the UK, two major interlinked forms of impact were generated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Informing public understanding of dialect and English language use, thereby validating diverse regional and national identities. ii. Contributing to the professional practice and goals of the BBC and the BL through policy enhancement, training, and developing broadcast and exhibition content.
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Professor Upton (appointed as Lecturer in Language in 1997, since 2012 Emeritus Professor) is a leading dialectologist whose research has been shaped by, and in turn advanced, the 65-year renowned study of English dialect at the University of Leeds. Upton’s expertise lies in regional English dialectal variation; he has acted as pronunciation consultant for the <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> and with responsibility for the British element of the <i>Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English</i>. His research has captured and explored social attitudes towards variation; elucidated the importance of the means and media by which dialectical variation is recorded and analysed; and has significantly expanded the data to evidence the continuing vitality of local variation.</p> <p>Upton began his research as RA, in 1975, to Professor Harold Orton, who initiated, at the University, the only systematic series survey of the dialects of England to be carried out, the <i>Survey of English Dialects</i> (SED). Upton has been associated with SED for 40 years. The most recent publication in the SED series, coordinated and devised by Upton but supported by a team, <i>SED The Dictionary and Grammar</i>, made available for the first time the material gathered by the historic SED, while adding a systematic analysis of the syntactic patterns of various dialects [1]. With AHRB funding and acting as PI with support of Co-I Oliver Pickering, then curator of Special Collections of the University’s Brotherton Library, Upton developed the ‘Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture’ [5], a programme that recovered, digitised, catalogued and made accessible, via the Web, the extensive collection of sound recordings (previously dispersed in the Brotherton Library and the School of English) amassed by the SED and the Institute of Dialect and Folk Life Studies.</p> <p>Upton’s work with the SED gave rise to a second AHRC-funded research project, ‘Whose Voices?’ [6], awarded to Professor Sally Johnson (also then at the University) and Upton, to develop a partnership, initially research-based, between the University and the BBC. The ‘Whose Voices?’ project had a twofold remit: first, the examination of issues of linguistic ideology as evidenced by the BBC and discussants on the BBC’s ‘Voices’ website; and second, the collection and interpretation of hitherto little-understood matters of community language use, especially in the seldom-explored area of local vocabulary. The BBC ‘Voices’ project produced the largest recorded research archive of dialects and speech patterns ever assembled, with greater breadth and depth of coverage even than SED work, and has been described by leading language scholar Professor David Crystal as ‘the most significant popular survey of regional English ever undertaken in Britain’ [A].</p>

Since 2008 and the retirement of Johnson, Upton (as PI on the project) was joined by RA Dr Milani (replaced by Birch, departed 2010), and two doctoral students, Turner and Thompson, whose PhD theses developed the ideological and methodological matters in the research. 'Whose Voices?' allowed the Leeds team of researchers to advance the area, for example in developing a 'hypermodal' approach: a methodology requiring the researcher to account for visual, as well as phonic, function in language representation in the new media [2, 4]. Other research attended to computer-mediated communication multilingualism [3] and resulted in a book exploring language ideologies in modern media [2].

Through Upton, 'Whose Voices?' also worked with a BBC-inspired project at the BL, 'Voices of the UK', funded by the Leverhulme [7], to develop and deposit recordings in the Sound Archive. Research undertaken in both projects cumulatively underlined that, in spite of standardisation and speakers' increased exposure to other accents and dialects through television and radio, regional and social language variation is thriving. Through the collaborations a better understanding was gained of the language varieties of users, engaging and in turn informing local populations on matters of significance to their social structures, networks, and identities. In addition, the research generated new methodologies for how dialectical variation is captured, disseminated and analysed.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references).

Book

1) Clive Upton, David Parry and J.D.A. Widdowson, *Survey of English Dialects: The Dictionary and Grammar* (London: Routledge, 1994). Reviewed as 'impressive' and 'sophisticated' in the *Review of English Studies*. Available on request.

Book chapters

2) Sally Johnson, Tommaso Milani and Clive Upton, 'Language Ideological Debates on the BBC Voices Website: Hypermodality in Theory and Practice', in Sally Johnson and Tommaso Milani, eds, *Language Ideologies and Media Discourse: Texts, Practices, Politics* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 223-251. Edited book developed from papers presented at conference at Leeds 2007 under the auspices of the International Association for Applied Linguistics. Available on request.

3) Bethan Davies, Tommaso M. Milani and Will Turner, 'Multilingual Nation online? Possibilities and Constraints on the BBC *Voices* Website', in Sheena Gardner and Marilyn Martin-Jones, eds, *Multilingualism, Discourse and Ethnography* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 197-216. Edited by prominent scholars in English Language and published by 'Routledge Critical Studies in Multilingualism,' series devoted to 'the publishing of original research, of global scope and relevance. Available on request.

Journal articles

4) Sally Johnson, Tommaso Milani and Clive Upton, 'Whose Voices?: A Hypermodal Approach to Language Ideological Debates on the BBC Voices Website', in *Lancaster Working Papers* No. 127, Centre for Language in Social Life, Lancaster University (2008). Peer-reviewed journal. Downloadable from <http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/groups/clsl/current.htm>.

External funding

5) AHRB Resource Enhancement Grant RE/AN5319/APN13627, £267,360, for project 'The Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture', awarded to Clive Upton and Oliver Pickering, 2002-2005. Rated 'outstanding' by the Research Council; selected as one of five projects nationally for audit by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the Research Council's report to Government.

6) AHRC Grant AH/E509002, £459,274, for project 'Whose Voices?: Language Ideological

Impact case study (REF3b)

Debates on the Interactive website of the BBC Voices Project', awarded to Sally Johnson and Clive Upton, 2007-2011.

7. Leverhulme Trust Grant F/00 122/AP, £225,000, for project 'Voices of the UK', awarded to Clive Upton and Jonathan Robinson (British Library, London), ultimately passed to Robinson, 2009-2012.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Engagement with the public and with public institutions was both intrinsic to the research and a marked form of impact. As 'Whose Voices?' matured alongside 'Voices of the UK', a distinguishing feature of the venture became ongoing feedback between the collaborating partners of Leeds University, the BBC and the BL. Upton's research into vernacular language helped the BBC and BL to develop strong relationships with communities by way of the language varieties that characterise them. For the purposes of this case study, the impacts have been differentiated into (i) benefits for public understanding and (ii) benefits for professional practice, although given the educational and cultural remits of the key partners, these are necessarily intertwined.

i. Informing the public understanding of dialect variation

The reach of the projects was significant. Creating participation in BBC 'Voices' and making a regional vocabulary archive of c.730,000 items available, 'Whose Voices?' encouraged and informed national debate on regionalism and local identity. Over 84,000 individuals contributed, with a website (still live: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/>) enabling the public to input material directly producing over 8,500 online contributions of data, including 1,201 recorded speakers in 302 interviews. The project was given 10 broadcast hours of TV and 200 hours of radio time, including 7 x R4 programmes at peak times and a dedicated 'Voices Week' across BBC local and regional networks. A further 111 newspaper articles reached a 43.7 million readership [A].

Significant community-focused public benefits were recognised in the British Academy's booklet, which was launched in the House of Commons as part of Universities Week (17 June 2010) [A]. As one of 10 case studies and the only representative of English studies, 'Whose Voices?' illustrated how arts research contributed to social empowerment and how 'words, accents and dialects reveal much about our national and community identities.'

Upton's insights on dialectical variation stimulated public institutions to reach widely into communities. No other BBC project 'has reached so far, into so many communities' [C]. An online Voices map (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/results/wordmap/>) created engagement throughout the UK to share information 'about communities to communities all over the UK.' Upton developed an editorial brief to train local audio recorders to capture what was significant in everyday language use. Crucially, the project enriched the cultural life of geographically isolated UK communities, such as one village in Scotland which obtained a sense of its place on the UK map via the engagement with BBC audio recorders. The process of assembling the recordings enabled the BBC to understand the significance of dialectical differences and to engage directly with often-new communities creating a horizontal, rather than top-down, relationship. The broadcasts and website validated and shared dialectical differences *between* communities, for example with 'recordings of Polari the Gay slang, and people... talking about Scouse Jamaican Patois,' where previously 'outside of the groups that were using those languages, most people didn't even know those dialects existed . . . now they've shared them and anyone can hear them used.' This dissemination of dialectical differences helped the BBC promote diversity [all corroborated in C].

BBC's 'Voices'-generated materials were deposited in the British Library Sound Archive and used in the BL's 'Evolving English' public exhibition (November 2010 - April 2011). According to the BL [D], Upton's codification of that material was 'invaluable' in helping to build the content and knowledge underpinning the exhibition, enhancing the collection and making a framework for accessing it. Upton's study of local detail brought new research insights that helped the BL make its collection 'more accessible. . . more widely available'. 'Evolving English' proved to be the most

successful winter exhibition ever at the BL, attracting a wider-than-usual audience profile. The research was drawn upon to generate both public events and a learning programme attracting a big schools audience (many schools came from outside BL's usual constituencies), with most events sold out. 150,000 visitors in total attended the exhibition, an average 1,015 visitors per day, with the majority of visitors new to BL and a high level of press interest throughout [D]. The research enabled the BL to generate interest in and increase public understanding of their collections. Against expectations, they found that 'there was an untapped thirst for information, and a really popular interest' in the collection [all corroborated in D]. The exhibition website, which remains live, contains podcasts by Upton, Crystal, Barry Cryer, Steven Pinker and others (<http://www.bl.uk/whatson/podcasts/prevexhibition/english/index.html>).

ii. Changing the professional practice of public organisations and helping them to meet their organisational objectives

In level and nature, public engagement in 'Whose Voices?' helped the BBC fulfil its published 'public purposes' of 'sustaining citizenship and civil society', 'promoting education and learning' and 'representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities.' As the largest joint partnership with which the organisation has been involved, 'Voices' represented a new way of working for the BBC, in sustained collaboration with academics. The project also impacted upon the BBC's deployment of web resources for engaging audiences. Informed by the project's research on media [3, 4], the BBC gained enhanced appreciation of its website practices. 'Voices' was the first time the internet was central to a BBC project, 'and the way in which it engaged people from all over the UK probably has influenced how BBC projects have used the web since.' The research determined editorial policy on wider programme development; for example the online and interactive element of 'History of the World in 100 Objects' was directly inspired by 'Voices' [C].

The research generated materials which helped the BL to meet its published strategic aim of guaranteeing access for future generations. The collection and exhibition contributed to their aim of 'enriching the cultural life of the nation' and have furthered BL goals of 'growing the world's knowledge base' and 'promoting the public understanding of social science'. 'Voices' also inspired strategic change in the organisation. Whereas previously exhibitions were typically object- or collection-led, with 'Evolving English' the BL realised the potential of a thematic-led exhibition drawing on different parts of the collections. 'Without a doubt it enabled us to explore new themes and look at presenting collections in a new way.' Having an academic as a core member of the Library Advisory Committee was unusual but with Upton's presence the BL learned that 'having that connection to the research certainly made a real difference to the success of the project and... for future working, it reinforces to us how important it is to have that sort of collaboration with academics' [D].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

A) British Academy, *Past Present and Future: The Public Value of the Humanities and Social Sciences* (London: The British Academy, 2010). Available here: <http://www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/364>

B) AHRC report, *Economic impact case studies of arts and humanities research*. Case study 5: 'The Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture', available on request.

C) BBC Project Director, BBC 'Voices', Report of interview approved by interviewee (23 July 2013) plus email correspondence, available on request.

D) Head of Social Science, The British Library, Report of interview approved by interviewee (26 July 2013) plus email correspondence, available on request.