ANALYSING 21ST CENTURY BRITISH ENGLISH

CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE *VOICES* PROJECT

EDITED BY CLIVE UPTON AND BETHAN L. DAVIES

ANALYSING TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BRITISH ENGLISH

The *Voices* project of the British Broadcasting Corporation, a recent high-profile media investigation, gathered contemporary English dialect samples from all over the UK and invited contributions from the public to a dedicated website. This book explores both issues of ideology and representation behind the media project and uses to which the emerging data can be put in the study of language variation and change.

Two lead-in chapters, written from the complementary perspectives of a broadcast media specialist, Simon Elmes, and an academic linguist, David Crystal, set the project in the BBC's historical, social, and linguistic contexts. Following these, authorities in a range of specialisms concerned with uses and representations of language varieties address various aspects of the project's potential, in three broad sections:

- Linguistic explorations of the representations of language and the debates on language evoked by the data.
- The linguistic product of the project, including lexical, phonological, and grammatical investigations.
- Technical aspects of creating maps from the large electronic *Voices* database.

An interactive companion website provides the means to access, explore, and make use of raw linguistic data, along with interpretive maps created from it, all accompanied by full explanations.

Analysing Twenty-first Century British English brings together key research and is essential reading for advanced undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and researchers working in the areas of language variation, dialect, and sociolinguistics.

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PREFACE

Clive Upton and Bethan L. Davies

Voices was a project conceived in the British Broadcasting Corporation to take a 'snapshot' of the everyday speech and speech-attitudes of its United Kingdom audience at the start of the twenty-first century. It was seen as informing popular understanding of English and other languages, generating programmes for national and local radio and television, and material for the BBC website and publications. It was realised from the start that those concerned with the technical discussion of linguistic issues would benefit from project involvement too. This book makes use of the second of these possibilities.

The contributions to this book are written by a wide range of specialists in both broadcasting and academic language study. The first two chapters set the scene for *Voices* in its historical and immediate contexts, from the points of view of, respectively, a senior BBC producer who has been responsible for many language-focused programmes and series, and an academic with unparalleled broadcasting experience. The chapters that follow these are closely connected to two large research projects making use of *Voices* findings: *Whose Voices?* funded by Arts and Humanities Research Council grant AH/E509002, and *Voices of the UK* funded by Leverhulme Trust grant F/00 122/AP. Four chapters concentrate on issues of language ideology, looking at both the BBC's actions in setting up *Voices* and disseminating its information, and what that information tells us of linguistic matters through public debate. The remaining chapters see their writers taking portions of raw language material generated by the project, processing it to explore a variety of issues and experimenting with it to test its potential.

Voices proved to be a considerable broadcasting success in 2005, with the ripples from it extending through the BBC up to the present time. The intention of this book is threefold: it celebrates an imaginative step by the Corporation; it provides information across a wide range of subjects of linguistic interest and concern; and, as importantly, it suggests just some of the possible ways forward into an existing body of material, some of which is made available through the accompanying website (www.routledge.com/cw/upton).

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VOICES: A UNIQUE BBC ADVENTURE

Simon Elmes

When an organization – and not only the BBC – announces a 'major new…' anything, we tend these days to become suspicious. The odour of hype, of over-selling, and of slight hucksterism hangs round the phrase like cheap perfume. Sometimes, though of course, it is perfectly valid – no-one would complain that the great Radio 4 series *A History of the World in a Hundred Objects* was anything but 'major'. And in many ways the same can be said for *Voices*, a somewhat less trumpeted yet equally ground-breaking initiative on dialect and local language undertaken by a lot of BBC people, but, critically, steered by a small, committed handful, in 2005.

Whatever the precise merits or demerits of the term 'major', the BBC has a long and intimate relationship with language, and with the English language in particular. John Reith and his lieutenants who were, ninety years ago now, in at the very beginning of what was then the British Broadcasting Company, were severe in their precepts about the organization, and from the earliest days 'correctness of speech' was emphasized (though, they insisted, it shouldn't be stilted). 'Correct speech' became a talisman alongside correct dress. BBC announcers were required to wear dinner jackets at the microphone, and in April 1926 the legendary Advisory Committee on Spoken English was set up to regulate and rule on the language used when broadcasting, with luminaries including the then Poet Laureate Robert Bridges, Bernard Shaw, American-born essayist and critic Logan Pearsall-Smith, and later Rudyard Kipling (Briggs 1961: 221). 'Broadcast' itself was one of the first words they debated. How should this new term, or at least a new meaning of an old one, be conjugated? The Great Ones decided it should work on the model of 'cast'; thus they recommended 'we broadcast' not 'we broadcast*ed*'. It is a confusion that still routinely has non-native British English speakers in a muddle.

The formality and seriousness with which the BBC took language from the very beginning belies, however, the nature of broadcasting. Programme-makers and broadcasters are creatures of their times, who love to reflect the spirit of

the moment, to catch fashion as it wafts by. It is how we 'connect with our audiences'. So for all its stiff and starchy rule-making and Squeersism about the way people spoke on the wireless, an equal and opposite tug for naturalness has always been felt and enjoyed by audience and programme-maker alike. Indeed, presentation and the 'broadcast voice' were obsessions of early critics and writers on the new medium – the columns of *Radio Times* were often filled with debates on the subject and, in an early instruction to religious broadcasters, pulpit styles were definitely off-limits:

> You are asked to remember … that your vast audience is not a crowd or a congregation but various individuals to whom you are speaking in the intimacy of their homes…. Thousands of them will 'switch off' their sets if the opening is unattractive.
>
> (Briggs 1965: 235)

Today, there is no Advisory Committee on language in the BBC, nor should there be. Long gone is the prescriptivist mentality that would confine language in boxes of so-called perfection. Broadcasters recognize that words and styles evolve (despite what many listeners would wish). Today, the Pronunciation Unit is there to help out on difficult words, and radio producers are routinely encouraged to offer announcers help on how to pronounce names and terms that might present problems. But for the most part, any regulation is limited to the editing of scripts.

When it comes to programmes on language, the BBC, whether on radio or television, has usually (and quite understandably) placed appealing to its audiences ahead of a more academically-driven sense of mission. So while full of real linguistic substance, even Victoria Coren's wonderful television series *Balderdash and Piffle*, in which she attempted to find earlier-than-existing citations for terms in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, was in thrall to entertainment in its format. The choice of the terms under scrutiny was (quite rightly in broadcasting terms) driven by popular appeal rather than by any form of academic need, and the format of the series was given real buzz and excitement by turning the assessment of the 'evidence' for ante-dating of first citations into a sort of Star Chamber of the *OED*'s great and good.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with any of that, but the Reithian mantra of Inform, Educate, and Entertain will always be tripartite, and the entertaining element almost always has a knack of ending up infringing upon the educating part. So with language broadcasting, projects almost always end up being entertainingly unscientific, made for broadcast rather than as definitive research tools. It is apparent that Reith was concerned about this risk to serious broadcasting from the outset:

> Reith's big fear was what he called 'the brute force of monopoly' might disappear and competition would force down standards. He believed in

public service broadcasting. He did not invent the expression 'entertaining, informing and educating' – that was the American broadcasting pioneer David Sarnoff in 1922 – but he made it so central to the way he ran the BBC that his name became a byword for it: Reithian. Pure entertainment was a prostitution of broadcasting.

(BBC 2012)

Voices, in 2005, is the only exception I know of that offered both true investigative rigour and entertaining broadcasting. But to tell the story of *Voices*, we need to start more than fifty years earlier.

When Harold Orton and Eugen Dieth's great Survey of English Dialects (SED) was begun in 1950 (Orton 1962: 9), it was laid down on formal academic lines. Respondents were selected specifically to reflect a good locational spread in mainly rural locations across England, to offer the richest range of dialectal variants. Their responses to a 1300-item questionnaire were written down phonetically, and conversations were recorded on-site by fieldworkers like the late Stanley Ellis, with whom I had the privilege and great pleasure of working over the years. The recordings are held by the British Library and by the BBC archive, and are wonderful slices of country life from an England half a century and more ago. There are, it is true, aspects of the survey that I personally find unsatisfactory: it is substantially rural, selected to emphasize extremes of dialect use rather than to reflect some sort of median picture, and concentrated on older and often very elderly informants. And of course, as a Survey of *English* Dialects, it does not cover Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland (though see Upton, this volume, on this). However, it is a massive and beautifully organized piece of work that allowed for the first time the establishment of a truly accurate linguistic picture of England.

What it was *not*, however, for all its use of audio recording to capture its informants' contributions, was programmes. And so we immediately crunch into the dilemma already mentioned of programme-making set against formalized and rigorous academic enquiry. However, it has not stopped plenty of people over the years making wonderful programmes about the way we speak, scientific or unscientific. I think, in my own lifetime, of Harold Williamson's hugely popular series on radio in the 1950s and 60s called *Children Talking*, which combined the winsome magic of childhood speech and a child's-eye view of the world with big questions of life and death, good and evil. And today, the estimable Stephen Fry has cornered the market, on television as on Radio 4, in programmes about the development of language.

When I first had the opportunity myself to make programmes, Stanley Ellis came up with the idea of revisiting the SED recordings made some 30 years earlier. I, however, was keen to go further and also carry out some new recordings, to spread the net beyond the SED's terrain and locate the voices within the place they reflected. The regional language would be the *vehicle* for the stories of the people and the places they inhabited. We soon discovered that the SED recordings

were fairly intractable fare for ordinary programme-making, being rather dense and quite often incomprehensible to the ordinary listener given only one chance to seize the meaning. So *Talk of the Town, Talk of the Country* became altogether new work, with informants (very unscientifically) chosen to reflect a range of ages (we especially wanted to hear from young dialect speakers to chart the changing face of dialect). These were 18 programmes locked into communities, from the Western Isles to Devon, from urban Belfast, Bristol, and Glasgow to DH Lawrence's Nottinghamshire. And they were full of stories told in rich local language. Ellis provided not only a beautiful, lyrical script evoking his own journeys through these places, but also the formal analysis of the consummate linguist spotting nuance and variety and offering expert commentary. They were glorious programmes to make, and I hope, too, to listen to. They were not, however, a survey from which formal data could be extracted.

Likewise, *Word of Mouth*, Radio 4's regular magazine programme about language, which was started by Frank Delaney in 1992 and today continues under the tutelage of Michael Rosen, has for twenty years kept a watchful eye on the way we speak. And Melvyn Bragg's 26-episode *The Routes of English* which I produced devoted one whole series of six documentaries to exploring dialect in the UK. Again, keeping listeners engaged as well as informed was the aim; so while instructive, it could never be exhaustive. Once more the aims of broadcaster and academic researcher diverged rather than coincided.

This is for me precisely why *Voices* was such an exceptional project, a truly 'major' new venture for the BBC. In March 2003, following the widespread interest aroused by *Routes of English*, I was contacted by the BBC Editor of New Media in Cardiff, Mandy Rose, who had come up with a simple and brilliant idea: to 'celebrate the diverse languages, dialects and accents of the UK':

> From black Londoners in Peckham to Loyalists in Portadown, from Treorchy to Taunton, Liverpool to Lanarkshire, the geography of the UK can be mapped in accents and dialects. The diversity of the country can be also reflected in the many languages – both indigenous and immigrant – now spoken here. In an ambitious multi-platform project involving our audience and a range of expert partners BBC Nations and Regions will conduct an audit of the ways we talk across the UK in the early 21st century.
>
> (Rose, personal communication)

It so happened that at the time I was thinking along somewhat similar lines, though Mandy's idea was bigger, better and far more scientifically conceived than mine. Her proposal also had the unbeatable central component of interactive technology, which would make the eventual *Voices* proposition so dynamic and rooted in ordinary listeners' experience. David Crystal, who already had a long track record of BBC Language broadcasting, and Clive Upton, Reader then Professor of Modern English Language at the University of Leeds, were

engaged as academic partners, and when family matters overtook Mandy, she passed the baton of leadership to Faith Mowbray. Faith, David, and Clive were superb advocates and advisers for the project, and between them gave it both the organising structure and academic rigour that would both ensure that it happened on time, to schedule and pretty much in the form that Mandy had dreamed.

The other key member of the team was an outstanding radio broadcaster whose recruitment was central to the practical infrastructure of the *Voices* project, without which it would quickly have foundered however much goodwill and energy the rest of us could contribute. He was Mick Ord, who at the time was Managing Editor of the BBC's local radio station in Liverpool, Radio Merseyside. A remarkable journalist and utterly down-to-earth realist, Mick has a marvellous imagination that allows ideas to soar. With Faith providing clear, disciplined leadership and tremendous inventiveness to the essential web proposition – the interactive *Voices* dialect map – and Mick cajoling and demanding and inspiring his colleagues across BBC Local Radio to get out and give their all to this strange project (so different from the normal fare of local council disputes, traffic problems, and crime), *Voices* had the team to make it happen.

The other vital element was money. Pat Loughrey, then Director of Nations and Regions for the BBC, is a lover of words, of poetry, and of people. He had the vision, and the pockets, to be able to see just what a clever piece of work this project was. Not only would it generate hours of stories by and about his listeners to fill airtime in each of the 40 local stations and the national stations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, but it would be a marvellously publicizable event, in the middle of sleepy August, that would shout 'BBC local' and 'BBC regional' loud and clear to the country and within the Corporation itself. It also offered an unparalleled academic opportunity to set on record the way the nation was speaking to and about itself in the first decade of the new millennium. For a man who is today Warden of Goldsmiths, University of London, the academic achievement of *Voices* was surely not insignificant.

And so the project was set in motion. Mandy Rose's original ambition in 2003 was:

> a website featuring a multi-layered interactive map [providing] an engaging and educational interface for exploring the subject. Beneath the map the website provides a wealth of background information. Once launched the website will be a growing, live space where users can add their own voices … around a number of themes.
>
> (Rose, personal communication)

To achieve this, the team needed a methodology, a way of gathering material that would provide the data in a sufficiently rigorous manner to satisfy the demands

of comparative study within the map. Random collection would simply not do. At the same time, the material gathered by the project needed to satisfy what is – as I have demonstrated – that competing criterion of engaging broadcasting. Enter Clive Upton and his team with a standardized set of questions, based on their existing research (Llamas 1999; Kerswill *et al.* 1999; see Crystal, Upton, this volume) which would, it was hoped, elicit from interviewees interestingly contrasted local terms and constructions. These were focused round six nexuses of ordinary life: 'how you feel'; 'what you do'; 'what they wear'; 'getting personal'; 'what you call them'; and 'inside and outside'. Within these core areas there were a set of very specific questions to be asked – so under 'what they wear' were questions about words for CLOTHES, TROUSERS, and CHILDREN'S SOFT SHOES WORN FOR PE, while under 'getting personal' the terms sought were for RICH, LACKING MONEY, MOODY, LEFT-HANDED, ATTRACTIVE, and so on. Now, these may have seemed somewhat random, but in fact Clive and his team, with their deep knowledge of dialect patterns in the UK, and from the vast resources contained in Orton's SED and previous less methodical dialect surveys and dictionaries, had a pretty fair idea of which terms had in the past demonstrated the greatest diversity and regionality (local terms for LEFT-HANDED for example are as widespread and various as the phenomenon itself). Brilliant too was the way the Leeds method built these research criteria into an attractive and easy-to-reference diagram that looked something like an elongated early sputnik, but which everyone soon came to know as the 'Spidergram' (Figure 1.1).

Thus the enquiry was decently funded, it had a sizeable chunk of academic rigour, and above all it had managerial support within the sprawling BBC. But that was only half the battle, or indeed barely half. Orton's SED took his team well over a decade to capture its 300+ records of how *England* spoke. To achieve what was wanted, it would need to take a tenth of that time. And that meant days, weeks, and months of hard foot-slogging on the part of an army of field-workers. For *Voices*, some 51 'audio-gatherers' as they were rather unattractively termed sallied out from the UK's local and national radio stations to find communities of people with some common thread of interest. And this was where robust methodological structure met the editorially- and entertainment-driven components that are the concern of broadcasters. Amazingly, and uniquely in my experience, the relationship turned out to be a happy and productive one. The fieldworkers were given the task of identifying groups of people in their local or regional radio station area who might be tapped for responses to the survey questionnaire. Groups should represent all layers of society, with as wide an age range as possible, although young children were excluded. There should also be a good geographical spread across the local region in order to contrast urban and rural areas.

The audio-gatherers were given a day's training in questioning and recording technique and issued with precise instructions about how the group discussions were to be conducted. Given the clever range of questions Upton and his team
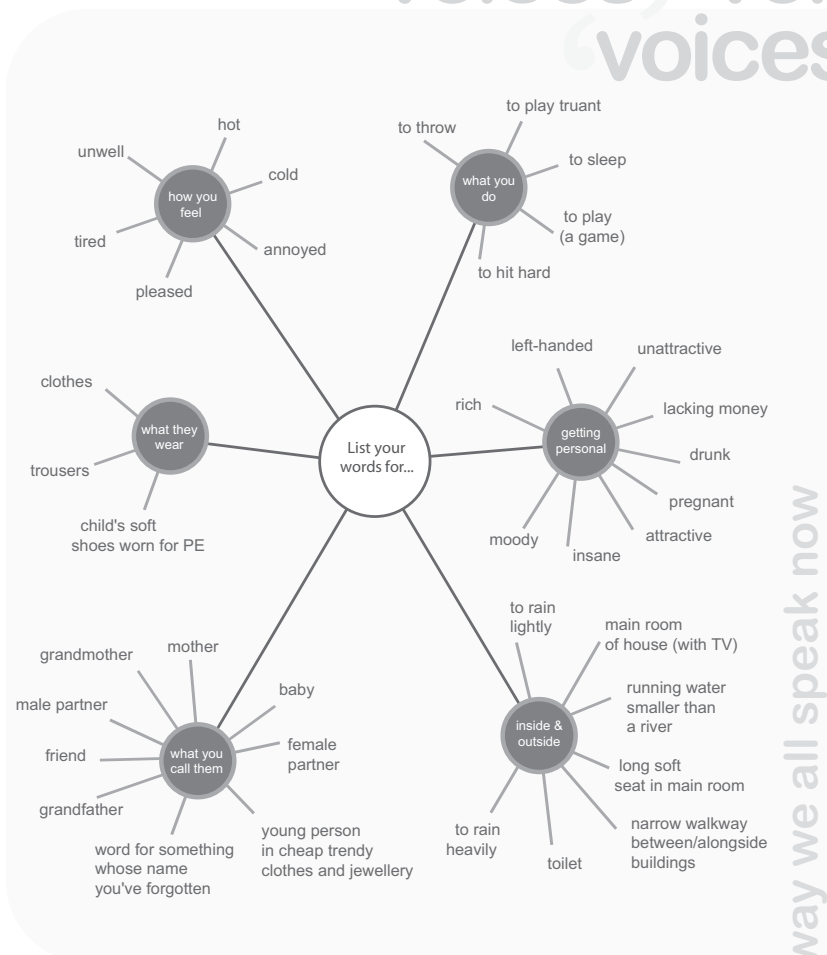
FIGURE 1.1   The BBC *Voices* Spidergram

at Leeds had devised, entertaining and lively discussion was almost guaranteed. But consistency in the methodology was vital in order to allow proper academic comparison to be made. So the audio-gatherers were instructed not to offer answers, while nonetheless guiding the conversation around the topics on the Spidergram. In total, 321 separate interviewing sessions were carried out with 1,200 participants, producing the equivalent of a whole calendar month's worth of continuous recordings (Robinson *et al.*, this volume).

Diversity and range was sought at every level, so amongst the groups of local people the audio-gatherers recruited to the cause were hairdressers, barbershop-singers, Young Farmers, grandmothers, historical battle recreationists, teachers, supermarket workers, salad-factory workers, lifeboatmen, aristocrats, gay men, poetry fans, farm-labourers, women golfers, travellers, bowls-club members, agriculture students, A-Level students, members of a fishermen's choir, rugby league fans, garage hands, Tiree islanders, café staff, Welsh hoteliers, Midlands Methodists, parish councillors, Polish immigrants, luxury car salesmen, ex-miners, St Kitts immigrants, Barbadians from Reading, Jamaican Brummies and a group of young actors…

Interviews ranged in length from about 45 minutes to two hours; some were tightly packed with linguistic detail, others meandered delightfully round the intricacies of the speakers' lives, stopping to take in particular dialect terms when the moment arose. And this was where the colour and sharpness of individual experience that makes fascinating broadcasting came in. Not only were the contributors – or as I suppose we should, being suitably academic, call them, 'informants' – recruited from within BBC local and regional radio broadcast areas, the stations themselves made a whole week of programming out of the interviews and the rich seam of stories about local life and history. So in Burnley, Lancashire, I recall with huge fondness the group of elderly men and women who collapsed in fits of laughter as they recalled their experiences of using an outside privy, the Tippler toilet, or 'Lancashire Long-drop' as they knew it:

> An' i' was all very windy as well bicoss it wen' straiught dauwn to the drein. Saw [so] the win' would coom dauwn the drein, woon't i'. An' you'd si' there an' you'd bi windeh. You see they din't 'ave lids on – they joost 'ad a saeyt [seat] with an 'ole in, an' my broother use' to frighten me to death becuz 'e use' tuh seay if yuh sit on a long taam, a rat'll coom oop an' bi'e yuh bottom….

> [And it was all very windy as well, because it went straight down to the drain. So the wind would come down the drain, wouldn't it. And you'd sit there and you'd be windy. You see they didn't have lids – they just had a seat with a hole in, and my brother used to frighten me to death, because he used to say if you sit on a long time, a rat'll come up and bite your bottom….]

There were 38 specific concepts for which the gatherers sought the speakers' natural vernacular equivalent. Questions on these were put to those interviewed by BBC reporters, were mounted on the BBC's *Voices* website (www.bbc.co.uk/ voices), and were printed on cards available at local radio stations, libraries, and elsewhere, in a nationwide call for information on words and attitudes towards them. Some questions were simple – 'what do you call your FATHER, MOTHER, GRANDFATHER, GRANDMOTHER, BABY, MALE/FEMALE PARTNER?' and so on. Others had a more elaborate and looser definition, such as: 'what would you call A YOUNG PERSON IN CHEAP, TRENDY CLOTHES AND JEWELLERY?' or 'what do you call the NARROW WALKWAY BETWEEN BUILDINGS?' From the deep historical knowledge gleaned from dialect dictionaries and the SED, Upton knew well that this last would be likely to elicit terms like *ginnel*, *jitty,* and *twitchel*, but how far across the UK would the more standard *alley* or *alleyway* have spread with its uniforming smoothing-out of difference? As for the trendy young person, the word of the moment in 2004/5 when the survey was carried out was *chav*, and sure enough *chav* turned up routinely right across the country. But there were variants, like the Tyneside *charva*, the more recognizably Liverpudlian *scally,* and the Scottish *ned* from the Central Belt.

Then there were questions about the home ('what's the LONG SOFT SEAT IN THE MAIN ROOM?', 'what do you call the TOILET?' or 'what do you call the MAIN ROOM IN YOUR HOUSE WITH THE TV?'). At first sight, many of these questions appear rather simplistic, yet a seemingly rather obvious question such as 'what do you call someone who's LEFT-HANDED?' can unblock a whole lifetime of changing language and anecdotes to back it up ('I was always called cack-handed at school'… 'I was always told off for using my left hand…'). And the range of language that this particular question untapped was especially striking – most commonly *cack-handed*, but in Scotland *corrie-handed*, *corrie-fisted*, *cloddy handed*, *corrie-dukit,* and *cairy-handy.* As for the LONG, SOFT SEAT, well, clearly that was going to be *sofa* or *settee* surely? And indeed that was the normal rather limited set of options to emerge from the *Voices* survey. I was unprepared, therefore, for the variant that came storming through from the north Midlands, where, for many, this familiar piece of domestic furniture was – uniquely in my experience – a blend, *sofee*.

To the hundreds of hours of recordings collected were added hundreds of thousands of on-line and paper-based responses (Thompson, Upton, this volume) from which to create content for the local stations' output. And for one week in August 2005, *Voices* became a national obsession. On TV there were special programmes reflecting local language, all the BBC's radio networks became involved, and of course in the local stations all over the UK, together with Radio Ulster, Radio Scotland, and Radio Wales, *Voices* week meant special features, buses where listeners could drop in and record contributions, and discussions of all sorts and shapes. On Radio 4 across the whole summer, Dermot Murnaghan hosted a weekly peaktime live programme called

Word4Word, where guests like Lynda Mugglestone of Oxford University, poet Lemn Sissay, and novelist Howard Jacobson joined Upton to discuss various themes about the English language and local speech. Material from the *Voices* tapes was played throughout, and contributions were solicited from listeners by telephone.

One of the most fascinating areas for me within *Voices* was the way we charted the rapidly evolving stock of terms deriving from Britain's vibrant multicultural diversity, such as the transfer of *blud* and *bredren* out of the Afro-Caribbean communities where they were first encountered, via music and fashion, into the whole community, at least amongst younger and often urban speakers. This was territory never touched by Orton and the SED, and it felt very much part of the reality of twenty-first-century Britain. Likewise, in a reverse pollination, young Yorkshire women with roots in Leeds' Asian community spoke with some of the same vowels and used some of the same (though admittedly fewer) local terms as the traditional Tykes whose voices were captured high on the North York Moors.

The evidence that the survey – detailed, nationwide and rigorous – threw up thus provided authoritative contemporary grist to the academic commentary that people like Upton and Mugglestone were able to offer. But at the same time, through the delightful, colourful, and intensely-felt stories and responses of the native speakers interviewed across the country, the evidence was brought vividly to life. These were not laboratory guinea pigs, but a real cross-section of ordinary people *informing Voices* naturally and unforcedly about the lives they led. And in that, it really moved up a gear from the ground-breaking work of the SED fifty years earlier.

And for me, personally, it was as if the spirit that had informed my 1980s foray into dialect broadcasting, *Talk of the Town, Talk of the Country* with Stanley Ellis, had blossomed into something national and all-embracing. I quite remember the sense of exhilaration I felt as I played through the recordings to find material for my own *Voices* book (Elmes 2005), as if in some way I was able to elevate myself above these islands in some panoramic helicopter-shot, and then place a stethoscope against the landscape and listen in to the myriad conversations about ordinary life – living, loving, dying, shopping and working, eating and sleeping…. It was the heartbeat of Britain, a rich medley of vowels and voices telling about lives being lived, now.

And the real legacy of all this devoted and intense work on the part of everyone involved with *Voices* is that you can still hear that heartbeat. The work of Faith Mowbray and her interactive team in Cardiff most definitely endures. Log on to the website or visit the British Library's website (see Robinson *et al.*, this volume) and you can still hear those stories gathered by reporters in parish halls, local clubs, or simply in people's front parlours (or *lounges* or *sitting-rooms* or *back-kitchens*), as fresh as the day they were recorded. Run your mouse over the brilliant interactive map and click on the places as they appear on screen, and you open up a trove of accent and vocabulary offered up by thousands of online

contributors that provides a real snapshot of vernacular English from 2004 until data stopped accumulating there in 2007. The 'Language Lab' section allows you to examine every one of the 38 semantic items, grouped under the lifestyle themes, and then to plot graphically where the highest incidence of each term – like *skive*, *bunk off*, *wag,* and so on for TO PLAY TRUANT – lies across the land. It is a fascinating picture, and still seven years on has enough linguistic science about it to match SED's peerless isoglossic maps from fifty years ago (Orton and Wright 1974; Orton *et al.* 1978).

Whether there could ever be another such venture – adventure, too – into the ever-changing way we express ourselves individually and in local groups across Britain, I somehow doubt. *Voices* was a product of its time, when the BBC in its wisdom had the resources and the will to set off on this huge trek. But language never stands still. We hear quite frequently about disappearing languages and places where the last living speakers of whatever tongue are now approaching their final years; yet we do not chart the last users of old British dialect words until we discover to our surprise that no-one knows them anymore.

Or not, as the case may be: Dolly Pentreath, who died in 1777, might have been the last fluent speaker of the Cornish language, but it is likely that it persisted in at least some vestigial form amongst the fishing community for years later. So surveys like *Voices* are always going to throw up new evidence for old words as well as new terms, new coinings that follow social trends and fashion. Thus today in 2013, our 2005 project is already well out of date and the snapshot we made has already been superseded by new usages and acquisitions.

But then, holding back the river of language was always a futile task.

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