

# Reflections from the outside and the inside: construct resources and “modern RP” in interaction

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# Introduction to the talk today

## Part I

Background and “the death of RP?”

Aims of our project

Introducing the *construct resource*

## Part II

Methods of analysis

Our data

## Part III

Summing up, Discussion and Perspectives

# Part I: Background

- Linguistic resources and their indexical fields  
(e.g. Eckert 2008, Silverstein 2003)
- Construct resources and their indexical fields  
(Fabricius and Mortensen in prep)
- Establishment language attitudes in the UK,  
their maintenance and their demise  
(Agha 2003, Mugglestone 2003)
- How ideological beliefs surrounding British accent  
variation are socially structured (Coupland and Bishop 2007)
- And here: how they are *emergent, potentially layered*  
and *interactionally structured*

# What would constitute the death of RP?

- Extinction of a certain way of speaking  
(sustained generational change)
  - ❖ a set of linguistic resources
- Extinction of the ideological place of RP  
(as the only accepted standard, as an ideal to strive for, as **the** prestigious form of British English, as a class variety, as talking posh, as a 'yah'/'rah' accent)
  - ❖ a set of construct resources

Two recent examples  
of *accent stylisation*  
and *dialect stylisation*  
in the press in the UK:



**Eeh bah gum**  
English dialects



1970



2030

Source: Paul Kerswill, Lancaster University

<http://www.economist.com/node/18775029>, The Economist, June 2nd 2011

# Agha (2003)

- RPs transformation from ‘talking proper’ to ‘talking posh’
- (...But the empirical data stop around 1980 and are tendentious....)
- **What’s needed is a more up-to-date empirical picture of the UK**

# Aims of our project 1

- To sharpen terminology and add precision to the study of language ideologies
- **The construct resource is an ideological set of postulates about language that emerge historically and circulate in society**
- Using analyses of metalinguistic talk as a way of studying these ideologies

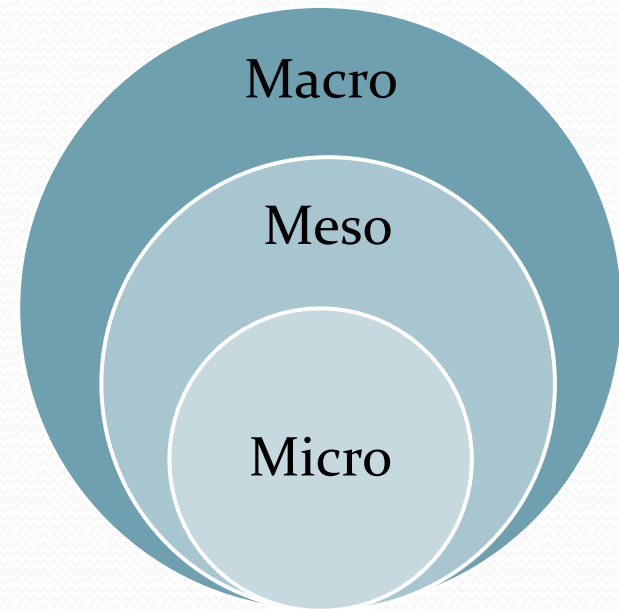
# Aims of our project 2

- To study modern RP in its present social-semiotic landscape
  - the place of accent pride and accent prejudice
  - the local versus the non-local
  - the North-South divide
  - accent stereotyping processes

# The layered linguistic resource

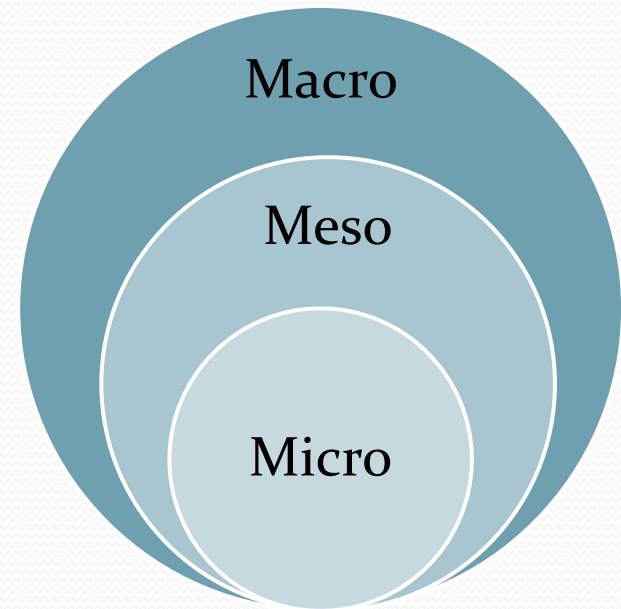
(Coupland 2007, 2010)

- Macro levels of social class/  
gender/age/ethnicity/place
- Its meso-level situation/  
context/stances
- The micro-level  
linguistic form/resource



# The layered construct resource

- Macro levels of language ideology in society
- Its meso-level situation/ in context/stances and roles
- The micro-level as personal and other-expression



# Part II: Methods of analysis

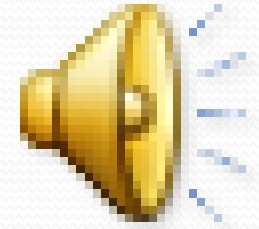
- An emergent view of jointly constructed discourse in the **interview situation**
  - Elicitation question “Does accent matter in the UK?”
  - Each instance comes into its own right
  - Finding generalities across the interviews
  - Two cases presented here (Tara and Frances)
  - Partial picture of longer interview sequences
- An emic approach (the participants’ view)

# Interviewees

- ★ **Tara**, age 21: parents both professionals and university educated in the UK; private school and grammar school education in UK (outside London)
- ★ **Frances**, aged 19: parents both professionals and university educated in the UK; international and local schooling in continental Europe
- Both second generation at Cambridge University
- Tara the insider, Frances the ‘insider and outsider’
- Recorded Cambridge University 2008 by AF



# Tara



Tara: erm (0.4) I think sometimes one's one's own accent  
erm (0.3) it (0.8) at least (0.6) erm (1.0)  
erm (.) people I've met who come from the North (.)

INT: hmmm

Tara: erm they the- they tend to (0.4)  
some of them seem to define themselves quite a lot  
by their a- (0.3) by their accent and they're quite  
proud of it

INT: hmmm

Tara: erm especially people from Newcastle

INT: mhm

Tara: erm (0.5) they they won't let me say Newcastle  
it has to be Newcastle (0.4) and erm (1.1)

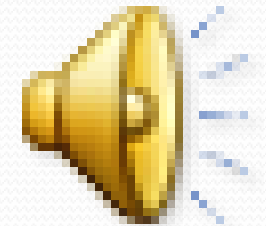
# Frances



Frances: I mean I'm told I have quite a posh accent and I think that (.) that (1.9) for some people that doesn't make me the most approachable person er I I mean it works both way round

INT: mhm hm

# Frances

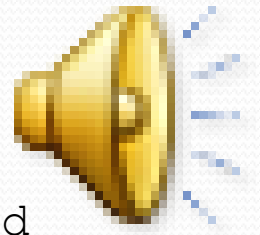


Frances: I think (0.7) particularly  
North South is a huge thing  
I mean (0.5)

INT: hm

Frances: a Northern accent (0.3)  
so often is (0.5) you know (1.1)  
well people make (0.7)  
a connection between a Northern  
accent and (0.4) maybe not being  
as intelligent erm (1.4)

# Tara



Tara: I- I think some people in the UK are prejudiced

INT: hmm

Tara: against certain certain accents

INT: hmm

Tara: erm (0.9) I wouldn't say it was so much (0.7)  
erm (0.4) Northern or Southern al- al- al- although  
there actually

INT: no

Tara: there is a bit of that yeah actually there is (.)

INT: hmm hmm

Tara: erm (0.4) Northerners I've heard saying that  
Southerners are posh

Tara: and ooh I had to speak all posh and Southern today  
and this

INT: mhm

# Part III: Summing up

- Macro socio-cultural framing construct resource(s)
  - Accent creates social distinction
  - People have pride in being Northern
  - Northern is authentic and people think it shouldn't be tarnished
  - Northern accents can carry negative associations of different kinds
  - People with southern accents are posh
  - People with posh accents are unapproachable

# Part III: Summing up

- Micro frames in self- and other-positioning
  - “they say...” / “people think...” / “people make a connection...”
  - “I think...” / “I’ve heard...” / “people I’ve met”
  - Frances: (I accept) people telling me I have quite a posh accent

...There are also intermingled levels in the accent stylisations themselves... (*posh, Newcastle*)

# Part III: Summing up

- The meso frame:

Frances: a Northern accent (0.3) **so often is**  
(0.5) **you know** (1.1) **well people make**  
(0.7) **a connection** between a Northern  
accent and (0.4) **maybe** not being as  
intelligent erm (1.4)

*(I'm willing to play the interviewee and report on this  
accent prejudice, but it's (maybe) not mine...)*

# Discussion

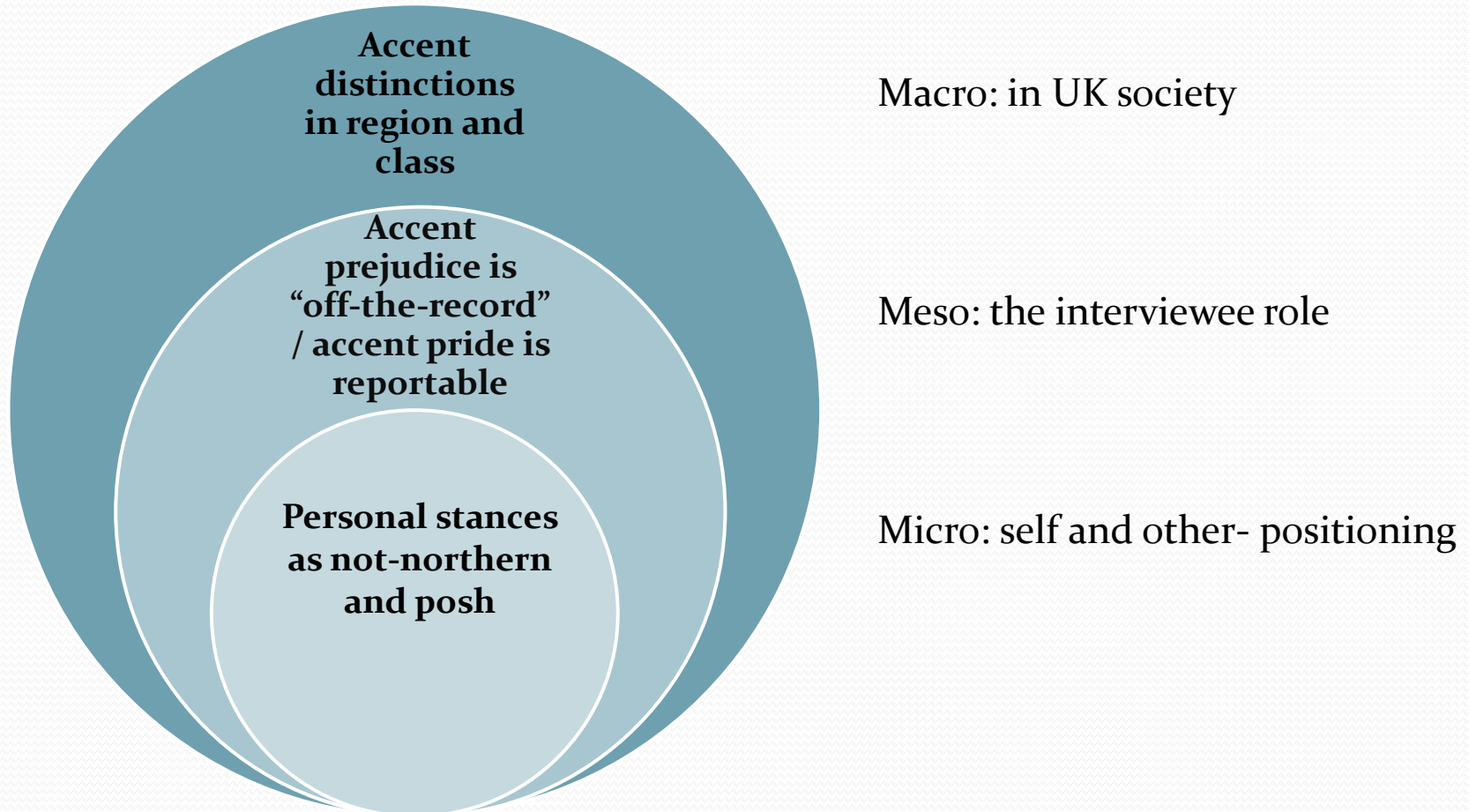
- The ‘construct resource’ concept as an identifiable cluster of features, emerging from enregisterment processes and other language ideological processes
- Macro-level values have been strong enough to survive Frances’ ‘outsider’ history

# Selections from Coupland (2010)

*Social change in Britain, 1960-2009: A tendentious list*

- The decline of the Establishment...
- Failing trust in professional authority...
- The growth of the middle class but the accentuation of the rich/poor divide...
- Massively increasing geographical mobility...
- Reframing and rescaling of local-global relationships...

# Towards a revised Establishment language ideology in the UK in the 21st century



# Selected References

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