

Standard Language Ideologies and the 'construct': the case of RP

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Overview of the paper

- Part 1: Background. The double denotation of RP: the 'native' and the 'construct'
- Part 2: Deconstructing the construct/towards a model of the construct: blueprints, ideologies, positionings and mappings
- Part 3: Applying the model in ongoing research

Part 1: Background

- PhD study: *T-glottalling between stigma and prestige: a sociolinguistic study of modern RP* (Fabricius 2000, see also Fabricius 2002)
- Focus on variable presence of t-glottalling in a quantitative sociolinguistic study of RP
- Getting a methodological grip on a target social group defined by educational background and parental occupations
- Thus, exploring the diachrony of an accent variety and its relationship to the received 'construct' of RP through sociologically defined speech data

'Native' versus 'construct'

(Fabricius 2000)

- A distinction used initially, to hive off the 'native variety' /*parole* (to be investigated empirically) from the 'construct' of RP
- 'this is what people have in their heads as a concept of the variety' as opposed to the observable language use
- Constructs are learned and are susceptible to generational change
- Presumably at a different rate to changes in the native variety

Note:

- *Native RPs* because of phonetic variability e.g, in rates of t-glottalling
- *Construct RPs* because of e.g. generational factors (t-glottalling's 'acceptance')
- In both cases we assume there is an identifiable common core to some degree

Accessing the construct

Constructs can be brought to conscious awareness in various ways

- E.g. perception test in Fabricius 2000 (+/- t-glottalling spoken examples in various phonetic contexts; younger speakers with a more liberal construct)

Also through overt questioning in interviews (Fabricius 2000:152)

- Did your mother or father ever talk about the way you spoke as a child?
- Did they ever correct you or your brothers or sisters?
- Do you remember changing the way you spoke after you went to school?
- Have you ever been to any form of speech or drama training? For how long?
- What do you think about accents on the BBC? (1998)
- Do you think accents 'matter' to people in the UK (2008)
- Do you think that the way you speak will make a difference when you are interviewed for your future job?

Experimental methods (other papers in this workshop)

Accessing the construct

- Some interview examples :
- Here, context of discussing parental comments on speech;

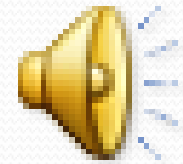


Female speaker born 1976, interviewed 1998

- FS: there's sort of a slight backlash going on at the moment my mother says 'yer' she says like he's twenty-three years [Jɜ:z] old and it's like "No, mother, 'year' [jɪə]"

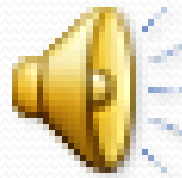
Another example

- (Male speaker born 1980; interviewed 1998):
- AF: Um, what do you think about accents on the BBC?
- (1.1)
- MS: what do I think about them?
- AF: What do you think about them, how do you feel about them
- MS: um (0.4) I think that that the voice of the BBC on the World Service at sort of two in the morning is one of the most reassuring things, you know, I know...



A third example

- MS2: perhaps the traditional sort of World Service view as (.) was sort of "This is London calling"
- INT: ((xxx))
- MS2: it was still certainly still the English that was sent out to the rest of the world as my father did, I mean, there was (.) a certain amount of English language there was (.) fairly traditional almost 1950s (.) affected English (.) uhm
- INT: hmm



To sum up so far: "RP as fact *and* fiction" (Ramsaran 1990)

'Native RP' (s)

- Sociolinguistically observable through a defined population in successive generations
- Sociologically
 - *Socioeconomic background*
 - *Educational background and experiences*
- Phonological system with phonetic variation
- Agha (2003: 234) 'phonolexical' (register) eg TRAP/BATH split

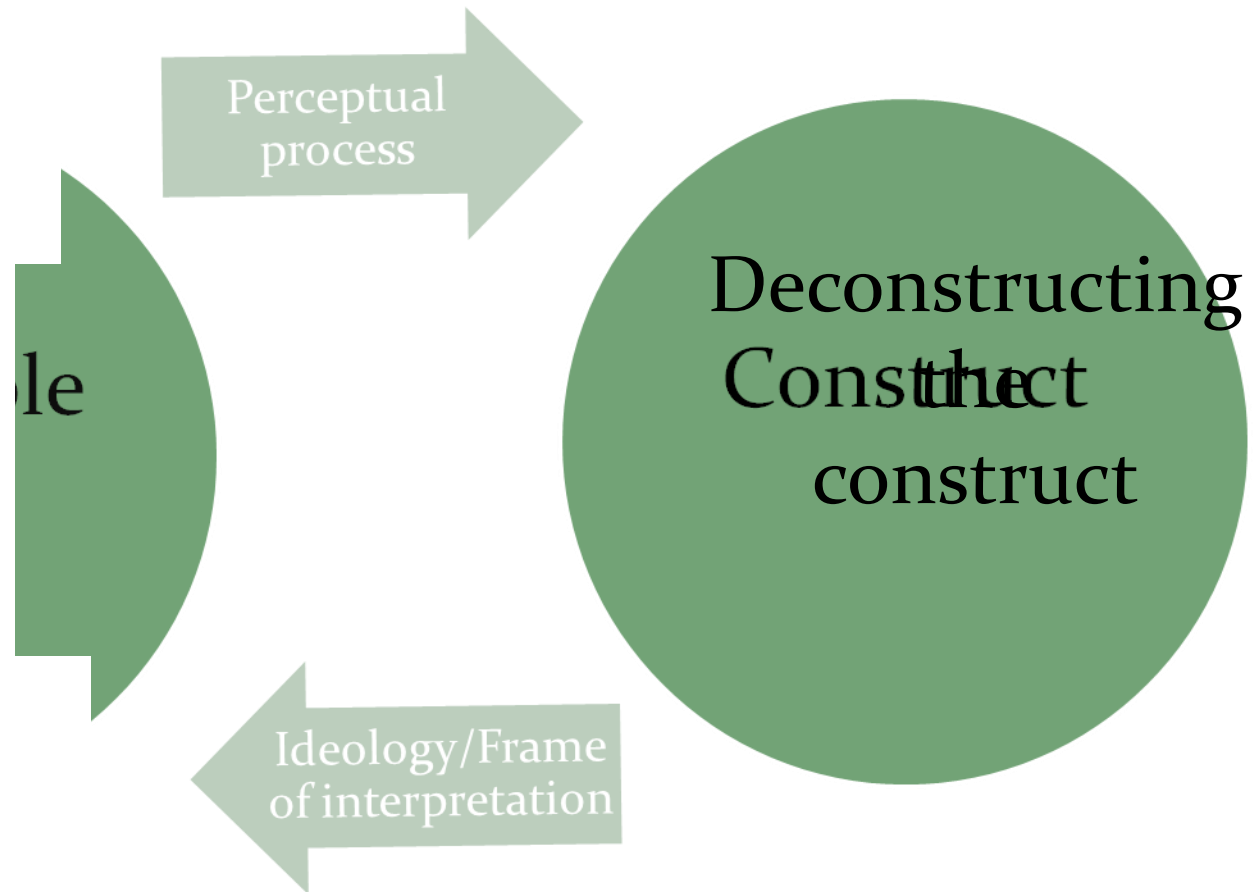
'Construct RP' (s)

- Systematically related to n-RP but distinct and with its own diachrony
- What is 'standard' comes into play, and can change/be negotiated
- Each generation may have its own cutoff points as to what counts as 'posh'
 - Examples of 'clergy-speak' (tapped /r/ *tomorrow*)
- A sociolinguistics of perception (Harrington, Kleber and Reubold 2008, on generational perceptions of /u/-fronting)
- E.g. on age-graded reactions to t-glottalling

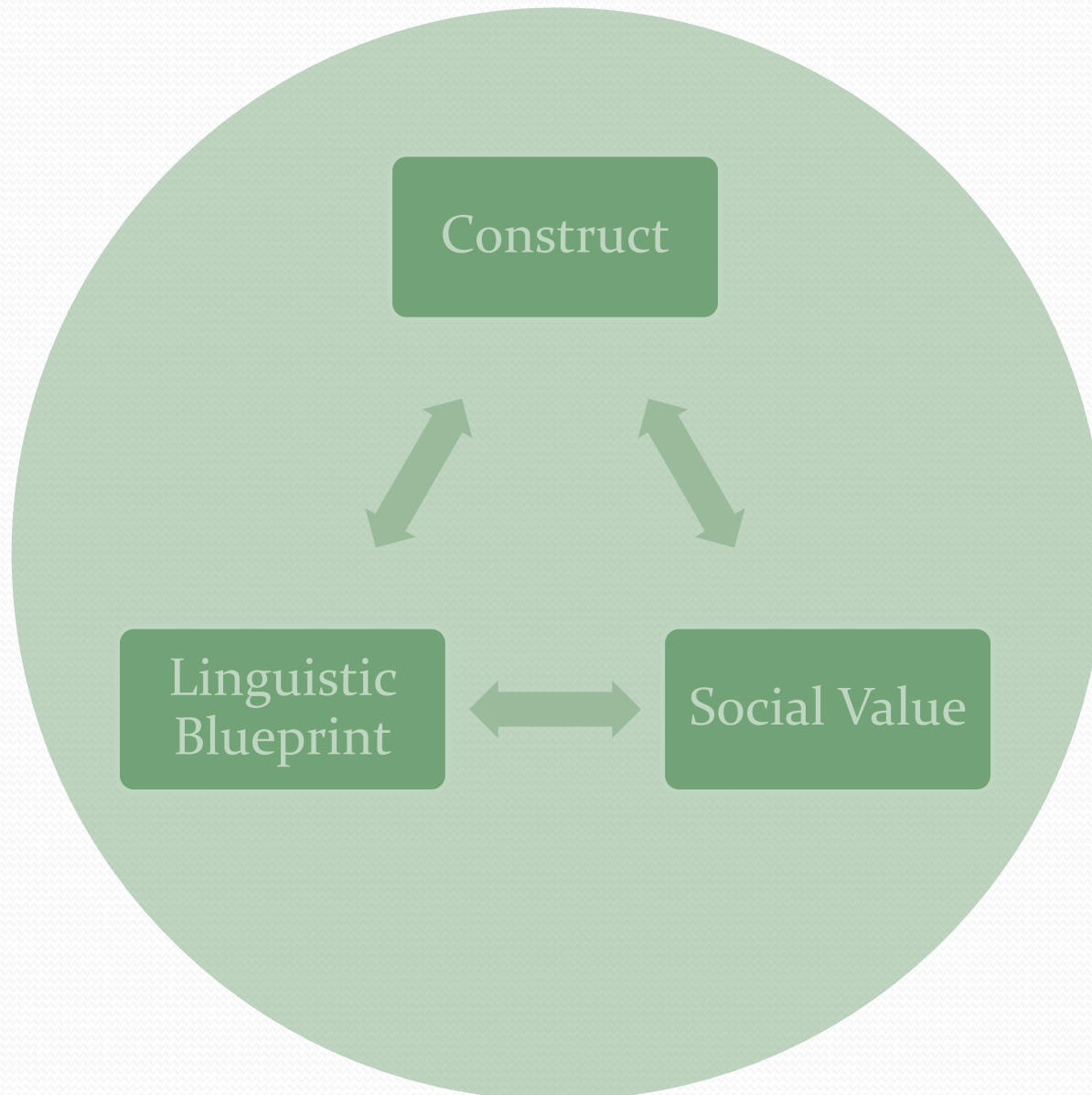
The dialectic relation between native and construct

- Changes in the native variety (frequencies, new variants) may eventually lead to changes in the construct
- Conversely, changing constructs might also support and encourage variable and changing native practice
- Importantly, all 'varieties' have this potential double denotation, not just 'standard' ones
- See also Johnstone et al (2006:101) who compares the enregisterment processes of RP and Pittsburghese and sees similar processes and similar 'metadiscursive activities' = construct verbalisations

Model of native/construct relation



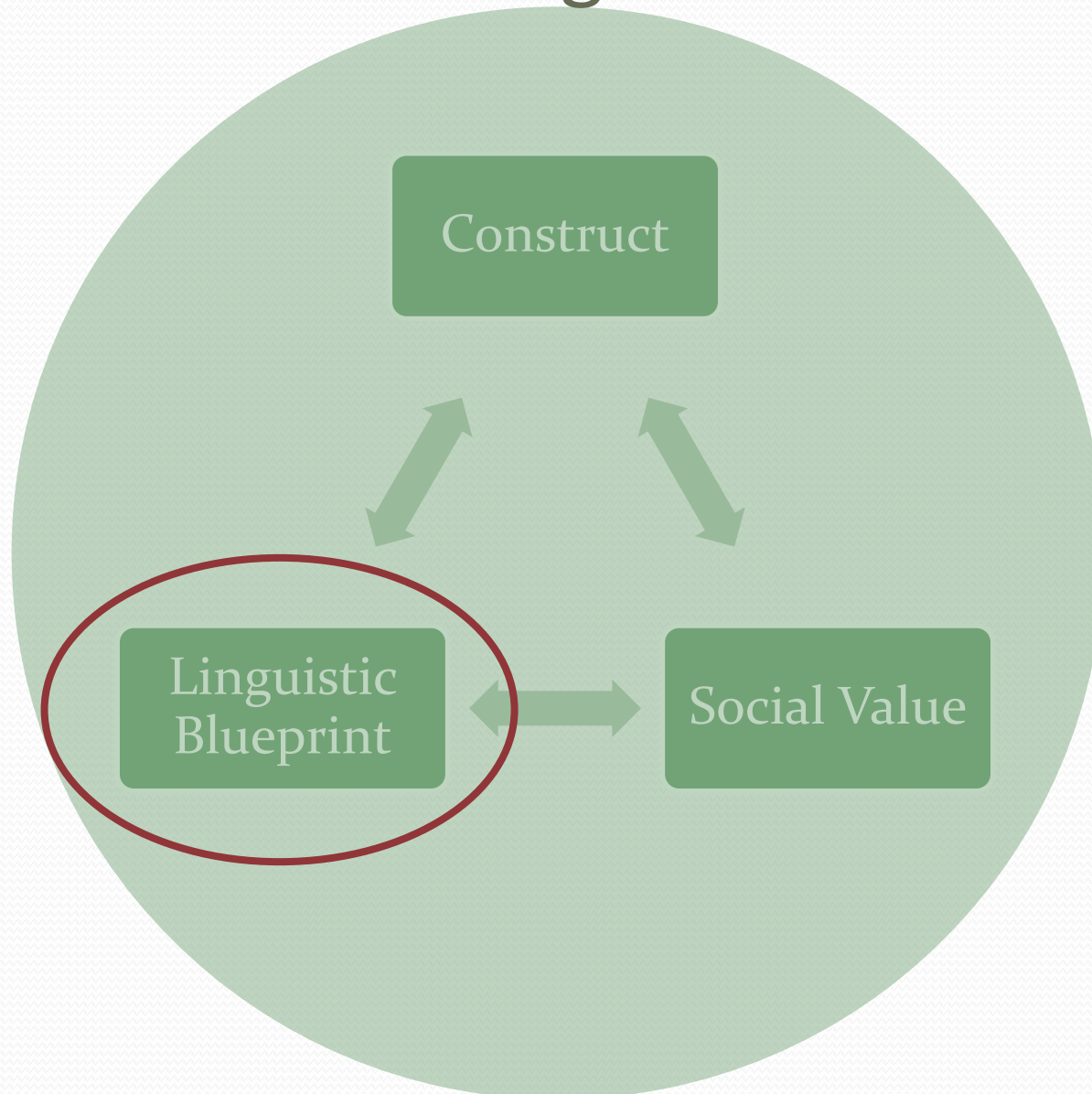
Part 2: Deconstructing the construct



Deconstructing the construct

- Ideas about how variety/variant X sounds, encapsulated in phonetic /phonological/phonolexical blueprints (clusters of linguistic indices)
- Ideas about how variety/variant X is positioned in the sociolinguistic landscape, whether one's own variety or not: and its social value vis à vis other blueprints
- We want to claim here: both of these elements of the construct can be made accessible and consciously reflected upon (in one way) through interview questioning

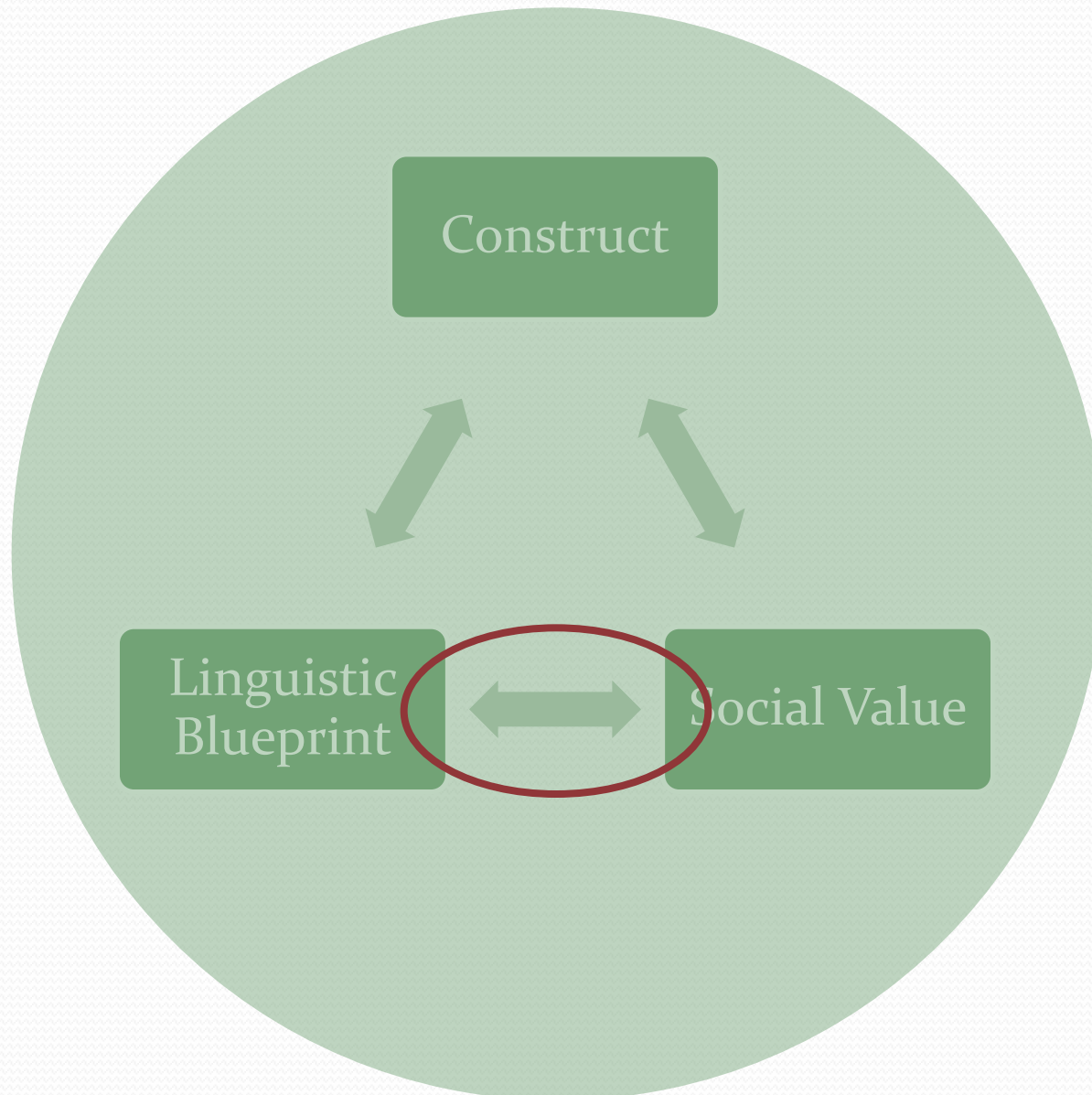
Part 2: Deconstructing the construct



How the linguistic blueprint comes into being

- Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson (2006) discusses the process of 'enregisterment' of Pittsburghese during 20th century
- Silverstein (2003) and Agha (2003), concept of 'enregisterment' of a variety and metapragmatic work
- Labov's indicators, markers and stereotypes theorised as functioning as part of Silverstein's 'orders of indexicality'
- Agha discusses the historical process around the enregisterment/enregistration of RP in period 1700-1900

Part 2: Deconstructing the construct



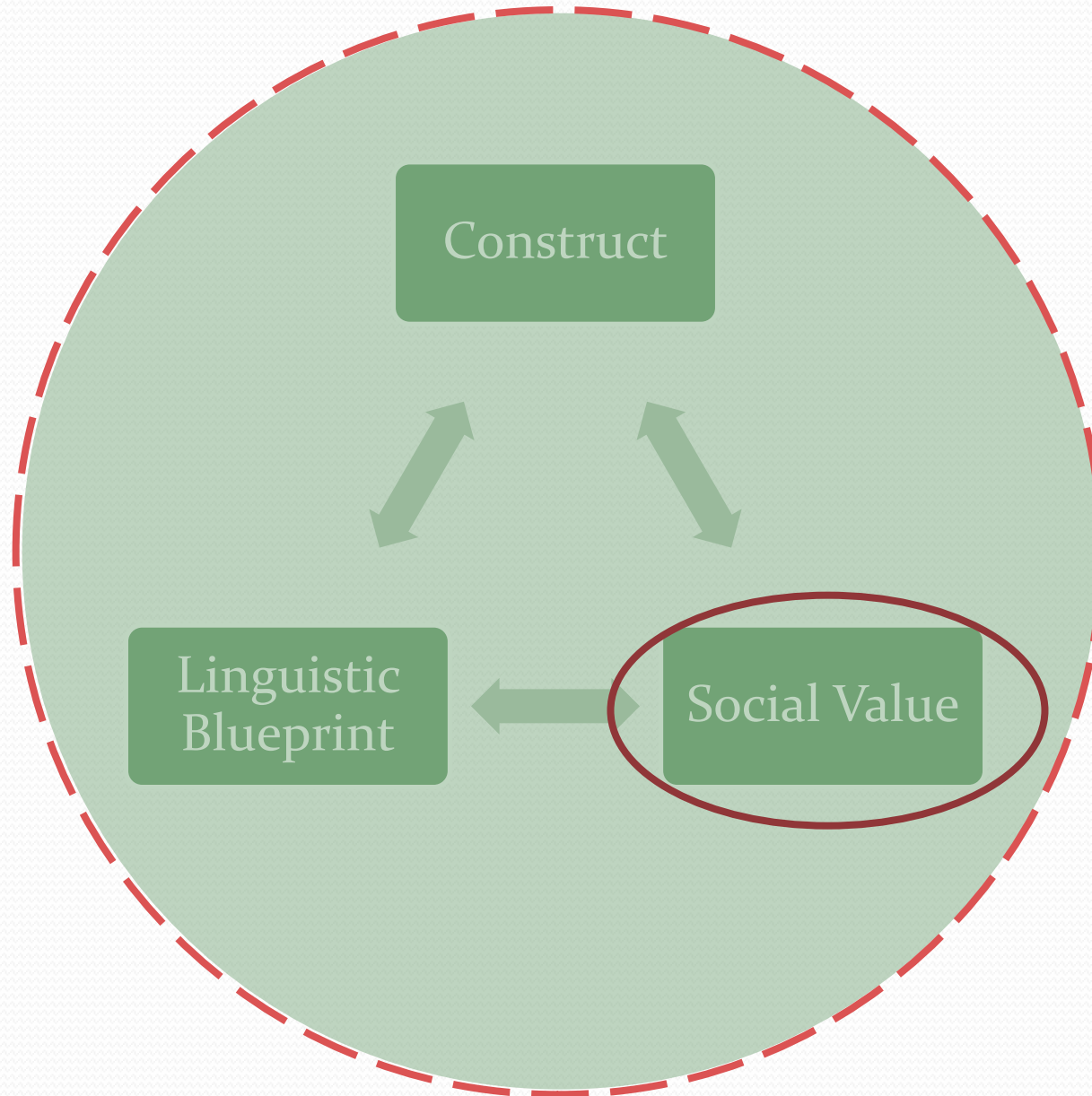
RP-like accents in the 21st century

“RP-like accents emerge with their traditional evaluative credentials largely intact, but not altogether. When informants oriented to *A standard accent of English*, they generally afforded prestige and social attractiveness quite liberally. Younger informants withheld some of this positivity, but not a great deal.”

Coupland and Bishop (2007: 85)

- Shows the contingency of the link between blueprint and social value, but assumes also that the blueprint remains stable (which may not be the case, as the authors acknowledge)
- Because the use of labels as a package of blueprint and social value
- The two may need unpacking...
- A fleshed-out blueprint of ‘a standard accent of English’ may vary a great deal across the generations

Part 2: Deconstructing the construct



Contextualising a construct

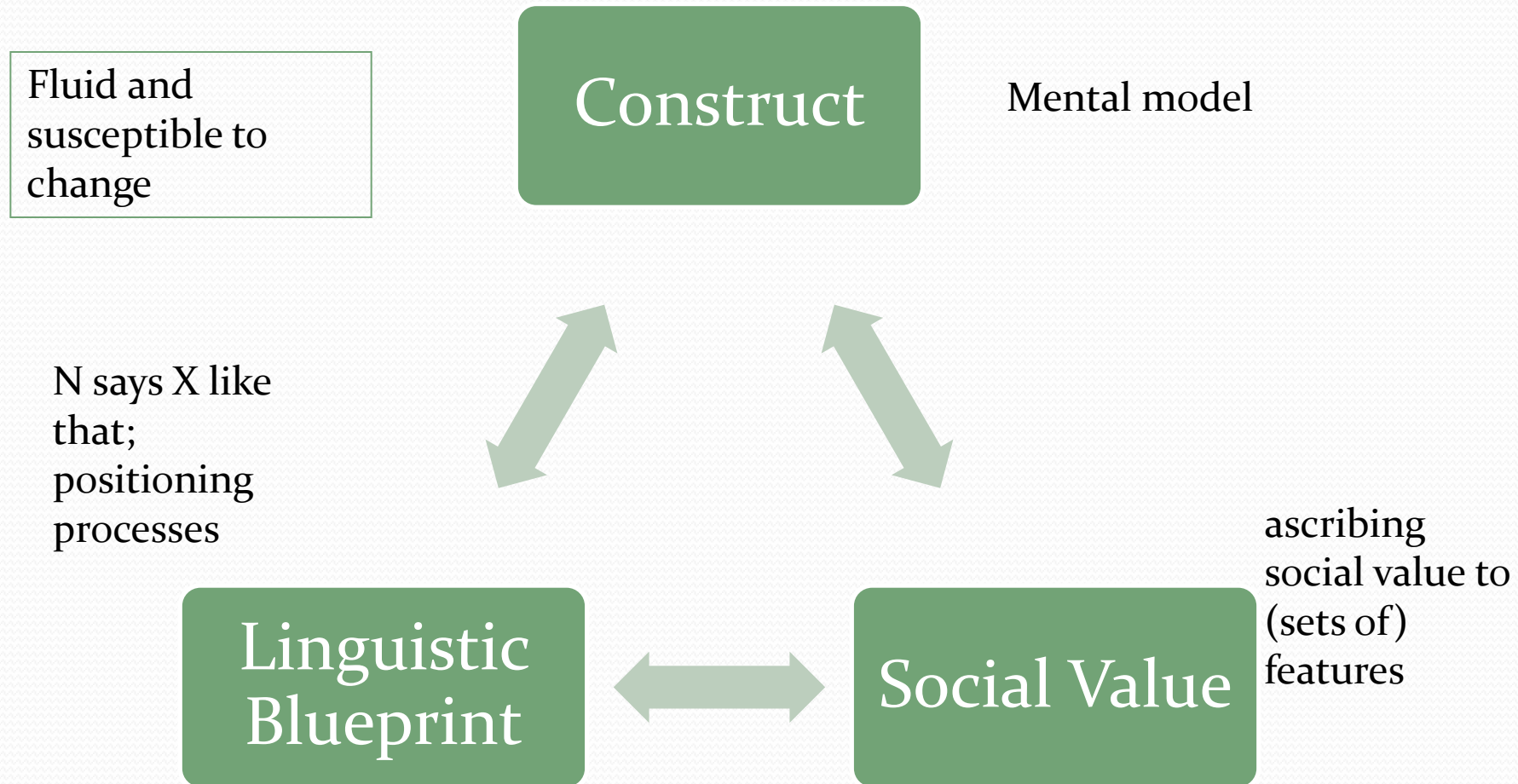
Establishment Standard Language Ideology

“an ideology with the following characteristics:

- conservative and in fact reactionary, anti-progressive
- elite, based on class-linked privilege
- purist, seeking to cleanse ‘sloppy’ or ‘loose’ usage
- myopic about its own class basis
- iconically maps values onto linguistic features and styles, in a universalist fashion
- interprets 'bad' usage in terms of low competence, awareness and education”

(Garrett, Robert, Coupland, Mortensen, Selleck 2009)

Part 2: Summary

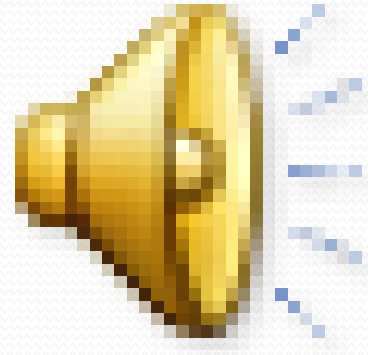


Part 3: Applying the model to current and ongoing research

- Data: Interview corpora collected by AF 1998 and 2008
- Context: Historical social differentiation in UK education
 - public/private sector;
 - Collegiate Universities and Access schemes
 - Widening participation
- Question: Given widening participation, are language ideologies being negotiated and perhaps undergoing change in a higher education context?
- Can also be broadened to the international context
- Open to macro- and micro-level investigation
- Here: What do students articulate about linguistic *blueprints*, their salience and value? (Do accents 'matter' to people?)

Text example

- See handout



Conclusion

- Modelling of the double denotation
- Deconstruction of the 'construct'
- Investigating the construct empirically through interview data

- Future plans
 - Ongoing work with further data examples from the corpus

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Abstract

This paper will explore one way in which the ‘double denotation’ of the term ‘standard language’ has been operationalized in a study of variation and change in RP in the UK: the notion of ‘construct’ (which can be extended to any (standard) language situation), introduced in Fabricius 2000 and 2002. ‘Construct’ in those works was used to ‘carve off’ certain aspects of the social situation of RP which stood in the way of empirical investigations of the variation and change-in-progress observed in recordings of native RP speakers. The ‘native-RP’ versus ‘construct-RP’ dichotomy was key to opening up the sociolinguistics of standard language varieties.

We see ‘construct’ versions of standard languages as natural consequences in attitudinal terms of speakers’ experience of growing up within a heterogenous speech community wherein overt normative standards operate and are transmitted through channels such as formal education and media. Each individual may potentially gradually build up his or her own (more or less conscious) ‘construct’ notion of what constitutes ‘standard’ (or ‘good’ or ‘better’) forms of language, alongside competence in their vernacular variety, whether a standard or non-standard vernacular. Generational change can be observed in patterns of the ‘construct’: just as empirical examination of patterns of production can show change over time, so patterns of the acceptance or rejection of certain pronunciations or grammatical structures, for example, can change. Examples of the overt expression of ‘construct’ notions from interview data gathered in 1998 and 2008 will be presented and discussed here.

Thank you for listening!

Talk powerpoint file available at the first author's

Modern RP Page:

www.ruc.dk/~fabri

