

Superdiversity and social class: An interactional perspective

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2013

1. Introduction

In recent years in Britain, interaction face-to-face has become a potentially rather significant site for an understanding of large scale social processes.

From one direction, researchers concerned with migration and population mobility are looking for new principles of social cohesion in local 'conviviality' and low-key interactional 'civility' (Gilroy 2006; Vertovec 2007; Wetherell 2009). Group classifications look increasingly precarious; the traditional binaries – majority/ minority, host/migrant – can no longer account for the emerging splits and alignments; and more and more people are saying 'You can't put me in a box' (Fanshawe & Sriskandarajah 2010). Contemporary urban environments present a huge challenge both for identity politics and for traditional forms of sociology (Burton et al 2008), and increasingly, commentators register their uncertainty with the term 'superdiversity', a concept designed to

“underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything... previously experienced..., a dynamic interplay of variables including country of origin,... migration channel,... legal status,... migrants' human capital (particularly educational background), access to employment, ... locality... and responses by local authorities, services providers and local residents” (Vertovec 2007:2-3).

At the same time, in a period of growing economic inequality, there has been a resurgence in the cultural and qualitative analysis of social class, rejecting the reduction of class to single indicators like occupation (Savage 2005). There is a return to Raymond Williams' analyses of “the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes” (1977:110) and to E.P.Thompson's concern with class as a process that is produced “in the medium of time... in action and reaction, change and conflict” (1978:295-6), and contemporary scholars like Beverley Skeggs insist on understanding class processes in “everyday negotiations of the mundane” (1997:6).

For sociolinguists with a particular interest in interaction such as myself, these are fascinating developments, but they present an immediate conundrum: if one set of commentators is saying that we have hitherto unimaginable forms of superdiversity at play in interaction, and another group is saying that interaction is a primary site for class reproduction, who is right? Or maybe more realistically, what is the connection?

To address these issues, I would like to explore a few snatches of talk in contemporary London life. These centre on an informant I shall call Anwar, and they come from a project focusing on English among adults of Indian descent in Southall.¹

2. Superdiversity and social class in interaction: A case study

The informant I shall discuss is a 40 year old businessman who owns a restaurant and catering business in West London where he lives. Here he is at the start of an interview talking about his involvement in the family business:

Extract 1

Anwar (businessman, male, early 40s, born in London, Punjabi background), in interview with Devyani Sharma. Key: **London vernacular; Punjabi**; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP

Anwar: **ou**t of the **for**ty years that er:: of my age
 twenty years of that i've been working in the business
 um:: tha's committedly

°and er°.. [...]
 well w- we used to start in a very mediocre type of set-up

Now this is his brother talking about work at the beginning of another interview and it is worth comparing their accents:

Extract 2

Naseem (businessman, M, mid 40s, born in Pakistan, Punjabi background) in interview with Sharma

Key: **London vernacular; Punjabi**; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP

Naseem: I doubt it ..
 now there there's so many
 no not doubt it
 there definitely there's not
 there's a a lod of legislation
 that you have to be under a certain age
 y' ave to-
 oh you're only allowed to work a certain amount of hours

They are both very fluent, but which sounds more Punjabi? Anwar, and this shows up in their uses of retroflexion as well as in their uses of standard and London vernacular English. These differences were reflected in the elicitation interview much more generally, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: % of Punjabi, standard and vernacular English T in the two brothers' interview speech:

	<i>Punjabi</i> retroflex T	STANDARD ENGLISH T	Vernacular glottal T
Anwar (349 T tokens)	38	55	2
Naseem (328 T tokens)	15	65	12

So we have two middle-aged brothers working in the same business all their lives, one with English that sounds more Pakistani. In fact, one of them was born in Pakistan, but it *wasn't* Anwar - it was his older and more English-sounding brother, Naseem, and this contradicts the commonsense assumption that migrant families assimilate to English norms the longer they spend in England.

Of course, once one looks beyond just country of birth to their dispositions and to the *milieu*² that each of them inhabits, the anomaly dissolves. Anwar is a prominent community activist, cultivates transnational business links in Pakistan, and insists that when he goes there on his regular visits, he really mixes in. In contrast, Naseem focuses mainly on work and close family, and says that when it comes to the Pakistan cricket team, he'll support anyone playing against them. Still, two brothers in the same business sounding so different looks like a problem for tick-box determinism, and a point for superdiversity.

In the next piece of data, it looks as though there might be another problem. Here is Anwar on the phone with Ronni, an old friend from school, turning from a discussion about business to enquire about the family:

Extract 3

Anwar (businessman, M, early 40s, born in London, Punjabi background) phoning Ronni (M, early 40s, Punjabi background) on his mobile.

Key: CREOLE; **London vernacular; Punjabi**; [] IPA phonetic transcription

5 ((ringing tone))
 6 R: ((inaudible))

7 Anw: ((in Jamaican accent:)) WA:APN RA:NNI
[wa:m] [a:]

8 ((in a more London accent:)) **ow's 'ings** man
[øʌʊz ɪŋz]

9 R: ((inaudible))

10 Anw: nice one man

11 ((in Punjabi:)) **kiddaan**
((Translation: 'what's up'))

12 everything alright?

13 R: ((speaks for 2.0 - inaudible))

14 Anw: wha's happening

15 R: ((speaks for 3.5 - inaudible))

16 Anw: yeh man yeh yeh (.)

17 hows everyfing
everyfing cool

18 R: ((speaks for 2.5 - inaudible))

19 Anw: ((with sigh?:)) yes bru**V** yeh yeh yeh yeh (.)
((the conversation is interrupted by an incoming call. When the incoming call is completed, Anwar rings Ronni back and they discuss a business arrangement. Then in line 73, Anwar shifts the topic:

72 R: ((speaks for 1.4 - inaudible))

73 Anw: **kor kiddan** — wha's **goin down** man everyfing cool
((trans: 'what else is up?')) [æʊ]

74 R: ((speaks for 2.3 - inaudible))

75 Anw: how's 'ings a' e YARd
[haʊ s ɪŋz æ ə jʌd̥h]

At least at first, this mix of linguistic elements looks rather spectacular, involving features associated with Punjabi, with vernacular London English, and with standard English, and there is also some Jamaican vocabulary, one part of which is pronounced with Punjabi retroflexion ('YARd' [jʌd̥h]) in line 75) – see Table 2:

Table 2: Some of the linguistic resources in play in Extract 3

Creole features	Punjabi	Traditional London vernacular
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • line 7: 'waapn' used as a greeting (Hewitt 1986:130) • line 7: fronting of [ɒ] to [a] in the friend's name (Wells 1982:Ch.7; Sebba 1993); • line 75: 'yard' used for 'home' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • line 11 & 73: 'kiddaan', attributed inter-ethnic currency in Extract 10 line 27 • line 75: Jamaican 'yard' pronounced with short central vowel [ʌ] and a retroflex D 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lines 8 & 75: zero-TH in 'aa's [ø]ings' (Wells 1982:329) • line 8: H-dropping in 'ow's' • lines 18,16,73: TH-fronting in 'bruv' and 'everyfing' • line 73: alveolar -ING in 'goin' • line 73: centring diphthong in 'down' – [dæʊn] (line 73) (Wells 1982:305)

But although this might create the initial impression of London language as a bewildering kaleidoscope, there are in fact at least four ways in which we can say that Anwar's speech reflects relatively stable social structuring.

First and most obviously, the speech in Extract 3 is rather different from how Anwar talked in interview. In fact he himself sees this way of speaking as a distinctive style, and he gives it a name, based on the area where he lives– 'Southallian'. So we can start by saying that this kind of talk is one identifiable element in an at least partially structured repertoire of styles. Second, it is not just Anwar who can talk like this. In the data from 2007-8, there are other, mainly male, informants who use this style, and the Punjabi greeting 'kiddaa' is also used by local white and black people (see Rampton 2011a for more discussion). Third, Anwar's friendship with Ronni goes back to his school-days, which is where he says this style emerged. In fact I have analysed a great deal of data from the 1980s (Rampton 1995), when Anwar was an adolescent, and his speech in Extract 3 is highly consistent with the kinds of crossing and mixing that I identified then. And this means, of course, that the kind of

speech displayed in the extract has been a stable feature in British urban life for the last 30-40 years, as has indeed been amply attested in popular culture.³

The fourth way of linking this speech to social structure requires further reference to my data from the 1980s. During fieldwork in the 1980s, my informants saw Creole and indigenous white non-standard English as roughly equivalent; they said it was highly unlikely that either posh kids or new immigrants would use the multi-ethnic mix of Jamaican, Punjabi and local vernacular English that characterized their neighbourhood; and their mixings, crossings and stylizations expressed an alignment with peer sociability and popular culture, not with education (Rampton 1995). Combined with the demographic facts of their socio-economic positioning, all this invites the conclusion that in these polylingual practices, youngsters had developed a set of conventionalized interactional procedures that reconciled and reworked their ethnic differences within broadly shared experience of a working class position in British society. Race and ethnicity were very big and controversial issues in the media, education and public discourse generally, but with language crossing and stylisation, it looks as though kids had found enough common ground in the problems, pleasures and expectations of working class adolescent life to navigate or renegotiate the significance, risks and opportunities of ethnic otherness. Through language crossing, adolescents in the local neighbourhood refigured ethnicities within the dynamics of British social class (see Rampton 2011b for elaboration). In fact, there is support for this interpretation in a growing body of research on European cities (e.g. Jaspers 2005; Madsen 2008), and so extrapolating back to Anwar, I would like to suggest that the style illustrated in '*hor hiddan* – wha 's *goin down* man everyfing cool' has quite strong working class associations.

So, far from being either unpredictable or even surprising, there is a lot of recognisable conventionality – stable social structuring – in Anwar's speech in Extract 3: it is a distinctive stylistic option that he has carried with him for over 30 years; it is shared in common with a lot of others; and its indexical connotations are working class, local, as well, perhaps, as rather masculine.

But if this way of talking is working class, how come it is being produced here by a prosperous businessman? And if this mixed style really is associated with working-classness, then does the use of it by a businessman show that the linguistic markers of class have lost their material groundings, that class is now style without economic substance, just one among a plethora of off-the-shelf sociolinguistic options in London? Have superdiversity and its associated processes now subverted social class itself?

To investigate what 'class' might mean in a context like this, it is worth attending to two of Anwar's more business-oriented calls.

The first is to Bilal, a barrister whom he has actually known since Bilal's boyhood, and here they are, shifting from business matters to family:

Extract 4

Anwar (businessman, M, early 40s, Punjabi background) phoning Bilal (lawyer, M, late 20s/early 30s, Punjabi background) on his mobile.

Key: CREOLE; **London vernacular**; **Punjabi**; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP; [] IPA

phonetic transcription

- 1 Anw: ((phone rings))
2 Lwyr: hello
3 Anw: hi Bilal How you doING
4 Lwyr: yeah *alhamdulillah* not too bad
5 how you doing
6 Anw: yeah I'm I'm I'm fiNe Thank you vERy much..
7 I THOUGH[' -
[ʔ]
8 Lwyr: [you've caught me at a good moment
9 cause I just finished courts
10 s[o just going back to chambers
11 Anw: [o-
12 oh oh OKAYyeah
13 'a's great
[øæs]

14 .hh e:::hm BILal .00.13
 15 THE REASON why I called you is e:::h
 16 I jus' WANTED TO LET you KNOW THat ((X - a name pronounced in Punjabi))
 17 He came.. ande:::h we DECIDED **not tu**pursue His case

Overall, Anwar is a lot more standard in his talk to Bilal than he was with Ronni, and this is summarised in Table 3:

Table 3: Stylistic differences between Extracts 4 & 3

Conversation with lawyer Lines 3-13 (Ex 4)	Conversation with Ronni Lines 7-18 (Ex 3)	Comment
Line 3: 'hi Bi <u>l</u> al How you do <u>ING</u> '	Lines 7 & 8: 'WA:APN RANNI ow's 'ings man'	a) greetings in informal Anglo with the lawyer <i>versus</i> Creole with Ronni b) lawyer's name pronounced with Punjabi retroflexion <i>versus</i> Jamaicanisation of Ronni's name
Line 10: ''a's great' Line 6: 'I'm fine'	Line 10: 'nice one' Line 17: 'everyfing cool'	c) Talking to Ronni, D's lexis is more idiomatic ('nice one') and colloquial ('cool' vs 'fine')
Line 6: 'THank you' Line 7: 'THough''	Lines 17 & 19: 'every <u>f</u> ing', 'br <u>v</u> '	d) Standard pronunciation of TH with the lawyer <i>versus</i> vernacular London with Ronni
Lines 3-13: no vocatives other than the lawyer's name	Lines 8,10,16: 'man' Line 18: 'bruv'	

The contrast is even sharper when we compare the way in which Anwar shifts the topic from business to ask about the family. With the lawyer, he does this as follows:

Extract 5

Anwar on the phone with Bilal the lawyer (1.17) .

CREOLE; **London vernacular**; **Punjabi** ; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP; ; [] IPA phonetic transcription

53 Anw: ((*finishing the business topic:*))
bu' I I I'LL keep you iNformed iN whaT's Happening
 [bʌ? ɑ: ɑ: ɑ:ɪ] [n] [n] [t] [hæpniŋ]
 54 How's everyTHING ELse
 [θiŋ eɪs]
 55 How's the famili:

With Ronni, it was:

Extract 6 (taken from Ex 3)

73 Anw: **kor hiddan** - wha's **goin down** man everyfing cool
 [wɒs gəʊɪn dəʊn]
 74 R: ((*speaks for 2.3 - inaudible*))
 75 Anw: how's 'ings a' e **YARD**
 [həʊ s iŋz æ ə jɑd̥h]

The contrast is very clear – relatively standard with Bilal, and much more mixed with Ronni.

Let's move to a second comparison. In addition to engaging with the barrister, he also talked on the phone to a mechanic in the East End of London, and so here he is, talking to Ishfaq the mechanic, introducing the reason for his call:

Extract 7

Anwar with Ishfaq the mechanic, turning to the reason for his call.

Key: **Traditional London vernacular; Punjabi**; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP ;
 [] IPA phonetic transcription

11 Ish: yeah yeah n' too bad **bruv**
 12 (.)
 13 Anw: yeah y' kNow e::hm e::h
 14 TH- THIS THESE eh iNsuraNce peoPLÉ
 15 THEy're ReaLLy me- muckiNG me aRounØ ri:gh?
 16 (.) 20
 17 [now-
 18 Ish: [(wha- wha? they sayin
 19 Anw: **wELL you kNow wh' I mean**
 [wɑ:lɪ jə nɑ α mi:n]
 20 THEy're jusØ (.) pussYfoo?in about⁷THEy are you kNow
 [ʔin]
 21 (0.5) 25
 22 Ish: hhahahahaha[haha
 23 Anw: [you **kNow**
 nə::
 24 Ish: hehehehe[hehehe
 25 Anw: [so:: {smiley voice}
 26 (.)
 27 So liSTEN
 28 loo?- 'ow we g'nna ge? dis car sor?ed ou? man
 29 Ish: **riGH?**
 30 wha? I'm gonna do yeah
 31 ((continues with a plan of action))

Talking to the barrister, he had introduced the reason for calling as follows:

Extract 8

Anwar with Bilal the barrister, turning to the reason for his call.

Key: **Traditional London vernacular; Punjabi**; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP; [] IPA phonetic transcription

12 Anw: oh oh OKAY yeah
 13 øa's great⁷
 14 .hh e:::hm BILAL
 15 THE Reason why I ca**lled** you is e::h
 16 I jus' WANTED TO LET you KNOW THAT ((**X** - a name pronounced in Punjabi))
 17 He came.. and e::h we DECIDED **not to** pursue His case
 18 (.)
 19 Bil: [right
 20 Anw: [**and** e::h He was GOING back AND e::h he was gonna get His
 [ʔ]
 21 work permit visa (.)
 [ʔ]
 22 SO so THATHe could just e::hm..
 23 you know DO everyTHING above eh eh above board **an'** ehm
 24 Bil: fair fair enough okay
 25 Anw: AN' beINGTHE ceLebrity He is ..

Clearly, Anwar's lead into the reason-for-calling is less elaborate with the mechanic than the barrister – "y' kNow e::hm e::h TH- THIS THESE eh iNsuraNce peoPLÉ..." (Ex 7 lines 13-14) compared with "e:::hm BILAL THE Reason why I ca**lled** you is e::h I jus' WANTED TO LET you KNOW THAT **X**..." (Ex 8 lines 14-16). His lexis is generally more colloquial – "muckiNG me aRoun" and "pussYfoo?in about⁷" (Extr.7 lines 15,20) versus "DECIDED **not to** pursue His case" (Ex.8 line 17). And his pronunciation is also less standard, as shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Quantitative comparison of two phonological variables in Anwar’s pronunciation to the mechanic and barrister in Extracts 7 & 8:

	Conversation with the mechanic (Extract 7)	Conversation with the barrister (Extract 8)	
T in word medial and word final positions	alveolar [t] (STANDARD BR ENG)	1 (line 20)	5 (lines 13,16,16,22,25)
	glottal [ʔ] (non-standard London)	5 (lines 15,20,28,28,28)	2 (lines 20,21)
	retroflex [ɖ] (Punjabi)	0	2 (lines 16,17)
-ING in participial suffixes	velar [ɪŋ] (STANDARD BR ENG)	1 (line 15)	2 (lines 20,25)
	alveolar [ɪn] (non-standard London)	1 (lines 20)	0
Proportion of STANDARD BRITISH ENGLISH features	25% (2 out of 8)	64% (7 out of 11)	
Proportion of non-standard London features	75% (6 out of 8)	18% (2 out of 11)	

Listening to the recordings themselves, Anwar is hearably the same person across all these extracts, with the same pitch range, the same voice quality, and the same pool of linguistic features: Punjabi, London vernacular, standard English, with Creole available too. Even so, (a) he turns *some* of these linguistic elements *up* and *others down* as he moves from one conversation to the next, and (b) he is very reflexive about this, referring to ‘Southallian’ in the interaction with Ronni, describing speech like the barrister’s as ‘polished’, and saying that the mechanic’s a Cockney, a “thoroughbred east-ender... of Pakistani origin”.

So, to go back to the question about style, class and its economic correlates, three things are clear from these comparisons. First, these shifts in speech dovetail with a very real hierarchy of wealth and status – this isn’t just playful pastiche, and Anwar gets *more* Cockney with the *mechanic*, not with the barrister. Second, Anwar’s using a very traditional British semiotic to position himself in his conversations with these two people. Standard and vernacular, posh and Cockney, have been intricately linked to socio-economic stratification in Britain for at least 250 years. But third, these linguistic features don’t just come fixed in the encounters, attached to particular jobs like wigs or overalls, and there is more going on here than Anwar just retuning his accent to the class position of the person he’s talking to. Instead, as the talk unfolds, he uses these classed speech forms to shift the footing and to adjust his interactional demeanour. To see this, let’s have another look at what he does when he is telling the mechanic why he called:

Extract 9 (see Ex.7):

13 Anw: yeah y' kNow e::hm e::h
 14 TH- THIS These eh iNsuraNce peoPL
 15 THEy're ReaLLy me- muckiNG me aRounØ ri:gh?
 16 (.)
 17 [now-

18 Ish: [(wha- wha? they sayin

Analytic comment

Anwar is fairly standard in the first formulation of the reason for his call

A neutral response – Ishfaq asks for elaboration

19 Anw: **wELL you know wh' I mean**
 [wɑ:l l jə nɑ α mi:n]
 20 THEy're jusø(.) pussyfoo?in about⁷ THEy areyou kNow
 [ʔIn]
 21 (0.5)
 22 Ish: hhahahahaha[haha
 ((after Ishfaq laughter dies down, his next turn is:
 "right, what I'm gonna do..."))

Anwar doesn't elaborate as requested, but reformulates in much more of a London vernacular accent

Ishfaq engages...

Anwar starts out fairly standard, and the first time he announces his problem – “THEY're ReaLLy me-muckiNG me aRounø ri:gh?” - the response from Ishfaq is non-committal – ‘what are they saying’? But instead of responding to this by going into detail as requested, Anwar just recodes his general sense of grievance in more of the London vernacular – “**you know wh' I mean**” & “pussyfoo?in” – and this time, Ishfaq bursts into a hearty laugh. Anwar's reformulation isn't any more informative than the first time around, so it must be *the way he says it* that catches Ishfaq.

What we have here is an illustration of Bourdieu's “practical mastery of the social structure” (1991:235), and Sapir's reanimation of social institutions in everyday communication (1949:104). So on the one hand, taking the broad contrast between Anwar talking to the lawyer and Anwar talking to the mechanic, we can say, yes, in terms of large-scale, long-term social processes in Britain, it looks as though there is still hierarchic ranking among dialects, registers and styles, closely linked to occupational and economic structure. But once we look closely at interaction, the cartography of classed styles loses some of its immutability, and instead, it is absorbed into very local, personal and particular purposes and projects (cf Ochs 1996). Yes, linguistic forms like these may be signs in a very stratified political economy, but we also breathe them in our efforts to get from one moment to the next.

So it looks as though processes associated with social class are still very powerful in the UK, though it is worth clarifying what social class means here. Class has stopped being just a demographic category, and instead, it is being treated as a set of differentiated ways of speaking-and-doing that we can tie back to the hard economy as a system of contrasting semiotic styles with very robust institutional underpinnings and a lot of material effects. This is broadly compatible with the cultural theory of Williams and Bourdieu, who see class as “a whole body of practices and expectations... a lived system of meanings and values” (Williams 1977:110), and insist that the “most resolutely objectivist theory must take account of... the very construction of this world via the *labour of representation*” (Bourdieu 1991:234). And in linguistic anthropology, it is also in tune with what Irvine says about style (“‘styles’ are... part of a *system of distinction*... index[ing] the social formations (groups, categories, personae, activity types, institutional practices etc) of which they are characteristic” (2001:22)), and with what Agha says about ‘register’ (“registers are *historical formations* caught up in group-relative processes of valorisation and counter-valorisation, exhibiting change both in form and value over time” (2004:25)). So where does this now leave superdiversity?

3. Conclusions

It is worth just recapping on the data we have considered. First we had the difference in the English used by Anwar and his older brother, and linked to this, there seemed to be a kaleidoscopic array of linguistic resources in his vernacular speech, drawing forms from Punjabi, Cockney, standard and Creole English. In fact, we can account for the contrast between Anwar and Naseem if we recognize that instead of just inhabiting pre-given locales, individuals generate and maintain their own partly distinctive *milieux* over time, but at least at first glance, these data seem to present the kind of challenges to established patterns that is captured by the term ‘superdiversity’. Specifically in the case here, our data unsettle stereotypic assumptions about migrant families shifting to English over time, as well as traditional images of exclusively Cockney-like vernacular London English.

But when we took a closer look at communicative practice, we saw Anwar operating with signs and styles grounded in a number of wide-spread, long-term social processes: talking to the lawyer and

the mechanic, we had the traditional semiotics of British social class; speaking Southallian urban vernacular with Ronni, there were evocations of formative experience at the intersection of youth, migration, ethnicity and class; and in fact here is just one more extract in which Anwar speaks to a Sri Lankan woman who doesn't know much English, itself a reflection of ongoing population mobility:

Extract 10

Anwar on the phone with a Sri Lankan woman who doesn't speak much English.

Key: **Traditional London vernacular; Punjabi**; STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP .

- 1 Anw: HeLLo: yes e:h (.)
 2 heLLo _____**l**
 3 how are you
 4 you ok**ay**?
 5 Woman: ((speaks for 3.0))
 6 Anw: ye::s you keeping we**ll**?
 7 Woman: ((speaks for 5.0))
 8 Anw: yeah
 9 Woman: ((speaks for 2.0))
 10 Anw: yah I **need** you **do** job **fo:r** me

Anwar speaks here in a telegraphic 'foreigner talk', not only turning up the Punjabi features in his pronunciation but also simplifying the syntax (see line 10), and he subsequently told us that although he produces this style unthinkingly, it gets remarked on by his daughter, who questions his performance of what she refers to as 'bud bud', a (sometimes racist) term widely used to derogate the English of migrants from the Indian subcontinent.

Bureaucratic, sociological, even sociolinguistic tick-box classifications might and indeed often do struggle with practices like these, but even so, if we are in less of a hurry, it is not too hard to place these interactions in longer, wider social processes. More than that in fact, there were no signs of confusion or incoherence in the data themselves, and as far as we can tell from the recordings, all of Anwar's speech seemed to be ratified interactionally, understood and accepted by his interlocutors.

In Vertovec's account of superdiversity, "social scientists – to say nothing of civil servants – have few accounts of what meaningful interchanges look like, how they are formed, maintained, or broken, and how the state or other agencies might promote them" (2007:27). Contrary to this, the sociolinguistic data here and elsewhere do show something of what "meaningful interchanges look like", and "how they are formed [and] maintained". Indeed more generally, evidence like this plays an important role getting large-scale processes like ethnicity and migration into perspective, showing that they are significant but by no means all-encompassing, that they are complex yes, but also more ordinary and liveable than anything one might infer from the high octane, headline representations of the political and media arena (Harris & Rampton 2009). Rather than being as preoccupied, fractured or troubled by contemporary change as public discourse often imagines, a lot of ordinary people are actually fairly adept in the navigation of what is characterized as superdiversity, bringing intelligible order to their circumstances.

Pushing one step further: Can data and analyses like these answer the high-profile questions proposed by politicians and policy-makers? Do they also show "how the state and other agencies might promote [meaningful interactions]"? Are there new principles of social cohesion in here, a set of practices that can be rolled out for the betterment of society, advanced by the state and other agencies?

Here we need to be much more cautious. Yes, data like these can be vital as a corrective to the distorting stereotypes and dramatizations that dominate public discourse, but even so, it is essential to recognize (a) that the coherence here is partly produced by the shift of analytic perspective, from the large-scale demographic aggregations which underpin statements about superdiversity and fears about social cohesion, down into a quite closely focused interest in participants' interactional sense-making; and (b) that I have actually been rather selective in my choice of data, and also fairly superficial in the analysis. We don't, for example, have responses in some of the extracts, and we haven't looked at how Anwar fares in any longer term projects. If we really did want to go further in the search for new principles of social cohesion in interaction, then among other things, we would need to attend the

interactional effects of Anwar's own social status, and/or the potential contention around styles like the one he uses with the Sri Lankan woman, and we would really have to find and study recordings of the interactional experience and enactment of struggle, dispute, and frustration. There are, in short, no quick fixes for policy anxieties in the study of interaction *per se* – these are issues that need sustained ethnography as well (assuming, that is, that one accepts the premises underpinning these policy discourses, which are of course themselves often open to dispute).

But moving past the quest for immediate policy dividends, we can still formulate some quite powerful claims about the connections between diversity, class and language, suggesting a way in which speech and language bring intelligible structure to contemporary urban contexts. Here it is helpful to refer back to the work of David Parkin in the 1970s, itself broadly compatible with the perspective on style and social structure that I linked to Bourdieu, Irvine and Agha.

Studying urban multilingualism in newly independent Kenya, Parkin described how the values and connotations associated with different local, national and international languages converged in a complex system of symbolic oppositions. This system of contrasting varieties provided

“a framework for [the] expression of [both emergent and established] ideological differences,... [It was] a kind of template along the lines of which social groups [might] later become distinguished... [Indeed more generally w]ithin... polyethnic communities, diversity of speech... provides... the most readily available ‘raw’ classificatory data for the differentiation of new social groups and the redefinition of old ones” (1977:205,187, 208; also e.g. Irvine 2001:22,24).

In fact, systems of contrasting styles like these are going to provide orientational templates for the socialization of individuals as well as the formation of social groups, and I would like to draw two inferences from the data I have referred to in this paper. *First*, English speech in the UK encompasses at least two sets of polar contrasts: (a) the newcomer/local contrast associated with immigration, and (b) the high/low, standard/vernacular polarity associated with social class (see also Rampton 2011b). And then, *second*, the class axis ([b]) is especially insistent, at least in Britain. Of course the intersection of these axes of differentiation is complex and dynamic: my reanalysis of the data from the 1980s sees speech forms that were once associated with immigrants gradually reinvigorating working class British vernaculars, and it is also clear that in different ways, class sensibilities are influential in attitudes to migrant newcomers, ‘freshies’ and ‘FOBs’ (Rampton 2011b:1246-7; Shankar 2008). The polarities of gender introduce additional complexities, and if we want to understand the ongoing enactment and reproduction of these templates, we need to examine situated encounters where people struggle over who is up and who is down, who's out, who's in, and where the lines are drawn. Still, it seems to me that for participants, this kind of symbolic economy is going to bring a level of simplifying intelligibility to environments that others may only see as dizzyingly super-diverse. Or at least that, I think, is an important question for sociolinguistics to pursue.

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Endnotes

¹ The data come from a 2008-2009 project with Devyani Sharma, Lavanya Sankaran, Pam Knight and Roxy Harris, entitled *Dialect Development and Style in a Diaspora Community*, funded by the UK Economic & Social Research Council (RES-062-23-0604). There were >70 informants with mainly Punjabi ethnic backgrounds, aged between 14 and 65, born both in the UK and abroad (in India, Pakistan, East Africa, Malaysia and Hong Kong). Fieldwork was conducted by Devyani Sharma and Lavanya Sankaran, and it involved participant observation, interviews and self-recordings conducted by a smallish subset of the informants. This paper owes a great deal to my colleagues on the project, although the errors are of course my own.

² The term *milieu* refers to much more than just physical locale. For Albrow et al 1997:30, it refers to "our ability, but also the necessity, of creating our own environment according to our intentions and always in

cooperation and conflict with our fellow-beings”. Dürschmidt elaborates on this phenomenological perspective, insisting that milieux should be “defined as relatively stable and situated configurations of action and experience, in which individuals actively generate a distinctive degree of familiarity and practical competence... This configuration enables individuals to handle successfully the changing variety of micro-globalisation” (1997:57). In fact, globalisation (and superdiversity) provide a good deal of impetus for the use of this notion: “It needed the disruption of local communities and their completely ‘localised relations’ and the extension of people’s field of action and experience beyond a specific locale in order to make us fully realise that the individual generates a milieu in an always changing environment, instead of just inhabiting a pre-given locale (cf Giddens 1990:101ff)” (Dürschmidt 1997:61)

³ See e.g. Apache Indian in the 1990s (described in Back 2003), and Gautam Malkani’s 2006 novel *Londonstani*.

Transcription conventions

Fonts representing accents, lects and languages:

- CREOLE
- **London vernacular**
- *Punjabi*
- STANDARD ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION/RP

[] IPA Phonetic Transcription (revised to 1979)

Conversational features

- (.) pause of less than a second
- (1.5) approximate length of pause in seconds
- [overlapping turns
- [
- CAPITALS loud
- >text< more rapid speech
- () speech inaudible
- (text) speech hard to discern, analyst’s guess
- ((text:)) ‘stage directions’

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