

Language ideologies, policies and prejudice in England's education system

Ian Cushing, Brunel University London

ian.cushing@brunel.ac.uk

Linguistics and Knowledge About Language in Education (LKALE) SiG

- A forum for researchers applying linguistic theory in formal education contexts in the UK for L1 and L2 students, from primary to HE.
- A body of expertise to inform public policy and debate on the teaching of grammar, literacy and meta-language.
- LKALE was founded to parallel the LAGB Linguistics in Education committee, with a representative from LKALE on the LAGB committee.

Overview

1. Doing and living language policy

- Critical language policy
- Policy enactment

2. Context and methods

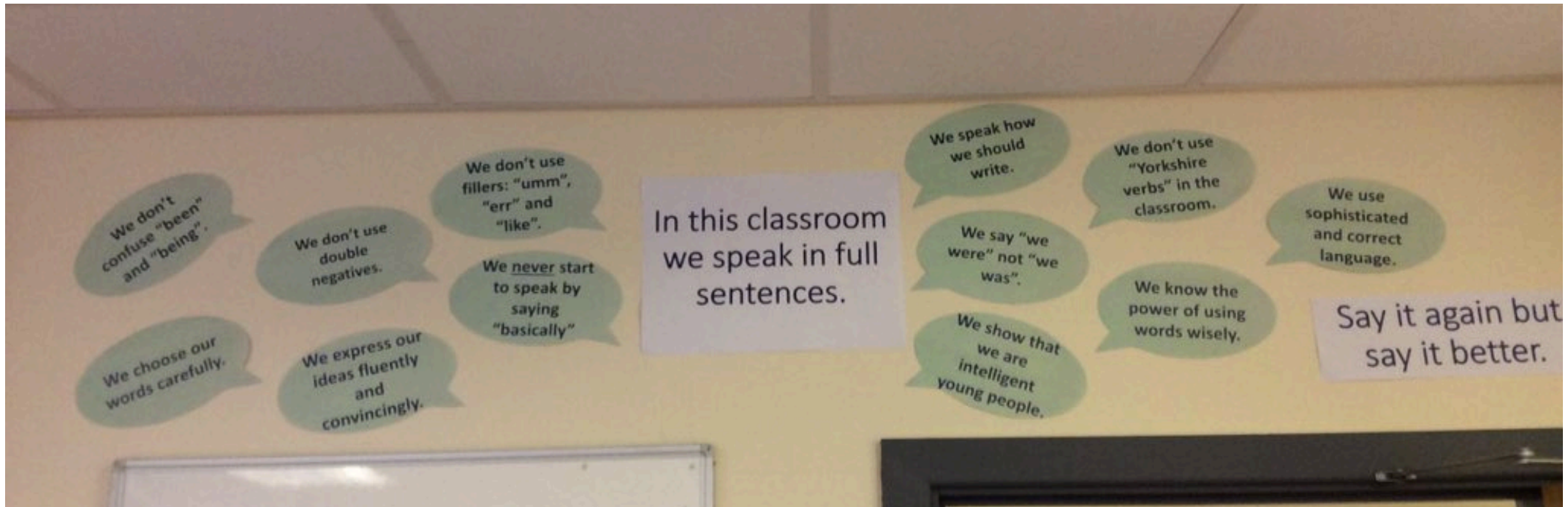
- Schools in England and post-2010 education reform
- Data gathering, sorting, exploring

3. Policy making and processes

4. Language policing, prejudice and standardisation

***Doing and living* language policy in schools**

- Ongoing, multi-site project with an over-arching aim of exploring how language policy gets ‘done’ and ‘lived’ in primary-secondary schools.
- The ‘social life’ of language policy.
- Language policy as chaotic, messy, contested, negotiated and dynamic.
- Schools as key social spaces where language(s) become subjugated, marginalised and legitimised.
- This talk draws on a number of articles from this project (Cushing 2019, 2020a, 2020b) and others currently in press/under review



Where do these ideas about language in schools come from and how do they circulate?

What is the 'social life' of these policies for the people that 'do' them and 'live' them?

How are these local school policies part of a broader policy context and network?

Critical language policy

- Language policies shaped by language ideologies
- Used to promote political and societal agendas
- Serve to further empower dominant social groups whilst further marginalising others
- Enacted through ‘mechanisms’: tests, rules, linguistic landscapes etc., rather than just ‘policy documents’
- Shohamy 2006; Spolsky 2009; Tollefson 2013

Policy enactment

- Education policies are not simply ‘implemented’, but *enacted* creatively, involving multiple interpretations, negotiations, adaptations and resistance
- Policy enactment is a ‘cycle’ rather than a linear flow from ‘top-down’
- Policies are enacted within the local context of the school: pressures, budgets, geographies
- Teachers are ‘not just cogs in the language policy wheel’ but active policy makers
- Ball et al 2012

The standard language ideology (Lippi-Green 2012) and the construction of a ‘good pupil’

a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class

Policy in schools gets ‘done’ and ‘lived’ through a cluster of mechanisms and technologies which circulate and intermingle to discursively construct sets of ideas and discourses about language. These include official, state-produced curricula and frameworks, but also everyday artefacts such as pedagogical materials, linguistic landscapes, tests, rules and school-produced policies, as well as teachers’ own beliefs, attitudes and knowledge about language. Looking at these as a network allows us to see the *social life* of language policy, which requires linguists to get inside the spaces that policy gets embodied.

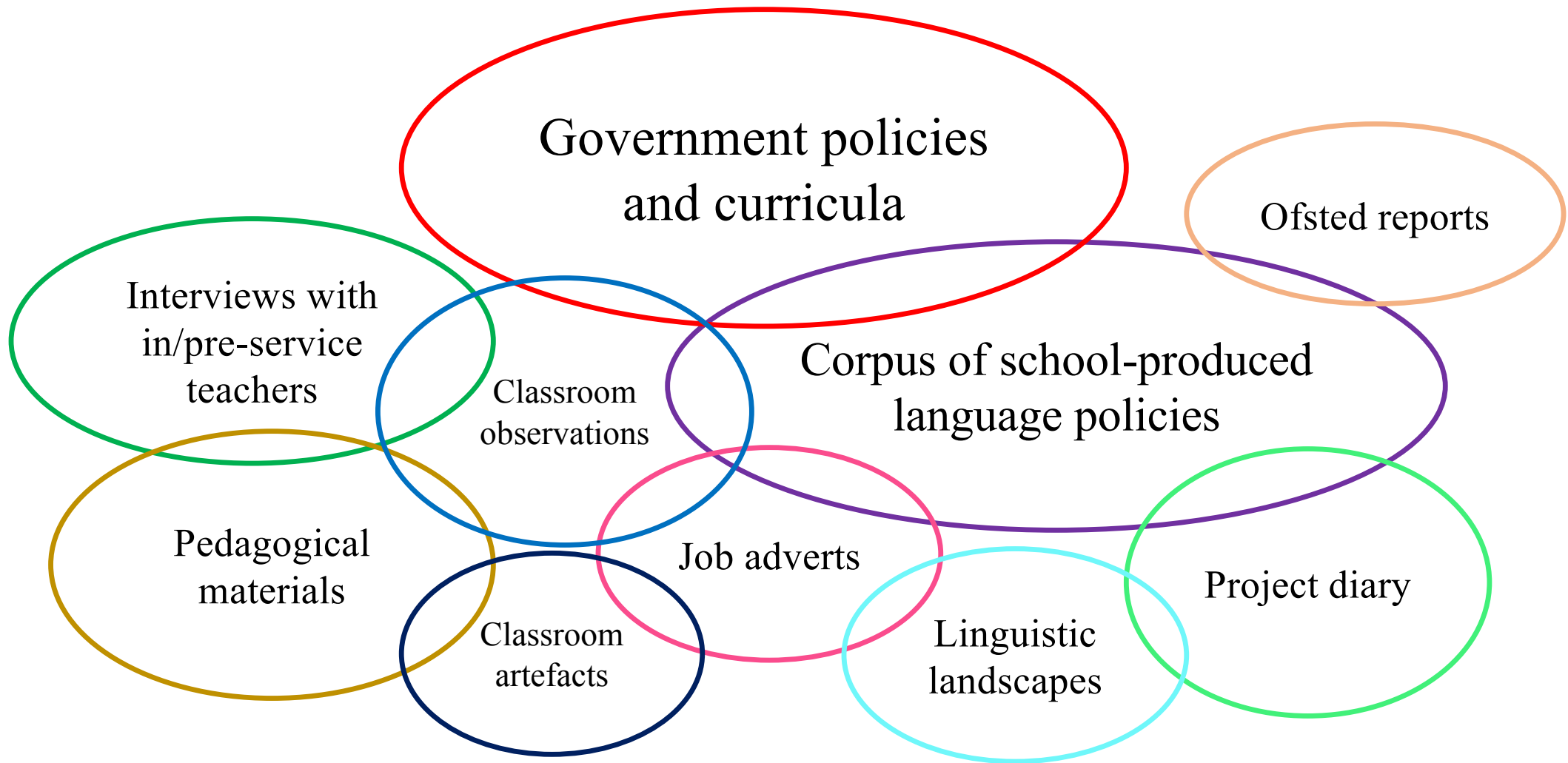
Cushing (forthcoming)

Methods

- A ‘skein’, ‘rhizome’ and bricolage of policy data, broadly following the principles and methods outlined in Heller et al (2018):
 1. **Observing:** finding out what people do and the activities they engage in in schools (pedagogies; classroom interaction)
 2. **Interviews:** finding out what accounts people provide and what they say about things (teachers; students; management)
 3. **Materials collection:** finding out what material traces exist (policy mechanisms and artefacts).
- People do ‘not just read and write texts; they *do* things with them (Gee 2015: 36).
- People do not just ‘do policy’, but policy ‘does them’ (Ball 2015).
- To capture language policy ‘levels’ from macro-meso-micro through the analysis of policy artefacts and how policy gets *embodied, materialised, done and lived*.

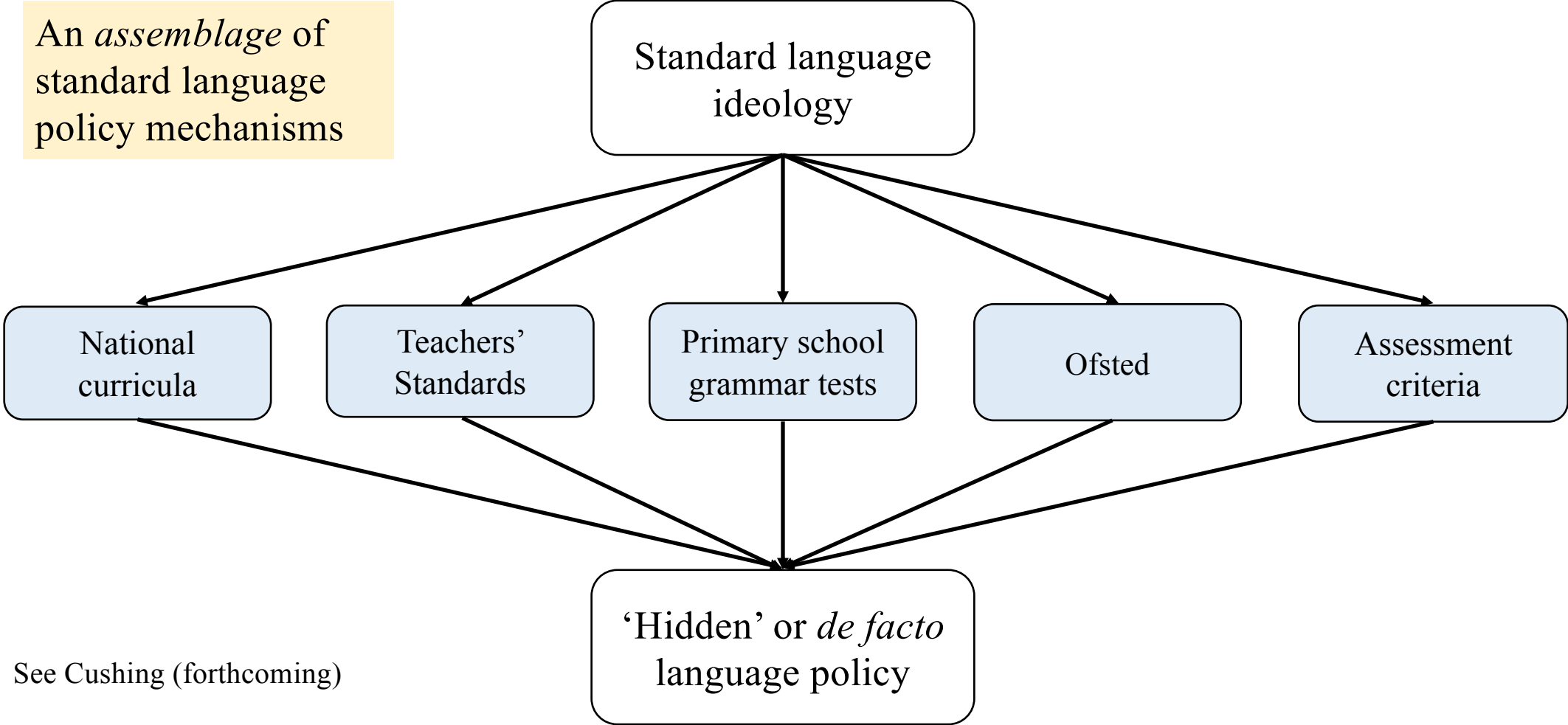


Data, chaos and the 'messiness' of language policies in school



Context of policy reforms and expanded language policy (Shohamy 2006)

An *assemblage* of standard language policy mechanisms



See Cushing (forthcoming)

Standard language ideologies at macro-level

Curriculum

They should be taught the *correct* use of grammar. They should build on what they have been taught to expand the range of their writing and the variety of the grammar they use. (DfE 2014a: 10, my emph.)

Teachers' Standards

demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and *the correct use of standard English*, whatever the teacher's specialist subject. (DfE 2013a: 11, my emph.)

Ofsted reports

Pupils are not given enough opportunities to articulate their learning. On the occasions that they do, teachers **fail to help them speak correctly and in standard English**.

XXX School; Requires Improvement; 2019

In all lessons, in all subjects, students are challenged to write and speak accurately, without **slang** or colloquial language, and at length. The academy's progress in almost **eradicating the use of 'like'** as a sentence connective by students is one example of this hugely successful focus.

XXX Academy; Outstanding; 2019

Teachers **model standard English continuously** and help pupils **communicate** and **enunciate correctly**.

XXX Academy; Outstanding; 2019

Policy making in schools

- School-level policies often reappropriated macro-level discourse and ideologies.
- Remedial notions of ‘correctness’ and ‘repairing’.
- Much evidence of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, where policy documents exist within a network of flows, pathways and relations, reverberating with the ideas of multiple writers.
- The ‘meaning’ of a language policy text emerges not in isolation then, but through its textual and discursive contact points with other texts and policy documents of past and present (Johnson 2015).

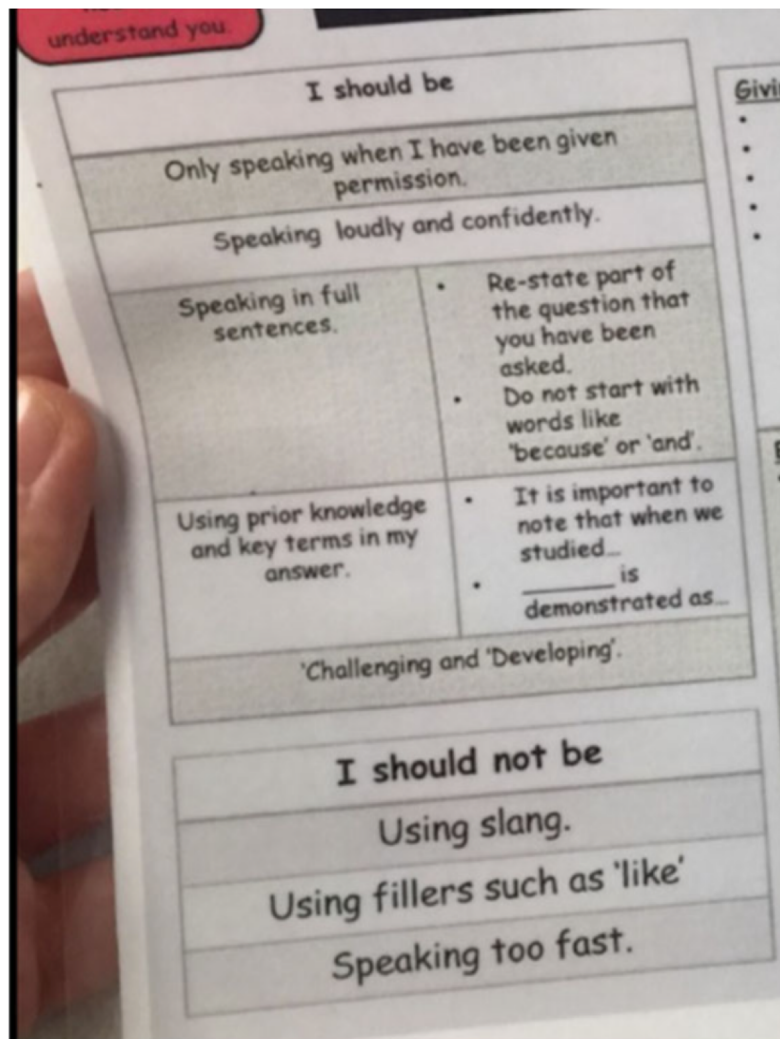
Teachers will **promote the use of Standard English in lessons and around school**. It is the responsibility of both staff and students to **raise standards** in literacy. This starts with an expectation that students should **respond in full sentences and in Standard** English; teachers are expected to **model** this, **to challenge poor oracy**, and to provide students with the language necessary for **a high-level response**.

XXXX Primary School (Literacy Policy)

The way that pupils speak to each other and to staff **denotes their character**. We expect pupils to **speak in full sentences and use standard English**. The use of **slang** and inappropriate language will **not be tolerated** and pupils will be **corrected** by staff. We will encourage the pupils ‘to leave the street at the gate’ and **model adult/professional language**.

XXX Primary School (Literacy Policy)

Linguistic landscapes of surveillance and policing

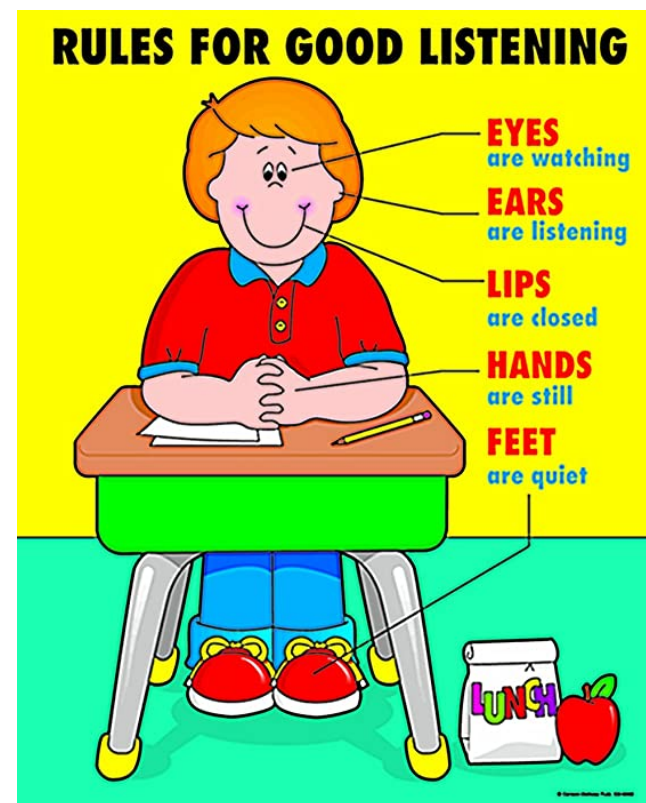


- Systematic controlling, monitoring and regulating of classroom language through scripts and routines.
- Teachers constructed as standard language role-models who have the authority and licence to police language (see also Snell 2013); 'eradicationist' pedagogies (Baker-Bell 2020), yet also work within a policy mechanism of control and compliance.
- Institutional prescriptivism and 'verbal stigma', legitimised by macro-level policies: *word jails*, *slang bans*, *grammar police* and the process of 'pedagogical coercion' (Cushing 2019)
- Interviews with teachers ($n=42$) showed how these types of punitive policies are often enacted and rationalised in reference to macro-level policy
 - As one way of meeting perceived Ofsted requirements
 - As one way of interpreting the curriculum
 - As one way of aligning with the Teachers' Standards
 - Institutional and societal pressures

Standardised language; standardised bodies

- S** Sit up straight
- L** Listen to the teacher
- A** Ask and answer questions in full sentences
- N** Nod your head
- T** Track the speaker

London secondary school, 2020
(Cushing forthcoming)



South African primary school
(Janks 2010)

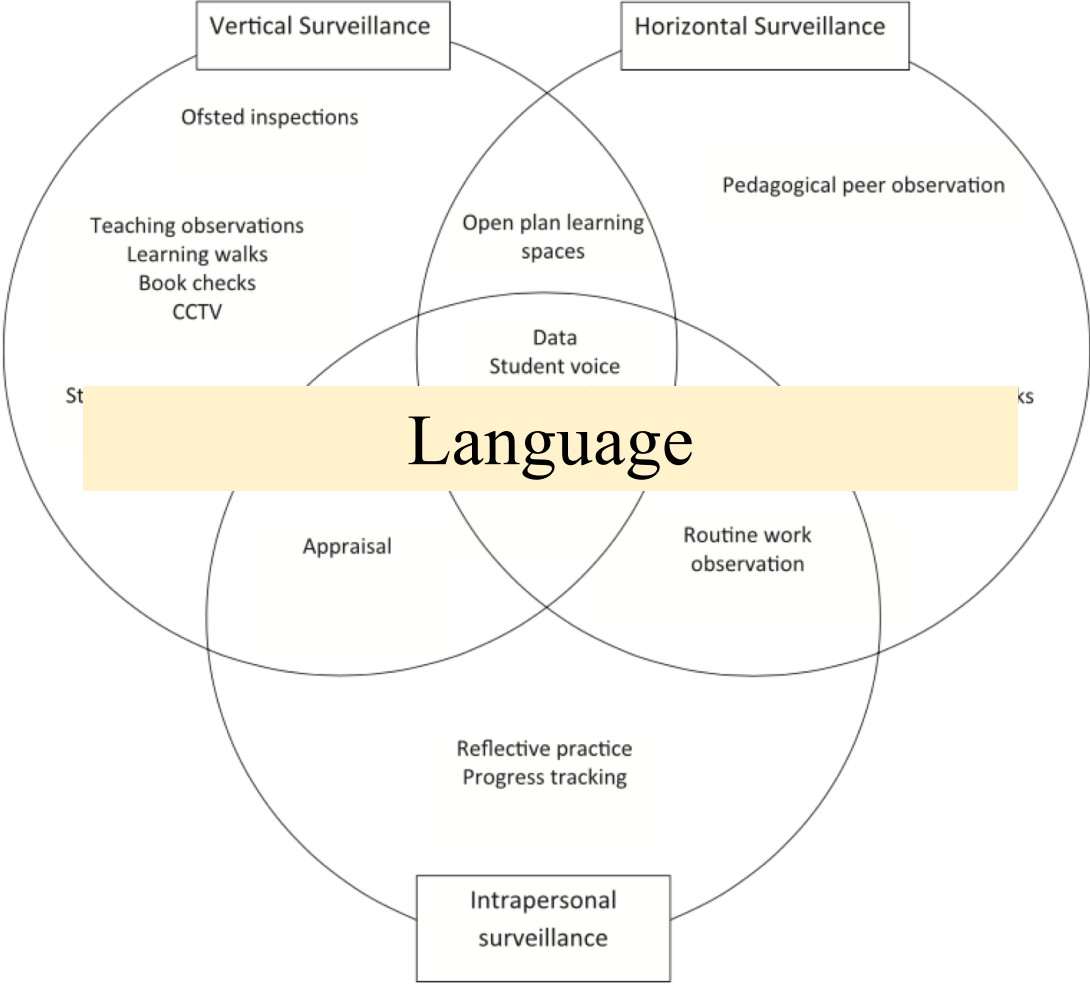
Language, law and order

- Schools in England been given much greater power to implement strict ‘no excuses’ / ‘zero-tolerance’ discipline policies, underpinned by intimidation, incarceration and deterrence.
- Whitman (2008): ‘new paternalism’: highly regulated and prescriptive attempts to make students think and act in terms of ‘middle-class values’, including standardised English.
- An **embodied, expanded view of standard language ideology** to include the body and the environment: clothing, hairstyles, movement, seating arrangements (see also Rosa 2019).
- Slippages between ‘behaviour management’ and ‘language management’:

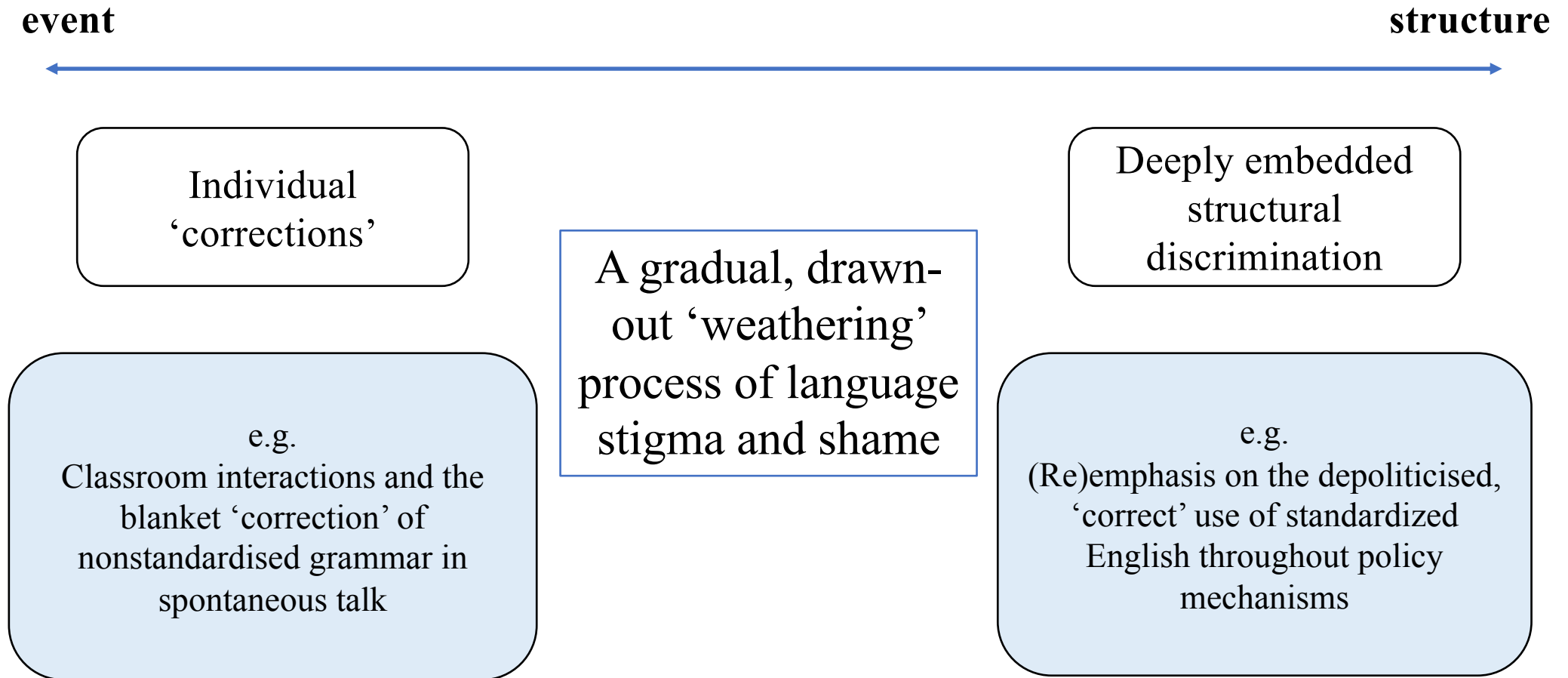
conservatives use ‘grammar’ as the metaphorical correlate for a cluster of related political and moral terms: *order, tradition, authority, hierarchy* and *rules*. In the ideological world that conservatives inhabit, these terms are not only positive, they define the conditions for any civil society, while their opposites—*disorder, change, fragmentation, anarchy* and *lawlessness*—signify the breakdown of social relations.

(Cameron 2012: 96)

Schools and surveillance (Page 2017: 995)



Language policing in the policy process



Conclusions

- A ‘messy’ and ‘socially-orientated’ approach highlights the intertextual/interdiscursive nature of language policy enactment.
- Teachers have agency in the policy cycle, yet work within pressures and constraints meaning spaces for resistance can be difficult to create.
- Language policing manifests itself at both event and structural levels, along with disciplining of the body and movement: an expanded view of the standard language ideology
- Language ‘hygiene’, stigma and discrimination is a constant, drawn out process of ‘erosion’ and ‘weathering’ (Cushing forthcoming), rather than something that is always immediately obvious and visible.
- Further efforts required across education and applied linguistics in terms of developing teachers’ critical sociolinguistic knowledge and critical pedagogies to understand and resist language stigma.

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