

“Wogs, Westies and Writing in Western Sydney”: The reappropriating of labels and the teaching of Academic English

Adrian Hale

University of Western Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

Students and educators at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) have long had to confront issues of social isolation-division: geography, migration, class, welfare-capital inequities, wide variations in English-language competence and accent, and lower than national-average educational backgrounds. Various offensive labels have been invented, or re-applied, by the wider community to refer to the people who live in the suburban areas serviced by this university. These labels are symbolic of much deeper social divisions, but they can also be seen as derogatory referents to people with low social –including linguistic - capital. A new, linguistics-based approach to the teaching of Academic English at UWS seeks to reverse the stigma of offensive labelling as an impediment in the pursuit of literacy, motivation and, ultimately, social empowerment. Indeed, it may very well be true that, for many of these students, the perceived deficiencies in capital are actually linguistic and cognitive advantages which directly assist in their apprehension of the academic register of English.

Keywords: Academic English; Linguistic Capital; Register; Ethnic Identity; Literacy.

INTRODUCTION

This paper will address the issues of identity and class/social-capital disadvantage as experienced by students at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) who were enrolled in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) subject. This crisis of disadvantage was symbolised by labels relating to ethnicity, economic deficit and suburban location. Rather than seeing labels as representative merely of learning impediments, the labels were reclaimed as items of identity and advantage, and ultimately, as intrinsic motivators.

Solutions were found in the main areas of curriculum design and delivery. By helping students to relate success in an academic form of English, to their pre-existing linguistic skills (often present in bilingual backgrounds) and by helping students to formalise critical literacy skills through reflective writing on their social experience/s, the subject became both highly relevant and intrinsically motivating. With an annual student population of around 1800, success has been measured by higher rates of retention and lower fail rates- both generally attributable to aspects of motivation, as actualised by academic potential.

This paper, therefore, will present a brief discussion of the subject's theoretical design, before engaging in a more detailed discussion of the ways in which labels have been reclaimed as part of its curricular core purpose.

DESIGN OF SUBJECT

Rationale for the EAP subject at UWS and curriculum design

The generic utility of systematic theoretical approaches to the teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is well established in the literature. It is, after all, a field which seems to closely follow, and to highly influence, practice (see, for instance, Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Bundy, 2004; Coffin et al., 2012; Gardner, 2012). While some studies could be characterised as 'pure research', most of these lines of enquiry, by contrast, could be referred to as studies in the resolution of impediments to student learning of EAP. Of course, these impediments are typically first identified at the local, practitioner level. Resolutions to these impediments, once analysed, on the other hand, may very well be derived from a blend of theory and praxis. That is certainly the case with the EAP subject developed at UWS, which responded to students' literacy needs through an innovative blend of theoretical frame, customised curriculum design and flexible delivery-accommodation at the local level. The subject itself was the product of internal research. In 2010, UWS responded to internal studies identifying a clear literacy gap in students presenting for tertiary study, by introducing new, purpose-driven subjects in each School. The impulse was driven by the need to provide:

Mandatory units in each school that aim to develop students' academic literacy skills...to i) introduce students to the expectations of academic literacy at tertiary level, ii) inform their understandings of academic literacy practices and iii) develop their academic writing and literacy skills through completing contextually relevant and meaningful writing-based and/or blended learning assessment tasks (Mowbray, 2013, p. 5).

Indeed, the implementation of this set of recommendations was entirely context-driven. Therefore, in recognition of the specific literacy needs of the students in UWS' School of Humanities and Communication Arts (HCA), some autonomy in framing its literacy subject was "built into" its design:

Given the diversity of the student population at UWS however, the university may face some unique challenges in responding to the literacy needs of its students and in developing resources that effectively support students' literacy learning (Mowbray, 2013, p. 5).

The literacy subject, titled Analytical Reading and Writing (ARW), was designed to teach academic literacy as a support to the generic BA program. The subject, originally framed with a rhetoric-philosophy model of literacy, received negative student feedback. A proposal, to frame ARW with a Systemic Functional Grammar literacy model, was rejected on the basis of metalinguistic inaccessibility and low applicability. ARW was subsequently re-framed with a generalised linguistics approach and a customised critical-analytical base. Following this re-framing, the subject received favourable feedback from students and teaching staff. ARW was then upgraded to its current core/compulsory unit status for all 1st year students in the BA and BA (Teaching) programs. It also attracts enrolments from students in other degrees who can take the subject as an elective. Currently, its current annual enrolment is over 1800 students.

Specifics of subject design, in response to general student needs and the BA program

The pedagogical dilemma - of having to address a diversity of student literacy needs, within a mainstream subject, while students are simultaneously studying other subjects - means that ARW requires a very targeted, and intensive, curriculum. Because of the 'situated' nature of the subject within degree programs, the curriculum was never designed to address the needs of students with low proficiency in the English language. Rather, the assumption has been made that students presenting for ARW already possess a "minimal conversational competence in the English language" (UWS, 2013a, p.5).

The exact nature of "competence" at UWS is tied to IELTS rankings (see Coffin & Hewings, 2004; Coffin et al., 2012), but it also has a pedigree from other notions of language competence. It has reference to Chomsky's original concept of competence as an "underlying grammatical system...intuitively known by all native speakers" (Flowerdew, 2013, p. 6) and it also acknowledges other, more codified theoretical divisions of grammatical, sociolinguistic, interactional and discourse competencies by later researchers (such as Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swan, 1980; Leung, 2005; Celce-Murcia, 2008). Less specifically, and in the context of deregulation in Australian universities, there is a type of self-selection by students who enrol at UWS with the expectation that they are prepared for the demands of communication in a generic BA. Therefore, ARW assumes students are competent in the code of English, upon which competence a specific register of English (with its associated formal skills in referencing and essay writing, for instance) will be scaffolded.ⁱ

In designing the subject, therefore, it was necessary to consider the purpose-nature of ARW as essentially that of a bridging subject which supports the aims of the BA. That is, it is assumed that students need facilitation from generic language competence to specific register ability. This idea of register ability was further refined into areas of 'literacy deficit-gain'. These three areas of EAP deficit-gain were given the following labels: Functional Literacy, Intra-language Literacy and Critical Literacy. They can be linked together under the heading of utility. That is, they can be assessed contextually for whether they offer practical help in motivating students to overcome - perceived or real - social deficits in linguistic capital. Or, to put it another way, in order to learn, students need to be persuaded that the things they are being taught (and the way this content is delivered) are of direct utility to them.

These areas of literacy are explained to students in the following ways. Functional Literacy is defined as a conceptual awareness and practical grammatical-expressive literacy at the expert user level of competence in the English language register of Academic English. More specifically, this functional literacy requires grammatical competence in the reception and production of texts in the academic register. Assessment criteria include correct use of: spelling; syntax; word class; punctuation; sentence structure; clause to paragraph cohesion and coherence; essay structure; topic sentences; thesis statements; vocabulary and repertoire.

Intra-language Literacy is defined as the ability to reflect on language use in general, using concepts such as: metalanguage; reflection on types of language use; social attitudes to language use, including arbitrariness and conventionality; distinguishing the academic register; nuances in vocabulary; the study of style guides; and advanced referencing and research techniques.

The third area is that of Critical Literacy, which is defined as knowledge and skills in: logic and the evaluation of argument; critiquing the Western University liberal arts tradition; distinguishing argument from exposition and opinion; identifying authority, evidence and speaking positions; synthesis of source materials; use of structural quotation and evidence; and the question of bias and objectivity in university-level writing.

This curriculum design and blended delivery cater for the uniqueness of UWS student demographics. For the purpose of clarifying this discussion of student needs, some central observations will be made relative to these demographics, before relating them to a more generalised applicability in the teaching of EAP. It is also relevant here to note that the subject ARW is constantly subject to external review (driven by student survey-feedback) and, in its current blended delivery, is at 95% online for assessment tasks, but up to 80% for on-campus attendance. This mixed delivery caters for the reality of a diverse student population dispersed across a large suburban area.

GWS AND UWS STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Geography and demographics

UWS services a geographical region of Sydney which is highly distinctive in the nation of Australia: geographically and demographically. Geographically, UWS is a multi-campus university which is spread across a large area of Sydney's suburban sprawl, from semi-rural fringes to suburban centres in the wider Sydney basin. This region, officially referred to as "Greater Western Sydney", occupies around 9,000 square kilometres, or $\frac{1}{4}$ of the entire Sydney metropolitan region by area (NSW Trade & Investment, 2013). Potentially, this university caters for almost half of Sydney's total population of 4.3 million (NSW Trade & Investment, 2013). By contrast, there are four other, older, publicly funded universities in Sydney (UNSW, USyd, Macquarie and UTS) which are concentrated in the eastern half of the city, and which together service the other areas of Sydney's population. Because these other universities have been established, collectively, for much longer than UWS, they also have extensive alumni and business-government grant networks which add significant scholarship, social prestige, and campus services-infrastructure support to their government funding for student places.

This means that half of the city's population is serviced by four well-funded, prestigious and 'local' universities, while the other half of the city is served by one, newly established university dispersed across a large geographical area, such as UWS, which was established 25 years ago, in 1989, from an amalgamation of previously unrelated colleges scattered across the western suburbs of Sydney. While students can, potentially, attend any of these universities from anywhere in Sydney, the reality for most students in Greater Western Sydney (especially UWS students), is quite different. These students typically need to physically travel long distances (often without the benefit of public transport) if they want to attend university at all.

There is, then, a geographical spread of tertiary opportunity in Sydney which mirrors a spatial division between the highly urbanised centre/east of the city and the generally suburbanised west of the city. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is a spatial division which has a corresponding demographical division. Western Sydney, in contrast with other areas of Australia, is dominated by large-scale patterns of immigration, social disadvantage (including welfare dependency, lower educational attainments and poorer options for public transport), and higher diversity for languages spoken, culture, ethnicity and religion (Western Sydney Region of Councils [WSROC], 2013).

GWS is also an area dominated by lower levels of per-capita income: workers typically commute and/or work in more 'blue-collar' fields, including manufacturing and service industries (WSROC, 2013). Another aspect of this industrial divide, is the fact that if residents of GWS seek employment in 'white-collar' fields, they typically will have to commute to eastern/central areas of the city. One way of interpreting these demographics, would be to assert that residents of Western Sydney simply have to work and/or commute for more hours and for less pay, relative to other Sydney residents (WSROC, 2013).

A major demographic aspect of Western Sydney which warrants closer inspection is its absorption of Australia's immigrants: around 40% of all newly arrived immigrants settle in Western Sydney. Indeed, almost 60% of Western Sydney's population consists of either 1st or 2nd generation immigrants (Collins, 2006, p.135). It is also one of the most diverse multicultural communities in the world, including up to 180 nationalities and at least 100 different community languages (UWS Pocket Profile, 2009; Collins, 2006, p.135). A significant number of these migrants arrive in Australia with inadequate English language skills. In the 2011 Census, for instance, respondents were asked to self-define for English language proficiency: "128,617 people in the WSROC Region who speak another language report difficulty with speaking English" (WSROC, 2013). Superficially, at least, it would seem that such linguistic deficit, in a host country where English is the medium of formal education at all levels, could only be problematic for social capital.

The real significance of GWS and UWS demographics in the area of linguistic capital

Of course, while contextually a lack of English language proficiency is problematic, in general cognitive terms, competence in one or more languages should be seen as a form of capital, rather than simply a situational deficit. So, regardless of whether people new to Australia arrive with low, or high, proficiency in English, they typically have language skills in one or more other languages. In the 2011 Census data, a significant percentage of respondents in Western Sydney reported that they spoke English well, and spoke at least one other language in addition to English (WSROC, 2013). This category of people (34.2%, or well over 500,000 people), combined with the number of people reporting problems with English (8.5%, or over 120,000 people), together account for 42.7% of the population of Western Sydney. This means that almost half the population of the region served by UWS, are people who speak a language (in addition to, or) other than English.

Most of these people, who speak a language other than English, will have also had the benefit of formal grammatical education in that language. There is sufficient research evidence to indicate that a formal grounding in formal grammar provides the metalinguistic-cognitive advantage in 2nd language acquisition (Haugen, 1953; Weinreich, 1953; Thiery, 1978; Romaine, 1989, 1991; Li, 2007). This is significant, in the context of an Australian (primary and secondary school) educational environment, where for the past 30 years, formal grammar has been almost entirely absent. Therefore, it can be claimed that many LOTE-NESB people, new to Australia, and resident in GWS, potentially have a linguistic advantage over Australian-born people, who are typically monolingual, and who have no capital in the area of formal grammatical understanding of their own language (Tovey, 2013).

It is logical then, that a lack of formal grammatical education for the Australian-born population in GWS is a contributing factor in lower educational outcomes in this region (WSROC, 2013). It is also logical, that migrants to GWS who are not given adequate educational support/opportunity in transitioning from latent linguistic potential, to actual English language competence, will follow similar patterns of underachievement. This is despite the fact that many of these migrants actually arrive in Australia with educational qualifications which are higher than average for this region (WSROC, 2013). Unfortunately, the reality for many of these people is that, without a successful transition into English language competence, these qualifications are never fully utilised. As a further complication, it is evident that many teachers in the public education system, trained into a curriculum which ignored formal grammar for at least 30 years, are ill-equipped to facilitate this linguistic potential for either migrant or Australian-born students. This is a situation being addressed in recent years through the reintroduction of formal grammar into the primary school syllabus, but the reality of GWS linguistic deficit is complex, and generationally embedded. To ask teachers (who are often also sourced from GWS) to teach grammar is problematic, since:

It...assumes that teachers can produce the requisite forms of grammatical knowledge when many of the teachers themselves are products of the same educational system where grammar was not explicitly taught...It effectively condemns generations of students to...‘educational ghettos’, or a deeply entrenched system of social disadvantage. The better suburbs, and the better schools, will always have more chance of getting teachers who can model higher registers of the language, while the rest of the schools, and the majority of students, will miss out. (Hale & Basides, 2013, pp. 91-92).

Unless individuals in GWS can access more opportunities for linguistic capital attainment, it is unlikely that this situation will change. After all, there is a strong link between access to education (or other linguistic transformational opportunities), and social-capital opportunity. Another way of viewing this latent, but unrealised potential across variegated communities in GWS, is to see it as a type of institutional marginalisation from power, in the access-facilitative area of education. Indeed, it represents a situation where a demographic divide inhibits real social mobility. Education can be seen as a major transformative key in the overcoming of such obstacles: “education is political and its relationship to other social institutions is readily defined in a system that works more effectively for social groups that already have cultural and social power” (Jones Diaz, 2004, p. 98).

The implication, therefore, for any real educational intervention, is that there is every probability of a social change: teachers, equipped with linguistic capital can make this skill set available to following generations. At UWS, this is being addressed, but there are associated deficits tied to lower literacy levels. These include a general cultural deficit of educational aspiration, and this is linked to a typical lack of confidence: regionally and individually. Unfortunately, this means that, attitudinally, students presenting in 1st year cohorts at UWS are underprepared for the literacy requirements of tertiary education. Internal UWS data indicates a correspondence between generally poor educational (cohort) attainments prior to commencement at university with similar data for the GWS community in general (University of Western Sydney, 2013c). For example, almost 60% of ARW students present at university without having completed high school (University of Western Sydney, 2013c). This includes students, who are recent migrants to Australia, but whose prior educational qualifications are not recognised officially by the Australian Government. It is hardly surprising then, that most students (up to 80%) who present at UWS in 1st year cohorts are also the first in their family to have ever attended university (University of Western Sydney, 2013a/b/c). Students thus often begin university study without any culture of higher educational attainment. More seriously, they often experience (far too frequently) a familial-cultural distrust and undermining of students’ aspirations. Related to this can be added the ‘mix’ of more or less ‘hidden’ demographic features. For example, students from GWS are more likely to have: carer/familial responsibilities (including young children and extended family); disabilities or other life challenges (including migrant experience of dislocation and refugee trauma); fulltime or insecure casual work responsibility; and transient accommodation issues (University of Western Sydney, 2013a/b/c).

If these factors are regarded as a collective challenge to the commencement of tertiary education, it is hardly surprising that the participation rate for residents in GWS in tertiary institutions is at least 20% below the national average (University of Western Sydney, 2013a/b/c; WSROC, 2103). Typically, therefore, the residents of GWS simply do not have the normative cultural tradition of university experience. Indeed, perhaps the most important consideration is that GWS students are sensitive to a wider social expectation of under-achievement. That is, the general Australian community, and in particular, the wider community of Sydney, considers tertiary success for GWS residents as the exception, rather than the rule.

The result is that many GWS-UWS students arrive in 1st year feeling isolated, underprepared, under-motivated, and without any real understanding of tertiary expectations. Having taken the immense social and psychological step towards university, many students do not really expect to succeed. Even with targeted support networks supplied by the various programs at UWS, 1st year student withdrawals/disenrolments have in previous years peaked at over 20% by the 5th week of semester. It would appear that the cycle of low self-esteem and underachievement has been self-fulfilling. In part, at least, this social expectation has been justified, statistically. It is also embedded in certain 'labels' which reduce the residents of GWS to the periphery of society. As symbols of social placement, this powerful semiotic layer facilitates a rationalisation for, and reinforcement of, underachievement.

THE POWER OF LABELS

The nature of labels

Labels used as social differentiation offer high connotative power. They reflect social values and they generate new social realities. They are affective and effective for social stasis, and they are deictic and they possess high impact for in/out-group solidarity. More importantly, they reinforce and compound attitudinal-cultural deficits. Although there is some debate over the actual data and social force of labelling, there is consensus that:

Labels and language are believed to affect our perceptions of people and events. An important example is our sensitivity to the names used to designate certain minority groups in our society [effects] can go beyond the identification process to elicit positive or negative associations. (Donakowski & Esses, 1996, p. 86)

In further defining the affective power of labels, Crystal's dual categorization, which means the affective definition works for labels in both positive and negative ways, is slightly reductive but still useful. Crystal defines them as both structurally (grammatical) "vocatives" and functionally "phatic-solidarity markers" (Crystal, 1995 pp. 220,290). Labels, of course, can work either way- for positive or negative affect. They can be used to signal out-group identity, but of course, there is no out-group marking without simultaneous (implicit) reference to the in-group which uses the label to exclude those marked as different. This is consistent with Malinowski's (1923) original identification of the uses of phatic communication as reflective of "the basic human need to signal friendship – or at least, lack of enmity" (Crystal, 1994, p.10). Phatic communication can work in negative ways too, of course, since exclusive labels are representative of the needs of people to identify not only exclusive membership of, but also exclusion from, a group. Indeed, as labels become conventional and accepted for affective power, they then become ritualised forms of address and institutionalised (Schegloff, 1991).

Labels thus signal patterns belonging to specific speech communities (Wardhaugh, 2010, pp. 129-132), and, depending on the social capital enjoyed by any given speech community, labels can be used to exert enormous power over other groups and individuals. Accordingly, labels are functional as items of sociolectal cultural (or speech community) demarcation and exclusion (Fromkin et al., 2009), and thus they signify power relations. As discourse and identity markers, they act as arbitrary and conventional signals of group membership (Jaworski & Coupland, 2006, pp. 3-11). As such, knowledge and appropriate use of labels can be a type of "cultural literacy" (Hirsch et al, 2002) which enables members of a speech community to include or exclude (Fairclough, 1999; Wardhaugh, 2010, pp. 351-353). Indeed, there seems to be a consensus that the act of using labels is "performative" or generative of

“asymmetry in power relations” (Hellinger & Ammon, 1996, p. 256). Labels thus work to “emphasise power relationships...congruent with stereotypes” (Boxer, 2002, p. 199).

These power relations, representative of existing demographical difference, are ‘normalised’ by the very labels used to identify difference in the first place. It is not uncommon, for instance, for residents of GWS to be referred to in derogatory ways by others in the Sydney region (and beyond, into the wider Australian community). Difference can be identified, and positioned, by reference to ethnic appearance, cultural-religious dress or other symbols of clothing difference, by first or last names, or by suburb (usually generically). Associative meanings are used to discriminate and position-marginalise. Sometimes the discrimination is subtle; at other times the labels are overt and unmitigated. Domains of interaction include social networks, employment, and access to public services. However the labels are applied, they are generative of social inequity.

Labels for GWS residents: ‘wog’, ‘westie’ and related labels

In the case of GWS residents, labels are applied for 2 categories of difference: class and ethnicity. Class is reflected by physical location and social capital. Ethnicity is defined as difference to, or variation from, the more mainstream Anglo society. Various labels fall under each category, so the category of class can be represented by the label “westie”, and it is synonymous with “bogan” and “yobbo” in Macquarie Dictionary. ‘Bogan’ and ‘yobbo’ are respectively defined as:

Bogan...A young person who dresses and behaves in an uncouth fashion...someone who lacks stylishness in their manners or appearance...lacking in style or sophistication.

Yobbo...An unrefined, uncultured, slobbish person.

While these terms are synonymous, the label ‘yobbo’ has seen a decline in usage, and it is increasingly replaced with the label ‘bogan’. Indeed, the label ‘bogan’ has been expanded beyond its original, rather vague denotation for ‘uncool’, into lexical territory that conflates with ‘westie’ (Rowen, 2013). Similarly, although the label ‘westie’ in Macquarie Dictionary had, originally, semantically neutral and specific deictic geographic reference for the residents of GWS, it has taken on high negative connotations, and is now typically applied to mean lower class, unsophisticated and poorly educated. The US equivalent would be “poor white trash” (Hughes, 2010, pp. 191-192). In the GWS context, it refers to a particular suburban identity, and by extension, class (Redmond, 2007).

Classism is a powerful tool of division, especially when it is applied as a permanent marker of derogatory social control (Hughes, 2010, p. 191). This is certainly true for the label ‘westie’. However, in recent years, the label ‘westie’ has also, to some extent, become conflated with the label ‘wog’, in recognition of the fact that residents of GWS are more likely to be ethnically mixed and thus racially different to residents of the eastern half of the city (Hughson, 2001; Zevallos, 2004; Simic, 2007; Gwyther, 2008; Carniel, 2009).

Originally signifying high offence and social force, the term ‘wog’ was used to refer to any person of darker skin colour. As such, its application has been notoriously imprecise and malleable (Hughes, 1988, pp.126-138; Hughes, 2010, pp. 144, 155). In the Australian context, its offensive power in recent decades has been reclaimed by ‘ethnic’ comedians, or diluted through proscription by activists in so-called Political Correctness (Zevallos, 2004). Effectively, this instance of PC means that normative social attitudes have driven the term into ‘underground’ usage. Contributing to this dilution of effectiveness as weapons of offence is the reappropriation of the labels by the labelled. Thus, more recently, the labels ‘westie’ and ‘wog’ have become emblematic of defensive pride. For those previously labelled as

'outsiders', these labels have taken on covert prestige. When used to self-identify, the labels are fiercely applied to mark a type of linguistic territory (Allard, 2002; Simic, 2007; Gwyther, 2008; Sala et al., 2010).

Perhaps logically therefore, as these labels are adopted as self-descriptors, and the denotation of 'westie' is associative for mixed (or at least indeterminate) ethnicity, the newer term, 'bogan' has become more common as an external descriptor. Thus, the label 'bogan' has taken on new social force and is used, increasingly, as the new 'westie' label (Rowen, 2013; Stephens, 2013). More significant, however, is the way in which 'bogan' operates and fills a lexical need which is (implicitly at least) ethnically specific as well as demographically/class-based. 'Bogan' has greater application because it implies lower class and 'white'. The irony, of course, which Rowen does not seem to be aware of, is that while the label is used, ostensibly in reference to lower class 'white' Australians, and especially in reference to residents of GWS, in the context of an increasingly diverse ethnic GWS, this newer label is already becoming amorphous. Thus, for non-GWS residents, the term 'bogan' has ethnic and class specificity. Meanwhile, for many people in GWS, for whom mixed ethnicities and inter-racial marriages are becoming, increasingly, unremarkable and mundane, the label 'bogan' is used to denote class, but not necessarily ethnicity.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that these labels are often amorphous, residents of GWS, who are already sensitive to their demographic difference, understand quite well the power of labels which discriminate on the basis of ethnicity or class, and which are applied against them. The question remains, therefore, as to how the students of UWS might negotiate these labels as they struggle with other areas of demographic deficit.

DEMOGRAPHIC DEFICITS AND LABELS AS OPPORTUNITY-ASSETS FOR MOTIVATIONAL LITERACY

The answer to this complex dilemma was not in ignoring these 'negative' aspects of students' situations, but rather in directly addressing them. The negative labels, therefore, became symbolic of reclamation of identity. A deliberate decision was taken to 'rework' the labels into tokens of capital and opportunity. So, for instance, the reality of ESOL migrant experience was reworked into lectures and tutorial content as a linguistic capital asset, not deficit. That is, evidence from previous semesters was supplied to indicate that students with lower English language competence, but who had backgrounds which included formal grammatical training in one or more other languages, typically excelled at the formal grammatical requirements for some assessment tasks. In addition, students who had this linguistic capital could be expected to be teachable into the requirements of the academic register of English (Jenkins, 2007). With hard work and support, these students typically adapted their existing linguistic capital into a working competence in this register, and they were also able to transfer these skills into more discipline specific, content-based subjects in their degree. Of course, students who were not yet at this stage of competence were encouraged to view their progress as a motivator for later success in repeating the subject ARW.

A more complicated label to address is the label relating to class. For many students presenting at UWS, a lack of familial-community support means that they are very vulnerable to negative labels (White, 2011). Many of these students are monolingual, or inconsistently bilingual, and general literacy, or competence in English, especially for the academic register, is weak or minimal. For these students, a 'crash-course' in formal grammar is essential, and they need to see it as relevant to their education and career. Indeed, the greatest resistance to adopting the formal English required is the sensitivity to identity; they see Academic English as alien to their demographic or speech community.

The key to overcoming this identity struggle was to have tutors and lecturers model the identity transition for students. Academics who were from GWS, but who were now successful in the wider academic world, were selected to teach into the subject ARW. This reinforced the latent expectation that UWS offered students a place of identity and belonging, familiar to their speech communities, but also facilitative of transformational identity. This solidarity of place and community meant that students were thus able to see that Academic English was a desirable (or aspirational) and additional, skill set; it was a vehicle for social success but was not obtained at the expense of identity or community. It was compared to a lingua franca which could be used as necessary to facilitate social mobility. It was also 'sold' to students as a key ingredient in empowering others in the GWS community, should they then go on to become educators themselves.

More formally, students were presented with the 'market' choice that they were confronted with. This accords with the concept of linguistic 'market value', as articulated by Bourdieu (1991), who defines this effect as a type of class stratification. Indeed, the residents of GWS are keenly aware of their place in this market of social valuation according to linguistic production of accent and vocabulary. It is an awareness of linguistic deficit linked to social estrangement:

This means that the market fixes the price for a linguistic product...and we have learned the value that the products offered on this primary market...receive...The sense of the value of one's own linguistic products is a fundamental dimension of the sense of knowing the place which one occupies (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 484-485).

Another key element in the motivation of UWS students to take on the skill sets associated with university and the Academic Register, was to explicitly discuss social marginalisation as part of the lecture and tutorial process. More importantly, it was essential to reframe this GWS typicality as another asset. In this case, it was a matter of reinventing disadvantage as emblematic of greater critical literacy. As residents of GWS who are already on the 'fringes' through low socio-economic placement, and who frequently are new to an English-speaking community, UWS students present at university with an inherent outsider's view of the Western academic tradition. This type of "observer's paradox" (Labov, 1972, p. 209), means that, as outsiders not fully participating in the capital and power structures of mainstream society, they are more aware of these exclusions and structures in the first place. This is also true for the power structures and hegemonic paradigms of the Western university system. They understand only too well that "education is never neutral...universities [are] a key site of struggle, where local knowledges meet global knowledges...over different representations of the world" (Pennycook, 1997, p.262). Thus, the average UWS student has a 'head start' for criticality, and having identified this potential asset, the subject ARW encourages students to develop their unique discourse as an additional frame with which to build criticality.

The net effect has been positive. Previously, many students saw aspirational linguistic capital as a threat to identity, with all the undermining covert prestige of linguistic under-performance. Now they see their linguistic capital (deficit or otherwise) as potentiality. They understand that under-performance linguistically means lower market value and unrealised potential. They also understand that it offers a restricted code as opposed to an elaborated code. That is, if a GWS resident cannot adapt, or perform, their linguistic repertoire across registers and accommodate the communicative needs of a wider range of interlocutors in the greater Australian context, they are confined to a narrower social mobility.

Assuming that there are no real or substantial cognitive differences between residents of GWS and the rest of Sydney, there is no reason why UWS students cannot unlock their linguistic potential. The difference is that this latent potential has been activated by the very marginalising affect that GWS residents are subject to. The key was in turning these labels, along with other aspects of demography

and geography, into motivations. In this case the definition of motivation means to make GWS/UWS students into independent learners, with a sense of social power and purpose. There is, after all, a “rich reservoir of cultural, social and economic capital produced in many of the communities residing in Greater Western Sydney” (Jones Diaz, 2004, p. 97); it just needed activation. Indeed, the ability to recognise, internalise and transform labels and deficits into a type of intrinsic motivation, is a real skill. It can be referred to, therefore, as a Motivational Literacy, since it represents an ability to decode social structure and difference, and to recode these areas of deficit, into a negotiated set of motivated skills.

To elaborate, it is possible to combine aspects of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations into a sense of autonomy over learning; or an aspect of literacy capital (O’Sullivan & Howe, 1996). That is, we can define Motivational Literacy (ML) as the ability to recognise one’s own level of literacy relative to an aspirational level of literacy, and to self-motivate (including the seeking out of support material and education) for the attainment of that desired literacy level. ML also entails a student’s adeptness in organisation, readiness to take up assessment tasks, to read widely and to synthesise information into relevant critical thinking, and the ability to overcome linguistic deficits (and social disadvantage) through application of inherent intelligence and diligence. Indeed, ML taps into GWS student potential in many ways. One very important area of potential is the latent critical potentiality, where students can use language skills sets to assess the language of the academy- the very arena of language use from which they would normally be excluded. After all, sensitivity to the ways in which their world is constructed, from the outside (or perhaps, the inside out) offers UWS students a critical ‘edge’ over those for whom the world of language use is unexceptional. Indeed, UWS students seem to be more alert to the idea that there is no such thing as ‘ideology-free’ teaching (Pennycook, 1997). Rather, UWS students need little guidance to see the ways in which language:

...provides the categories available through which both the personal and social world can be interpreted. Thus, language provides a potent means through which the world is defined in social consciousness and, historically, has served a key means by which social inequalities and different forms of cultural oppression have been hegemonized. (Rassool, 1998, p. 90)

ML contains within it the means to maintain impetus and to attain self-confidence to speak and to “enter academic dialogue [where] authority to speak is grounded in...research and critical acumen” (Hale & Basides, 2013, p.1). This is consistent with other studies which focus on student-centred (or directed-constituted) motivation and frame, corresponding to “activity theory” (Leontiev, 1981; Roebuck, 2000; Lantolf, 2000). It constitutes an environment where students feel conspicuously included, or in control, of their learning objectives, and where they ‘own’ their language/s (Swalander & Taube, 2007; Price, 2014). Students in this more collaborative setting are: “individual learners [who] engage with the task, that is, [they] understand their perspectives of the objectives of tasks and criteria for success in them” (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002, p. 33). Similarly, students are expected to internalise these skills, so that they can: “develop their own personal ethos for practice, study and lifelong learning” (Andrews & Patil, 2007, p.253). As one indicator of success, while enrolments at UWS have been growing in the past 4 years, the dropout rate has been declining, and graduations have increased (Gilmore, 2014; Moodie, 2013; UWS 2013b, 2013c).

This idea of a personal ethos, combined with independent learning, is difficult enough in any educational context. It is even more problematic in the GWS context, where there is little or no culture of educational achievement, relative to the wider community. Each student, therefore, who manages to succeed through the demands of first year at UWS, is enabled by a sense of personal empowerment

which will sustain them through later study and into the workforce. Perhaps also, the ML they find is more substantial than it is for other students in the general community, because it was generated from a more challenging environment, and against labels of high social force.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen, therefore, that in the context of social and educational disadvantage, and in a situation where labels are used to further position people into social isolation-division, the reclamation of identity is critical in the pursuit of educational goals. For residents of GWS and thus most students at UWS, real disadvantage consists of inequities for the experience of (social and spatial) geography, migration, class, welfare-capital, wide variations in English-language competence and accent, and lower than national-average educational backgrounds. Additionally, the (often inter-generational) experience of educational under-achievement, and the covert prestige for labels denoting class and ethnicity, further entrench this lack of social mobility.

For students who present at UWS in the subject ARW, these areas of deficit are not simply ignored or treated as entirely negative aspects; they are re-worked into emblems of potential capital advantage. By identifying the deficits as linguistic and cognitive advantages which directly assist in their apprehension of the academic register of English, students are encouraged to see that they have autonomy over their educational experience. For many of these students the Academic Register is a huge challenge to their ability, self-esteem and speech community identity, but if they come to see it as merely another (but very advantageous) skill-set which can add to their existing repertoire, they are typically motivated to develop more linguistic marketability. They also tend to become more independent learners. This is Motivational Literacy, and it is tied to expanded, or inter-speech community identity, and linguistic repertoire. The labels might not 'disappear', but they tend to be 'hyphenated' into a more nuanced identity. It is common to hear UWS students self-identify, for instance, as they study and graduate, along these lines: "I'm a westie, and I am a success at university".

REFERENCES

- Allard, A. C. (2002). 'Aussies' and 'Wogs' and the 'Group in-between': Year 10 students' constructions of cross-cultural friendships. *Discourse*, 23(2), 193-209.
- Andrews, T., & Patil, R. (2007). Information literacy for first-year students: an embedded curriculum approach. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 32(3), 253-259.
- Basturkmen, H., & Lewis, M. (2002). Learner perspectives of success in an EAP writing course. *Assessing Writing*, 8, 31-46.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). Language and symbolic power. In A. Jaworski, & N. Coupland (Eds.), *The discourse reader* (2nd ed., pp. 480-490). Abingdon (UK): Routledge.
- Boxer, D. (2002). *Applying sociolinguistics: Domains and face-to-face interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Bundy, A. (Ed.) (2004). *Australian and New Zealand Information Literacy Framework: Principles, standards and practice* (2nd ed.). Adelaide: Australian and New Zealand Institute for Information Literacy.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1-48.

- Carniel, J. (2009). Sheilas, wogs and metrosexuals: masculinity, ethnicity and Australian soccer. *Soccer & Society*, 10(1), 73-83.
- Celce-Murcia, M. (2008). Rethinking the role of communicative competence in language teaching. In E., Alcon Soler, & M. P. Safont Jorda (Eds.), *Intercultural language use and language learning* (pp. 41-57). Berlin: Springer.
- Coffin, C., & Hewings, A. (2004). IELTS as preparation for tertiary writing: Distinctive interpersonal and textual strategies. In L. Ravelli, & R. Ellis (Eds.), *Analysing academic writing: Contextualised frameworks* (pp. 153-171). London: Continuum.
- Coffin, C., Hewings, A., & North, S. (2012). Arguing as an academic purpose: The role of asynchronous conferencing in supporting argumentative dialogue in school and university. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 11(1), 38-51.
- Collins, J. (2006). Ethnic Diversity and the Ethnic Economy in Cosmopolitan Sydney. In D. H. Kaplan, & W. Li (Eds.), *Landscapes of the ethnic economy* (pp. 135-148). Lanham (MD): Rowman & Littlefield.
- Crystal, D. (1994). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1995). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Donakowski, D. W., & Esses, V. M. (1996). Native Canadians, first nations or aboriginals: The effect of labels on attitudes toward native peoples. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 28(2), 86-91.
- Fairclough, N. (1999). Global capitalism and critical awareness of language. *Language Awareness*, 8(2), 71-83.
- Flowerdew, J. (2013). *Discourse in English language education*. Oxon (UK): Routledge.
- Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., Hyams, N., Collins, P., Amberber, M., & Harvey, M. (2009). *An Introduction to Language* (6th ed.). South Melbourne: Cengage.
- Gardner, S. (2012). Genres and registers of student report writing: An SFL perspective on texts and practices. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 11, 52-63.
- Gilmore, H. (2014). University census date arrives: One in five students quit by first year. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.smh.com.au/data-point/university-census-date-arrives-one-in-five-students-quit-by-first-year-20140329-35pv4.html#ixzz2zeRsnbcp>
- Gwyther, G. (2008). Once Were Westies. *Griffith Review*, 20, 153-164.
- Hale, A., & Basides, H. (2013). *The keys to academic English*. South Yarra (Melbourne): Palgrave Macmillan.
- Haugen, E. (1953). *The Norwegian language in America: A study in bilingual behavior*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hellinger, M., & Ammon, U. (1996). *Contrastive Sociolinguistics*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hirsch, E. D., Kett, J.F., & Trefil, J. S. (2002). *The new dictionary of cultural literacy*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Harcourt.
- Hughes, G. (1988). *Words in Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Hughes, G. (2010). *Political correctness: A history of semantics and culture*. Chichester (UK): Wiley Blackwell.
- Hughson, J. (2001). The wogs are at it again: The media reportage of Australian soccer 'riots'. *Football Studies*, 4(1), 40-55.
- Hyland, K., & Hamp-Lyons, L. (2002). EAP: Issues and directions. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 1, 1-12.
- Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride, & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics: Selected readings* (pp. 269-293). Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Jaworski, A., & Coupland, N. (Eds.) (2006). *The Discourse Reader* (2nd Ed.). London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jones Diaz, C. (2004). Difference and Diversity at the University of Western Sydney. *Teaching Education*, 15(1), 97-101.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lantolf, J. (2000). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Leontiev, A. (1981). The problem of activity in psychology. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Leung, C. (2005). Convivial communication: Recontextualizing communicative competence. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 15(2), 119-144.
- Li, W. (2007). *Bilingualism reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Malinowski, B. (1923). The problem of meaning in primitive languages. In C. K. Ogden, & I. N. Richards, *The meaning of meaning* (pp. 296-336). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mitchell, T. (1992). Wogs still out of work: Australian television comedy as colonial discourse. *Australasian Drama Studies*, 20, 119-133.
- Moodie, G. (2013). FactCheck: Are university drop-out rates higher than ever? *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/factcheck-are-university-drop-out-rates-higher-than-ever-16383>
- Mowbray, S. (2013). *A review of current literacy skills units at UWS*. [Data file]. Penrith, Australia: University of Western Sydney.
- NSW Trade & Investment. (2013). *Western Sydney*. Sydney: NSW Department of Trade, Investment, Regional Infrastructure & Services. Retrieved from <http://www.business.nsw.gov.au/invest-in-nsw/regional-nsw/nsw-regions/western-sydney>
- O'Sullivan, J. T., & Howe, M. L. (1996). Causal attributions and reading achievement: Individual differences in low-income families. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 21, 363-387.
- Pennycook, A. (1997). Vulgar pragmatism, critical pragmatism and EAP. *English for Specific Purposes*, 16(4), 253-269.
- Price, S. (2014). Student "ownership" of language: A perspective drawn from Bakhtin and Derrida. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, 8(3), 12-22.

- Rassool, N. (1998). Postmodernity, cultural pluralism and the nation-state: Problems of language rights, human rights, identity and power. *Language Sciences*, 20(1), 89-99.
- Redmond, A. (2007). Surfies versus westies: Kinship, mateship and sexuality in the Cronulla riot. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 18(3), 336-350.
- Roebuck, R. (2000). Subjects speak out: How learners position themselves in a psycholinguistic task. In J. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 79-96). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Romaine, S. (1989). *Bilingualism*. New York: B. Blackwell.
- Romaine, S. (1991). *Language in Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowen, R. (2013). *Bogan 2.0: An investigation of Bogan using an interactional semantics approach*. Paper presented at the Pragmatics meets Semantics Symposium, Brisbane, Australia.
- Sala, E., Dandy, J., & Rapley, M. (2010). 'Real Italians and wogs': The discursive construction of Italian identity among first generation Italian immigrants in Western Australia. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 20(2), 110-124.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1991). Reflections on talk and social structure. In D. Boden, & D. H. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Talk and social structure: Studies in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis* (pp. 44-70). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Simic, Z. (2007). Were Westies White? Negotiating Race and Place in the Western Suburbs of Sydney. In L. Boucher, J. Carey, K. Ellinghaus (Eds.), *Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity* (pp. 63-70). Melbourne University conference and seminar series 16. Melbourne, Vic.: RMIT Publishing in association with the School of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne.
- Stephens, K. (2013). *Today, even the affluent are quite at ease with being Bogans*. Sydney: Sydney Morning Herald.
- Swalander, L., & Taube, K. (2007). Influences of family based prerequisites, reading attitude, and self-regulation on reading ability. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 32, 206-230.
- Thiery, C. (1978). True bilingualism and second language learning. In D. Gerver, & H. Sinaiko (Eds.), *Language interpretation and communication*. New York: Plenum.
- Tovey, J. (2013). *Newcomers do best in literacy, numeracy*. Sydney: Sydney Morning Herald.
- University of Western Sydney. (2009). *University of Western Sydney pocket profile (2009)*. Retrieved from http://careers.uws.edu.au/site/assets/media/Files/Pocket_Profile_2009_FINAL.pdf
- University of Western Sydney. (2013a). *Analytical reading and writing (100846) student learning guide and unit outline, 2013 Autumn* [Data file]. Penrith, Australia: UWS.
- University of Western Sydney. (2013b). *Student demographics report pre-assessment 2012 Autumn* [Data file]. Penrith, Australia: UWS.
- University of Western Sydney. (2013c). *Unit demographic results snapshot: Unit 100846, Level 1, analytical reading & writing* [Data file]. Penrith, Australia: UWS.
- University of Western Sydney (no date). *Working at UWS: Who we are*. Retrieved from <http://careers.uws.edu.au/Working-UWS/Who-we-are>

- Wardhaugh, R. (2010). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (6th Ed.). Chichester (UK): Wiley-Blackwell.
- Weinreich, U. (1953). *Languages in contact: Findings and problems*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Western Sydney Region of Councils (WSROC). (2013). *WSROC Region: economic profile*. Retrieved from <http://economy.id.com.au/wsroc>
- White, J. L. (2011). Resistance to classroom participation: Minority students, academic discourse, cultural conflicts, and issues of representation in whole class discussions. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 10(4), 250-265.
- Zevallos, Z. (2004). Where are “wogs” from? Exploring subjective understandings of racism. In *Revisioning Institutions: Change in the 21st Century. Proceedings of the Annual Conference of The Australian Sociological Association*, 8-11.

ⁱ Note that UWS has a close partnership with UWS College (UWSC), which functions as a preparatory tertiary institution, and which offers more intensive English language training (including IELTS testing). Graduates of UWSC tend to exceed this minimum competence level in English and they do well in the subject ARW. International students are, by contrast, typically expected to undertake IELTS testing (or to have credit/advanced standing for subjects already completed as demonstrated English competence) as a pre-requisite for enrolment at UWS.