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Towards a sociocultural understanding of children's voice

Janet Maybin 14.6.12 In press *Language and Education*.

Abstract

While 'voice' is frequently invoked in discussions of pupils' agency and empowerment, less attention has been paid to the dialogic dynamics of children's voices and the sociocultural features shaping their emergence. Drawing on linguistic ethnographic research involving recent recordings of ten and eleven year-old children's spoken language experience across the school day, this article examines how pupils' voices are configured within institutional interactional contexts which render particular kinds of voice more or less hearable, and convey different kinds of value. Analysis shows how children appropriate and reproduce the authoritative voices of education, popular culture and parents in the course of their induction into social practices. At the same time they also express varying degrees of commitment to these voices and orchestrate their own and other people's voices within accounts and anecdotes, making voice appropriation an uneven, accumulative process shot through with the dynamics of personal and peer-group experience. The examination of children's dialogue from different contexts across the school day highlights the situated semiotics of voice and the heteroglossic development of children's speaking consciousness.

Introduction

In his vision for a good society, Dell Hymes suggests that the concept of 'voice' should combine two kinds of freedom: 'freedom to have one's voice heard, freedom to develop a voice worth hearing.' (1996: 64). While this would seem an eminently worthwhile goal, however, such freedoms are not as straightforward as they might at first sight appear. The 'freedom to develop a voice worth hearing' is affected in complex ways by children's access to and positioning within institutionally configured conversations, interactions and encounters with diverse texts, as indeed is the freedom to have their voice heard. While 'voice' has been frequently invoked in discussions of identity, agency and empowerment, less attention has been paid to the dialogic nature of its emergence and the sociocultural dynamics which shape the views children put forwards, and the responses they experience. In this article I therefore take a step back to examine some of the ways in which children experience and express voice in their everyday spoken language across the school day. I define 'voice' as speaking consciousness (Bakhtin, 1981) together with a speaker's 'capacity to make themselves understood by others' (Blommaert, 2005: 255). However, I also see voice or, more accurately, voicing, as intrinsically dialogic, incorporating elements of addressivity and responsivity both in relation to speakers in a specific interaction and also in relation to voices from past experience and in the surrounding environment (Bakhtin, 1981; Volosinov 1973, 1976).

In the next section below I explain my use of the concept of dialogicality, and go on to discuss how I combine Bakhtinian theory with ethnography and ideas from linguistic anthropology about indexicality (Ochs, 1996; Agha, 2005; Blommaert, 2006). I then introduce the data from ten and eleven year-olds' language experience across the school day on which this article is based. In subsequent sections of the article I discuss examples of data

I collected from a range of children's dialogues in school, examining how sociocultural practices and expectations affect the emergence and hearability of specific voices, and their valuing by particular audiences. I would suggest that such sociocultural factors play a central role in the development and shaping of children's speaking consciousness.

Theoretical approach

Bakhtin offers important insights into the different layers of dialogic dynamics which configure children's voices. In addition to the patterns of responsivity and addressivity mentioned above, he suggests a further layer of dialogicality inside the utterance, where speakers may appropriate and reproduce the voices of others as if, or almost as if, they were their own. Merging with the appropriated voice, or expressing subtle degrees of distancing, represents a kind of inner dialogue. For instance, a child may directly repeat an authoritative teacher voice 'Shh, we've got to concentrate!' or express subtle distancing 'She says that I always go me own way' (Maybin, 2006). Children also reproduce voices to invoke characters, including themselves, in accounts and anecdotes of personal experience which are largely constructed through reported speech. When children recreate these voices they also express their own alignment (again in a kind of dialogue with them), depending on their purposes in the reporting context. These various voicing processes thus involve both the taking on of social values and positions through appropriation (that is, a reproduced voice brings with it associated positions and values), and also personal agency which is expressed through the ways in which these other voices are stylised, framed and evaluated. In this sense a child's voice is socioculturally shaped, dialogically emergent and incrementally layered in situated, individually distinctive ways.

While the Bakhtinian theory of voice as dialogic and heteroglossic has proved richly suggestive within language and cultural studies of children and young people (e.g. Dyson, 2003; Duff, 2003; Rampton, 2006; Maybin, 2006; Sperling and Appleman 2011), it indicates rather than theorises the links between language and social context. Hasan (2005) argues that this undertheorising of context is also a shortcoming in Vygotsky's classic account of semiotic mediation and the development of individual higher mental functions, which he claims originate in social experience (Vygotsky, 1978). While for Bakhtin and Vygotsky voice and higher mental functions are generated within situated dialogue, they stop short, she suggests, from providing an adequate explanation of how particular varieties of social interaction and their linguistic realisation are socially situated. To complement Bakhtinian theory and explore the sociocultural situatedness of voice in more detail, I have used ethnographic research to examine how children's meaning-making and articulation of voice emerge out of situated social practice. In this sense I am using ethnography as an epistemological tool (Blommaert 2005) to build a sociocultural account of voice. My ethnographic observations, interviews and growing familiarity with the children's cultural world illuminate the contexts which shape their spoken language experience and the nature and significance of the references they make, explicitly or implicitly, to various aspects of their experience. For example, my observations, interviews and research into the local environment (including educational policy and practices) informed interpretations of the significance of children's references to school institutional procedures, student-organised

games and rituals, and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships and popular culture. In particular, ethnographic experience enabled me to develop a richer account of the indexical relationships expressed in children's talk, that is, the ways in which their language use points to particular features of the sociocultural context.

Indexicality can be directly referential, for instance realised through words like 'here', 'there', 'now' or 'then' or pronouns pointing to specific places, times or people. It can also be performative, for instance one boy's use of the term 'mate' to another may represent a bid for social solidarity. Indexicality has also been used in a broader sense by linguistic anthropologists to refer to how particular kinds of language use invoke complex social identities, or past or present experiences. For instance in considering the relationship between language and gender, Ochs (1996) argues that linguistic forms may index a combination of social meanings such as stances, social acts and social activities, which in turn indexes a gendered identity for the speaker. Similarly, Agha (2005) suggests that specific patterns of speech forms (e.g. accent, grammar, stance, prosody) become associated with a social voice so that some combination of these can be taken to index its associated social characteristics, for instance the gender, class, age and profession of the speaker and, by extension, particular kinds of people, for instance the posh teacher or the macho boy. This makes the voices recreated in children's accounts particularly resonant, as characters and the speaker's alignment towards them are represented in recreated scenarios which are instantly recognisable to this age-group, such as having an argument with your mother, standing up to a teacher, or dumping a girlfriend. Blommaert (2006) suggests that there is further social anchoring of indexicality through various kinds of 'centring institutions' such as the school, family and peer group. These institutions generate hierarchical orders of indexicality to which people have to orientate in order to be social, in relation to homogenising tendencies towards an emblematic ideal member, for instance the good student, the obedient daughter or the cool peer group member.

Methodology and data

The data discussed in the remainder of the article come from on-going research into ten and eleven year-olds' construction of knowledge and identity through informal language practices in school. This age group are experienced as children and pupils, but are negotiating new kinds of knowledge as they pass through the transition from childhood into adolescence. As explained above, my methodological approach involved a combination of ethnography and Bakhtinian analysis of voice augmented by linguistic anthropological conceptions of indexicality. I collected continuous recordings of the pupils' talk across the school day over two weeks in the 2009 spring term, in a predominantly working class, multi-ethnic English primary school. One example (Extract 4) comes from earlier similar research carried out in the 1990s in a white working class school. In both cases a small voice recorder carried in a belt pouch was attached to a lapel microphone pinned to the top of the child's shirt. The recorder was alternated across a number of talkative children whose educational performance was approximately average according to school assessment records. Each of these children wore the microphone for one to four days and a second recorder was moved around the classroom to collect additional data. Permissions were obtained from the school, parents and

children. Permission was renegotiated with students at a number of points throughout the research, for instance at the beginning and end of days when they wore the microphone, in order to ensure on-going informed consent (Morrow, 2008). Small amounts of data were deleted at their request.

During the recordings I sat at the back of the classroom, worked with pupils who were not being recorded (in the earlier study) or observed from the edges of the playground at break and lunchtime. I returned to each school two months after the initial data collection and recorded informal semi-structured interviews with children in friendship pairs or trios when I asked them about issues which had cropped up in the continuous recordings and about their more general interests and activities. Again, some small sections of these recordings were deleted in line with children's wishes. Analysis of the recordings (50 hours on-going talk and eight hours of interviews in 2009) was informed by ethnographic observations, collections of texts and photographs and by contextual knowledge about the educational and local environment. This combination of the analysis of children's spoken language interactions with an ethnographic understanding of practices falls under what has been termed 'linguistic ethnography' where ethnographic methods are used alongside linguistic or discourse analytic procedures to describe patterns within communication (Maybin and Tusting, 2011).

Discussion of data: the sociocultural configuration of voice

In the discussion below I focus on the emergence of children's voices in different discursive contexts in school: teacher-student dialogue, informal talk among peers and the interviews I held with friendship pairs and trios. Within these contexts children's voices are dialogically configured in the three ways outlined earlier. Firstly, their voices emerge through local, and also more attenuated, dynamics of addressivity and responsivity. Secondly, children appropriate the voices of other people and texts, for instance teachers, parents, friends, or the media. In some cases they reproduce these voices more or less as if they were their own, expressing a strong alignment with the voice and a strong commitment to its evaluative positioning, sometimes borrowing this to add force to their own purposes (Tannen, 2009). On other occasions, children signal their own separateness from the voice and varying degrees of alignment and commitment through grammatical, prosodic or contextual cues. Thus, children align or distance themselves from other people in their social world through nuanced forms of voicing. Finally, children recreate their own and other people's voices within their accounts and anecdotes, producing a complex layering of dialogic relationships within and across narrative boundaries. Again, they signal alignments with these voices, for instance using indirect speech, strong prosodic marking to signal oppositional parody or stylisation expressing degrees of distancing (Bakhtin, 1984), and they recreate dialogues where opposing positions are played out against each other to explore particular dilemmas. These dialogic dynamics, and the interrelationships and tensions between adult authority, peer group values and the inwardly persuasive discourse of children's everyday personal experience (Bakhtin, 1981), are foregrounded in various ways in the examples of data which are analysed below.

Appropriating schooled voices

In many ways teaching and learning dialogues are constructed through the echoing, borrowing and appropriation of voices between teachers and pupils. Teachers take what pupils offer and rephrase their words, shifting them into educational and specific disciplinary genres (Mercer, 2000). Children then realign their voices with their teacher's and reuse their words. Indeed, social constructivist theory emphasises how children and young people develop and change through dialogue, and a substantial research tradition addresses how educational dialogues can help students to learn and acquire new understandings and perspectives more effectively (e.g. Mercer and Littleton, 2007, Alexander, 2008). These new understandings and perspectives are then represented in some educationally beneficial change of voice. As well as taking on and reproducing new subject knowledge from their dialogues with teachers, children appropriate the procedures which are used to accomplish school tasks. For instance, in talk among themselves, they rephrase instructions from the teacher or worksheet such as 'you've got to name the shape' or 'you're allowed to copy it out', signalling their commitment to institutional authority through the modal phrases which position them as obedient students. In this way children often help to induct each other into institutional practices, repeating or rephrasing the authoritative voices that direct their activities (Maybin, 2006).

In addition to internalising and reproducing voices from dialogues with teachers and teaching texts, students also take on voices more generally from their educational environment, reflecting particular policy regimes and approaches to assessment. In the 2009 data, teaching was strongly focussed on preparation for the national Key Stage Two Standard Achievement Tests (SATs) which dominate English children's lives in Year 6 of primary school (Hall and Ozerk, 2010). The classes I recorded were filled with practice on former examination papers, feedback to pupils about their performance and children's comparison of each other's grades. Subject teaching of English, Mathematics and Science was closely specified within national guidelines which also structured the examination guidance. For instance, English teaching involved tightly specified analysis and production of written texts. Pupils' attention was continually directed to aspects of language structure: sentences, punctuation, text organisation, composition and effect (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2008), and references to these language features dominated the examination marking schemes frequently referred to by the teacher, during class.

While children echoed the grammatical metalanguage used by teachers in talk among themselves, for instance 'my punctuation's accurate isn't it?' and 'you have to use short and complex sentences', their talk was also dominated by what they interpreted as the overriding purpose of their current work, that is, the achievement of an acceptable grade in the SATs examinations. Average ability Year 6 pupils were expected to be working at Level 4, with more able children achieving Level 5. Pupils had picked up some of the school's anxiety about its positioning in the national league tables, and their most animated interactions in class occurred around the return of their practice examination papers. The following exchange was typical of the emotional intensity of such occasions, when children anxiously measured themselves against the levels attained by peers:

Extract 1 (transcription conventions are listed at the end of the article)

1	Jess	what's your level? (.) What level are you? (.) WHAT LEVEL ARE YOU?
2	Emma	<i>(gasp)</i> I'm 4b
3	p	no, only by one mark
4	Jess	oi, Emma, I'm 4b (xxx) I was four marks away from getting a 4a (xxx) I moved up a whole level. I was a 4, I was a 3b in December and now I'm a 4b. I moved up a whole level
5	p	(xxx)
6	p	she was a 3b
7	Jess	I moved up
8	p	she was a 3b and she moved up to a 3a <i>(laughter)</i>
9	Emma	oi, I'm a 4b <i>(higher voice)</i> I'm a 4b <i>(normal voice)</i> I'm going to try and get a 4a.
10	ps	(xxx)
11	p	ah: you must be well good. What are you, a 4c?

Expressions like 'she was a 3b' or 'I'm a 4b' are highly evaluatively and emotionally significant here because they index the powerful hierarchical grading framework emanating from the Government Department for Education, which acts as a centring institution (Blommaert 2006) in this context. Extract 1 illustrates pupils' total absorption of an authoritative voice, which they reproduce as if it were their own, apparently expressing full commitment to the evaluative perspective of the SATs. Through excited comparison of their current and previous marks with those of others, they insert themselves into an ideal emblematic pupil trajectory of improvement within the hierarchical framework, for example as a 'well good' 4a, or a previous 3b who has now 'moved up a whole level'.

The SATS were a powerful force in teachers' and pupils' lives, and it was rare for children to challenge the nature of their work preparing for these examinations. On one occasion, however, 11 year-old Akeem raised an objection about the way in which Ms. Finch was directing children to produce 'a brilliant diary entry'. Ms. Finch had just rehearsed with pupils the kind of language features that she said the examiners would expect them to use, including level five speech marks, higher level sentence openers, good connectives and varied lengths of sentences and paragraphs. She then checked that children had understood what they needed to do:

Extract 2

1	Ms F	yup, o:kay. Put up your hand if you don't, if you're not sure about your diary entry now, if you're ever asked to write a diary entry d'you know what you've got to do. Akeem, what's your problem? Anyone not- not sure? Akeem.
2	Akeem	I'm not very good with ideas and that. Coz I, I know what I've done during the

		day but I don't, if I, I don't have any i-, good ways=
3	Ms F	=of writing it?
4	Akeem	yea=
5	Ms F	=well try and put some humour in then like you do anyway. You know, as long, as soon as you start putting in your thoughts and your feelings that will make it an interesting diary
6	Pupil	but I don't know about that stuff
7	Ms F	well that's what you've got to do, I'm sorry
8	Akeem	I thought a diary was meant to be <u>free</u> . You write whatever you want in your diary
9	Pupil	yea, exactly
10	Pupil	(xxx[xxx])
11	Ms F	[no, no, not for a test you don't

Children frequently talked about and reflected on events among themselves and undoubtedly had thoughts and feelings, but Akeem's hesitation in turn 2 and his fellow pupil's claim of ignorance in turn 6 suggest that they find it difficult to imagine how to write about such matters within the generic framework which their teacher had gone to such lengths to explain. Within the national guidelines, sub-criteria under 'composition and effect' include 'writes imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts' (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2008: 27). Classroom instruction, however, usually remained focused on sentence and paragraph structure and punctuation and it was difficult for many children to find a way of speaking imaginatively or thoughtfully into such a tightly regulated grammatical space. Akeem's complaint in turn 8, suggesting a different kind of diary genre which privileges the writer rather than the form, definitely makes sense to other pupils (turn 9). In one sense Akeem is also clearly heard by the teacher, who provides a definitive response 'no, no, not for a test you don't' (turn 11). Indeed, when any activity from life outside school, like diary writing, is recontextualised within the curriculum, it is inevitably transformed in line with pedagogic purposes (Bernstein, 1996). However, this interaction clearly illustrates how Akeem's capacity to express himself and to be understood, in a homework task in this strongly assessment-driven context, is heavily restricted by the requirement to speak through a particular tightly specified formal register which he finds incommensurate with the idea of a diary. While the idea of a 'free' diary voice resonates with peers, it will not be 'worth hearing' in the SATs.

Reproducing voices in talk among peers

The school assessment procedures which provide authoritative reference points for classroom discourse, driving teachers' responses and shaping the acceptability of children's voices, are also widely evident in talk among peers. However, their informal talk was also orientated towards other powerful reference points, and the next two examples feature engagements with voices from popular culture and from parents, respectively.

Children frequently hummed and reproduced snatches of popular songs as they sat over their work, travelled between classrooms or hung around together at lunchtime. This often involved a merging of voices, where for instance one girl would start singing or humming a line and others joined in. An example of this kind of collaborative voicing occurred one morning when eleven year-old Mel and her friends were repeatedly humming or singing snatches from Rhythm and Blues singer Rihanna's 'Unfaithful', a song focussing on the singer's ambivalent feelings about her sexual infidelity. The most extended version of the song occurred as Mel and her friends sat together working in the literacy class, where their singing merged with the general classroom clatter.

Extract 3

1	Mel	<i>(nasal singing voice) And I know that he knows that, and I killed him inside da da da da happy with somebody else. I can see Which one is she=</i>
2	ps	<i>= The story of my life, searching for the right, but it keeps avoiding me</i>
3	Emily	<i>Sorrow in my soul</i>
4	Mel	<i>(nasal singing voice) Something something wrong (xxx) me</i>
5	Ps	<i>(xxx) and this is more than love, and this is why the sky is blue</i>
6	Mel	<i>he he (humming)</i>
7	ps	<i>And he knows I'm unfaithful and it kills him inside, to know that I am happy with some other guy.</i>
8	Mel	<i>I can see him dying</i>
9	all ps	<i>I don't wanna do this anymore I don't wanna be the reason why Everytime I walk out the door I see him die a little more inside I don't wanna hurt him anymore I don't wanna take away his life I don't wanna be... A murderer:: I feel it in the air, When I'm doing my hair, (xxx)</i>
10	Emily	<i>I like it where em (singing) I said I won't be long=</i>
11	ps	<i>= just hanging with my girls</i>
12	Emily	<i>that's my favourite bit, I love that bit</i>
		<i>(...)</i>
17	Mel	<i>(nasal singing voice) the sky is blue he he (Mel continues to hum)</i>

This performance, especially turns 7-9, seems to be a clear example of the synchronisation of pitch, rhythm (and probably body stance) in collaborative singing which intensifies social connection through collective musical performance (Turino, 2008). Collectively, the girls appear to take on and enter into an emotional and moral alliance with the popular singer's

feelings and stance (Frith, 1996; Rampton, 2006). However, Extract 3 also illustrates the subtle stylistic shifts children use to express varying degrees of commitment. In turns 1 and 4, Mel starts out distancing herself from the song through the nasal tone of her voice, her rather irreverent use of ‘something something’ in turn 4 and the short laugh in turn 6. As the song catches on and spreads among her friends, she takes on the voice of the singer with them more directly (by turn 7) and by turn 9 has merged her voice with theirs. At this point she seems to have been drawn into a direct joint expression of the singer’s feelings. However, in turn 17 Mel then moves back again to resume her nasal, slightly mocking voice, with the short laugh suggesting withdrawal to a more detached position.

It has been argued that pre-teen girls’ fascination with popular singers inducts them into a precocious sexuality linked with submission to dominant heterosexual norms (e.g. Monnot, 2010). Indeed, Rihanna’s video of the song, which children referred to in later conversation, includes highly sexualised stances and gestures. However, although popular singers’ romantic perspectives and sentiments were highly ‘hearable’ and valued, especially among the girls, Mel’s shifts into and out of the song suggest that she may not be wholeheartedly committed to Rihanna’s stance. Setting this performance within the broader context of on-going peer group talk also suggests a more complicated picture. During the three days when she was being recorded Mel did indeed take up a variety of heterosexual stances in discussion among children about boyfriends and girlfriends and in responses to magazine photos of celebrities. However, role models in popular culture are not exclusively heterosexual and Mel also, on occasion, expressed interest in a character in the television teenage series *Hollyoaks* who ‘might be lesbian’, and said her sister was a lesbian. She also played ‘lesbian nurses’ at lunchtime with friends, possibly prompted by a popular Catherine Tate television sketch. Finally, Mel defended the rights of the girls to show each other physical affection (not necessarily sexual), against a number of boys who found such displays ‘disgusting’. In Extract 3 Mel could be seen as borrowing rather than appropriating Rihanna’s voice, momentarily empathising with and even inhabiting a possible future self (cf. Dyson, 2003) whilst still retaining the option to play with and distance herself from the emotions and judgements involved. While adults may hear children’s reproduction of voices from popular culture as precocious heterosexualisation (Department for Education, 2011), for Mel these performances are part of a more general heteroglossic exploration of sexuality.

In addition to echoing and responding to voices from various media (Maybin, 2013), children also frequently reproduced the voices of people from their everyday social world: parents, teachers, siblings or friends, and also their own voices, in anecdotes and accounts of personal experience. As discussed earlier, these accounts need only a few reproduced turns of dialogue to index a scenario and dilemma which resonate with listening children. In addition, children’s use of narrative creates a layering of voices and dialogicality which facilitates a more nuanced exploration of knowledge and experience, through the relationships generated by characters’ responses to each other inside the story, and the connections of these with previous positions in the on-going conversation outside the story and with voices and personae from children’s past encounters (see also Koven, 2002). This patterning is evident in Extract 4, which comes from my earlier research (Maybin, 2006). Ten year-old Julie,

Kirsty and Sharon have been anxiously discussing the amount of swearing on the tapes I was collecting, while sitting together and completing some work in the classroom:

Extract 4

1	Julie	Children aren't meant to swear
2	Kirsty	If people swear at them, they can swear back (.)
3	Julie	I swore at my mum the other day because she started, she hit me
4	Kirsty	What did you do?
5	Julie	I swore at my mum, I says 'I'm packing my cases and I don't care what you say' and she goes 'Ooh?' and (<i>I go</i>) 'Yea!' I'm really cheeky to my mother!

Following what might be termed a narrative abstract (Labov, 1972) 'I swore at my mum the other day because she started, she hit me' (turn 3), and Kirsty's invitation 'What did you do?' (turn 4), Julie then uses the anecdote in turn 5 to create a discursive space within which she can briefly explore the question raised in the previous turns: that is, whether children should never swear or whether swearing is justified if someone else swears at them first. A dialogic chain of utterances between Julie and her mother provides most of the content of the anecdote, creating the drama and driving the action. Julie's indexically rich 'I'm packing my cases and I don't care what you say' is a response to 'she hit me', and also an anticipation of how her mother might respond ('I don't care what you say'). Her mother's 'Oh?' is then both a response to Julie's initial defiant statement and also a question, requesting a further answer.

At first, Julie seems to provide an example that would illustrate Kirsty's point: 'If people swear at them, they can swear back', if we accept that hitting is functionally equivalent to swearing. But she immediately adds an evaluative comment, 'I'm really cheeky to my mother!' which seems to be closer to the evaluative position she herself originally stated: 'Children aren't meant to swear' and may also represent her mother's position. Thus Julie's anecdote brings together and juxtaposes the different previous positions stated by herself and Kirsty, animating and briefly exploring these alternative viewpoints and the relationship between them, both through the dialogic relations within the anecdote and also through its dialogic relations with previous turns, in their on-going conversations.

In addition to the dynamics within the current interaction, Kirsty and Sharon hear Julie's anecdote about this recognisable scenario in relation to previous stories she has told about her relationship with her mother (also captured in the continuous recordings), which often presented Julie as feisty and rebellious. There are also intertextual links with other stories told within the peer group about children's changing power relationships with adults (Maybin, 2006). Julie's own voice emerges through the stances and alignments she expresses across her own stories, and through her experience of hearing stories from other children. For instance, prohibitions around swearing had a strong resonance for girls. In both my sets of data, while swear words were frequently used by children among themselves at break and

lunchtime, neither boys nor girls swore audibly in the classroom or in their interviews with myself, and girls in particular expressed high levels of anxiety about instances of swearing I might be recording and whether these would lead to them being ‘told off’. While expressive uses of swearing were hearable and indeed prestigious in communication within the peer group, particularly as part of the constellation of verbal cues indexing macho identities among the boys, they were deemed inadmissible in talk with adults who saw swearing as especially inappropriate language behaviour for girls.

Dialogic interview dynamics

The extracts discussed above illustrate how official institutional contexts at school, and the more informal institutional context of the peer group, entail different kinds of hearability and the privileging of different kinds of voices. Discussion also indicated some of the complexities of appropriation in children’s voicing, including what might be termed the strong appropriation of a specific educational assessment discourse (mediated by competition within the peer group), challenges against the appropriation of generic writing criteria, invocations of media texts to try out sexual desires and identities and the narrative exploration of appropriate uses of language. In the examples above, children appear to exercise more freedom in talk with peers, where they draw on a wider range of experience and texts in collaborative performances of song and anecdotal accounts. However, peer-group dynamics also render particular children’s voices more or less hearable and valuable, and these positions can sometimes be subsequently reconfigured and revalued in talk with adults such as parents, teachers or, as is highlighted in the final extracts below, researchers.

My research interviews were in a sense institutionally hybrid, adult-children interactions in school which were not driven by educational aims, but intended to elicit accounts of children’s social worlds from their own perspectives. Extracts 5 and 6, recorded in 2009, involve three boys and two girls respectively, all of whom were eleven year-old working class children. In Extract 5 Ryan’s anecdote, prompted by my question about whether he and his two friends were at the girlfriend stage, emerged piecemeal across a number of speaking turns, which included contributions from Alan and Sean.

Extract 5

1	Janet	em so are you three at the sort of girl friend stage yet or not?
2	All	[yea
3	Ryan	[they two are. I I I had a girl friend yea but then I dumped her, cause she was <u>so annoying</u>
4	Alan	cause she she int in school
5	Janet	what was annoying [about her
6	Ryan	[I had three girl friends, Lily was my last girlfriend, Lily
7	Janet	yea

8	Ryan	yea, but she, I dumped her, <i>cause she</i> was so annoying
9	Janet	right
10	Ryan	Yea [and
11	Sean	[cause he was going out with Lily when we was in Greenvalley in [Year
12	Ryan	[yea
13	Sean	Three
14	Sean	Two, Two cause=
15	Janet	=how was she [annoying
16	Ryan	[in Year Three. She annoying, yea, cause everyone yea, cause everyone tend to talk walk up to me and kiss me, yea, she all (<i>whiny voice</i>) 'Ryan, come he:re, kiss m:e' so I went (<i>aggressive voice</i>) 'Shut up, you're dumped'. I kicked her (.) (<i>stifled laugh</i>) cause she kept doing that (2) (<i>stifled laughter</i>) I did like that (<i>mimes kicking movement</i>) I was trying to play football
17	Alan	with me and Sean =
18	Janet	= so she was she was getting in the way she was annoying you
19	Sean	do you like (xxx)
20	Alan	it's his [girlfriend's
21	Janet	[a:h
22	Ryan	it's Leah's

Ryan, as was typical of the other white working class boys in my data, represented himself as tough, canny and macho in his various accounts of personal experience across the data (cf. Evaaldson 2002). Within the anecdote, Ryan's own and Lily's reported voices, and the dialogue between them, index particular stances, relationships and practices, a genre of girlfriend/boyfriend interactions with culturally recognisable images of the nagging, needy female and the macho, tough male. Alan and Sean contribute additional details warranting Ryan's account and its location in a previous school they attended together. Within our interview conversation, the anecdote is a response to my asking why Lily is annoying and also perhaps to the fact I've asked Ryan twice (turns 5 and 15): I've been a bit nagging and annoying myself. And, I would suggest, it has links with other stories circulating among the boys about their tough, macho behaviour, and to stories from local gossip, the media and so on, about this kind of gender interaction.

The evaluative function of Ryan's story, in other words its significance for him and the point of telling it (Labov, 1972), is particularly interesting in relation to the dialogic emergence of

his own voice. His evaluative position appears fairly stable throughout his description of why Lily was annoying and his animation of the dialogue, but becomes hesitant in turn 16 after ‘I kicked her’, i.e. ‘cause she kept doing that... I did like that...I was trying to play football’. Ryan’s presentation of himself kicking Lily may be acceptable bravado in talk among his friendship group of boys, but his pause of two seconds and the boys’ stifled laughter in turn 16 seems to signal an awareness of my own discomfort at this point. When Ryan then says ‘I did like that (*mimes kicking movement*) when I was trying to play football’, this casts potential new light on his action: the implication now is that Lily got in his way in the game and he, accidentally perhaps, kicked her. Alan then confirms that there was a football game going on, ‘with me and Sean’ and Sean diverts my attention by indicating a coloured cord round his neck, which he got from his girlfriend.

I had watched the mixed gender football games at lunchtime where children did indeed get shoved, kicked and knocked over and, according to my observations, their courtship practices were mixed in with football games as well as with class work and other on-going official activities in the school day. Sensing my (unvoiced) disapproval of his behaviour towards Lily, Ryan thus recontextualises and ‘normalises’ his ‘I kicked her’, retrospectively re-evaluating its force through taking it out of the boyfriend/girlfriend interaction and into a more innocuous football game. Ryan’s subtle shift in relation to the image of himself he had created in the anecdote acknowledges the evaluative stance of a particular part of his audience, i.e. myself, and demonstrates the kind of adroit management of responsivity and addressivity which I found characteristic of children’s talk more generally.

While the voices Ryan initially creates invited a particular kind of gendered hearability and value which I did not share and, through my response, signalled to be ‘unhearable’, Laura and Ellen on the other hand appeared freed up in the interview to speak about previous denials of voice. They described on-going ostracism by peers who refused to talk to Ellen and recoiled from any potential body contact with her, crossing their arms to create an imaginary ‘titanium bubble’ which protected against ‘contamination’. Laura had also become ‘tainted’ through her continuing association with Ellen.

Extract 6a.

17	Laura	=like <i>noone</i> really likes me any more, like. They do like me, but not as much as they used to =
18	Ellen	= exactly. People used to like me and now they don’t so they’re like yea scared of me touching them by accident they’re like ‘Oh: [get away from me
19	Laura	[germs’
20	Ellen	o:h she’s (xxx) (<i>exaggerated high pitched drawl</i>) ‘no returns titanium bubble for li::fe and on my stu::ff and on my frie::nds’ Hm hm:
21	Janet	So has that happened in your year group, then=
22	Ellen	=yea =
23	Laura	= yea the thing is it gets so annoying because

24	Ellen	it just makes you not want to come into school
----	-------	--

The exaggerated drawl Ellen uses in turn 20 to reproduce the titanium bubble formula so strongly distorts her voice that I had to listen to the tape a number of times in order to decipher the words. This hyper-stylization separates Ellen clearly from the voice she is reporting, perhaps also indicating that she has had the formula directed at her many times. The reported voice indexes an exclusion practice specific to this age group which denies Ellen her own voice, since her classmates refuse to talk to her. Within the interview context, however, with her friend Laura, she expresses what it feels like to be on the receiving end of this treatment (turn 24).

There then follow a number of linked accounts across the interview about rumours and secrets being spread and betrayals by so-called friends. Ellen describes her difficult relations with Emily, who had at one point been Laura's best friend:

Extract 6b

40	Ellen	[she made up loads of stuff about me remember she hated me, yea, after Year Five she was seriously mean she lost the rag when I asked her dad to get the bracelet I got off of her that my <u>granny</u> gave to me and then she <u>died</u> (.) and that was like 'O::h' and now she's being (xxx)
41	Janet	so you had you lent this bracelet to Emily or swapped it or something =
42	Ellen	= I lent it to her and she never gave it back
43	Janet	and it was a really important bracelet for you
44	Ellen	especially when my gran died
45	Janet	yea =
46	Ellen	= so it's like 'Oh, I hate you Emily' =
47	Janet	=hm:=
48	Laura	=I never hate people because my mum tells me I shouldn't my mum tells me I shouldn't =
49	Ellen	=but [you just want to
50	Laura	[but I just don't like them
51	Janet	hm:
52	Laura	I <u>feel</u> I hate them and <u>want</u> to hate them but it's really rude to say

Ellen represents her responses to Emily, which were perhaps unspeakable at the time, through a kind of inner dialogue: ‘and that was like ‘O::h’’ (turn 40) and ‘so it’s like ‘Oh, I hate you Emily’’ (turn 46). Shortly after this, Lauren also replays an inner dialogue, in this case with her mother who tells her she shouldn’t hate people. As she puts it, ‘I feel I hate them and want to hate them but it’s really rude to say’ (turn 52). The unsayable in this case is the inwardly persuasive voice of Laura’s direct everyday experience, which has to be mediated by authoritative adult injunctions about politeness, so that it is overridden and transformed into ‘I never hate people’ (turn 48). Turn 52 suggests that Laura is torn between aligning herself with Ellen’s feelings (turn 46) and complying with the politeness norms enforced by her mother. Laura’s own voice, at this point, is less a definite position and more a site of struggle between emergent feelings and responses to Ellen, myself, and her mother’s expectations.

Conclusion

Drawing on a combination of ethnography, Bakhtinian theory and linguistic anthropological conceptions of indexicality, I have discussed how children's voices are institutionally configured, dialogically emergent, and appropriated from adults, peers and texts of various kinds. What can be spoken and how it can be said are enabled or constrained by specific sociocultural expectations and interactional dynamics, whether in relation to teacher-directed delivery of the curriculum, interaction and reflection among friends, or the context of the research interview with myself. Schools, parents, popular culture and discourses about gender relationships shape older children’s speaking consciousness in quite profound ways. In an important sense, appropriation of voices indexing school assessment and curricular criteria (Extracts 1 and 2), parental injunctions about what can and cannot be said (Extracts 4 and 6), the heterosexual romantic discourse of popular culture (Extract 3) and gender stereotypes (Extract 5) mediate children’s induction into culturally configured practices and values.

Thus, children’s opportunities to have their voices heard, and what counts as a voice worth hearing are differently configured across institutional contexts and children have to negotiate different sets of institutional affordances, sources of authority and interactional dynamics in the course of expressing and reflecting on inwardly persuasive experience. Contexts, however, are not monolithic but layered and interlocking, incorporating diverse and sometimes fluid patterns of indexicality. Thus the teacher and her students orientate to different indexical orders in relation to the functions of a diary in Extract 2, Julie’s story in Extract 4 indexes themes which resonate throughout children’s talk as well as in her current conversation, Ryan in Extract 5 reconfigures the significance of his behaviour in a peer interaction, in the course of the interview with myself. Nor is induction into cultural practices unidirectional. Patterns of addressivity and responsivity are complex and children negotiate solidarity with friends alongside adult injunctions and demands. Peer talk and sociability mediate engagement with school procedures, national assessment and popular culture and so induction into these is shot through with the dynamics of peer group and personal experience, expressed sometimes in anecdotes incorporating diverse layers of dialogic meaning. In addition, children’s voices are always already imbued with sociocultural values and experience: peer-group culture plays out patterns of inclusion and exclusion which drive adult

social organisation and peer groups are sites for stereotyping and silencing as well as sources of solidarity and friendship.

I have suggested that, within these complex contexts, children express agency dialogically, through various forms of voice stylisation and framing. They use prosodic, grammatical and contextual cues to align themselves with the voices they take on or reproduce (in narratives and elsewhere) from the curriculum, popular songs, mothers, girl-friends, classmates and themselves on a previous occasion. For instance Mel uses a distancing nasal tone of voice in the pop song in Extract 3 and Lee parodies Lily's whining in Extract 5. Julie uses direct speech to animate a dilemma through a narrative trajectory in Extract 4 and Laura uses indirect speech to represent her mother's authoritative instruction that she shouldn't hate people in Extract 6. In relation to children's speaking consciousness and capacity to make themselves understood, their representations of their own voices seem particularly significant: Julie characterises herself as feisty and playful and Lee initially presents himself as tough and aggressive in Extract 5, but shifts to a position he deems more acceptable to myself. Ellen is silenced by the titanium bubble ritual but reports an inner response which is voiced in the interview, and Laura expresses a struggle between feelings and words and between possible responses to Ellen, Laura's mother and myself.

In conclusion, this analysis suggests a rather different model of voice from the liberal humanist notion of voice as core identity, or the rather rational, individualistic conceptions of speaking and listening in the English National Curriculum (DfE 2011). I would suggest that these models neglect the significance of sociocultural factors, which I have argued are deeply implicated in the emergence, hearability and valuing of individual children's voices. More simplistic notions of pupil voice and communication processes do not adequately address the subtlety of children's dialogic uses of voicing to explore and interrogate cultural experience. Discussions of how to promote children's voices within education need to acknowledge the complexity of their active and enquiring spontaneous dialogic explorations of knowledge, and the heteroglossic development of their beliefs and values. The complex patterns of voicing discussed above provide a rich potential for children's learning in a broad sense, raising questions about how they might be offered a wider range of opportunities within education to develop a voice that is worth hearing, not only within the narrow parameters of national assessment systems, but in the context of the broader, richer diverse cultural experiences which shape their on-going lives.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

Names have been changed. Some punctuation has been inserted to aid comprehension

= latching

[Overlap

Italics laughter in the voice

so annoying Emphasis

li::fe stretched sound

CAPS Louder than surrounding talk

Sorrow in my soul singing

(.) Pause of under a second, otherwise length indicated in numbers of seconds eg (2)

Comments in italics and parentheses clarify prosodic or paralinguistic features eg (*high posh voice*), (*stifled laughter*)

(xxxx) unable to transcribe

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