Research Article

D. M. Ponton*

Social Class, Interactional Pragmatics and the Likely Lads

Abstract: Long exposed to the democraticising effects of modernity, Britain's class structure supposedly collapsed during the 1990s (Turner 2013), though against this contention there is ample evidence to suggest that its essential contours are unaltered, and that the classless society is itself a myth (Marshall et al 1988). This paper explores an earlier period, in Britain's not too distant past, when the labels, 'working class' and 'middle class' were less controversial. The BBC's sit-com 'Whatever happened to the likely lads?' (Clement and La Frenais), from the early 1970s, was one of its most successful ever, enjoying both public support and critical acclaim. The show follows the lives of Bob Ferris and Terry Collier, two working class school-friends from the north-east who, after a period of separation, find each other again as they start out in life. While Bob is aspirational, attempting to achieve his goals of social progress through work, further education and marriage, Terry pursues the same lifestyle, viewing his friend's progress in terms of class betrayal. An episode from the series will be explored using a pragmatic-dialogic approach (Kecskes 2016), to suggest that the invisible framework of class needs to be invoked in order to make sense of the dialogue.

1 Introduction

This study attempts to look at something that is generally considered, if it exists at all, to be invisible. Within linguistics, the macro-category of 'identity' includes physical, psychological, sociological and demographic categories, viewed as indexes of identity, such as gender, age, race, height, eye colour, occupation, religion, etc. (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998, Singh 2004: 100, Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Some of these categories, such as eye colour or height, are overt aspects of an individual's persona, while others require closer knowledge of the person - religious or political affiliation, for example, may not transpire during a superficial acquaintance. Others, such as social class, the focus of this paper, are aspects that may not emerge, in any definitive way, even over a long period of association.

Identifying a person's social class, which once might have appeared a straightforward task, is not as simple as it may have been, for example, during the period when Marxist philosophy dominated global events, and 'proletariat' and 'capitalist' were more recognisable identity labels. Yet, as Featherstone's book on Englishness shows (Featherstone 2009), it is hardly possible, even today, to write about British society without invoking a class structure whose contours may be invisible, but which still represents a potent social force, guiding life choices, political affiliations and evaluations at all levels.

For these reasons, with the aim of tracing social class, alongside the other identity indexes listed above, as an implicit factor in the social construction of identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2005), it is useful to explore data from an earlier period in Britain's evolution, when industrial realities were different, and when speech

*Corresponding author: D. M. Ponton, University of Catania, Catania, Italy, E-mail: dmponton@hotmail.co.uk

patterns could have been closer indicators of social class. The paper finds that, like other implicit identity markers such as religious or political affiliation, social class figures in conversational exchanges as part of the shared background knowledge of participants, and can be analysed using an approach based on the pragmatics of interaction (Kecskes 2010) and an application of the principle of salience (Oakes et al.1994).

Whatever happened to the likely lads? is a BBC sitcom from the 1970s, which follows the lives of two friends, Bob Ferris and Terry Collier, characters who had been the subject of an earlier comedy, simply called *The Likely Lads*, broadcast in the 1960s. The series were set in a north-eastern cityscape which, though never definitively identified, resembles Middlesborough and Newcastle. For both series, but especially for the second, the question of social class was a central trope, as the two friends have different aspirations: while Terry is content to remain working-class, Bob seeks to better himself through marriage. The second series, from which the episode analysed below is taken, begins with Terry's return from a five-year spell in the army, to find that Bob has left his old job at the factory (which has closed), and is engaged to Thelma, an old school flame, daughter of a prominent local constructor. The friends are growing up, and apart; though still tied by nostalgia to common social rituals, there is increasing tension between the social practices and situations of Terry (unemployment and the dole, darts, billiards, the betting shop, still living in mother's terraced house) and Bob (workaholic, evening classes, skiing holidays, badminton club, new home on a housing estate). Moreover, the two characters' speech is markedly different; Terry's accent is recognisably Geordie working class, while Bob's is more socially and regionally neutral.

The episode is explored using a pragmatic-dialogic approach (Kecskes 2016), to suggest that a focus on the implicit framework of class helps make sense of movements within the dialogue and also, parenthetically, explicate the comedy. The class structure and its associated, invisible ramifications, represent key background knowledge; they may exist nowhere apart from in the minds of participants, but are nonetheless real for that.

2 Speech patterns and social class

Though George Orwell famously called Britain 'the most class-ridden country under the sun' (Orwell 1970: 87), some social commentators have found that, due to the democratising effects of modernity, Britain's class structure has collapsed, in recent times (Turner 2013). In an American context, but using arguments of wider application, Paul Kingston declared the 'classless society' to be a modern day reality (Kingston 2000). The stable demographic social categories, associated with blue and white collar employment, with distinct social groups, each with their own traditions, behavioural patterns and forms of speech, have largely vanished. In their place has come a more fluid society, where accent is no longer such a reliable indicator of social status. Myles (2010: 15), for example, notes the fall in social esteem of Received Pronunciation among upper middle class southerners, who frequently prefer instead to mimic the tones and idioms of 'a watered down working-class East London accent'. Though more prevalent among the young (and hence, arguably more of an indicator of age than of social class), this pattern is nevertheless indicative of an erosion of lines of linguistic demarcation.

In their survey of the class system in modern Britain, Marshall et al (1988: 2-3) summarise Gorz's (1982) vision of the demise of traditional categories of social class. Work, in this perspective, has become, for blue and white-collar worker alike, 'a blank interval on the margins of life, to be endured to earn a little money'. Tightly-knit communities of workers in heavy industry have been replaced by a 'post-industrial proletariat which, with no job security or definite class identity, fills the area of probationary, contracted, casual, temporary and part-time employment'. Nor is employment seen, as it once was, as a sphere for personal fulfilment; rather, it is a means for obtaining money with which to fuel 'private havens' at home, whose leisure possibilities have become the principal sources of happiness:

> Class membership, among this atomised mass of consumer-oriented individuals, is lived only as a 'contingent and meaningless fact'. The idea of class consciousness, like that of the proletariat itself, is an illusion long since shattered by changes in science and technology that have destroyed the power of skilled industrial workers. Only the dinosaur of class analysis persists and perpetuates the mythology (Marshall et al. 1988: 3).

They also document processes whereby the emergence of new industries, reliant on advanced technology and highly specialised staff, has determined a shrinkage of the 'working classes', and a new social mobility (Marshall et al. 1988: 272).

Though Britain's social landscape may have undergone dramatic changes over the last few generations, research in sociolinguistics conducted during this period has frequently indicated the correlation between speech patterns and social class. Put simply, people from different social classes speak differently (Holmes 2013: 143). One of the findings of Trudgill's (1974) study of speech in Norwich, for instance, was that the local vernacular tends to be used more among the lower classes, though it can also serve as a regional identity marker across class divides. Coupland (1984) found that voicing of intervocalic /t/ was a feature of lower rather than higher social strata. Such work is not limited to the English language; Reiter and Martìn Rojo (2015) explore the stigmatisation of immigrant versus native varieties of Spanish, while Theodoropoulou (2014) investigates the relation between social class and language variety among Greeks in contemporary Athens.

Such work, naturally, because it appears to stigmatise certain patterns of speech (Milroy 2007: 137), has a potential for provoking controversy, and nowhere is this truer than with Bernstein's (1960, 1971) work on language codes. Bernstein suggested that working class students spoke a 'restricted code,' 'characterised by embedded and literal meanings, limited command of deixis, and thresholds in technical complexity' (Luke and Graham 2009: 62). Middle-class children, by contrast, mastered an 'elaborated code' fitted for 'educational success and mastery of academic and scientific discourses'. Working class speech, he argued, 'progressively orients the user to descriptive, rather than abstract, concepts' (Bernstein 1960: 271). Ironically, Bernstein admired the so-called restricted code, for the greater potential for spontaneity and directness it conferred on working-class speech.[1] However, his approach, though influential, drew fierce criticism for the apparent elitism of its implications. Bernstein saw speech as intrinsically connected with social groups, reinforcing cultural ties within them and hence tending to the reproduction of social inequalities:

> The speech form does not 'cause' the sub-culture. The former is a function of the latter. [..] the child learns his society through the language and in its use a form of social tie is progressively strengthened (1971: 56).

It is not easy, however, to define 'working class speech'. Researchers have focused on a variety of phonological features, and Macaulay (2009: 987) lists a significant body of work on vowel and consonant use in working class speech. Myles (2010: 14), in this regard, identifies key characteristics such as the regular use of the 'glottal stop', the 'non-rhotic' dropping of the 'r', flattened vowels, and 'h'-dropping at the start of words. Cheshire (2002: 20), summarising the findings of a study by Williams and Kerswill (1999), says that, in Reading, "the predominant variant for all the working-class speakers is a back, diphthongal [ɔI]". The same study found that young working-class speakers in Hull see pronunciation of initial [h] as 'southern and posh, and strive to avoid it' (Williams and Kerswill 1999: 157-8).

Whatever happened to the likely lads? features one of Britain's most distinctive dialects, Geordie. Of the region, Watt says:

> Newcastle's location doubtlessly underpins perceptions of the city as remote, inward-looking and linguistically 'backward' (in terms of both conservatism and stigma) (2002: 53).

Tyneside is part of the northern imaginary, or stereotype, described by Russel (2004: 4), which sees it as 'harsh, industrial, grimy, and the particular province of the working class'. Regarding the dialect, some researchers concur that it was developed among, and typifies, the working-classes (Joyce 1991, Wales 2006, Beal 2009). Joyce, for instance, says that dialects, though the principle of regionality is also relevant, acted as powerful indexes of working class identity:

> Dialect spoke to "working folk" of all occupations and geographical locations, conferring on them citizenship in the nationalities of "Lanky", Yorkshire "Tyke" or northeast "Geordie" (1991: 172).

---

1 The Guardian. Basil Bernstein. Online at: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/sep/27/guardianobituaries.education, last visit 19/12/17.

While some regional accents are held in low esteem by the users themselves (Beal 1999: 37), Geordies are proud of their language (Beal 1999: 37, Svartvik and Leech 2006: 133). Though Lancaster (1992: 53) calls it 'impenetrable', Woods (2006: 13) claims that it generally associates its speakers with 'friendly, trustworthy and sociable' qualities. However, it is also true that, like many regional accents, Geordie was stigmatised until recent times. Watt (2002: 54-55) gives examples of accent discrimination, and says that more grammars and pronunciation manuals were produced in Newcastle, in the 19th century, than anywhere else in the English-speaking world. The aim was to 'correct' the deviations from standard English, so that locals would not be penalised in their social aspirations (Crowley 1991: 79, cited in Watt 2002: 55). Beal (1999: 37-38), in fact, gives details of surveys showing that Geordie was viewed unfavourably, as recently as 1992, compared with other regional accents of the British Isles (Freeborn 1992).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a phonological description of the Geordie dialect: what is more relevant, among the above considerations, is its association with the working classes, and its potential to provide a focus for social cohesion and group membership. In the terms of social identity theory (Tajfel 1972) and self-categorisation theory (Turner and Oakes 1989), the use of Geordie speech represents a resource through which an individual, such as Terry Collier, is able to signal his membership of a particular social group, along with the 'evaluative implications of this membership' (Tajfel, 1972: 292). As we shall see, Terry's speech and behaviour bespeak a personality that conforms to the general picture just outlined: his use of dialect can be viewed as an attempt to maintain a regional and class identity that resists the more aspirational perspectives of his friend Bob. He epitomises the direct, spontaneous speech traits apparently admired by Bernstein, comes across as friendly and sociable, proud of his social status, though with something of a chip on his shoulder; the result, perhaps, of his self-conscious adherence to a stigmatised social group.

3 Methodology

Before moving onto the analytical framework in detail, the choice to study the language of a sit-com, rather than to focus on 'authentic data' perhaps needs some justification, though lately some studies of discourse in film and TV have appeared, treating these as separate discourse domains with their own generic features (Rey 2001, Quaglio 2009, Dynel 2011, etc.) In this context, Biber raises a question:

> Conversations on television seem completely natural to the normal viewer. But is that because we have come to expect a particular style of interaction on TV, or because those interactions accurately capture the actual linguistic characteristics of everyday conversation? (2009: xiii)

The question is a rhetorical one, remaining largely unanswered in Quaglio's book. Dynel (2011: 312) suggests that authentic conversation is marked by much greater complexity than that found in sitcoms. Nevertheless, Quaglio does argue that there are essential similarities between the kind of 'natural language' used in TV shows and authentic communication. From the point of view of this study, the question of authenticity is hardly an issue; more important was finding data dealing with the question of social class, and from this perspective, a TV sitcom dating from the 1970s represents an invaluable resource. Sitcoms are products of their time, and the underlying social realities are part and parcel of the viewing experience, recreated more or less effectively by the show's producers, according to their own imaginaries, technical expertise and industrial practices (see Rowley 2015).

The analytical framework applies a model of the pragmatics of interaction, building on Kecskes (2010, 2016). The distinction between 'what is meant' and 'what is said', Bach's gloss of what is more technically termed 'the semantic-pragmatic' distinction (Bach 2005: 17) is of basic importance in many, if not most, studies of verbal interaction. As Bach (2005) also says, it has been widely accepted, after the work of Austin (1962) and Grice (1975), that what speakers mean by uttering sentences generally goes beyond the surface meaning of the words used. Both conversational pragmatics (Leech 1980, Levinson 2000, Wilson and Sperber 2004, Black 2006, Kecskes 2008) and cognitive linguistics (Van Dijk 1997, Lamb 1999, Pinker 2000, Croft and Cruse 2004), have explored these issues.

In the latter field, Van Dijk's notion of 'mental context models' (Van Dijk 1997) systematises what participants know about the communicative situation, about the participants involved, and so on. He assumes that each participant in a conversational exchange has a mental context model that includes the following categories of knowledge, each possibly further subdivided:

> Setting: location, timing of communicative event;
> Social circumstances: previous acts, social situation;
> Institutional environment;
> Overall goals of the (inter)action;
> Participants and their social and speaking roles;
> Current (situational) relations between participants;
> Global (non-situational) relations between participants;
> Group membership or categories of participants (e.g. gender, age) (Van Dijk 1997: 193)

Van Dijk makes it clear that these knowledge features are not fixed entities but that, on the contrary, they are 'routinely and ongoingly updated, negotiated, challenged, and interactively managed' by participants during the course of interaction (Van Dijk 1997: 194). For example, in the *Likely Lads* episode analysed below, entitled *Guess who's coming to dinner?*, the scene at the dinner party begins with the following small-talk between the host, Alan, and Terry:

> Alan: "I expect you're glad to be back, Terry, you must have noticed some changes."
> Terry: "Oh aye, what with decimalisation and André Previn conducting the LSE."

Both share similar knowledge of certain aspects of the *setting*, but application of Van Dijk's model allows us to appreciate distinctions, in the areas of other of his categories, that highlight differences in the cognitive and social characteristics of the participants. For instance, Alan, as host, occupies a different *current role* to Terry, his guest; he has the *overall goal* of putting him at his ease. He lives in a comfortable, middle-class home, and therefore has different *social circumstances*, and belongs to a different *social group* to Terry. The fact that they belong to different social classes affects the *global relations* between the two, and so on. These factors help us to appreciate the pragmatic sense of Alan's remark, which is that of a host putting a guest at ease.

In conversational pragmatics, the socio-cognitive approach (Kecskes 2010, 2013) sees interlocutors as social beings with individual minds, where processes of meaning-making depend on social as well as individual factors. As Kecskes (2016: 35) states, human beings are just as egocentric (as individuals) as they are cooperative (as social beings). The term is not intended in a pejorative sense, but rather refers to what he calls the 'attention-bias' that results from their prior experiences. In Kecskes' account of meaning in interaction, speakers and hearers bring the most 'salient' information up to 'the needed attentional level in the construction (by the speaker) and comprehension (by the hearer) of the communication' (Kecskes 2016: 35). In most conversation types, clearly, the roles are interchangeable, with each interlocutor taking turns to occupy the roles of speaker and hearer. Kecskes attempts to follow shifts in meaning that result from the interplay between speaker and hearer implicatures. Of salience, he says that it

> refers to the relative importance or prominence of signs. It is the most probable out of all possible. The relative salience of a particular sign when considered in the context of others helps an individual to quickly rank large amounts of information by importance and thus give attention to that which is most important (Kecskes 2016: 34).

The 'most probable out of all possible' meanings is the one which will be 'heard' by the recipient as the speaker's implicature, and around which s/he will construct a response.

What matters in these accounts, therefore, is not necessarily the context *per se*, but as it appears to the participants, and as it is referenced in the implicatures of each successive contribution. With each utterance, what Attardo (2001) calls the 'storage areas' of participants may be added to by new information, or old information must be discarded as untrue or modified, and so on. In terms of relevance theory, these

inputs progressively influence the way the speakers represent the world to themselves; draw conclusions, revise assumptions, confirm impressions, and so on (Sperber and Wilson 1995).

It may be asked why Kecskes prefers the term 'speaker implicature' to the more usual term, within pragmatics, for what is understood by the listener, i.e. 'explicature', or the 'combination of linguistically encoded and contextually inferred conceptual features' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 182). A possible answer is that, by focusing on what listeners understand (rather than on what speakers mean), he avoids the complications raised by Moeschler (2007), who distinguishes between 'basic' explicatures which involve propositional forms, and 'higher-level', where illocutionary dimensions may be involved. The possible illocutionary/perlocutionary dimensions of any utterance are included, in the analysis, with a separate column, in the tables below, recording what the speaker is 'trying to do'. The analysis also focuses on what participants know, as that knowledge is both illustrated in their utterances and as it is developed by the unfolding interaction[2].

The methodology aims to trace the presence of social class as an implicit factor in discourse, orienting interpretations and directing the flow of developing interactional meaning. The participants, it will be seen, dance around it initially, they refer to it via implicatures, but it is seen to emerge unmistakeably during the denouement of the episode.

4 Guess who's coming to dinner? Analysis

The question of social class is present in most of the series as a fundamental spring of most of the humour, but in the episode analysed here, called *Guess who's coming to dinner*, it is an explicit focus. Bob and Thelma, soon to marry, are invited to dinner by their friends Alan and Brenda, and Terry is also invited. All the characters, except Alan, a middle-class southerner, went to the same junior school, and share the same working-class background. They each relate to the topos of social class in their different ways, but the main focus is on Brenda, whose aspirations have brought her into the middle classes. She tells the company proudly that her husband went to 'a leading public school', that his mother has an account at Harrod's, and resists the attempts of the others to evoke the 'good old days' at their junior school. The tension in the episode is provoked by Terry's insensitivity to her desire to parade more elegant social norms, and he mortifies her several times by referring to her father's fish and chip shop, or her Auntie Elsie's job in a brewery. The scene ends in a blazing row, which shows the issues of social class in sharp relief.

In terms of the above discussion of speech patterns, the accents and expressions of the characters reflect their own stances towards the question of social class. Brenda's accent is closest to RP, even closer than that of her supposedly middle-class husband. Bob's and Thelma's are neutral; only Terry comes across as a typical working class Geordie. Thus, while both Bob and Thelma, but especially Brenda, have apparently modified their speech and accents towards the perceived prestige variety of Standard English, Terry has remained in the comparatively stigmatised group of speakers of the local dialect.

In the first extract, below, Bob introduces Terry and Alan:

Table 1: 'Guess who's coming to dinner', extract 1

	Dialogue	Speaker implicature[3]	Hearer's Inference	Action	Participant knowledge
1	Alan: "I expect you're glad to be back Terry, you must have noticed some changes."	x	X	Tries to put Terry at his ease	Alan knows that Terry has been away
2	Terry: "Oh aye, what with decimalisation and André Previn conducting the LSE."	x	These have been the most noticeable social changes over the last 5 years; T. is aware of the classical music scene	Tries to impress Alan	Terry knows that Alan is likely to be interested in classical music

2 Analysis maintains the fiction that the participants are 'real' people, and not actors repeating parts. Thus, in the interests of simplicity and because this is not relevant for the research, it does not record the actors' 'knowledge' that they are performing in front of camera and a studio audience.
3 Implicatures will only be spelled out where it appears that more might be implied (speaker), or inferred (hearer) than is encompassed by the surface meaning of the words.

Not much is implied, beyond the surface meaning of the conventional phrase, in Alan's first remark; nor can the hearer imagine what changes he is referring to. However, Terry's reply is different: by singling out two particular changes, he allows Alan to infer that, of all the changes that there have been over the past five years, these are the most noticeable for him. In an illocutionary/perlocutionary perspective (column three), Alan's speech aims to put his guest at ease, while Terry's reply, with its mention of André Previn, can be interpreted as an attempt to impress him with some middle-class name dropping. Terry begins with a stereotypically Geordie remark ('Oh aye'), which contrasts with Alan's conventional middle-class diction. While the reference to 'decimalisation' can be straightforwardly 'heard' as a predictable response to a question about the changes over the last five years, the mention of Previn is different. Terry knows (column four), since Bob told him before they arrived, that Alan is keen on classical music, therefore this could also be an attempt to ingratiate himself. However, in the context of an answer to Alan's implicit question: *what have been the most significant changes you have noticed?,* the reference to a change in the conductor of a symphony orchestra allows Alan to infer that Terry is a music lover, since he apparently ranks this change as of equal importance to a change in the national currency. We might also feel that Terry is trying to show his middle-class host that, even though he may be working-class (and, therefore, stereotypically, uninformed about current affairs and deficient where highbrow culture is concerned), he is able to give opinions on both.

In the dialogue immediately preceding this, Terry had demonstrated his lack of social skills by insulting Alan's favourite football club, Chelsea, and been rebuked for this by Bob, who is anxious that Terry's (working-class/Geordie?) forthrightness will not spoil the evening. Terry's initial remark backfires, as his confusing LSO (London Symphony Orchestra) and LSE (London School of Economics) indicates that he doesn't really know much about the subject. Bob now tries to repair Terry's 'mistake':

Table 2: 'Guess who's coming to dinner', extract 2

	Dialogue	Speaker implicature	Hearer's inference	Action	Participant knowledge
3	Bob: "LSO." (embarrassed laugh)	This is a mistake that anyone could make	Terry made a natural slip	Bob tries to repair	Bob knows that Terry knows nothing about classical music / Bob knows that Alan is an expert
4	Alan: "Oh are you interested in classical music then?"	I like classical music too; if you like it we have something in common	x	Alan tries to find common ground	Alan doesn't know that Terry knows nothing about classical music
5	Terry: "No, can't stand it."	We don't have this in common	x	Terry rejects this	Terry forgets that Alan is an expert
6	Bob: "Alan has a great collection of classical music. Especially Beethoven".	Terry, you have just made a faux pas because Alan loves classical music	I have just made a faux pas	Bob tries to repair	Bob knows that Alan's favourite composer is Beethoven
7	Terry: "Oh well, Beethoven's fine. He's alright. It's all the others I can't stand but Beethoven's alright."	I've just made a faux pas and I'm sorry	Terry likes Beethoven	Terry tries to repair	Terry knows that Alan's favourite composer is Beethoven

The implicature of Bob's correction and nervous laugh (3) is that Terry has made a natural slip of the tongue; he is covering up for Terry, concealing his ignorance (in fact, he only knows about the composer's new role because Bob told him earlier in the evening). This is the sense in which Alan is likely to hear Bob's remark, and he takes Terry's comment in (2) at face value, as indicative of an interest in classical music, which makes his question in (4) a natural one, since he is seeking common ground with his guest. He receives Terry's curt rebuff (5), which indicates, once more, his lack of social polish. At this point, Bob is forced to repair again, introducing the topic of Beethoven, and Terry's anxiety to repair the gaffe (7) shows

that he recognises the rules of polite society (always agree with your host), though the way he does so still risks giving offense. As Bob's contribution in (6) implies, Beethoven is simply Alan's favourite composer, i.e., the favourite among many others in his 'great' collection. Therefore, though Terry praises Beethoven, he is still offensive to the genre of classical music ('it's all the others I can't stand'), and will probably only succeed in convincing Alan that he knows nothing at all about Beethoven or classical music. Moreover, Terry's use of casual speech to discuss high culture, in keeping with class stereotypes, will probably strike Alan as inappropriate: 'he's alright', 'I can't stand him' are evaluations more suited to a discussion of footballers than composers.

Classical music, here, appears to function as an index of social class: while Alan's taste for classical music positions him as middle-class, Terry's outright rejection of it will be heard by viewers, in the context of what they know about Terry's philosophy of life, as a rejection of the values and social practices of the middle-classes. Bob's position is ambivalent, and median. Since he knows both Terry's total ignorance of classical music and Alan's expertise; and, moreover, also knows that Terry has a chip on his shoulder about the middle-classes, he knows that the topic has potential for causing tension, just as that of football had done moments earlier. However, we see that he is not as ignorant as Terry; he knows the correct abbreviation for the London Symphony Orchestra (3), and is able to distinguish between different composers, identifying the host's favourite (6). Bob, therefore, is better able than Terry to mix in an environment where classical music may be discussed.

The next extract features the social ambitions of Brenda:

Table 3: 'Guess who's coming to dinner', extract 3

	Dialogue	Speaker implicature	Hearer's inference	Action	Participant knowledge
1	Bob: "No, I mean isn't it nice with Terry here? I mean, it takes you back, doesn't it? It takes you back to Park Juniors, form Four B."	Our schooldays at Park Juniors were happy times and the memories should unite us	(Brenda)[4] we were happier/better in those days	Constructs a sense of solidarity	Bob knows that he, Terry, Thelma and Brenda went to Park Juniors
2	Brenda: "I'd like to think we've come a long way since Park Juniors."	Our situations have improved since then	(Terry) Brenda's living circumstances have improved since then	Resists Bob's move	Brenda knows that her circumstances and those of Bob and Thelma have improved
3	Terry: "Well you certainly have, Brenda, the last time I knew you, you were living above your dad's chip shop near the glue factory."	You are, basically, a working-class girl at bottom	(Brenda) He's reminding me of my humble origins	Resists Brenda's move; returns to Bob's theme of 'the past'	Terry knows that Brenda's dad used to have a chip shop
4	Alan: "Did your father have a fish and chip shop, dear?"	You never told me about that	x	Tries to get into the conversation	Alan didn't know that Brenda's dad used to have a chip shop
5	Terry: "Yes, he did, a good ,un and all, a silver grid, big helpings and free batter."	x	x	Gives more information	Terry knows what the chip shop was like
6	Brenda: "I'd better see how things are doing."	I don't like this conversation	x	Tries to evade the subject	Brenda knows her dad used to have a chip shop
7	Terry: "Are we having rock salmon and chips for old times' sake?"	You probably still cook the same food now that you did then	(Brenda) you haven't changed as much as you pretend	Humiliates Brenda	Terry knows that Brenda's dad used to have a chip shop

4 Since the hearers are multiple, I have indicated the name, in parenthesis, of the hearer most concerned with interpreting the implicature.

The theme of Park Juniors (1) occurs frequently throughout the episode, as the four main characters reminisce; fondly, in the case of Bob, Thelma and Terry, while Brenda resists the topic (2). That Park Juniors was a school for working-class children is made plain by Brenda's later declaration:

> "So much for Park Juniors. It can have no interest for Alan. Alan went to a public school."

It is also implicit in her reluctance to embrace the subject, and in her claim that the group has 'come a long way' since Park Juniors. The inference here is that the 'distance' is to be measured in terms of social success, and that this is the speaker's implicature is confirmed by Terry's next contribution, which spells out the distance that Brenda herself has come (3). Brenda's facial expressions show how little pleasure she has in being reminded of her humble origins (figures 1 and 2, below):

Figure 1: Terry speaking to Brenda (15:09) Figure Two: Brenda's reaction (15:14)

Alan's remark (4) shows that he had no idea that his father-in-law once owned a fish and chip shop, implying that Brenda had kept this a secret from him. Brenda now tries to physically escape from the scene, but Terry's final remark (7) once more mortifies her by insisting on the fish and chip shop topic. The suggestion that the evening's menu will be 'rock salmon and chips' - i.e., working-class fare - is an unwelcome reminder of her origins; in fact, the meal will be 'cheese fondue followed by gooseberry fool and wafer-thin mints', as Bob puts it, later.

Interpretation of speaker implicatures - by participants and analyst - can never be an exact science, but will only ever be, in Kecskes' phrase, 'the most probable out of all possible'. It is possible, for example, that Terry's insulting reminder of Brenda's humble origins (3), though heard as such, was said without intention to wound. Paradoxically, in view of Terry's tendency to evoke 'the good old days' with fond nostalgia, he may have simply been trying to stimulate a similar response in her, unaware of the fact that the topic was taboo. However, it should have been plain to him, both from her verbal and kinesic responses (figures 1 and 2, above) that the subject was not pleasant for her; and his later insistence (7), despite Brenda's attempt to remove herself from the room, makes this an unlikely interpretation. More likely, given Terry's tendency to inverted snobbery, is the hypothesis that he is trying to bring Brenda back down to earth.

The tension builds throughout the dinner and comes to a head when Terry reveals that he and Bob were 'seduced', in the boiler-room at Park Juniors, just as Brenda is complaining she was 'attacked' by two boys, in the same place. The inference is that Brenda's account of the incident is not true, and she turns on Terry in a vigorous denunciation of his lifestyle and prospects:

Table 4: 'Guess who's coming to dinner', extract 4

	Dialogue	Speaker implicature	Hearer's Inference	Action	Participant knowledge
1	Brenda: "Part of your reluctance to leave the past, Terry Collier, is that you have very little to look forward to in the future, and your present hasn't much to offer beyond the pub and the billiard hall. Most of us have improved ourselves, developed as people. But you? You're an embarrassment to your family and an embarrassment to your friends."	Bob, Thelma and I have progressed socially since junior school, but you have not	(Terry) This girl knows a lot about my current state	Attacks Terry	Brenda knows Terry's current situation and future prospects
2	Bob: "Wait a minute. He doesn't embarrass me. He might be coarse and he might be vulgar."	Whatever Terry's faults, I am on his side	X	Defends Terry	Bob knows Terry well
3	Terry: "Are you with me or against me?"	x	(Bob) Terry might think I'm criticising him	Defends himself	Terry knows Bob knows him well
4	Bob: "Just shut up a minute. He might be crude and he might be a bit rough at the edges. And all right, he might have eaten the wrong end of his asparagus. But I'll tell you one thing. He's down to earth, and he's honest."	There are more important values than middle-class table manners	(Brenda) Bob is standing by his friend, just like old times	Defends Terry	Bob knows Terry is not a social climber
5	Brenda: "Ha! Here's a turn up for the book. The good old days, those two back in the saddle."	Bob is just backing his friend up	(Thelma) Brenda misunderstands Bob's motives	Attacks Bob and Terry	Brenda knows Thelma may side with her
6	Thelma: "Well, I think Bob's right."	x	X	Defends Bob	Thelma knows Terry and Brenda well
7	Brenda: "What? I never thought you'd take Terry Collier's side."	Given your feelings towards Terry, your attitude is surprising	(the same)	Attacks Thelma	Brenda knows Thelma's normal attitude to Terry

The key phrase in Brenda's attack on Terry (1) is 'most of us have improved ourselves, developed as people'. It is hard not to read/hear this, in the context of the episode, as an implicit reference to the improvements made in her (and Bob and Thelma's) material circumstances; in other words, in terms of their upward movement from the working towards the middle classes. Her characterisation of Terry as frequenting 'the pub and the billiard hall' features stereotypical pursuits of the working classes. Bob's defence (2,4), in fact, picks up on this implicature by developing a discourse (again, a somewhat stereotypical one) of virtuous working class attributes (down-to-earthness, honesty) contrasting with false middle class values, i.e. a concern for table manners (the notion that it is important to know which end of an asparagus to eat), above these more important identity attributes. Viewed in this light, Terry's 'coarseness', 'vulgarity', 'crudity' and 'roughness at the edges' are re-drawn as virtues. Bob alludes here to a broad socio-historical discourse of contrast between working-class 'authenticity' and middle-class 'superficiality', that may be invoked to justify apparently crude verbal behaviour, along lines set out in the above discussion of features of the Geordie language.[5] Brenda's response to Bob's backing up of Terry is to appeal to what she knows of Thelma's usual reaction to Terry Collier, via the phrase 'those two back in the saddle' (5). In fact, in most of the other episodes of the series, Bob is positioned between the two, with Thelma representing the future, the middle-classes, material success and security; and Terry the past, his own working-class origins, promiscuity and freedom from responsibilities. Therefore, it would be normal for Thelma to back up Brenda

---

5 On working-class stereotypes, see Miller and Riessman (1961). The depiction of Terry Collier's character is in conformity with much of their description (e.g. pp. 90-92).

against Terry, since the two women share a similar perspective on life. However, the denouement shows that Thelma, like Bob, is not totally committed to bourgeois respectability, and buys in, to some extent, to a moral perspective that privileges (working-class) values such as authenticity over (middle-class) values such as table manners and (false?) politeness:

Table 5: 'Guess who's coming to dinner', extract 5

	Speaker implicature	Hearer's inference	Action	Participant knowledge
1	Thelma: "Terry is honest. And that's something we all seem to have lost since Park Juniors. He's got no pretensions. He would never deny he lived above a chip shop.	Brenda you are dishonest and pretentious	(the same)	Defends Terry/ Attacks Brenda	Thelma knows both Terry and Brenda well
2	Terry: (to Alan) "I didn't live above a chip shop."	X	x	Excuses himself with Alan	Terry knows a row is coming
3	Brenda: "What exactly are you trying to infer, Thelma? That I am a snob?"	X	x	Attacks Thelma	Brenda knows that she has social pretensions
4	Thelma: "Yes, you are, Brenda, you're an enormous snob and you always have been."	x	x	Insults Brenda	Thelma knows Brenda is a snob
5	Brenda: "What a bitchy thing to say."	x	x	Insults Thelma	Brenda knows Thelma will not like being called a bitch
6	Thelma: "Well it's the truth."	x	x	Defends herself, attacks Brenda	Thelma knows Brenda is a snob
7	Alan: "I like a lively discussion."	x	x	Attempt at peace-making, lowering the temperature	Alan knows the row could escalate
8	Brenda: "If I was such a snob, why would I invite that into my home for dinner?"	The fact that I am prepared to have Terry to dinner shows that I am not a snob	x	Defends herself, insults Terry	Brenda knows what a 'snob' is
9	Thelma: "Oh, I'll tell you why you asked Terry. Because the only way you can measure how far you've come from 23 Doglead Lane is to parade your possessions in front of an audience. I've seen you do it before. When you watch people admiring your fabrics and praising your carpets and envying your precious fondue set, you wet your knickers!"	x	x	Attacks Brenda	Thelma knows Brenda well

Thelma's attack on Brenda, once more, delineates invisible social structures and indicates a conflict of values that, apparently, belong to one or other of the social classes involved. 'Honesty' is seen as a fundamental virtue, linked by her to Terry Collier (1) which Brenda, by her unwillingness to acknowledge that she lived above a fish and chip shop, has lost. By her use of the pronoun 'we', however, Thelma temporarily includes herself (and Bob), with Brenda, as having betrayed an aspect of their moral characters in seeking to better themselves. As Terry stands out as the epitome of working class authenticity, in her view, so does Brenda appear the exemplar of its opposite; in defending Terry, it is natural for her to attack Brenda. Brenda responds to Thelma's implicature asking her to spell it out more clearly (3), and Thelma does so with the explicit term

'snob', adding the intensifying adjective 'enormous'; Brenda responds with an insult of her own (5). Use of the word 'snob' plainly indicates the relevance of social class for appreciating the nature of the quarrel.[6] It is noticeable in the section where the 'gloves are off' (2-7) that there are no apparent implicatures; instead, as Thelma says, 'the truth' is spoken (6), in terms that admit of no misunderstandings.

Brenda defends herself from the accusation of snobbery by mentioning her willingness to invite working-class Terry to her dinner party (8). However, in so doing, she uses the non-human demonstrative 'that' to describe him (8), thus insulting Terry and indicating that, although she was willing to have him round for dinner, her real attitude towards him is contemptuous. This implicature raises the temperature of Thelma's rejoinder (9) even more, and her final characterisation of Brenda positions her as a classic social climber who seeks confirmation of her new status in the envy and admiration of her visitors. In the context of describing explicatures, Black (2006: 81) says 'the greater the reliance on what is linguistically encoded, the more explicit the message'. What Thelma hints at, in (1), she spells out, in (4), and the home truths are told in a plain-speaking style - which is consistent, as we have seen, with accounts of Geordie identity, with no obvious implicatures. Thelma's identity thus progressively emerges (Bucholtz and Hall 2005), during the interaction, as one that is consistent with her own origins, i.e. Geordie working class.

5 Conclusion

Social class has been a perennial theme of British sit-coms, which have frequently featured either colourful working class characters (Steptoe and Son, Only Fools and Horses, On the Buses, Till Death Us Do Part); or the aristocracy (To the Manor Born, You Rang, M'Lord?, Jeeves and Bertie). In many of these shows, the theme is the rationale or basis for the show itself, but it also appears as a key element in the comic appeal of other sitcoms (aristocratic Margo in the Good Life or Sergeant Wilson in Dad's Army, working class Compo in Last of the Summer Wine, Arthur Daley in Minder, etc.). Moreover, despite the above discussion about Britain's supposed transition to a classless society, the theme has not disappeared, but rather morphed into new shapes. The aristocracy are still mocked in recent shows like Life is Toff or Almost Royal, the working classes through Harry Enfield's 'Loadsamoney' character or, more recently, Little Britain's chavs (Hunt 2013).

The aim of this study has been to explore the presence of social class in conversational discourse, as an implicit factor in discourse, orienting interpretations and directing the flow of interactional meaning. To that end, the choice of Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads? appeared a natural one since, in the episode in question, social class performs precisely this function. There may be merit in a historical perspective; in a context such as that of modern Britain, where apparently the Queen herself has begun to adopt features of a 'mockney' idiom,[7] it may be harder to observe the contours of social class in discursive interaction.

In 1970, however, terms such as 'working/middle/upper classes' were uncontroversial. Their precise boundaries were fuzzy; Trudgill (1974), for instance, distinguishes between 'lower working', 'middle working' and 'upper working', with similar subdivisions for the other levels, but few could doubt that such categories existed, and had an important place in the national psyche. What I hope to have shown, in the above analysis of a sitcom, is that social class had a very real existence, as part of the cognitive make-up of the participants. Social class was a tangible feature of their daily lives, it affected and conditioned their choices, their evaluations, their possible horizons.

This is reflected in the sitcom's inner world, and though it may be something of an analytical fiction to treat the characters' scripted dialogue as some sort of 'authentic' interaction, such an approach may

---

6 Snob: A person with an exaggerated respect for high social position or wealth who seeks to associate with social superiors and looks down on those regarded as socially inferior. Oxford Living Dictionary. Online at: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/snob, last visit 20/12/2017.

7 Guardian. The Windsor estuary. Online at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/dec/21/monarchy.guardianleaders, last visit 19/12/2017.

be a useful one. The shows were filmed in front of a live audience[8], and their laughter can be seen as confirmation of the realities of the class structure in Britain at the time since, as Colletta (2009) suggests, self-recognition is a feature of effective satire. Thus, though the interactions are invented, we may presume that the implicit social structures, in which they are situated, are real.

References

Antaki, Charles & Widdicombe, Sue. (eds.). 1998. *Identities in talk*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.

Attardo, Salvatore. 2001. *Humorous texts: A semantic and pragmatic analysis*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Austin, John, L. 1962. *How to do things with words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bach, Kent. 2005. Context ex Machina. In Szabó Zoltán Gendler (ed.), *Semantics vs. pragmatics*, 15-44. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beal, J. C. 1999. 'Geordie Nation': Language and regional identity in the North-East of England. *Lore and Language* 17 (1-2). 33-48.

Beal, J. C. 2009. Enregisterment, commodification and historical context: "Geordie" versus "Sheffieldish". *American Speech* 84 (2). 138-156.

Bernstein, Basil. 1960. Language and social class. *The British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 11, No. 3. 271-276.

Bernstein, Basil. 1971. *Class, codes and control: Volume I. Theoretical studies towards a sociology of language*. London and New York: Routledge.

Biber, Douglas. 2009. Foreword, in Quaglio P. *Television dialogue: The sitcom Friends vs. natural conversation*. John Benjamins: Amsterdam.

Black, Elizabeth. 2006. *Pragmatic stylistics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bucholtz, Mary and Hall, Kira. 2005. Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach. *Discourse and Society* Vol 7 (4-5). 585-614.

Cheshire, Jenny. 2002. Who we are and where we're going: Language and identities in the New Europe. In Paul Gubbins & Mike Holt (eds.), *Beyond boundaries: Language and identity in contemporary Europe,* 19-34. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto and Sydney: Multilingual Matters.

Colletta, Lisa. 2009. Political satire and postmodern irony in the age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 42, No. 5. 856-874.

Coupland, Nicholas. 1984. Accommodation at work: Some phonological data and their implications. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 46. 49–70.

Croft, W. & Cruse, D. A. 2004. *Cognitive linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crowley, Tony. 1991. *Proper English? Readings in language, history and cultural identity*. London: Routledge.

Dynel, Marta. 2011. I'll be there for you: On participation-based sitcom humour. In Marta Dynel (ed.), *The pragmatics of humour across discourse domains*, 311-333. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Featherstone, Simon. 2009. *Englishness: Twentieth-century popular culture and the forming of English identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Freeborn, Dennis. 1992. *From Old English to Standard English. A course-book in language variation across time*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gorz, Andre. 1982. *Farewell to the working class*. London: Pluto Press.

Grice, H. P. 1975. Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and semantics, Vol. 3, Speech acts,* 41-58. New York Academic Press.

Holmes, Janet. 2013. *An introduction to sociolinguistics, 4th edition*. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Hunt, Leon. 2013. *Cult British TV Comedy: From Reeves and Mortimer to Psychoville*. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press.

Joyce, Patrick. 1991. The people's English: Language and class in England c. 1840-1920. In Peter Burke & Roy Porter (eds.), *Language, self, and society: A social history of language,* 154-90. Cambridge: Polity.

Kecskes, Istvan. 2008. Dueling contexts: A dynamic model of meaning. *Journal of Pragmatics* 40 (3). 385–406.

Kecskes, Istvan. 2010. The paradox of communication: A socio-cognitive approach. *Pragmatics and Society* 1(1). 50-73.

Kecskes, Istvan. 2013. *Intercultural pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kecskes Istvan. 2016. A dialogic approach to pragmatics. Russian Journal of Linguistics 20 (4). 26-42.

Kingston, Paul. 2000. *The classless society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Lamb, Sydney M. 1999. *Pathways of the brain. The neurocognitive basis of language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Lancaster, Bill. 1992. Newcastle - capital of what? In Robert Coll & Bill Lancaster (eds.), *Geordies: Roots of regionalism*, 53-70. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

---

8 British Comedy Guide: https://www.comedy.co.uk/tv/whatever_happened_likely_lads/details/49892, last visit 19/02/18.

Leech, Geoffrey, N. 1980. *Explorations in semantics and pragmatics*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Levinson, Stephen. 2000. *Presumptive meanings: The theory of generalized conversational implicature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Luke, A. & Graham, P. 2009. Class language. In Jacob L. Mey (ed.), *The concise encyclopedia of pragmatics*, 61-64. Oxford: Elsevier.

Marshall, Gordon, Rose, David, Newby, Howard & Vogler, Carolyn. 1988. *Social class in modern Britain*. London: Routledge.

Macaulay, R. 2009. Sociolect/social class. In Jacob. L. Mey (ed.), *The concise encyclopedia of pragmatics*, 983-989. Oxford: Elsevier.

Miller S. M. & Riessman, Frank. 1961. The working class subculture: A new view. *Social Problems* Vol. 9, No. 1. 86-97.

Milroy, James. 2007. The ideology of the standard language. In Carmen Llamas, Louise Mullany & Peter Stockwell (eds.), *The Routledge companion to sociolinguistics*, 133-140. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Moeschler, Jacques. 2007. The role of explicature in communication and in intercultural communication. In Istvan Kecskes & Laurence R. Horn (eds.), *Explorations in pragmatics: Linguistic, cognitive and intercultural aspects*, 73-95. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Myles John F. 2010. *Bourdieu, Language and the media: Social class in Britain*. Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Oakes, Penelope J., Haslam, Alexander, Turner, John C. 1994. *Stereotyping and social reality*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Orwell, George. 1970. *The collected essays, journalism and letters, Vol. 2: My country right or left, 1940–1943*. Edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Pinker, Steven. 2000. *The language instinct: How the mind creates language*. New York: Perennial Classics.

Quaglio, P. 2009, *Television dialogue: The sitcom Friends vs. natural conversation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Reiter, Rosina, Màrquez & Martìn Rojo, Luisa. 2015. The dynamics of (im)mobility: (In)transient capitals and linguistic ideologies among Latin American migrants in London and Madrid. In Rosina Màrquez Reiter and Luisa Martìn Rojo (eds.), *A Sociolinguistics of diaspora: Latino practices, identities, and ideologies*, 83-102. New York & London: Routledge.

Rey, J.M. 2001. Changing gender roles in popular culture: Dialogue in Star Trek episodes from 1966 to 1993, in S. Conrad & D. Biber (eds.), *Variation in English: Multi-dimensional studies*, 138-155. London: Longman.

Rowley, Stephen. 2015. *Movie towns and sitcom suburbs: Building Hollywood's ideal communities*. Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Russell, Dave. 2004. *Looking north: Northern England and the national imagination*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Singh, Ishtla. 2004. Language and ethnicity. In Linda Thomas, Shân Wareing, Ishtla Singh, Jean Stilwell Peccei, Joanna Thornborrow & Jason Jones (eds.), Language, s*ociety and power: An introduction*, 93-113. London: Routledge.

Sperber, Dan and Wilson, Deirdre. 1995. *Relevance: Communication and cognition. 2nd edition*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Svartvik, Jan & Leech, Geoffrey, N. 2006. *English: One tongue, many voices*. Houndmills: Basingstoke.

Tajfel, H. 1972. La categorisation sociale (social categorisation). In S. Moscovici, (ed.), *Introduction à la psychologie sociale*, 272-308. Paris: Larousse.

Theodoropoulou, Irene. 2014. *Sociolinguistics of style and social class in contemporary Athens*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Turner, Alwyn W. 2013. *A classless society? Britain in the 1990s*. London: Aurum Press.

Turner, J.C. and Oakes, P.J. 1989. Self-categorization theory and social influence. In P.B. Paulus (ed.), *The psychology of group influence*, 233-275. Hillsdale, MJ: Erlbaum.

Trudgill, Peter. 1974. *The social differentiation of English in Norwich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Van Dijk, Teun A. 1997. Cognitive context models and discourse. In Maxim, I. Stamenov (ed.), *Language structure, discourse and the access to consciousness*, 189-226. Advances in Consciousness Research 12.

Wales, Katy. 2006. *Northern English: A cultural and social history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Watt, D. 2002. 'I don't speak with a Geordie accent, I speak, like, the Northern accent': Contact-induced levelling in the Tyneside vowel system. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 6. 44-63.

Williams, A. and Kerswill, P. 1999. Dialect levelling: Change and continuity in Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull. In P. Foulkes & G. Docherty (eds.), *Urban voices: Accent studies in the British Isles*, 141-62. London: Arnold.

Wilson, Deirdre and Sperber, Dan. 2004. Relevance theory. In L.R. Horn, & G. Ward (eds.), *The handbook of pragmatics*, 607-632. Oxford: Blackwell.

Woods, Nicola. 2006. *Describing discourse: A practical guide to discourse analysis*. London: Hodder Arnold.