

<b>Institution:</b> Nottingham Trent University (NTU)		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D34 - Communication, Cultural & Media Studies, Library & Information Management.		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Changing attitudes to East Midlands English and raising awareness of language as heritage		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2011 – 2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Role:</b>	<b>Period employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Professor Natalie Braber	Professor	2005 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 – December 31, 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N</b>		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Braber's work has changed attitudes to East Midlands English. Language is crucial to identity but rarely considered an important aspect of culture and heritage by non-linguists. Braber's research uncovered a particular lack of public knowledge about and engagement with the language of the East Midlands. Through a sustained programme of creative and collaborative engagement, the research has: 1. Changed attitudes towards linguistic heritage; 2. Built connections between groups and allowed people to acquire new skills; 3. Empowered individuals by sharing methods of good practice; 4. Connected divided communities. It developed collaborations between mining communities, local heritage groups, museums, artists, writers, musicians and schoolchildren. It has made them partners in, and involved them with, preserving knowledge about local dialects, specifically 'pit talk', the language of miners. It did so through projects promoting art, creative writing and song. It enabled people to value their linguistic heritage and use it confidently in their cultural self-expression.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>In recent years, national bodies such as English Heritage have started to recognise intangible heritage as being as worthy of preservation as monuments, buildings and places. UNESCO recognises language as heritage, but the United Kingdom has not signed the Charter for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage and therefore there are no frameworks in place to protect or report on languages threatened with disappearance by societal and cultural change. Traditionally, the East Midlands has been neglected within linguistic research and, before Braber's work, the last examination of language variation in the region was carried out by the Survey of English Dialects in the 1950s. A thorough study of the region's spoken English was overdue and essential for an accurate picture of the forms and usage of the East Midlands dialect from the latter half of the 20th Century to the present day. Beginning in 2011, a series of studies carried out by Braber at the Centre for the Study of Inequality, Culture and Difference produced the first in-depth linguistic analysis of this region and developed knowledge of its different linguistic varieties [R1].</p> <p>In 2013 Braber carried out research with 325 school and college students to examine their awareness of East Midlands accents and dialects. Her results [R5, R6] showed that these young people were unable to accurately identify local accents and demonstrated very negative attitudes towards their own language. Many commented on the 'ugliness' of their accents, with some using descriptors like 'lazy', 'chavvy' and 'boring' to characterise their local language. Others said they didn't like it or were trying to get rid of it. Only two students said their local language was relatively easy to understand and just one believed it was 'friendly'. This raised the prospect of young people in the East Midlands actively seeking to push their local dialects away [R4]. To examine these findings in greater detail, Braber used British Academy funding to interview local people of all ages under her <i>East Midlands Voices</i> project. Her aim was to address a gap in knowledge about the East Midlands dialect as a living and changing variety of British English. In addition to using archival oral history interviews, samples of interviewees' speech were collected to further illustrate the dialects and accents of people from across the region [R1, R2]. Some interviewees had suggested that local mining communities 'had a funny language all of their own'. Braber followed up on these comments and discovered that many terms and words used by local miners comprised a unique language variety – one at risk of being lost with the closure of the collieries.</p>		

Further research facilitated by British Academy and Heritage Lottery funding [see Contextual Data] found that 'pit talk' was indeed an important aspect of local cultural identity and community cohesion. Despite research on the life and language of miners in other regions, the language used by miners in the East Midlands had not received any academic attention. Braber initiated work on this topic and found that language used by coal miners differed in the East Midlands, both within the region and compared to other coal communities [R1, R3]. Examples of pit talk highlighted through Braber's studies included 'greenun', which means 'throwing a sickie', 'mosh', which refers to coal likely to break through transportation, and 'grabbers' – men who regularly work overtime [R3]. Braber carried out extensive attitudinal research with mining heritage groups [R1, R3] and showed that, when thinking of their heritage, these groups typically considered tangible artefacts such as processional banners, mining lamps or tools. They were constantly surprised that their language was considered 'valuable' outside of their community, seeing it as 'ordinary' and 'everyday'. At the same time, they increasingly recognised that, with the cessation of mining, language would not be carried forward by future generations and, like other industrial languages, was under threat. This tied in closely with Braber's broader research aim of helping establish and foster a new field – language as intangible heritage – through the study of threatened language and heritage.

### 3. References to the research

The quality of the underpinning research is evidenced by rigorous externally peer reviewed outputs.

#### Books:

**R1** Braber, N and Jonnie Robinson (2018). *East Midlands English*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

**R2** Braber, N (2015). *Nottinghamshire Dialect*. Sheffield: Bradwell Books.

**R3** Braber, N; Suzy Harrison and Claire Ashmore (2017). *Pit Talk in the East Midlands*. Sheffield: Bradwell Books.

#### Book Chapter:

**R4** Braber, N (2016). Dialect perception and identification in Nottingham. In: Jennifer Cramer and Chris Montgomery (Eds.) *Cityscapes and Perceptual Dialectology: Global Perspectives on Non-Linguists' Knowledge of the Dialect Landscape*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 209-232.

#### Articles:

**R5** Braber, N (2014). The concept of identity in the East Midlands. *English Today* 30(2): 3-10.

**R6** Braber, N (2015). Language perception in the East Midlands. *English Today* 31(1): 16-26.

### 4. Details of the impact

Braber collaborated with a diverse range of publics throughout the impact period to stimulate a research-led understanding of the region's distinctive linguistic identity. Through a creative engagement programme, she brought together teachers, school pupils, museums, artists, musicians and former mining communities to promote the recognition and preservation of local language, culture and heritage. Miners' 'pit talk', has typically been omitted from public understanding of 'heritage' as there is relatively little nostalgia for our vanishing industrial past and even less awareness of language's status as intangible heritage. Addressing this double omission, Braber's projects drew together these groups to discover, engage with, and preserve intangible aspects of their culture and heritage. The miners' strike of 1984-5 has left a particularly bitter and divisive legacy in the East Midlands. Reaching out successfully to both sides of the dispute, Braber's work opened a pathway to a shared sense of industrial memory.

Achievements in four areas demonstrate the reach, depth and significance of the impact:

#### **Transformed attitudes towards regional identity, language and pit talk**

Braber's projects, *Dot Hills*, an HLF-funded project, and *Songs and Rhymes of the Mines* funded by NTU Global Heritage Fund, combined art and writing to bring together different groups and included four local secondary and two primary schools involving around 200 pupils in total. The workshops ensured teachers and pupils learnt for the first time about language variation and 'pit talk' and realised their importance. Braber arranged for the schools to visit three mining heritage sites - Bestwood Winding Engine House, Bilsthorpe Heritage Museum and Pleasley Pit Trust – where they interacted with former miners to create artworks. Teachers commented that the workshops and interactions with former miners and artists improved students' self-confidence and taught them new skills; 100% said their pupils had learnt about both their local heritage and

local area. Pupils commented that it had changed the way they thought about the life of miners, taught them about mining language and made some renew understanding of their own family [S5, S8]. Mining groups commented that it broadened their horizons to work with younger people in an artistic way; 86% said it had helped them share their knowledge and skills and 71% said it enabled them to have a positive impact on their community [S8].

Evaluation of feedback from ex-miners attending events Braber organised with the East Midlands Coal Mining Heritage Forum revealed that many had not previously considered their language as heritage. The Treasurer of the South Derbyshire Mining Heritage Group admitted: *'Before we worked with you we didn't realise our language was also part of our heritage [S9]'*. Groups identified the main benefits they had received: *'meeting with others is crucial'; 'knowing about other groups'; 'networking'; 'having a common voice is crucial'; 'together we have a better chance of preserving heritage' [S9]*. Such feedback led to Braber organising workshops on skills such as funding applications and social media use, and calling regular meetings with the Forum to share information about collections and events [S9]. A member of the Forum [S1] wrote: *'The work Natalie is doing in the field of language and linguistic heritage is of paramount importance because we all know language changes and we're now at that crossroads ... not to do that work now would be a gross negligence of heritage'*.

Braber's contribution to Nottingham's UNESCO City of Literature programme enabled a wider audience to learn about local language and its importance to identity. Her work influenced the organisation's objectives: *'Natalie's published research informed a lot of the work that we did and created a voice for our new website. It not only framed the words which we used for our 'Word of the Week' slot but also influenced the type of voice we used when writing copy for the website ... this feature ran for about two years and featured excerpts from her books ... our social media work which follows from Natalie's work was always one of the most popular things we did and it really created a debate about language' [S7]*. Braber created a popular 'Word of the Week' feature to support online and social media engagement, reaching over 9,000 people [S7]. Further public engagement included writing 3 pieces for *The Conversation* which reached over 110,000 people.

#### **Development of creative skills and practice by communities, educators and students**

Activities organised by Braber empowered people to take ownership of their unique language and identity, celebrate and value it. Local language was recovered, mapped and promoted as a medium for cultural and artistic engagement through music, art and creative writing. Local people were located firmly at the centre of this research.

The *Dot Hills* workshops enabled Braber to work with school children, former miners and artists to create a sound and art installation inspired by the history and transformation of the language and landscape connected to mining heritage [S5]. The resulting installation, produced by Kidology Arts (since purchased by NTU), was exhibited at Creswell Crags Museum in 2018, engaging, according to the record of entries, approximately 24,000 people. 100% of teachers and mining heritage groups stated they would value future events. 100% of children confirmed they had learnt new skills [S5]. Both pupils and teachers commented that they had enjoyed learning about language through making their own recordings and artwork and 70% said they had learnt new creative skills [S5]. One of the teachers commented that this 'hands-on learning' changed the way the pupils learned and, as a result, they put on a special assembly to pass on their learning to other students and parents [S8]. Two of the schools are located in highly deprived areas: a number of Year 10 children said this was the first time they had visited a museum.

The *Songs and Rhymes of the Mines* project involved a series of creative writing and poetry workshops facilitated by professional writers. These workshops enabled those new to writing to produce their own short stories and poems using local language. Braber worked with musicians who produced new songs. Pupils from one primary school produced the illustrations to accompany the songs and poems that were published in book form with a CD (an initial 200 copies sold out immediately) and via online streaming site BandCamp. The writers, poets and

musicians performed their work at open events, in poetry and writing festivals and Mansfield Museum. One review, on local music blog The Rocking Magpie, described the collection as '*glorious and heartbreaking*' [S6]. Feedback from all writers and musicians involved was positive. One musician who took part in the school workshop said: '*This new way of working pushed me beyond my comfort zone ... because I wouldn't have had the confidence or the ability to work in such a high-pressure situation by myself before. It has given me the confidence to apply for funding with the Arts Council*' [S10]. This funding bid was successful, allowing her to run Lancashire dialect reading and writing groups for residents in Pendle in 2019. Other comments from participants included [S6]: '*Working with professional music producers made a real difference*'; '*It often takes somebody from outside looking in to recognise something and that's exactly what Natalie did by recognising the dialect and the fact that we're in danger of losing this culture*'; '*This was the first time I felt I was able to use my own language when writing, rather than having to use Standard English*'. Most commented that working with dialect had been a new experience for them. The project led them to produce new work, reach new audiences, write new songs, form new collaborations, publish their own books, enter competitions, apply for different jobs and, in one case, set up a charity [S6]. It directly inspired an East Midlands episode of a BBC Radio 4 documentary called *Tongue and Talk: The Dialect Poets* [S6].

Braber set up *Coal, Community and Change*, a photography exhibition funded by NTU Global Heritage Fund which focused on forging a dialogue which examined the mining industry beyond the 1984-5 strike. In 2018-19, it visited The National Coal Mining Museum for England, Conkers Discovery Centre (a family attraction in the National Forest), Mansfield Museum, Chesterfield Museum and Harworth County Council, engaging 74,100 people [S2-S4]. The Mansfield Museum curator said it '*allowed us to reach new audiences in new ways*' [S3]. Evaluation of the exhibition took place throughout the exhibition's run and confirmed its positive effect on audiences. Many visitors commented that the exhibition had encouraged them to take further action, such as visit other exhibitions (30%), learn more about coal mining (18%) and learn more about heritage (10%). The exhibition caused visitors to engage further with local heritage, generating comments such as: '*I will write a poem*'; '*We will not forget*'; '*Will pass word onto schools on our history days*'; '*I will promote heritage in my school*' [S11].

#### **Exchange of good practice between local communities, mining groups and museums**

In 2017, Braber was one of the founder members of the East Midlands Coal Mining Heritage Forum. This forum meets twice a year and is attended by around 12 heritage groups from around the region and is also attended by other stakeholders who work in archives, museums and local councils. Alongside these meetings, Braber organised training sessions for members on collecting oral histories, working with social media, applying for funding and encouraging collaborative projects. A member said of the skills workshops: '*This allowed the different groups to share knowledge, skills, artefacts and has created a support network which is unique in this country*' [S9]. Such workshops were beneficial to the participants, but also helped trainers develop new methods. One commented, for example, that the workshops enabled them to embrace new technologies, work with new groups and facilitate future relationships with project partners [S9]. The artists commented that this was the first time they had engaged with academic research which was very valuable to them. The project allowed them to '*significantly develop their own practice*' [S6] and thereby develop new projects with other project partners and museums as well as sharing their work with new audiences. The community and heritage groups also benefited and now engage more in education, work with school groups and feel empowered and have been given the opportunity to work with new groups [S9]. Many expressed a desire for a shared network and website: this has been set up by Braber to include information about events, pit language and memories. A workshop on writing funding applications led to a successful bid by Pleasley Pit Trust for £17,000 towards a new visitor centre [S9].

Alongside the *Coal, Community and Change* exhibition, Braber worked with regional and national museums on projects to ensure language and intangible heritage is a focus of their exhibitions. This work is seen as impactful and benefitting their own visitor engagement strategies. Conkers Discovery Centre said [S4]: '*The exhibition and resulting activity really underpins and strengthens our association with the local mining group and brings real*



*educational insight to our customers. It has also helped us strengthen our credibility to our local members'. The Centre made Braber's exhibition a permanent part of its gallery as they felt 'it has an important impact on our visitors in helping maintain collective memories'. Mansfield Museum commented [S3]: 'It has been interesting to look at language and heritage in new ways, incorporating language and music, for example. Natalie has really helped us to see that language is just as important to heritage as our physical collections'. They added that they had put on events on language and heritage that they would not have been qualified to organise otherwise and that this project brought them together with new groups to discuss future work around intangible heritage. The National Coal Mining Museum for England also found they benefitted from this collaboration [S2]: 'Being able to work with mining heritage groups outside of Yorkshire is very important to us and a crucial objective. Working with Natalie as part of the Forum has been an excellent way for the museum to make contacts'. They also comment that: 'Using Natalie's research and approaches, we have been able to give support in terms of more technical curatorial advice which has had an impact on skills sharing and learning for mining heritage groups'. This work continues and further projects are underway to bring together different audiences to engage with local language and heritage.*

### **Building communities of memory in divided communities**

Language and the arts provide a safe and effective way to explore difficult histories and engage with divided community groups. Before engaging with Braber, many mining heritage groups were working in isolation, wondering how to ensure their knowledge could be passed to younger generations but often reluctant to engage with each other due to fractured relations. Working with such groups is not always straightforward, as some individuals and groups still refuse to work with the 'other' side of the 1984-85 strike. Having a neutral voice is important, as a founder member of the Forum notes: *'Natalie is able to talk to anybody and is able to act as a bridge between those different communities and it has been invaluable because it has meant we would all talk together – this has brought communities together by offering her neutral voice. Natalie can achieve a lot more in certain regions than other individuals because of her standpoint'* [S1].

The National Coal Mining Museum for England also noted the importance of bringing together such communities: *'Other regions don't have the same grouping that there is in the East Midlands group working with Natalie and what is particularly impressive is that even with the situation of Nottinghamshire there is still cross-communication going on there and getting miners from across borders into a room is impressive enough and has an important effect on community cohesion and development'*. They added that links established by Braber's project, *'will allow us to start building bridges between such groups, improving community relations and understanding'* [S2].

These activities have been crucial for these groups, allowing them to find common ground. Braber used the Forum as a key vehicle with which to engage and involve mining communities in her engagement programme. Coal mining has been left outside prevailing public understandings of 'heritage' as there is relatively little nostalgia for our lost industrial past; this research has raised the profile of this heritage by making miners aware that it is only by working together that they will increase their chances of preserving this important heritage.

### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- S1** Testimony letter, co-founder of East Midlands Coal Mining Heritage Forum
- S2** Testimony letter, Curator at National Coal Mining Museum for England, Wakefield
- S3** Testimony letter, Museum Development Officer at Mansfield Museum, Mansfield
- S4** Testimony letter, Director at Conkers Discovery Centre, Ashy-de-la-Zouch
- S5** Evaluation of participant and public feedback for the Dot Hills project
- S6** Interviews with musicians, writers and poets – and related online articles
- S7** Testimony letter, Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature
- S8** Formal evaluation report for Heritage Lottery Fund
- S9** Interviews with and surveys of community and heritage groups
- S10** Testimony letter, Artist, Yorkshire
- S11** Evaluation of the Coal, Community and Change photography exhibition