

Institution: University of Sheffield		
Unit of Assessment: D-27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Challenging language discrimination and unlocking creativity		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Jane Hodson	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of English	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1998–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013–July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Hodson has had social and educational impact by challenging damaging prescriptive practices and championing the validity of alternative forms of English. Her research has been instrumental in developing the methodology of the literacy charity Grimm & Co (G&Co), which is based in an area of socio-economic deprivation and low literacy, enhancing their programmes and helping raise their national and international profile. She has devised and led practice-based workshops, improving schoolchildren's creativity, engagement, and self-esteem, and helping schoolteachers develop new methods for engaging pupils. Additionally, Hodson's work on dialect has supported teaching and curriculum development at other HEIs in the UK and abroad.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Hodson's research traces the rise of prescriptive understandings of the English language in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the continued – and detrimental – effects of prescriptivism in the present day. She explores the ways ideologies of language shape how linguistic variation is represented in film and literature, and challenges hierarchical judgments about language use and language users.</p> <p>Prescriptivism holds that there are right and wrong ways to use language, and that speakers of standard English are self-evidently more intelligent and better-educated than speakers of nonstandard varieties. Previous research in the History of the English Language established the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a watershed for language attitudes, when numerous grammar books and pronouncing dictionaries disseminated rules about the 'correct' way to speak and write English. This prescriptive ideology, still subscribed to today by non-specialists, contrasts with the descriptivist approach adopted by academic linguists, who – since the early twentieth century – have subscribed to the principle that all language varieties are qualitatively equal, and that 'standard' English is a historical construct. Hodson (R1) demonstrates that pre-existing research into the emergence of prescriptivism has been guilty of retrospective disciplinary mythmaking, praising some grammarians (Priestley) for apparently anticipating twentieth-century descriptivism while damning others (Lowth, Murray), without considering the historical context within which they were writing.</p> <p>Since 2009 Hodson has focused on literary representations of language variety, which – she argues – play a crucial role in elaborating and disseminating popular attitudes towards linguistic variation. Semi-phonetic re-spelling, nonstandard grammar, and regional vocabulary are</p>		

repeatedly used to mark the speech of characters who are 'other' in terms of class, race, and/or place of birth, implicitly marking such characters as illiterate and uneducated. Through research on the AHRC-funded 'Dialect in British Fiction 1800-1836' (2009-2013; £151,414), Hodson shows that the early nineteenth century was a key period when such literary techniques took shape, and when cultural formulations emerged about what it means for fictional characters to speak 'American' or 'Yorkshire' English (R2, R4-6). It is possible to trace a clear line of descent from the practices of dialect representation in nineteenth-century fiction to present-day stereotyping of dialect speakers.

This insight influences her approach to twenty-first-century language use, particularly in an area (Yorkshire) where speakers still find themselves discriminated against for their regional language variety, and in educational contexts where people are judged on the basis of written 'standard' English. As Co-I on the AHRC-funded 'Language as Talisman' (2012-14; £31,739), Hodson developed experience of co-producing research, working with schools and community groups in Rawmarsh (Rotherham) to investigate local language use. This project demonstrated that, when eliciting information about how non-academics think about language, higher quality information and better engagement is achieved if the project is not framed in prescriptivist terms. Hodson's work thus has an important contemporary dimension, as she investigates ways in which the language of socially and geographically marginalised groups is represented in film, literature, and popular culture (R3). She has found that influential messages devaluing and delegitimising linguistic variation continue to be transmitted through these media, reinforcing and normalising language discrimination.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1.** Hodson, J. (2006). The problem of Joseph Priestley's (1733–1804) descriptivism. *Historiographia Linguistica*, 33(1–2), 57–84. <https://doi.org/10.1075/hl.33.1.06hod>
- R2.** Hodson, J., & Broadhead, A. (2013). Developments in literary dialect representation in British fiction 1800–1836. *Language and Literature: International Journal of Stylistics*, 22(4), 315–332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963947013497876>
- R3.** Hodson, J. (2014). *Dialect in Film and Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan. Available on request.
- R4.** Hodson, J. (2016). 'Jane Austen and the Prescriptivists' in Auer, A., Gonzalez-Diaz, V., Hodson, J. & Sotirova, V. (eds.) *Linguistics and Literary History*. John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lal.25.09hod>
- R5.** Hodson, J. (2016). Talking like a servant: What nineteenth century novels can tell us about the social history of the language. *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics*, 2(1), 27–46. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jhsl-2016-0002> (REF2)
- R6.** Hodson, J. (2020) 'The Problem of Dialect Poetry' in *No Dialect Please, You're a Poet: English Dialects in Poetry in the 20th and 21st Centuries* (Routledge), 57-72. ISBN 9780367258047. Available on request from HEI

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)**Impact on G&Co**

G&Co is based in Rotherham, an area with high social deprivation and low literacy. In 2015, 24.3% of children were affected by income deprivation [S1]; literacy results for 11-year-olds were consistently at least 5% below national benchmarks [S2]. A high percentage of the schools G&Co works with have higher than national averages of pupils on pupil premium [S3].

Hodson joined G&Co as a founding Trustee in 2014, supporting G&Co's growth from a small, peripatetic charity to an organisation with a permanent home (from 2016), national profile, and steady financial footing (£115K p.a. in Arts Council funding 2018-2022; £150K from Paul Hamlyn Foundation to deliver teacher development training for ten schools, 2020-22). The growth of G&Co's reputation and profile beyond Yorkshire is evidenced by BBC R4's 'Grimm & Co' programme (Nov 2019), a dramatisation of stories written by children at the charity [S2].

Hodson's research underpins G&Co's principles of non-prescriptivism. 'Devious Dictionary' (2014-15) comprised workshops with writers, artists, and 100 schoolchildren. 'Hodson innovatively imported a methodology used in museums education – 'Object Dialogue Boxes' – into a literacy setting. Using objects as catalysts, children invent words and explain their meaning. This changes children's relationship with language: rather than being told how to spell, or that words are not in the dictionary, they are given authority to explore language as a site of shared creativity. The project created a dictionary of new words, sold in G&Co's shop (249 sales, 2016-18). Creating physical products impacts positively on contributors, 'providing purpose and value' [S2]; as one child said, "*it boosts people's confidence because it feels like things are getting recognised*" [S4]. Hodson disseminated the project at a 2015 conference organised by London-based writing and mentoring centre Ministry of Stories, sharing good practice and raising G&Co's profile.

In 'Unthinking' (2015-16), Hodson scaled up the methodology from individual words to narrative. Workshops with schoolchildren used oral, collaborative storytelling and positioned writing as an exchange of ideas, removing 'fear of the page'. This project – challenging conventional ways of thinking about literacy by valuing every child's knowledge and disregarding grammatical rules – proved transformational for G&Co [S5]. Eliciting and developing knowledge children have (rather than training and telling) is now core to G&Co's approach. 'Unthinking' ran three more times in 2017. Its method was subsequently applied to punctuation in 'Unruly Rules' (2017). 'Unthinking' raised G&Co's national profile when showcased at the UK Literacy Association Conference (2018), and Hodson represented G&Co at 'Word Up!' (Amsterdam, 2018).

Impact on schoolchildren

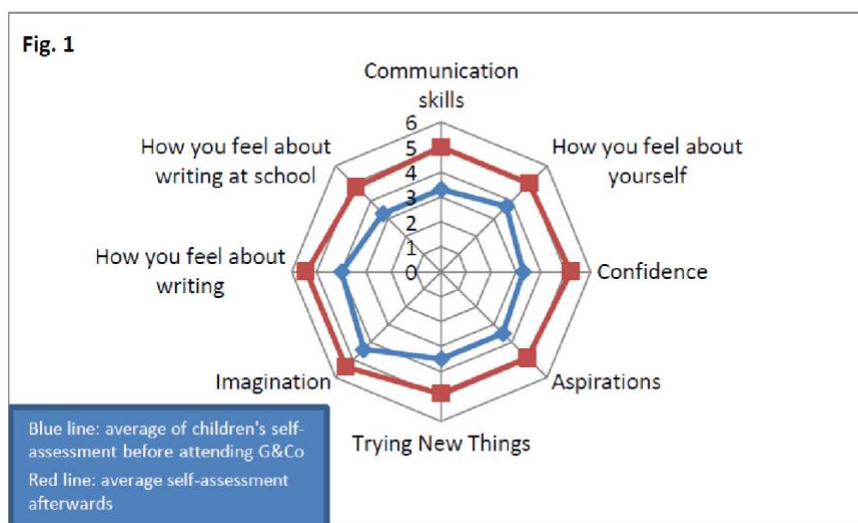
By 2018, G&Co had engaged with 6,000 schoolchildren [S5], including hard-to-reach demographics, e.g. twelve Roma-heritage children – a marginalised minority community, with a record of low school attendance and attainment – with whom Hodson worked on 'I Come From' (2013-14), producing exhibitions of the children's creative pieces displayed at the University and Hepworth-Wakefield, bringing the children into cultural spaces they do not usually access.

'This is what Articulate Sound Like' (2015) collaborated with fifteen Y7 pupils from Winterhill School, where 30%+ of students are 'disadvantaged' (i.e. in care/recipients of free school

meals), and 20% speak English as an additional language [S1]. After the project – collecting distinctive Yorkshire words – almost 80% reported being more interested in learning [S6].

Hodson's non-prescriptivist, child-centred approach increases schoolchildren's confidence, sense of creativity, and social interaction. 100% of parents interviewed after an 'Unthinking' programme agreed their children had improved in all these areas [S7]. As one stated, "*When she comes here, she feels confident and expresses her ideas without fear of being laughed at. She has a more developed interest in creative writing and reading*". Another noted their autistic child had been "*totally switched onto writing*".

This positive impact is evidenced by G&Co's 2019 report [S3], where the gap between the blue and red lines shows the change in children's self-assessment (fig. 1):



Teachers also report significant improvements in pupils' confidence, imagination, openness to new things, communication skills, and attitude towards writing (5+ in all categories, on a scale of 1-6; S3).

Impact on schoolteachers

G&Co's methods impact on teachers who see first-hand their effectiveness for fostering pupils' creativity and concentration. A 2018 Arts Council report states teachers 'were taken aback' by children's responses and focus, particularly boys and children with special educational needs [S8]. Teachers' appreciation of G&Co's methods is evidenced by the fact that 96% of visits result from word-of-mouth recommendations by teachers/schools [S3]. Teachers report that attending G&Co workshops influenced their pedagogical practice (average impact, 5+, on a scale of 1-6); as one teacher wrote, "*As part of our reflection on the visit, we recognised that we don't give the children enough opportunities to be imaginative in a freer way. We have tried to change our literacy curriculum as a result*" [S3].

Hodson's research also influenced teaching practice through workshops for schoolteachers, such as one held for eighteen teachers in 2014. Flipcharts show teachers adopting 'Object Dialogue Boxes' and collaborative/intergenerational story-telling, as well as equipping children to conduct research, and recognising the significance of accommodating different linguistic registers [S9].

Impact on HE

The first book on dialect in literature for over 30 years, and the first to study dialect in film, Hodson's 2014 monograph 'rekindled interest in teaching English dialects and their representation in different cultural fields' and 'opened up new areas of study' [S10], leading to new modules at Cardiff and Birmingham, and contributing significantly to modules at Liverpool, Kent, and overseas at Bielefeld (Germany), Lille (France), Rome (Italy), and Toronto (Canada). At least 2,000 students have been taught from the book.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1.** Data re: schools and Rotherham area.
- S2.** Media engagement with Grimm & Co (*Guardian*, Arts Council 'long read', BBC Radio 4 programme).
- S3.** Grimm & Co impact study report.
- S4.** 'Devious Dictionary' evaluation.
- S5.** Testimonial from CEO, Grimm & Co.
- S6.** Feedback from 'This is what articulate sounds like' (including films of the project).
- S7.** Parents' feedback from 'Unthinking'.
- S8.** Arts Council report 2018.
- S9.** Evidence about impact on teachers' practice.
- S10.** Data about HEIs using Dialect in Film and Literature.