1 Introduction

In October 2007, the *Sunday Telegraph* carried a report that Scottish actor Sean Connery had accused the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown of attempting to modify his Scottish accent in order to appeal to voters in England (Mandrake 2007). Connery was reported as saying that Brown's accent 'certainly isn't as pronounced as it was, but Gordon has to ride two horses down in Westminster. He knows it's difficult to appeal to people on both sides of the border, but he has to try, even if it means disappointing them both a bit.' Brown, the journalist suggested, was seeking to 'disguise his native tongue'.

Connery himself deployed his own Scottish variety of English when he played Richard the Lionheart in the film *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. This portrayal of an English monarch with a Scottish accent was much commented on (as was US actor Kevin Costner's non-British accent in his role as Robin Hood in the same film). Audiences have expectations, it seems. These are clearly not based on any reality of how these characters might have spoken. Modern audiences would undoubtedly struggle with the English spoken at the time in which the tales of Robin Hood are set, for example, and Richard the Lionheart himself, though born in Oxford, was a French-speaking Plantagenet, who, according to Harvey (1977), may have spoken little English at all. But these expectations are doubtless based on a stereotypical notion in some that such famous figures in English history ought to sound, to modern ears, English. The breaking of these socially normative language expectations seems to generate salience. While some people might experience such a violation of expectations positively, and so be quite taken by the idea of Richard the Lionheart as a Scotsman, others clearly experience it negatively, leading to some discomfort and entrenchment. (Such ideas about meeting or breaking expectations are part of Burgoon's 1995 'language expectancy theory', to which we will also refer later.)

Language attitudes permeate our daily lives. They are not always publicly articulated and, indeed, we are not always conscious of them.

But many nevertheless are overt, and we probably notice them in particular when they are negative and articulated explicitly, and often argumentatively, in public arenas such as the media or in our day-to-day conversations. Although we may feel that there are many different ways of expressing our thoughts in our languages, language variation carries social meanings and so can bring very different attitudinal reactions, or even social disadvantage or advantage. As Coupland (2007: 88) says, 'dialect or accent variables may be alternative ways of achieving the same reference, but it certainly does not follow that they are alternative ways of saying, or meaning, "the same thing". Such sociolinguistic issues underpin this book.

People hold attitudes to language at all its levels: for example, spelling and punctuation, words, grammar, accent and pronunciation, dialects and languages. Even the speed at which we speak can evoke reactions. In this introduction, we will take examples from some levels of language. We begin at the level of words. In fact, this level of language has received less attention overall in sociolinguistic work on language attitudes (although chapter 6 reports some research into lexical diversity and provenance). Words nevertheless provide some good exemplification here of the scope and pervasiveness of language attitudes. The introduction also considers the levels of grammar and accent, and attitudes to 'whole' languages and to codeswitching, with an eye, too, on standard language ideology. It also gives some initial insights into some of the concepts and other issues around language attitudes. A closer look at the nature of attitudes will be a focus in chapter 2.

WORDS

Some words are expensive. They can get you into arguments and fights. They can cost you your job. On the other hand, some can help to bring you success and money. Goddard (2002) points to the huge sums of money that companies spend on choosing brand names in order to try to ensure that these trigger desired connotations and positive attitudes in potential customers. She gives the example of the formation of a new travel company created in the mid-1990s, which was given two main possibilities for a new brand name. One was 'Destinations' and the other was 'Going Places', and the company in the end plumped for the latter. Anticipating the social connotations of these two candidates, they felt that 'Going Places' would be more strongly associated in people's minds with the dynamism and mobility that their

mass-market customers aspired to, and which the company itself wanted to project as its image.

Much strategic work on wording goes on in the political field too. In the USA, for example, Frank Luntz worked as a Republican political consultant, running focus group sessions (or 'Word Labs') with 'average Americans' to generate words and phrases to give to political candidates to use in their campaigns to help get the reactions they wanted from voters (Lemann 2000). Lemann writes 'Anybody who has to speak regularly to live audiences sees that some combinations of words do produce more and better reactions than others' (p. 110). Examples from Luntz's advice included using 'climate change' instead of 'global warming', 'tax relief' instead of 'tax cuts'. Luntz was also recommending the repeated use of the words 'listening' and 'children', because, he claimed, this would attract female voters. 'Why do you think Hillary Clinton went on a "Listening Tour" of New York?', he asked (p. 100). The idea of the Word Lab seems to be to discover how voters are already thinking and then to design language to convince them that politicians already agree with them. Whether we like this way of doing politics or not, through framing political debate in this way, this use of language is most certainly aimed at attitudes.

Personal names are also words that reflect and evoke attitudes, it seems. Crystal (1987 and 1997: 113) lists the top-ten given names for males and females in the USA and in England and Wales between 1925 and 1993. Cultural attitudes lead to a tendency for boys' names to be more enduring. For example, 'Michelle' was the top name for girls in 1970 in the USA, but does not appear in any of the other US top-ten lists between 1925 and 1993. In England and Wales, 'Trac(e)y' and 'Sharon' are in the top ten only in the 1965 list. In contrast, 'Robert' appears in the US top ten from 1925 through to 1982, and 'David' features in the England and Wales top ten from 1950 to 1981.

Attitudes to personal names can be looked at from other angles than simple preferences for one name or another, or even regarding levels of continuity. Barry and Harper (1995) studied the twenty-five most frequent given names of babies born in Pennsylvania in 1960 and 1990. By developing a 'phonetic gender score' based on features such as numbers of syllables, stress patterns and vowel qualities, they found that such features distinguished these popular names of males and females. Referring to previous findings by Duffy and Ridinger that female names were judged as more attractive and that male names were seen as more powerful, they suggested that 'phonetic attributes might contribute to the perception of a name as attractive or powerful' (p. 817). From this, then, we might surmise that a person's name can

have implications at the level of impression formation, impacting on our (at least initial) disposition towards that person.

In a similar vein, Smith (1998) developed an analytical model called the 'Comfort Factor' to predict with reasonable accuracy the results of political elections. The model was constructed by assigning weights to a range of sound features in candidates' names in past elections. Acknowledging the role of political issues and party loyalty in elections, Smith thought that many voters (especially less decided ones) might nevertheless be influenced by the sounds of the candidates' names. Applying his Comfort Factor model, he claimed that it was able to predict 83 per cent of the winners of presidential elections. Apparently, then, the study was showing that phonetic qualities of candidates' names could have some effect on people's attitudes and on their behaviour towards the candidates in the electoral process.

A rather different study of names was carried out by Harari and McDavid (1973), this time in a school setting in the USA. They wanted to examine whether teachers' assessment of students' performance might vary according to what the students' names were: i.e. whether teachers' attitudes to their students' names might be reflected in the marks the students received for their work. Generating a set of essays and allocating a range of names to each one, Harari and McDavid found that the grades awarded (by experienced teachers) in their study were indeed significantly higher when the essays were apparently authored by students with names considered attractive.

An important difference between this study and those mentioned previously is the explanation that Harari and McDavid provide. In the previous studies, the main attention was on the sound features of the words – stress, rhythm, vowel qualities etc. – and how these seemed to affect attitudes. This was seemingly a phonoaesthetic approach (see Crystal 1995). Harari and McDavid do not focus on such qualities that might be viewed as inherent in the words themselves, but considered the social stereotypes associated with the names. Stereotypes are cognitive shortcuts. Here, then, when people hear about someone called 'Arnold', for example, they would tend to place them in a subjective category in which reside all Arnolds, and to then perceive and judge them in the same way, positively or negatively, as if they are all much the same. In interpreting their findings, Harari and McDavid employ the assumption that names that are more common and seen as more attractive connote favourable stereotypes, and those that are rarer and judged less attractive connote negative stereotypes. Social stereotypes will recur in this book, since they feature large in the language attitudes field. But it is also worth noting that we have touched on

a controversy here: what is the basis of attitudes towards different language features, accents, etc.? Why do people tend to love some and hate others? Is it because of their inherent sound qualities (the 'inherent value hypothesis'), or is it due to their social connotations (the 'imposed norm hypothesis')? The latter is the generally held view (see, for example, Giles and Powesland 1975).

Names, whether personal names, brand-names or names of organisations, are of course certainly not the only words that people have attitudes towards or that can evoke attitudes. In the persuasion field, where there is often a focus on influencing people's attitudes, some research has been done on expletives, and whether their use is an aid or a hindrance in this attitudinal process. The general finding seems to be that the use of expletives is not advantageous in influencing other people's attitudes. One study, though, also found that, if they were used, they tended to work differently according to whether they were used by males or females. Bostrom, Baseheart and Rossiter (1973) grouped the expletives into three types: religious, excretory and sexual. In this US context, at least, females seemed to have more influence if they used sexual obscenities, whereas males seemed to have less influence with these than with excretory or religious ones. Interestingly, too, females achieved more attitude change overall through the use of more offensive language than males did, regardless of which of the three types they used.

While the study by Bostrom *et al.* included some important variables distinguishing different types of expletives and checking for differences in the reactions to speakers of each sex, subsequent theoretical approaches to communication have given more focus on how interactions engage with characteristics of the person at the hearing end. Communication accommodation theory (see, for example, Giles, Mulac, Bradac and Johnson 1987) argues that we have a tendency to adjust our style of communicating to those with whom we are communicating in order to gain their social approval and improve communication. So if we know that the person we are talking to usually uses a lot of obscenities, we might evoke more positive attitudes from them if we ourselves employ them. Communication accommodation theory is a significant theory in the language attitudes field and one we will look at more closely in chapter 7.

At the other end of the spectrum from the use of obscenities comes the careful choice of words to avoid causing offence. Political correctness concerns language referring to a variety of social groups: for example, non-racist and non-sexist speech. Its goal of projecting positive images is also intended to generate more positive attitudes and more constructive behaviour towards the social groups concerned and

thereby lead to a more inclusive society. But what do we know about people's attitudes towards attempts at making speech more politically correct? Some research has demonstrated that using politically correct language can be a difficult even if worthwhile path. Seiter, Larsen and Skinner (1998), for example, looked at people's reactions to campaign materials designed to raise donations for people with disabilities. They were represented in four different ways: e.g. 'handicapable', 'confined to a wheelchair', 'uses a wheelchair' or 'abnormal'. Communicators using terms such as the first three were regarded as more trustworthy and competent than those using terms like the fourth. But the communicator who took the politically correct option and tried not to refer to people with disabilities as victims – i.e. the one who used terms such as 'uses a wheelchair' – was no more successful in raising donations than the one who used terms such as 'abnormal'. It seems that people have to present more urgency and need in their communication if they want to get people to give money.

There are two important points to take away from this study at this stage. One is that the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is problematic. In this study, respondents held a positive attitude to some communicators – seeing them as competent and trustworthy – but this did not translate into the positive action of donating money. The second is that a key feature in language attitudes research is the stereotypical view of speakers in terms of personality traits. Ways of speaking give rise to judgements of people's honesty, competence, intelligence, enthusiasm, etc. These are two more aspects of language attitudes that will be recurring in this book.

Other words evoke attitudes with a somewhat (though not entirely) different focus, relating to public controversies over language usage. In my school English lessons in England, attention was often rather tediously drawn to so-called 'vulgar influences' from across the North Atlantic. 'Hopefully' was a word that often surfaced. 'We continued hopefully on our way' was viewed as correct. But 'Hopefully, this film won't last long' was said to be poor English, because a film cannot last hopefully. 'I hope this film won't last long' or 'It is to be hoped that this film won't last long' were said to be the correct modes of expression. Crystal (1996: 177) also mentions the 'hopefully' phenomenon, and adds, 'It is unclear why this particular adverb should have attracted so much adverse criticism, when many other adverbs are used in a similar way: thankfully, regrettably, sadly, happily, etc.'

In any event, 'hopefully' has brought us into the arena of public arguments about English usage. Readers will doubtless be particularly aware of this area of attitudes about language and languages, in part

because such complaints feature so commonly and explicitly in everyday discourse. Since these also relate to some concepts that are fundamental to the language attitudes field, we will examine some of these in this chapter too.

STANDARDISATION IN LANGUAGE

Attitudes towards language, positive and negative, are often influenced by the process of standardisation in languages. Many languages are said to have a standard variety: Standard British English, for example. Milroy (2007: 133) writes that, in such instances, 'language attitudes are dominated by powerful ideological positions that are largely based on the supposed existence of this standard form, and these, taken together, can be said to constitute the standard language ideology or "ideology of the standard language"'. Generally, in day-to-day living, people are apparently not conscious of the influence of these ideological positions, but tend to work on the basis that such norms are simply a question of common sense.

Milroy (2007) stresses that standardisation of any kind is concerned with uniformity and invariance, and how, in standard language ideology, great emphasis is placed on correctness. Preston (1996) has observed in the USA the overwhelming degree to which appeals to correctness permeate the way in which people talk about language. In standard language ideology, there are strong pervading common-sense views about which language forms are right and which are wrong. The notion of correctness is reinforced by authority. Standard languages are codified in dictionaries and grammar books, for example, and spread through educational systems. They are also reinforced by the awarding of prestige or stigma to language forms. The devaluing of some forms leads to a view of them as non-standard or substandard. Milroy (2007: 138) writes, 'all standard languages have to be given legitimacy, and all have to be maintained and protected through authority and doctrines of correctness. There is usually a tradition of popular complaint about language, bewailing the low quality of general usage and claiming that the language is degenerating' (p. 138).

In Crystal's (1981) list of the top-twenty objections about broadcasting language in the UK, one of the pronunciation gripes concerned the word 'controversy', and the claim that to pronounce it with the primary stress on the second syllable – con<u>tro</u>versy – is wrong, and that the correct form has primary stress on the first syllable – <u>con</u>troversy. To add a personal note, I recall this complaint, too, cropping up in

school English lessons, with the first of these two pronunciations outlawed as a 'vulgar Americanism' (and therefore one we should never be caught using). Algeo (1998) also refers to this attribution of the controversy variant to American English (this time by 'a knowledgable British author'), and Algeo disputes this belief: 'this antepenult accent is unknown in the States, being a recent British innovation' (p. 177).

The example raises two issues. One is the difficulty in standardising and fixing a social phenomenon that is inherently characterised by change and variation, and the other is that many of the justifications for these attitudes are premised on misconceptions about language. Ideologies can promote strong common-sense notions that can be viewed as distortions or myths.

Trudgill (1998) writes about the myth that words should not be allowed to change or vary their meanings. He also points to how some people will look rather too much at the origins of words in order to argue their 'real' meaning. For example, he mentions how they might condemn English speakers who talk about there being 'several alternatives' on the grounds that 'alternative' comes from the Latin word 'alter' meaning 'second', and so there cannot be more than two choices (p. 1). Trudgill extends the argument to the word 'nice', the origins of which go back to Indo-European roots that would give it the meaning 'not cutting'. 'No-one in their right mind though', he adds, 'would argue that the "real" meaning of "nice" is "not cutting"' (p. 2).

GRAMMAR

At the level of grammar, Cheshire (1998) comments on the attitudes to the use of double negatives in English. 'You don't know nothing' exemplifies the type of double negative that arouses the strongest attitudes, and Cheshire notes that it featured in the top-ten complaints sent in to the BBC Radio Four series *English Now* in 1986, with some saying that it 'made their blood boil' (Cheshire 1998: 114). This is a way of expressing a negative that is condemned by standard language ideology in Britain. As Cheshire observes, it seems to be only in Standard English that such double negatives attract such negative attitudes. Complainers say that they are illogical and nonsensical, because the two negatives must cancel each other out to make a positive. Cheshire (1998: 120) points out that, in the real world, not only are such double negatives used unproblematically in the majority of the world's languages, but they are also found in all the rural and urban dialects of English in both hemispheres, as well as in African-American English

and in all English creoles. Within Standard English, though, they are stigmatised and tend to be associated with low-status groups in society. Such associations between language and social groups are a pervading feature in language attitudes.

The disapproval of this kind of double negative in Standard English is almost certainly identifiable with the eighteenth-century hope that language could be fixed, a time when grammarians were trying to construct a set of norms in order to establish and then preserve good usage. Such attempts have been referred to as 'an illusion based on misunderstandings about the nature of language, values and human nature' (Algeo 1998: 178). Nevertheless, the process has left a strong mark on modern-day attitudes, amongst some at least.

The apostrophe has also attracted considerable comment at times. It has an interesting history in English, and is something of a latecomer in its present usage, in that it was not until the nineteenth century that grammarians tried to impose the current grammatical rules (see Austin 1989; Garrett and Austin 1993; Truss 2003). Modern attitudes are varied, and exist alongside a great deal of lingering uncertainty about standard usage. Garrett and Austin (1993) asked groups of university undergraduates in Britain and Germany, and a group of trainee English language teachers, to say how serious they judged various apostrophe errors to be in English. Errors where apostrophes were included in plurals (e.g. we sell car radio's) were seen as more of a concern than others, but overall, none of the errors were judged to be particularly serious (no higher than about the mid-point on a five-point scale from 'unimportant' to 'very serious'). The respondents attributed least importance to cases where apostrophes were simply omitted. It is clear, too, that apostrophe omissions, unlike the double negatives above, are not associated solely with low-status social groups. Reputable British institutions such as Harrods, Selfridges, Boots and Lloyds Banking Group seem at some stage to have made policy decisions not to use apostrophes in their names (see Crystal 1996).

There are many other usages that some people are vexed by. Ending sentences with prepositions (as I have just done), splitting infinitives, saying 'It is me' rather than 'It is I' are other favourites, again attempts by grammarians to impose standard norms, and sometimes by referring to the grammatical rules of a language that works very differently from English: Latin. Infinitives are single words in Latin. Although there are some instances of single words sometimes being split in colloquial English speech – 'absobloodylutely' – Latin infinitives were not, it would seem reasonable to assume, split. English infinitive forms have two components – to speak, to walk, etc. – offering scope for splitting.

The English rule itself – that nothing should come between 'to' and 'speak' etc. – was also formulated rather late, in the nineteenth century. So these negative attitudes to splitting infinitives are comparatively recent. Crystal (1984) notes that there were no complaints about them before the nineteenth century.

Preston (1996) points to how, when there is persistent use of non-standard language forms, people often refer to the 'internal recognition system' that users of these forms have, which allows them to infer not only the 'error of their ways' but also what the features of the 'real' system are. So there appears to be a folk-view that 'Non-standard speakers are not simply those whose environment, class, and lack of opportunity have failed to equip with the standard variety; they are also persons who have somehow rejected the deeper internal knowledge which they surely have about the correct way to behave (at least linguistically)' (p. 58).

Indeed, debates about the importance of standard language also extend to arguments about maintaining other kinds of standards. Alongside the enduring notion that the language is going to the dogs is the notion that people who do not adhere to the rules of standard language are themselves going to the dogs. To illustrate, Graddol and Swann (1988: 102) cite Norman Tebbit, former Conservative Cabinet Minister in Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government:

> If you allow standards to slip to the stage where good English is no better than bad English, where people turn up filthy . . . at school . . . all those things tend to cause people to have no standards at all, and once you lose standards then there's no imperative to stay out of crime.

This close association between judgements of language and judgements of the people who use the language is what underlies the stereotypical evaluations of language considered throughout this book.

LANGUAGES

There are also strong negative attitudes about 'whole languages' rather than aspects of usage within a language. Bauer (1998) points to claims sometimes made that some languages have no grammar, for example. She notes that, if something is a language, then it must by definition have a grammar. Similarly, there is a common belief that some languages are incapable of fulfilling a wide range of functions. They are often claimed not to be suitable for writing literature, for example, or for conducting affairs of state. These sorts of attitudes are often