A CRITICAL SOCIAL SEMIOTIC STUDY OF THE WORD *CHAV* IN BRITISH WRITTEN PUBLIC DISCOURSE, 2004-8

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the use of the word chav in written discourse in Britain published between 2004 and 2008. Taking a critical social semiotic approach, it discusses how chav as a semiotic resource contributes to particular ways of using language to represent the world – Discourses – and to particular ways of using language to act on the world – Genres – suggesting that, though the word is far from homogenous in its use, it is consistently used to identify the public differences of Britain as a class society in terms of personal dispositions and choices, and in taking an ironic, stereotyped stance towards such differences. It is suggested that these tendencies can be viewed as ideological, as contributing to social domination and inequality. Chav is also found to be subject to a great deal of metalinguistic discussion, some of which serves to critique the above tendencies, but much of which does not.

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1   Introduction

The word *chav* entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2004 defined as 'a young person of a type characterized by brash and loutish behaviour and the wearing of designer-style clothes (esp. sportswear); usually with connotations of a low social status', and announced as Oxford University Press's first ever word of the year (Dent, 2004). It was named as one of the 'words of the noughties' by the BBC (BBC, 2010a). It has given rise to 'humour' books such as *The Little Book of Chavs*, *The Little Book of Chavspeak*, *The Little Book of Chav Jokes, The Chav Guide to Life* (Bok, 2004a; 2004b; 2006a, 2006b) and *Chav! A User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class* (Wallace and Spanner, 2004), and a popular series of teenage novels, *Diary of a Chav* (Dent, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c). And, as well as being heavily used and debated in the British press, the word has been prominent in academic debate in cultural, media and social studies, where it has been both criticised as a term that contributes to class inequality (e.g. Moran, 2006; Hayward and Yar, 2006) and adopted as a label for a youth 'subculture' (e.g. McCulloch et al., 2006).

In this thesis, I take a *Critical Social Semiotic* (Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen, 2003) approach to *chav* as it is used in a number of Genres of public written discourse. In relation to previous research in which the word is discussed, I both narrow and widen the focus of discussion of *chav*. I narrow the focus of discussion of *chav* by concentrating on actual instances of the word in use in public discourse. Instead of analysing 'the chav' as a kind of person or as an idea, I concentrate on *chav* as a word, on those occasions in which the series of letters *c h a v* itself makes itself useful to writers. I view the word as what van Leeuwen (2005) calls a *semiotic resource*. And I

widen the discussion by relating the word's use to its wider social context, to social practices of representation and action, and by taking the metalinguistic debate surrounding the word into account, asking what the significance is of the talk *about* as well as the use *of* the word. These concerns are addressed by taking a social semiotic approach to *chav* (Halliday, 1978; Hodge and Kress, 1988; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen 2005), an approach that provides a framework for analysing 'the way people use semiotic "resources" both to communicative artefacts and events and to interpret them' and 'how people regulate the use of semiotic resources' (van Leeuwen, 2005; xi). And my decision to focus on a single word as my 'semiotic point of entry' (Fairclough, 2007) is inspired by the work of the cultural theorist Raymond Williams, and his book *Keywords* (1983) in particular. For Williams, words are socio-historical documents as well as socio-historical resources, materials deployed by people in times and places working towards particular ends, and are central to 'certain activities and their interpretation' and 'certain forms of thought' (1983: 15). In this thesis I aim to critically describe *chav* as such a resource, and to ask what 'activities' and what 'forms of thought' *chav* contributes to.

The data on which I draw is exclusively nationally published written English. Other researchers have commented on *chav* in spoken language elicited in interviews (Castell and Thompson, 2007; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009) or as part of ethnographic studies (Nayak, 2006; McCulloch et al., 2006). Such studies make valuable claims about the uses of the word in these contexts, in particular, raising the problem of how use of *chav* relates to ideas about and experiences of social class (Hayward and Yar, 2006; Moran, 2006; Nayak, 2006; Castell and Thompson, 2007; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). These studies, however, are without commentary on *chav* as a *semiotic*

phenomenon, without explicit theory of what the significance of the word as a resource for making meaning might be. Furthermore, given the public nature of so much of the debate about *chav*, it is worthwhile investigating the word as a public and not a private phenomenon. Thus my focus, rather than being on what people privately think of *chavs*[1] or of the word *chav*, is on how the resource itself has been put to use in public discourse.

1.1   Aims

I aim to investigate how *chav* has been put to use in a number of Genres of public discourse. Particular emphasis will be placed on how the word relates to Discourses of class and on how its use relates to the purposes of the Genres in which it is used.

My research questions can be stated as follows:

1.   What Discourses on social class does *chav* contribute to, help to create or to transform? That is, what does *chav* help writers to say about class?

2.   How does its use relate to the purposes of the particular Genres of public discourse in which it is used? That is, what does *chav* help writers to do with language?

3.   To what extent are my findings in relation to 1 and 2 above interpretable in terms of ideology, in terms of the use of meaning to produce and sustain social relations of domination (Thompson 1984)?

1.2   Guiding hypotheses

My guiding hypotheses relate directly to the questions above and are as follows: (1) that *chav* is used to represent class differences in terms of personal choice and thus to

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[1] Throughout this thesis, I use the words *chav* and *chavs* in italics, to indicate that it is the words as resources, and not any supposed real world referents that are my concern.

contribute to the individualisation of conceptions of class. I expect Discourses on Lifestyle and the Underclass to be relevant here, as these are currently prominent Discourses that might also be seen as individualising social relations. (2) I expect that *chav* will be used in Genres oriented towards the representation of 'everyday life' and not in explicitly political or bureaucratic Genres, and thus might contribute to what Hayward and Yar (2006) call the 'culturalisation' of the idea of the underclass. That is that *chav* might well be used in Genres that serve as guides to everyday life and to the kinds of people that we might encounter as part of this life. Finally, (3) I expect that the ideological force of *chav* might be to represent the public, socially distributed differences in appearances and behaviour between people living in a class society as private, personal differences, and thus, in representing the lives of the poor as motivated by personal dispositions, to articulate social inequality as an 'everyday' personal problem and to remove it from the political agenda.

1.3   Structure of the thesis

It is with Raymond Williams' (1983) *historical semantic* work in mind that I begin my work with a discussion of the etymology of *chav*, discussing the development of the word from its Romani origins to its recognition by the Oxford English Dictionary in 2004. In this discussion I hope to show that the meaning of *chav* has, even before it entered the dictionaries or became used widely in the media, been subject to a great deal of social semiotic work.

In Chapter Two my focus is theoretical. I discuss the framework within which I intend to make *chav* my object of analysis. This framework is a *critical social semiotic* one (Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen, 2003), one that sees language as a resource for

making meaning in social practice, as related to *Discourses* – ways of representing the world (Fairclough, 2003) – and *Genres* – ways of acting on the world (ibid.) – and aims to provide critique of the ways in which this might contribute to *ideological* processes (Fairclough, 1995a; Wodak, 2001). I focus in particular on the social semiotic aspects of the social practice of identification (Jenkins, 2004), and specifically class identification, and, in doing so, I draw on sociological literature. The work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1987) will be centrally important here – his is a perspective on class that emphasises the activity of classification, but also places limits on the role of semiotic identification in this activity. In short, I will argue that semiosis, and, indeed, specific semiotic resources, such as the word *chav*, are central to the practices by which we make and experience class, but that semiosis does not exhaust class.

Chapter Three begins my analysis with an investigation of the ways in which dictionaries have defined *chav*. The social semiotic framework stresses the importance not only of how resources are used, but of the attempts made to codify and regulate their use (van Leeuwen, 2005), attempts that Deborah Cameron labels *verbal hygiene* (1995). Dictionaries attempt precisely this, thus they played a key role in developing the social semiotics of *chav*. This is especially true of the OED, and I will discuss the consequences of the OED's inclusion of *chav* in late 2004 in some detail.

Chapter Four continues my concern with *verbal hygiene*, concentrating on critical claims made about *chav* in public cultural commentary. Based on a selection of texts drawn from the news media, academic and non-academic journals and popular books, I identify four major critical tendencies which I call *offensiveness* (concerned with the

fact that *chav* may offend people), *symptomatic* (viewing use of *chav* as a symptom of some personal or social disorder), *instrumental* (concerned with the use of *chav* as a means of creating social distance), and *representational* (concerned with the way of seeing society in which *chav* is implicated).

In Chapter Five I address the use of *chav* in 'impulse-buy humour books' selecting two such books for analysis; *The Little Book of Chavs* (Bok, 2004) and *Chav! A User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class* (Wallace and Spanner, 2004). These texts are explicitly stereotypical, and heavily ironic.

Chapter Six presents an analysis of over two hundred British national newspaper articles from 2004, 2006 and 2008, asking how *chav* is used in various more specific news Genres, in, for example, celebrity news, and opinion columns, and assessing the extent to which the tendencies identified in earlier chapters are reproduced in this large collection of texts. What is *chav* used to do in each of these Genres, and how is it used to represent?

In my analysis, though diverse uses of *chav* are found, general tendencies do emerge, and it is these tendencies that will be the focus on my final, concluding chapter:

 (1) *Chav* is implicated in a range of ways of writing about and constructing social class. Some of these have much in common with politically current Discourses concerning the Underclass (Levitas, 2005) and Lifestyle. Others have more in common with cultural ideas about class, about 'taste' and 'decency'. But in all cases, *chav* is used to mark a kind of 'lowness', and to articulate this as a personal, rather than a social, trait.

(2) *Chav* is used much more frequently, but not exclusively, in discourse oriented towards 'everyday' stereotyping than in discourse oriented towards administrative or bureaucratic identification. It is often used to articulate relationships between public appearances and apparent private traits, to identify strangers as particular personality types. And, in some texts, for example, the 'impulse-buy humour books' (Crombie-Jardine, 2010) this stereotyping is explicit and extreme.

(3) Closely related to this explicit stereotyping, *chav* is often used playfully, ironically, and, especially in texts like the *chav* humour books, but also elsewhere, to construct a 'cartoonish' stereotype for comedic effect. Drawing on a growing, but diverse, critical literature on contemporary uses of ironic humour (Zizek, 1989; Wallace, 1993; Bewes, 1997; Billig, 2001; 2005), I suggest that this humour can be seen as ideological, in ways analogous with Billig's analysis of racist 'joke' websites (2001).

I understand the first of these tendencies in terms of discourse as Discourse, and the latter two in terms of discourse as Genre (Fairclough, 2003). That is to say that, in terms that will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two, the use of *chav* in actual texts (discourse) is significant both in terms of the things that writers say about the world (Discourse) and in terms of the things writers do to the world (Genre).

1.4   History of *chav*

The word *chav* entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2004, defined as 'a young person of a type characterized by brash and loutish behaviour and the wearing of designer-style clothes (esp. sportswear); usually with connotations of a low social status', and awarded the status of 'word of the year' (Dent, 2004). This was very much a turning point in the word's history, marking its entrance into the vocabulary of the

national press; for *The Sun* and *The Mirror* 2004 was 'Year of the Chav' (the press coverage of the 'word of 2004' is discussed in detail in Chapter Three). But *chav* was certainly a word before 2004, and, in what follows I outline its history, tracing shifts in use and meaning. I begin with the Romani word *chavi*, borrowed into Parlyaree English slang over a hundred and fifty years ago.

1.4.1. Romani origins and Parlyaree slang

The OED gives *chav* Romani origins. This is supported by David Crystal speaking on a BBC (2006a) world service English Learning webcast, and an interview with someone who, according to the programme script, 'goes by the name of Professor Poppycock [and] was from a Romany background himself' (BBC, 2006b). Poppycock identifies the word as deriving from a Romani word for *child*. 'Chav,' he says; 'I've always known to be, if you say to a gypsy woman, How many kids have you got? "I've got five chavvies" she will say' (ibid.). This Romani usage seems to have been borrowed into English slang, or at least into the Parlyaree slang of the South East – 'a nineteenth century slang … which was used by fairground and circus people as well as prostitutes, beggars and buskers. … stigmatized or travelling groups of people who were set apart from the rest of society' (Baker, 2002; 2) – over 150 years ago. Eric Partridge, in his *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, claims that the word has been used since around 1860 and defines it as follows:

> **chav(v)y.** A child: Parlyaree: from ca. 1860 Ex Romany *chavo* or *chavi*.
>
> (Partridge, 1984; 202)

This is the meaning attributed to *chavvy* by 'Poppycock', so it seems that it was borrowed into Parlyaree with much the same semantic content as it was associated with

in Romani. *Chav* is also associated with Romani speakers in David Mitchell's novel *Black Swan Green* (2006; 301). The book's thirteen year-old protagonist stumbles down a quarry side into a Romani settlement, that has been the cause of a number of public meetings in the town in which the book is set. Accused of being a spy, the boy, is told 'You ain't ready to leave yet, *chavvo*' (emphasis in original). And a contributor to the vocabulary discussion forum *Vocaboly* attests to this use, and its Romani origins.

> Kent has always had a high level of Romani and [*chav*] is like so many words in kent which have come from Romani. kids in kent heard it and they would call each other chav or chavi like saying "alright boy" you would say "alright chav/chavi"
>
> (Vocoboly, 01/02/08)

I have also found this use to be attested to by a number of speakers in informal conversations during the course of my research. Largely these are from Kent, but also, interestingly, a number of people from elsewhere (Yorkshire, the Scottish Borders) have said that they find *chav* as it is currently defined to be strange, and think of it as a shortening of *chavvy*, meaning something like *child* or *friend*. These conversations by no means constitute a survey of *chavvy*'s use, but they do add further weight to the word's origins in Romani. These informants also indicate that *chav* has not undergone a complete semantic shift; to many people it still means *child*.

A shift away from the Romani, though, can be found in the punk band Sham 69's *Hersham Boys,* from 1979:

> Living each day outside the law
> Trying not to do what we did before
> Country slag with the Bow Bell voice
> So close to the city we ain't got much choice
>
> Council estates or tower blocks

> Wherever you live you get the knocks
> But the people round here they are so nice
> Stop being naughty take our advice
>
> …
>
> Dick eye chavvy
> It's a mud town slosher
> That's right guv'nor Jack the lad
> Know what I mean, eh
> Know what I mean
>
> *Hersham Boys* – Sham 69 (Polydor, 1979; lyrics transcribed at SweetLyrics.com, 2010)

Hersham Boys is about the band's home town of Hersham in Sussex, and specifically about their working class roots. *Chavvy* is used amongst other recognisably South Eastern working class forms; *guv'nor*, *Jack the lad*, *know what I mean*, *dick-eye*. (The latter defined in *Partridge* as 'an offensive term of address between males'; Dalzell and Thompson, 2008; 197.) Here *chavvy* seems to be a slightly more specific meaning than *child*, used particularly as a vocative in greeting, and perhaps as a derogatory one (as is also suggested by Dent, 2004; 143, though not in reference to 'Hersham Boys' in particular).

1.4.2 Regional meanings

Chavvy, then, seems to have become a feature of South East English slang, borrowed from Romani. It was to develop more specific regional associations, seemingly due to its phonological similarity with the town name *Chatham* (/tʃætəm/) in Kent.

In 2002, a website called *Chatham Girls* was launched. This was a mock dating site, displaying pictures and descriptions of 'Chatham Girls'. The website has since been removed but it was reported on by the online IT magazine *The Register* (25/05/02). *The*

Register's article doesn't use the word *chav* at all, but does use *chavvy*. This use, a mocking switch into a local non-standard dialect is similar to that used in the Sham 69 song in that it is used to, here mockingly, index class and region.

> So, if you've *got un x r free innit an itz a wun a dem conver'eebal wunz innit lite* and fancy a quick burn down the A2 in search of the ideal mate, look no further than Chatham Girls. Awite me chavvy!
> (The Register, 22/05/02)

This last sentence includes, in *awite*, an orthographic representation of l-vocalisation, a feature of South Eastern working class speech (Wells, 1986), and *me chavvy.* It seems that *chavvy* by this time had acquired local and class-based indexicality. It was not necessarily used to refer to people from a specific region, but its use, as a vocative, was seen by some as indexical of a regional identity.

If *chavvy* was used primarily by working class speakers in the South, it is possible that it started being used by others to refer to these speakers by metonym, i.e. a word used by some perceived group came to be a word used to refer to that group. And, perhaps because of the phonological similarity between *chav(vy)* and the beginning of the name of the town *Chatham*, in Kent, it seems that *chav* became used to refer to people from Chatham. This 'folk' etymological rationalisation (McMahon, 1994) is attested to in the first two citations for the word given by the OED; the first from 1998, and the second, 2002:

> Travelling from Maidstone to Chatham every day was bad enough. I was born in Brompton so am I a Chav or what?'
> (*uk.local.kent*, 1998, cited in OED, 2004)
>
> Meet the Chatham Girls, known as 'Chavs', whose fashion sense and reputation for easy virtue have earned them a global following as worthy successors to their northern neighbours [*sc.* Essex Girls]'
> (*Observer*, 26/05/02, cited in OED, 2004)

In both of these uses, an association with Chatham is presented as a feature of those called *chavs*. In the first citation it is not clear whether anything else is needed to be classed as a *chav*, but it is notable that the contributor to this internet forum does not know whether she is a *chav* or not. It is also notable that this use is dated 1998, four years before the use of *awite me chavvy* in *The Register*. This suggests a period in which both *chav* and its apparent predecessor *chavvy* as slang vocative were both used. And this might be a very long overlap indeed; Dent (2004; 143) suggests that *chav* might have been used in Kent for many years 'as a derogatory label' for Romani people in the area. The picture is undoubtedly complex. In the second citation, we can see other attributes of the *chav* beginning to emerge; their *fashion sense and reputation for easy virtue,* attributes that would go on to be important in the word's later development.

In this section I have outlined the changing use of the word in the South East of England, where it seems to have derived from the Romani word *chavi*, borrowed into English and used to mean 'child', and apparently more specifically, 'child' as a greeting. *Chav* may well have been used, by metonym, to refer to those who used this form, typically, it seems, working-class speakers, or it may be that *chav* developed directly from the Romani use, perhaps by a similar metonymic process. It might also be that the vocative use of *chav* further pejorised, and developed specifically classed meanings. In any case, the phonological similarity between *chav* and *Chatham* then may have lead to an association between the words and to *chav* being used to represent a kind of person from Chatham, as shown in *The Observer*'s (26/05/02) story about the Chatham Girls website. In the section that follows I look at how this local sense was lost as the word became Britain's number one word to refer to a 'young person in cheap trendy clothes and jewellery' (BBC, 2008a).

1.4.3 National spread

Localised words used to designate a group of young, working class people are common in British English. In my own schooldays, in Leicester in the East Midlands of England, middle class speakers used the names of local council estates and poor areas of the city, in altered form, to refer, not necessarily to people from those areas, but to people with the stereotypical qualities they attributed to people from those areas. So, the Saffron Lane Estate gave rise to *Saffs*, and the suburb Braunstone to *Braunos*. In these cases, a local meaning remained, both in the usage, which was restricted to speakers from the local area, and in the sense, which never completely escaped its local origins. *Chav*, though, as suggested above, at some stage managed to spread beyond the South East, and leave behind, for many users (though perhaps not for all), its association with this particular area of Britain. The success of this development is indicated by the development of two alternative, rationalised etymologies, one of which left any reference to locality behind (*chav* as an acronym of ***c**ouncil **h**ouse **a**nd **v**iolent*), and the other of which posited a place outside the South East as giving rise to the word (*chav* as a blend of ***Ch**eltenham **av**erage*). These will be dealt with later.

The clearest indicator of the national spread of *chav* is given by the BBC Voices project, from 2006 (BBC, 2008). This project, run by the BBC in association with the University of Leeds as part of a study of regional lexical variation, asked respondents what word they would use to refer to a 'young person in cheap trendy clothes and jewellery'. In the 7,440 submissions received, *chav* was the most frequent response, followed by *townie, scally, ned* and *pikey*. *Chav* also showed the greatest geographical spread, especially

when compared with s*cally*, *ned* or *pikey* which are all much more geographically concentrated.

So, why is it *chav* and not one of these other words that has become so widespread? *Ned*, for instance, is given by the OED as having a fairly constant meaning since the early Twentieth century. Defined as 'A stupid or worthless person; a good-for-nothing; *spec.* a hooligan, thug, yob, or petty criminal', the dictionary's first citation is dated 1910. *Scally*, too, far predates *chav*. The OED defines it as meaning 'young working-class person (esp. a man); *spec.* a roguish, self-assured male (esp. from Liverpool), typically regarded as boisterous, disruptive, or irresponsible. Also: a chancer, a petty criminal' and finds its first citation in E.M. Forster's 1936 Abinger Harvest: 'During the interval we discussed, not whether the Scallies were good, but whether they were better or worse than the Wags. They were less hot stuff, that was admitted on all sides'. In its longer form, *scallywag*, the OED traces the word back a further hundred years. Of course, it might be objected, these are clearly localised forms – *ned* is Scottish and *scally* used in the North West of England – and, as such, they are not be used to refer to people anywhere else. But, as discussed above, it was not so long ago that *chav*, too, had a firm sense of locality.

Asking how *chav* spread takes us back to Chatham; to the Chatham Girls website. Chatham Girls went online in 2002, and *The Observer's* story on the site became the OED's first citation for *chav* from a newspaper – *Meet the Chatham Girls, known as 'Chavs'* (*The Observer* 26/05/02). This was to remain the word's only use in a British

newspaper until the July of 2003[2], so there was no immediate media frenzy. *The Observer* reporter writes, implying that *chavs* are of interest to more than simply a regional group, 'Last week a cult website that exposed the phenomenon collapsed under the weight of international traffic, as curiosity about Medway's tackiest tribe spread from Brisbane to Baltimore'. But, while the website may well have been a point of interest, its short life (it closed down the day after *The Register* ran its story and in the week preceding *The Observer*'s) suggests its impact cannot have been too substantial, and, in any case, if *The Observer's* report is accurate, it maintained the *Chatham-chav* semantic connection.

This is not to say that the internet was not of any importance in the spread of the word *chav*, though. Rather, where the internet was important, it was because of other websites, not Chatham Girls directly. It was perhaps Chavscum.com (Chavscum 2006) that truly released *chav* from its local meanings, through sheer weight of class stereotypes. The compounding of the words *chav* and *scum* in the name itself is a good place to start. Unlike the Chatham Girls website, where *chav* was used to identify women represented as 'cheap' or 'tacky', Chavscum used *chav* in relation to deeper forms of 'deviance'; promiscuity, violence, crime:

> Chavs, Hoodies, Neds, Townies, Kevs, Charvers, Steeks, Spides, Bazzas, Yarcos, Ratboys, Skangers**,** Scutters, Janners**,** Stigs, Scallies, Hood Rats, whatever you know them as, this site is about them, Britain's peasant underclass that are taking over our towns and cities!
> (Chavscum, 2006)

Much of the material on the Chavscum website was reworked into the book *Chav! A User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class* (Wallace and Spanner, 2004), written by

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[2] This excludes an article about linguists studying the Scottish language Doric, in which a word spelt *chav* is used, and one from *The Statesman* in India which quotes, without comment, a use of *chav* in the book *Danny Boy* by Jo-Ann Goodwin, about a Doncaster teenager.

the creators of the website. At the end of *Chav!* (which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Five) there is an 'About the Authors' section, providing some information about the development of the Chavsum site:

> Mia and Clint met three years ago in a branch of McDonald's where they set themselves apart ftom the usual clientele by ordering burgers that cost more than a 'paaand'. Deciding they were kindred spirits cast adrift in a sea of scrunchies, baseball caps and bling, they began a quest to seek out chavish behaviour and laugh at it wherever possible. This led to the creation of the chav website – chavscum.co.uk – in December 2003. This site has now proved to be extremey popular and is the internet's premiere site for pics of chavs in the wild.
> (Wallace and Spanner, 2004; 256)

Another website that seems to have been influential in the development of the word is UrbanDictionary (2011). In 2003, a year before any of the traditional dictionaries gave *chav* a definition, the word started being defined on the site. Now, in January 2011, there are 326 definitions of *chav* on the site (as well as 74 of *chavs*, and 22 of *chavette*; UrbanDictionary, 2011). The most popular of the definitions reads as follows:[3]

> Picture this a young lad about 12 years of age and 4 ½ feet high baseball cap at ninety degrees in a imitation addidas tracksuit, with trouser legs tucked into his socks (of course, is definitely the height of fashion). This lad is strutting around, fag in one hand jewellery al over the over, outside McDonalds acting as if he is 8 foot tall and built like a rugby player, when some poor unsuspecting adult (about 17/18) walks round the corner wanting to go to mcdonalds for his dinner glances at the young lad, the young lad jumps up in complete disgust and says "Whats your problem? Wanna make sommin of it? Bling Bling" when the adult starts to walk towards the young lad, the young lad pisses himself and runs off to either his pregnant 14-year-old girlfriend or his brother in the army crying his eyes out.

This definition dates from May 2003, and has little in common with the earlier uses of *chavvy* or *chav* discussed above. Though the word is identified as referring to 'a young

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[3] Definitions on UrbanDictionary can be given 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down' by readers. The most popular is the definition with the most 'thumbs up'.

lad' there is now no mention of region. It is now appearances and, perhaps, an attitude of public bravado that are important to being 'a chav'. It is significant, too, that readers are invited to *picture* the chav. Along with a 'How to spot a Chav' page on the Chavscum website (Chavscum 2006), this marks a developing concern with identifying *chavs* in public, a concern that would be central to later uses of the word (Chapters Five and Six).

The internet, then, seems to have played a decisive part in the spread of *chav*. But more traditional, non-electronic means of language change must have played a part too. A full account of the spread would surely need to analyse spoken discourse, but, given the ephemeral nature of speech, the computer mediated communication discussed above perhaps represents the closest we can get to this. Newspapers, it seems, were not part of *chav*'s development for quite some time. After *The Observer*'s article mentioned above, *chav* is next found in a British newspaper over a year later. It appears in a series of stories in *The Gloucester Citizen* that started when the newspaper reported the 'elderly cusomers' of a *Boots* shop in the town feeling imtimidated by large groups of young people outside (29/07/03). The day after the publication of this first story came another headlined *We are not a threat to shoppers, say teens* (30/07/03), apparently due to a group of teenagers who 'stressed they hated violence when they piled into The Citizen's office in St John's Lane yesterday following the story featured in The Citizen'. The newspaper represents the teenagers' reports at some length. *Chav* and *townie* are used interchangeably in this series of articles.

> However, Nick Mascill, 17, from Quedgeley, said he and his friends were not to blame.
> "We can understand that we are intimidating because there's a big group of

> us but it's not because of our behaviour as we don't go around starting fights,"
> he said.
> "We have been made to go there due to the fact that wherever we go we get
> started on by townies." Ashley Harrington-Brown, 17, from Kingsholm said:
> "We
> come down to Boots to try and feel safe. They tend to pick on us because of
> our
> clothes and the music we like." Emma Allen, 21, from Spa Road, in Gloucester
> said: "We feel safe in a big group and there are security cameras outside Boots
> and it's in a public place. And if anyone tries to start on us we can run inside
> the store.
> …
> They said "**chavs**" or "townies," **youngsters who wear jeans and smart-casual
> clothes** and "trendies," who wear fashionable clothes, all picked on them.
> (*The Gloucester Citizen*, 30/07/03)

Chav is used here then in Gloucester, and to represent a type of young person defined primarily by their clothing but also, it seems, by their antagonistic relationship with this other group of teenagers, who the *chavs* 'pick on because of [their] clothes and the music [they] like'. These other teenagers, and their relationship with 'chavs' or 'townies', are defined in another article and a series of letters to the editor. The article, 'Can you tell a townie from a grebo?', talks of relations between '"grebos," "rockers" and "alternatives"' and 'chav[s] or townie[s]', fleshing out the representation of the *townie*:

> In Gloucester many of the teenagers ride bikes and some townies are
> known to wear their socks pulled over the bottoms of their trousers. They also
> wear caps - with the front bent around so it is almost circular and also have
> their collars turned up.
>   Many townies like to wear jewellery, particularly chains, which are
> usually gold or gold plated.
>   The boys will usually have their heads shaven or gelled with a fringe
> while the girls have their hair in ponytails and wear big hoop earrings.
>   They favour dance, drum and bass, hip-hop, garage and rap music.
> Favourites are artists such as DMX, Ja-Rule and Dizzy Rascal [sic.].
>   In Gloucester townies can most often be found outside McDonalds on
> Westgate Street but hang out all over the city.
> (*The Gloucester Citizen*, 31/07/03)

The *townie* here is presented in terms of appearance and taste in music; in terms which can be related to the idea that society is made up of lots of subcultures or lifestyles who enter into groups defined by their personal tastes (an idea that will be discussed in Chapter Two). This use, attributed to local teenagers by *The Gloucester Citizen,* is essentially the one entered into the OED in the following year. Behind the surface description of appearance here lies a complex system of taste meanings. Whilst no claim is made in the description of the townie that this is someone who is without taste, the 'tackiness' of the attributes included is there to be recognised. Resistance to this classification is in evidence in the final *The Gloucester Citizen* story:

> "I don't really call myself anything and I think people can wear what they want." Another Gloucester teenager who regularly gets called a townie contacted The Citizen after reports of fights among young people in Gloucester on Tuesday. He said: "I am upset that we can't all get along.
> "Also I am hurt to be referred to as a chav or townie.
>
> "I like to look my best and that does not mean I am any different to other alternative dressers. I do listen to a wide variety of music and so have no problems with them.
>
> "Gloucester is a multicultural city and so being different shouldn't bother anybody."
> (*The Gloucester Citizen*, 31/07/03)

The localised traits attributed to the Chatham Girls, their supposed poor taste and outlandish behaviour, have, by the summer of 2003, become much more general traits, represented in terms of a non-localised 'subculture' or lifestyle group, usually defined in terms of clothing and consumer tastes, and, especially where more 'stereotypical' representations are permitted as on the Chavscum (2006) and UrbanDictionary (2011) websites, violence, stupidity, promiscuity and criminality.

But the apparent synonymy of *chav* and *townie* in the *Gloucester Citizen* articles and the various other words reported for a 'young person in cheap trendy clothes and jewellery' in the BBC voices survey (2008a), suggest that rather than *chav* developing its own novel meanings, it was, from the start, developing alongside other resources for identifying people in very similar ways. *Chav* was not a resource for naming something new. However, the websites discussed in this section promoted *chav* as the predominant non-regional resource, a promotion that would be continued by Oxford University Press and a number of national newspapers at the end of 2004. Its rapidly shifting meanings in the previous few years would slow as, in 2004, it entered mainstream dictionaries and was named 'word of the year' (Dent, 2004), prompting an enormous amount of media commentary.

1.4.4. 2004 – 'Year of the chav'

Oxford University Press's proclamation of *chav* as 'Word of the Year' in *Larpers and Shroomers: the Language Report* (Dent, 2004), became numerous newspapers' proclamations of 2004 as 'year of the chav' (*The Daily Mirror* 29/12/04; *The Daily Mail* 19/10/04, 03/01/05; *The Sun* 01/01/05). While some of these newspaper articles were stories based on the OED's decision, announced in October, others used *chav* to summarise the year from its end. On the first day of 2005, *The Sun* looked back on 2004 with the words, 'CHAV culture swept Britain in 2004 and the best of the movement was championed by The Sun' (*The Sun* 01/01/05). This was also the year in which *The Little Book of Chavs* (Bok, 2004a) and *Chav! a User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class* (Wallace and Spanner, 2004) were published.

The word *chav* was the OED's 'Word of the Year' in October 2004, , defined as follows:

> In the United Kingdom (originally the south of England): a young person of a type characterized by brash and loutish behaviour and the wearing of designer-style clothes (esp. sportswear); usually with connotations of a low social status.

The 'word of 2004' announcement was made in an Oxford University Press book, Susie Dent's *The Language Report* (Dent, 2004) and a press announcement on the 18th October On the same day a number of news agencies carried the story, often including a list of past words of the year. The newspapers that took up these stories focused largely on *chav* itself, though, as a particularly newsworthy word of the year. *The Independent* Media section's 'The Week in Numbers' counts 10,000 'references in the press to "chav", named buzzword of the year' in the week commencing the 18th October (24/10/04). This definition, and the media coverage that followed will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three.

1.4.5 False etymologies

On two occasions during the course of my PhD research, I have discussed my work with teenage school pupils on university open days. On both of these occasions I asked the students I was speaking to where they thought *chav* came from, and overwhelmingly the most common answer was 'Council House and Violent'. There is a widespread belief that *chav* is an acronym for this series of words. I have occasionally heard it suggested that it an acronym developed by the police. On the online forum UK Police Online, for example, (which is not officially related to the British Police in any way), a page lists police acronyms. *Chav* is not on the list itself, but various commentators have added acronyms of their own below, including:

> CHAV: Popular phrase widely used. Several variations of the same. Council House And Vermin, Council House And Violent etc
> (UK Police Online, 2010)

A poster on UrbanDictionary writes:

> Chav = council house and violent
> (UrbanDictionary, 2011)

And Collins Dictionary includes a brief discussion of false etymologies:

> As 'chav' has sprung into widespread use, various explanations have been proffered – abbreviations of Chatham Average or Cheltenham Average, or an acronym of Council House And Violent, for example.

False etymologies of this kind represent reinterpretations of words. *Ned*, the Scottish word often viewed as a regional variant of *chav* (BBC Voices 2008) also has a false acronym, of this kind; ***n***on-***e***ducated ***d***elinquent.[4] *Posh* is commonly believed to be an acronym too, of *port out starboard home*. The word, so the story goes, developed because in the days of the British Empire the wealthy used to buy the more expensive tickets for the cooler north-facing side of ships travelling to India; thus people who were 'posh' travelled on the port side out and the starboard side on the way back. As with *council house and violent*, these etymological analyses and their popularity are based on interpretations of words' meanings that they then go on to support. These are similar to what historical linguists call 'folk etymologies' (McMahon 1994). Here the 'false etymologies' go on the give the words they purport to explain a particular semiotic emphasis, which has been brought about through 'folk' interpretations of words' existing meanings based on semantic (the possibility that these words at least *could* mean the things suggested by the purported phrase) and orthographic relations (that the first letters are the first letters of these constructed phrases). The semantic relation is the particularly interesting case here. *Chav* seems to have been interpreted by its users as

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[4] The origins of *Ned* are, in fact, unclear. The OED suggests that is might derive from *Edward*, but predate *Teddy Boy*, which is often given as an antecedent term. Also interestingly, *Ned* has recently been chosen as the name of a film about working-class Glasgow gangs of the 1970s.

having meanings related to class, to be a word that might plausibly have developed from a term used to identify people who live in council houses.

Another false etymology that is occasionally given claims that *chav* is a blend of *Cheltenham Average*. This is mentioned in the Collins definition above, as well as by numerous UrbanDictionary contributors. A story about the word in *The Telegraph* reads as follows:

> So, who coined such a sneeringly useful term? Well, the pupils of Cheltenham Ladies College, apparently.
> Rumour in the town has it that chav is derived from Cheltenham Average, the name given by the young ladies to the less-eligible young men of the town.
> …
> Vicky Tuck, principal of the 150-year-old college, was appalled by the suggestion that her girls, schooled so tirelessly in the need to respect other less favoured members of society, could have come up with such a derogatory label.
> (*The Telegraph*, 13/12/04)

Again, this rationalisation is developed on the basis of class, suggesting that the word is used by a group of relatively privileged young people to identify those that they view as beneath them. That this could be posited as the word's origin is, like *Council House and Violent*, suggestive of a widespread identification of the word as a derogatory class based term. Here, though, it is not supposedly used by the police to identify criminals in council houses but by wealthy young women to distinguish themselves from the less wealthy locals, a distinction made rather 'higher' up in class terms. This suggests some degree of indeterminacy in the class meanings of *chav*.

1.4.6 Summary

In this section, I have given an account of the etymology of *chav*. Borrowed from Romani by English speakers in the South East, its predecessor, *chavvy*, was used to

mean boy, generally, it seems, in greetings. Associated particularly with those from Chatham, and perhaps with working class women from Chatham, possibly helped along by the similar phonology of the epithet and the town's name, the word *chav* appears to have come into being, used to refer to working class women from the area, in a way that drew attention to a supposed lack of taste, a 'tackiness'. It was with this last meaning that *chav*, now with a similar meaning to the word *townie*, left its home in the South East and travelled the length and breadth of Britain. It was so successful in doing so, via the media, the internet and, undoubtedly, everyday conversation, that its home was forgotten. Alternative (false) etymologies traced the name back to *Cheltenham Average*, or to *Council House And Violent*.

A point that I feel it important to draw from my account of the etymology of *chav* is that this has not been some simple, discrete transition from one stage of meaning to another. Newer meanings have not *replaced* older ones. They have existed alongside each other, and in different uses of the word different potentials have been articulated. Many people that I have spoken to in the last few years still regard *chav* as 'really' meaning *child*. This relationship between social variation and historical change is, of course, central to Labov's sociolinguistic theory (1972a), but it is also emphasised in Williams' (1983) historical semantics and in Hodge and Kress's (1988) social semiotics. From these perspectives, the meanings of semiotic resources are socio-historical developments, based on people's uses of the resources that marks on pages and sounds in the air afford them. The history of *chav*, its historical semantics, demonstrate the ways in which the resource has been developed in use and worked upon. After outlining the theoretical background of my research in the next chapter, I analyse how this process continued in

2004 and beyond and ask, as *chav* became more prominent in public discourse, what the significance of this prominence might have been.

2   Theoretical background

2.1   Introduction

In this chapter, I begin by outlining a Social Semiotic approach to discourse, a perspective from which *chav* can be seen as a *semiotic resource* used to make meaning in socially situated interaction. I then briefly discuss the sociological concept of identification, the practice of establishing and contesting similarity and difference between people, and ask how semiotic resources are used in the identifying practices of class, suggesting that analysis of discourse is not sufficient for a full understanding of class relations, but that it does provide a means by which resources available to articulate class identification can be investigated.

I aim to give theoretical support to the idea that the semiotic resources available to people are closely related to the identifying practices of class societies like contemporary Britain, and that such resources are thus implicated in struggles over the representation of social life. Furthermore, I will suggest that, from a Social Semiotic perspective, semiotic resources are themselves subject to struggles over meaning, as attempts are made to regulate what particular resources mean.

I go on to discuss how semiotic resources, through their use in particular Genres and Discourses, might be implicated in the identifying practices of class societies, with the intention of providing a theoretical background against which to ask how *chav* might be involved in such practices.

2.2 Social semiotics

In this section, I introduce Social Semiotics, as developed by Hodge, Kress and van Leeuwen (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2005; after Halliday, 1978). In doing so, I refer to work not directly identified as Social Semiotic, but with a shared emphasis on the analysis of the socially and historically situated nature of meaning (Volosinov, 1973; Williams, 1977; 1983). This work has been highly influential on that of Hodge, Kress and van Leeuwen. So, too has the Critical Discourse Analysis of Fairclough, and, in more recent expositions of the social semiotic framework (e.g. van Leeuwen, 2005), much is borrowed from Fairclough's (e.g. 2003) writing on the relationships between *discourse*, *the discourse level*, and *social practices*. These terms will be explained below in an attempt to outline a framework that relates the analysis of particular semiotic resources, such as the word *chav*, to wider social and historical phenomena.

My discussion of social semiotics begins with the concept of the *semiotic resource* (van Leeuwen, 2005). I then go on to relate the semiotic resource to *the discourse level* and *social practice*. It is in articulating this relationship that connections can be drawn between discourse as language in use and the social world of which it is a part.

2.2.1 Semiotic resources

Social semiotics is the study of the use of *semiotic resources*; 'the actions and artefacts we use to communicate' (van Leeuwen, 2005; 3). This concept places particular emphasis on the active socially-embedded practices that give these resources meaning. Semiotic resources, for van Leeuwen, have 'semiotic potential constituted by those past uses that are known to and considered relevant by the users of the resource' (ibid.; 4),

and, since resources are continually deployed in new contexts and for new purposes, this potential is never fully fixed. From this perspective, '[s]tudying the semiotic potential of a given semiotic resource is studying how that resource has been, is, and can be used for purposes of communication' (ibid.; 5), rather than a matter of uncovering a fixed, true meaning.

The semiotic potential of a semiotic resource derives from its use in *discourse*; that is, from its use in socially situated interaction. But semiotic potential is also subject to relatively explicit regulation (van Leeuwen, 2005; Ch.3). People make attempts to alter, fix, or deny particular meanings. Dictionaries and style guides are an example of this. Such attempts are discussed at length by Cameron (1995), who calls efforts to comment on and regulate the meanings of linguistic resources 'verbal hygiene'. This exists, she writes, 'whenever people reflect on language in a critical (in the sense of "evaluative") way', and '[t]he potential for it is latent in every communicative act, and the impulse behind it pervades our habits of thought and behaviour' (1995; 9). So social semiotics involves the analysis not just of how people use semiotic resources in discourse, but what people say and write about them, the ways in which people act to affect semiotic potentials.

In respect of both points discussed so far – the emphasis on socially contingent semiotic potential, and on the emphasis on the attempts made by people to alter or fix semiotic potential – social semiotics is similar to the influential discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), for whom discourse is inherently open, and the role of the analyst is to investigate the attempts made to reduce this openness, to fix meanings, a practice which they call *articulation* (1985; 113). However, there is a major difference, which lies in

the relationship said to obtain between semiosis and other aspects of social life. For Laclau and Mouffe, all of social life can be analysed as discourse – no analytical distinction is made between semiotic and other types of activity. For Social Semiotics, influenced as it is by the materialist tradition of Volosinov (1973; discussed below), discourse, is understood to be in a dialectal relationship with other elements of social life, and is itself seen as a material phenomenon, the actual use of semiotic resources, rather than as an abstract signifying system (see Coulthard 1977 on the linguistic concept of discourse as language in use). In the subsections below, I outline a framework for the analysis of this relationship between discourse and other elements of social life, with reference to Fairclough's (2003) *discourse level* and the notion of *social practice*. It is, in fact, partly because I wish to maintain a distinction between semiotic and non-semiotic activity that I make use of Social Semiotic theory. As Eagleton puts it; 'It is needlessly obfuscating and homogenizing to subsume such things as preaching a sermon and dislodging a pebble from one's left ear under the same rubric' (1991; 219).

In my work, I intend to conceptualise *chav* as a semiotic resource, and thus to investigate its semiotic potential. Perhaps the most sustained attempt to investigate words as semiotic resources is found in Raymond Williams' (1983) *Keywords*. Williams, though, does not use the term 'semiotic resource' and does not call his approach Social Semiotic – it is, instead, 'historical semantics'.

Williams was interested in the meanings of *keywords*, words that he took to be 'significant binding words in certain activities and their interpretation' and 'significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought' (1983: 15). He saw such words as playing crucial roles in different ways of talking about the world and using language in it. In his

introduction he describes his sense that, on his return to Cambridge after WW2, he was coming back to a place where 'they just don't speak the same language' (ibid.; 11). And the investigation of the meanings of the 'keywords' of this partially unfamiliar language was Williams' aim. But more than that, Williams' development of *historical semantics* involved a recognition that the words that we use to talk about our world will *always* be partially unfamiliar to us. They have a history. This is a history that shapes meaning, and puts it beyond the immediate context, beyond the immediate control of either speaker or hearer, though not beyond human relationships. The meaning of a word, for Williams, then, is not an autonomous semantic property, but is to a large extent the result of the history of that word, just as for van Leeuwen (2005; 5). So Williams places a great emphasis on diachronic study, and indeed suggests that synchronic debates or confusions over the meanings of particular words may be traced back to diachronic change, not in an effort to arbitrate on the 'correct' meaning nor as a way to work towards a better language, to 'purify the dialect of the tribe' (ibid.; 24), but to better understand synchronic differences in emphasis. Williams insists that 'variations and confusions of meaning are not just faults in a system, or errors of feedback, or deficiencies of education. They are … historical and contemporary substance' (ibid.). That is to say that confusions and inconsistencies are not problems to be ironed out, or anomalies to be understood, but the real stuff of meaning as an activity embedded in social and historical relationships.[5]

But if the meanings of words is a product of history, then words can, for Williams, also contribute to that history In *Keywords*, he aims 'to show that some important social and

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[5] Williams made this point in the context of discussion of the specialist vocabulary of cultural theory. Thus the disagreements to which he refers are the kinds of disagreements that academics have over the appropriate use of such vocabulary. Such disagreements exist though in non-specialist vocabularies too.

historical processes occur *within* language, in ways which indicate how integral the problems of meanings and of relationships really are. New kinds of relationship, but also new ways of seeing existing relationships, appear in language in a variety of ways' (1983; 22). So we have a dialectic in *Keywords* between language and history. This is theoretically supported by Williams' other main writing on linguistics, *Marxism and Literature* (1977). Williams draws on Marx and Voloshinov (1973) to argue that language is the material of ideology, of 'practical consciousness', as Marx puts it in *The German Ideology* (2011) [1845], and that it is of little value to consider the latter without reference to the actual linguistic practices of human beings.

> The usable sign—the fusion of formal element and meaning—is a product of [the] continuing speech activity between individuals who are in some continuing social relationship. The 'sign' is in this sense their product, but not simply their past product, as in the reified accounts of an 'always-given' language system. The real communicative 'products' which are usable signs are, on the contrary, living evidence of a continuing social process, into which individuals are born and within which they are shaped, but to which they then also actively contribute, in a continuing process.
>
> (Williams, 1977; 37)

Williams' 'sign' here, which derives its never-fixed meaning from its past uses, shares much with van Leeuwen's (2005) *semiotic resource*. Williams stresses the fact that history makes meaning but also that we remain part of history when we take these meanings on, and are thus able to bring about change.

In an interview with *New Left Review*, Williams situates meaning in relation to particular social groups and institutions. 'In some cases,' he says;

> a very close and differentiated account [of a word's historical semantics] would be necessary, showing in which group a change of meaning started to occur, and then how and whether it was generalized – either diffused through the general educational system or in some other way, or remaining a term within a specific class'

(Williams, 1979: 178)

Williams' claim here is that words and their capacity to mean are often very strictly socially restricted resources, that meaning is not a property of a language, but something that develops in the interactions of specific social institutions and organisations. This point is made more explicitly by the Soviet Marxist linguist Volosinov (1973), and it is his work that I now consider.

Volosinov (1973) also takes what might be described as a Social Semiotic approach to words. Like Williams, his work precedes that of Social Semiotics and is a noted influence on the field (e.g. Hodge and Kress, 1988). Volosinov's linguistics takes the word as its focus, but he rejects the priority given to lexical 'self-identity' in the linguistics he calls 'abstract objectivism' (in which we can include Saussure's linguistics and most of that inspired by him). Volosinov rejects the idea that words have single definitive meanings that can be abstracted from particular, historically situated instances of language use. Rather, 'there are as many meanings of a word as there are contexts of its usage' (1973; 79). Reconciling this 'fundamental polysemanticity' with 'that factor of unity which is common to all its meanings' is 'the cardinal problem of semantics' (ibid.; 80), and it is a problem that cannot be solved, for Volosinov, so long as linguists view language as 'a stable system of normatively identical forms' (ibid.: 98).

In order to deal with the problem of meaning, Volosinov does the following (1973; Ch4): (1) he introduces a distinction between *theme* and *meaning*; (2) he describes how meaning, in interaction, emerges from theme; (3) he introduces a concept of *evaluative accent*; (4) he places a great deal of emphasis on the constancy of linguistic change. I will discuss each of these in turn.

(1) Theme is the indivisible meaning of any particular utterance. It is entirely context bound; it is 'the expression of the concrete, historical situation that engendered the utterance … determined not only by the linguistic forms that comprise it … but also by extraverbal factors of the situation' (1973; 99-100). No two utterances have the same theme, and the theme of any particular utterance cannot be attributed to any one particular element of that utterance.

Meaning is the necessary accompaniment to theme, and refers to 'all those aspects of the utterance that are *reproducible* and *self-identical* in all instances of repetition' (1973; 100). Such aspects 'have no concrete, autonomous existence in an artificially isolated form, but, at the same time, they do constitute an essential and inseparable part of the utterance' (ibid.). Meaning, unlike theme, can be broken down into constituent parts; it is analysable. Volosinov's example utterance in this discussion is 'What time is it?'. The theme of this utterance is an inseparable element of a particular situation, but the meaning 'remains the same in all historical instance of is enunciation … made up of the meanings of the words, forms of morphological and syntactic union, interrogative intonations, etc., that form the construction of the utterance' (ibid.). That is, meaning is stable, abstract and analysable. It is presumably meaning that allows Volosinov to reproduce 'What time is it?' as an example utterance, abstracting these words in this syntactic formation away from all those concrete situations of use.

(2) What kind of theoretical relationship exists between theme and meaning? I wrote above that meaning is the necessary accompaniment of theme, and, indeed, this works both ways: 'There is no theme without meaning and no meaning without theme' (1973; 100). It seems that Volosinov gives (pre)historical priority to theme, suggesting that

meaning is something like what later scholars would call an *emergent* property (Hopper ,1998; Sealey and Carter, 2004). For Hopper, to pick an example, the apparently stable forms of grammar 'are not fixed templates but emerge out of face-to-face interaction' (1998; 156).[6] Volosinov seems to be saying something very similar about semantics, as suggested by his use of 'congeal' in the following, regarding the possibility that there existed a (prehistoric) time when a single word was used with entirely flexible meaning:

> such a word, in essence, has no meaning; it is all theme. Its meaning is inseparable from the concrete situation of its implementation. This meaning is different each time, just as the situation is different each time. Thus the theme, in this case, subsumed meaning under itself and dissolved it before meaning had any chance to consolidate and congeal. But as language developed further, as its stock of sound complexes expanded, meaning began to congeal along lines that were basic and most frequent in the life of the community for the thematic application of this or that word.
>
> (Volosinov, 1973; 101)

Crucially for Volosinov, then, meaning, as a stable abstraction, derives from concrete, situation bound utterances. More specifically, it derives from the dynamic interpersonal nature of such utterances. To understand an utterance, for Volosinov, is not a passive process of matching form to meaning, but a dynamic meaning-making activity, such that 'meaning is the effect of interaction between speaker and listener' (ibid.; 102-103). Only because language users actively make sense of the thematic unity of utterances does meaning come into being; 'Only the current of verbal intercourse endows a word with the light of meaning' (ibid.; 102).

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[6] A key difference between Hopper's emergence and that which I am suggesting exists in Volosinov's work, is that in the former, emergence proceeds primarily through the individual (having social effects only via this route), where in the latter it is a socio-historical process that is under consideration.

(3) Furthermore, Volosinov introduces *evaluative accent*, intended to capture those meanings that are not simply 'referential' (1973; 103). Volosinov has, to this point, been working with a conception of the verbal sign as symbol, as metaphor for something else; a sign 'reflects and refracts another reality' (ibid.; 10). But he now adds evaluation to this, as an element that cannot be divorced from what he calls 'referential meaning': 'Every utterance is above all an evaluative orientation. Therefore, each element in a living utterance not only has a meaning but also has a value' (ibid.; 105). That is to say that, for Volosinov, utterances do not just point to objects or phenomena in the world, they also, unavoidably, evaluate the world; they take a point of view on the world.

(4) For Volosinov, as for Saussure, the sign is part of some larger scheme of signification. For Saussure such a scheme is fixed; it is *the language*. The whole language serves as a kind of metaphor for reality, or, as Jameson puts it, in Saussure's linguistics 'it is the totality of systematic language … which is analogous to whatever organized structures exist in the world of reality, and that our understanding proceeds from one whole or Gestalt to the other, rather than on a one-to-one basis' (1972; 32-33, quoted in Chandler, 2009; 'Signs'). Any particular language, such as English or French, is one such systematic whole, such that any given word in that language means the same for all of its speakers. For Volosinov, though, schemes of signification are not coextensive with languages.

Within a language we have not one scheme of signification, but several, and insomuch as these schemes rely on meaning they emerge from situated linguistic practice. The notion of emergence here leads to the suggestion that there is nothing permanent about

meaning; it is a historical phenomenon. In the socio-semantic development of society, for Volosinov, '[t]here is nothing … that could be said to be fixed' (1973; 106):

> There is nothing in the structure of signification that could be said to transcend the generative process, to be independent of the dialectal expansion of social purview. Society in process of generation expands its perception of the generative process of existence. There is nothing in this that could be said to be fixed. And that is how it happens that meaning – an abstract, self-identical element – is subsumed under theme and torn apart by theme's living contradictions so as to return in the shape of a new meaning with a fixity and self-identity only for the while, just as it had before.
>
> (Volosinov, 1973; 106)

The facts that meaning emerges from specific, historically and socially situated uses of language, and that history and society are always in a process of change means that meaning too is ever-changing, and always historical. The apparent fixity of meaning is always ready to be 'torn apart by theme's living contradictions' (1973; 106). One of the socio-historical relationships that makes language particularly susceptible to this constant change is, for Volosinov, *class*. Members of different social classes live different lives and take part in different interactions, from which different meanings, and especially different evaluative accents, emerge for the same signs. Differences in life experience and political interests mean differences in meaning.

In summary, then, what is the relevance of Williams and Volosinov to the social semiotic framework that I adopt? How do they help in the analysis of semiotic resources? Both emphasise the fact that language is a socio-historical phenomenon, and both stress that the abstractions that we develop about language – when, for example, we make a claim about the meaning of a word – are abstractions from concrete socio-historically situated events. From their perspective, words are clearly *resources*, phenomena that people use for particular purposes in particular interactions. And for both, it is from the

use of such resources that meaning emerges. Meaning develops only in interactions between people, and is wholly subject to such interactions. This relates closely to the Social Semiotic perspective, from which meaning is also viewed as subject to history.

I should finally say that the idea that word meaning is a product of use is by no means unique to Williams, Volosinov and the Social Semiotic framework. It is also key to what might be called the empirical linguistic tradition. J. R. Firth famously claimed that 'you shall know a word by the company it keeps' (1957; 179, quoted in Whitsitt, 2005; 300), and this statement has gone on to be a key influence on the development of corpus linguistics, influencing the development of *The Collins Cobuild Dictionary,* for instance (see Krishnamurthy, 2008). The difference between the empirical linguistic and the social semiotic framework seems to me, though, to be this: for the empirical linguists, the relevant feature of use is *cotext*; for the social semioticians it is a much broader notion of *context*. Resources, as I have argued, are given meaning not only by their co-occurrence with other resources (though I see no reason to ignore cotext) but through their use in particular social contexts. To understand how meaning is created, we have to look beyond the text, and specifically, to how resources are put to use in social practice.

2.2.2   Discourse, ideology and social practice – critical discourse analysis

While Volosinov and Williams stress the interrelationship between meaning and social practice, neither provides a developed framework for the analysis of this relationship. Such a framework is provided by Fairclough (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2003; see also van Leeuwen, 2005: Part II). In this subsection and the next, I outline how Fairclough relates discourse, as language in use, to social practice. Here, I

discuss what is meant by social practice, and, in the following subsection, go on to introduce the specific mechanism by which Fairclough relates discourse to social practice; the Discourse level (2003). It is through understanding of this relationship between discourse – the use of semiotic resources – and social practice that it is possible to develop a *critical* approach to semiotic activity, an approach that highlights and challenges *ideology*.

For Fairclough, discourse is to be seen as potentially a *moment* of *social practice* (2003; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; following Harvey, 1996). Social practices are 'habitualised ways, tied to particular times and places, in which people apply resources (material or symbolic) to act together in the world' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; 21), whilst moments of these practices are the 'diverse elements of life … brought together into a specific practice' (ibid.). The moments of any practice are in a dialectal relationship with each other; each moment 'internalises' the others, 'without being reducible to them' (ibid.). So social practices, recognised patterns of social activity, often involve discourse, but are never only discourse. Teaching for example, generally involves a lot of discourse – speaking, writing on the board, projecting images, gesturing – but it is not only these things; it involves moving around a classroom, the use of resources like pens, chairs, tables, working in a particular time frame, various technologies, and so on. Poetry readings are also heavily discursive practices, but they also involve non discursive moments; the use of a particular space, of microphones and speakers, lighting, maybe food and drinks. The discursive moment in such practices to some extent internalises the others. In the poetry reading, for example, the cost of renting the performance space may be high, and ticket sales low, which may change the structure and content of the poetry (the most salient discursive moment for the purposes

of this example), or even force the introduction of new discourse to advertise performances.

Discourse, then, as the situated use of semiotic resources, is never independent of social practice, never isolated from other types of activity, the other moments of social practice. The relationship between discourse and social practice is made by Fairclough through consideration of the *Discourse level*. It is this analytical construct that allows us to investigate the kinds of ways in which other moments of social practice are 'internalised' in discourse.

2.2.3 The Discourse level

For Fairclough, discourse, as language in use, can be related to social practice through the analysis of the Discourse level (2003).[7] This level is introduced to account for the kinds of things that discourse, as semiotic activity, does in social practice, and the ways in which these functions enter into the language of a particular text. Three abstractions comprise the discourse level – Genres, Discourses and Styles. Here I will be concerned with two of these – Discourse and Genre. My decision to focus on these in particular is due to Williams (1983) emphasis on the importance of words in 'certain forms of thought' and 'certain activities and their interpretation' (1983; 15). Discourse and Genre

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[7] To begin my discussion of the Discourse level (Fairclough, 2003), I wish to make a distinction, following Gee (1999) between *discourse* with a 'small *d*' and *Discourse*, with a 'big *D*'. The former refers to language in use, or, as it is used in Social Semiotics, to semiosis in use. Any meaning making activity is discourse. The latter refers to a particular way of using semiotic resources to represent the world. The former derives from the applied linguistic tradition of the empirical analysis of language (e.g. Coulthard, 1977) and is a mass noun where the latter is a count noun.

respectively correspond roughly to these two concerns – Discourses are to do with representation and Genres with activity.

2.2.3.2 Discourse

Fairclough writes (see also van Leewuen, 2005, for example):

> I see discourses as ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the 'mental world' of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world. Particular aspects of the world may be represented differently, so we are generally in the position of having to consider the relationship between different discourses. Different discourses are different perspectives on the world
>
> (Fairclough, 2003; 124)

This concept of Discourse has been applied widely by Fairclough (1995a; 2003; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999) as well as in social semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; 2001; van Leeuwen, 2005), and by social scientists (Newman, 2001; Levitas, 2005). It is a concept derived from Michel Foucault (see Fairclough, 1992; Ch.2, much of which discusses the relevance of Foucault, 1972 to linguistics), but with an emphasis on the materiality of Discourse, on the fact that such 'ways of representing' cannot exist independent of the resources that are used to represent them, an emphasis shared by Williams (1977, 1983) and Volosinov (1973), as discussed above, as well as being evident in Marx's influential claim that language is 'real, practical consciousness' (2011). From a CDA perspective 'ways of representing' are to be understood strictly in terms of the semiotic resources – traditionally linguistic but increasingly otherwise (Kress and van Leuwen, 1996; 2001) – actually used to represent; '[c]ritical discourse analysis engages in concrete, linguistic textual analysis of language use in social interaction' (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002; 62). This insistence that Discourse – ways of representing – can be understood through the analysis of discourse – semiotic activity –

is not one shared by other forms of discourse analysis (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002 give a comparison of types of 'discourse analysis' currently at use in the social sciences and humanities); it is a particular feature of the CDA framework.

Discourse is closely related to power. Researchers in CDA share a concern with the ways in which social inequalities bring about inequalities in people's abilities to produce and disseminate Discourses, and thus inequalities in people's capacities to represent the world in ways in accordance with their interests (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002). Van Dijk (2008) conceptualises this in terms of dominance by elite groups – politicians, the media, advertisers, educators – and, though I feel he is too deterministic in his implication of 'mind control', he provides a succinct account of the relationship between Discourse and power: 'Control of public discourse is control of the mind of the public, and hence, indirectly, control of what the public wants and does. One needs no coercion if one can persuade, seduce, indoctrinate or manipulate people' (*ibid*.; 14). So the ability to produce public discourse – which is certainly not distributed equally – is the ability to dominate the Discourses available to the public.

Where Discourses are implicated in the practices of dominance they can be said to be *ideological*. Ideology is a heavily contested concept; Eagleton, for example, begins his book on the subject with the sentence: 'Nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology, and this book will be no exception' (1991; 1). For the current purposes, though, I take Thompson's account of ideology as 'the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination' (1984; 4, in Eagleton 1991; 5). This definition has the benefit of working with the Social Semiotic framework that I have introduced so far, recognising meaning as a kind of social

practice, and labelling it as ideological when it serves a particular function; domination. Discourses – ways of representing – might be called ideological when they support relations of domination.

And it is the study of the ways in which discourse, as semiotic practice, is ideological that makes CDA critical. For Wodak, CDA 'aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimized ... by language use (or in discourse)' (2001; 2) and is, furthermore 'aimed at producing enlightenment and Emancipation' (ibid.: 10). Van Dijk writes that critical discourse analysts 'do not merely study social problems or forms of inequality because these are "interesting" things to study, but explicitly also with the aim of contributing to specific social change in favour of the dominated groups' (Van Dijk, 2008; 6-7).

2.2.3.2 Genre

Genres are relatively stable forms of discourse oriented towards particular activities, such as letters of complaint, receipts, lectures, or essays; 'ways of achieving communicative goals' (van Leeuwen, 2005; 277). What makes a form of discourse a Genre is this functional use. All discourse can be seen as part of some Genre or other, since all discourse has some kind of communicative purpose. But this does not mean that Genres are fixed, monolithic entities. Indeed, they change as the kinds of activities that people need to perform change. Fairclough notes that genres are often *mixed* (2003; 34); ways of using discourse for one activity are often recontextualised as part of another activity, and perhaps a number of genres are drawn on in this way. For Fairclough (2003), as for van Leeuwen (2005), it is not textual form but social function

that determines how we should analyse any given text in terms of genre. Textual forms, however, are associated with particular functions.

Genre as an analytical concept can be applied at various levels of abstraction. Jokes can be seen as a Genre since they are oriented towards a similar activity, but, in more specific terms, there are many forms of jokes and they are made in a variety of more specific situations and put towards a variety of more specific purposes. Douglas (1975), for example, tries to develop an anthropological account of the universal properties of joking, while other analysts might focus on specific types of jokes as specific discursive activities.

Genres, like Discourses, can be subjected to ideological critique. Just as ways of representing the world can reinforce relations of domination, so can ways of using semiotic resources to act in it. Indeed, recent accounts of ideology have stressed the ways in which ideologies operate through activities, and not just representations (Eagleton, 1991; Ch.1). Bourdieu for example, says that theorists of ideology 'have spoken too much about consciousness, too much in terms of representation. The social world doesn't work in terms of consciousness; it works in terms of practices' (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1992; 113). And Genres are closely related to practices; they are the ways in which semiotic resources are used to achieve things in practice.

2.2.3.3 Discourse level – summary

The Discourse level provides a means by which semiotic resources can be related to social practice, a way of understanding their use in terms of Williams' 'certain activities and their interpretation' – Genres – and 'certain forms of thought' – Discourses (1983; 15). Thus Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analytic framework, and its more explicitly

social semiotically oriented adoption (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2005), serve to articulate the ways in which semiosis is engaged in social practice, and will be a useful tool for my analysis. I will make use of the framework to understand the role of *chav* in social practice in terms of *Genre* and *Discourse*, and to ask to what extent it fulfils an *ideological* purpose by contributing, through the discourse level, to practices of domination.[8]

But it is rare for this framework to be applied to the analysis of a single word. In what follows, I discuss a piece of CDA research, by Fairclough, which in his (later) terms, takes a word as a 'semiotic point of entry' (2007).

2.2.4   The word as a 'semiotic point of entry'

Fairclough (2007) suggests that a CDA project, though it might ultimately be concerned with a social problem that is not simply semiotic, not just about meaning, should begin with a 'semiotic point of entry'. In my research this starting point is a particular word, a particular semiotic resource, *chav*. Fairclough's (1991) study of the word *enterprise* might serve as an example of how a critical linguistic approach can be taken to the use of a single word.

Fairclough asks what *enterprise* means in the speeches of the Conservative Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Lord Young, between 1985 and 1988. Rather than identifying a single meaning, Fairclough finds 'a field of potential meaning, and sets of transformations upon that field according to wider political strategies' (ibid.; 38). He

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[8] I should note that I do not see all semiotic activity as ideological. All semiotic activity is mediated by *Genre* and by *Discourse* – i.e. is part of some socially constructed way of representing and acting – but not necessarily by *ideology* because not all semiotic activity can usefully be identified as contributing to social domination. If it were, CDA would be in the position of having to critique everything, without priority.

proceeds by identifying, using the OED, three distinct senses of *enterprise*, which he labels the 'activity', 'quality' and 'business' senses. Most of Lord Young's uses of the word, Fairclough claims, are, to varying degrees, *ambivalent* with respect to these senses; 'any occurrence of the word is open to being interpreted in any of the three senses or any combination of them' (ibid.; 39). In particular contexts, though, this ambivalence is minimised, and occasionally even eliminated: so, in *Jobs come when enterprise has the freedom and vigour to meet the demands of the market, to produce the goods and services that people want*, '[t]he verbal context unambivalently gives the business sense' (ibid.; 42). More common, though, are cases where cotext does not entirely disambiguate, but suggests at a hierarchy of senses, 'not … promoting one sense to the exclusion of the others, but … establishing particular configurations of meanings, particular hierarchical salience relationships among the senses of "enterprise"' (ibid.; 40). For instance, Fairclough suggests that such a hierarchy is established in the pair of sentences *Competition provides the spur to greater efficiency. Incentives provide the spur for individual initiative and enterprise*, where 'the conjunction of enterprise with an expression that signifies a personal quality (individual initiative) … highlights the quality sense, though the preceding verbal context [competition … –JB] places it at the "business qualities" end of the scale' (ibid.; 42).

Fairclough suggests that the different senses of *enterprise* belong to distinct 'vocabularies (what some would call "discourses")' (1991; 45; this 'some' including the later Fairclough whose work I have described above), but he also suggests that the ambivalence itself is a salient part of the Discourse. *Enterprise* is associated with 'a field (a meaning potential and ambivalence potential)' within such a discourse (1991; 45). This 'field of ambivalence' is, in fact, the result of 'semantic engineering', a phrase

Fairclough borrows from Leech (1974), and related to political strategy. The particular configuration of meanings, and ambivalences, associated with enterprise serve to blur the distinctions between the different senses, in such a way that '[t]he total configuration that results is the linguistic facet of a major strategic conjunction in government policies: between a promotion of workplace and beyond, consumerism and a vocationally geared education system' (1991; 47).

So, the relevance of Fairclough's work for my research is fourfold. First, his is a relatively extended empirical analysis of a particular word from a critical linguistic perspective. Second, he stresses the use of this word within a Discourse: it is an element of the scheme of representation employed by the Conservative government of the mid-1980s that *enterprise* is used with a particular kind of ambivalence, such that ideas about personal and economic success become intertwined. Third, Fairclough's aim is to identify the way in which *enterprise* is used in a particular Genre – in political speeches. In another Genre, the word might have very different uses. Finally, Fairclough views Lord Young's language as a kind of semantic work. Rather than just using a word with predetermined meanings, Lord Young is altering the potential of this word. However, Fairclough calls this activity 'semantic engineering' (Leech, 1974), with the implication that active interference with the resources of the language is something to be criticised itself. In this, Fairclough diverges from Volosinov, Williams and the Social Semiotic tradition, for whom active interference in language is part of the social practice of language. If Fairclough's pejorative terminology is justified here, it is for political reasons, and not because there is anything wrong with acting on semiotic resources in itself.

Having outlined what I mean by semiotic resources and how they are implicated in social practice, it is to the capacity for people to actively alter and regulate these semiotic resources in struggles over what it is possible to mean – the activity that Fairclough (1991) calls 'semantic engineering' – that I now turn.

2.2.5   Verbal hygiene

For van Leeuwen (2005), the analysis of a semiotic resource should not simply be an investigation into the use of that resource; it should also be an investigation into the way in which the resource is subject to active regulation. In the linguistics of Saussure, van Leeuwen notes, language (or langue) has its own rules, which exist independent of human interference. '[R]ules rule people,' he writes, 'not people rules' (ibid.; 47). But;

> Social semiotics sees it differently. It suggests that rules, whether written or unwritten, are made by people and can therefore be changed by people. To represent them as if they can not be changed – or not changed at will – is to represent human-made rules as thought they are laws of nature.
>
> (Van Leeuwen, 2005; 47)

So, for van Leeuwen, the potential of semiotic resources can be actively altered by people. But, he claims, there are limits to this, and the key limit is *power*.; 'not everybody can change the rules. To be able to change rules you need power' (2005; 47-48).

Cameron (1995) too is critical of the neglect of human agency in the dominant traditions of Twentieth century linguistics. 'Verbal hygiene' is the phrase she uses to discuss evaluative metalinguistic practices of all kinds. It exists, she writes, 'whenever people reflect on language in a critical (in the sense of "evaluative") way', and '[t]he potential for it is latent in every communicative act, and the impulse behind it pervades

our habits of thought and behaviour' (1995; 9). One of Cameron's intentions is to challenge a descriptive view of language that fails to allow metalinguistic activities into its field of investigation. Taking a stance towards language is not an unnatural act to be discouraged but one that is essential to linguistic practice. For Cameron, 'there is no language without normativity' (ibid.; 163). Cameron's concept of hygiene can be related to the theoretical framework I have bee discussing so far, whereby words do not just mean, but are made to mean by people doing things with and to them. For both Williams (1977; 1983) and Volosinov (1973), the study of linguistic meaning was the study of how people make meanings. Cameron's verbal hygiene captures, amongst other things, the fact that they might do so in ways that are relatively reflexive and evaluative.

Social semiotic resources are thus something that their users are to some extent aware of, to varying degrees. It is not only linguists who talk and write about language. I believe, along with Cameron that linguistic resources are constantly under review by their users and that this attention is far from superfluous. Cameron's book (1995) includes discussion of the various ways in which this verbal hygiene manifests itself: dictionaries and style guides, prescriptive grammar, so called 'political correctness'. Verbal hygiene debates about the words used to represent social groups are far from infrequent in public discourse, and far from insignificant. A recent survey conducted for Ofcom, for instance, suggests that television viewers and radio listeners consider words deemed to be socially discriminatory to be the most offensive words (Synovate UK, 2010). Ofcom gathers such information to actively inform decisions about the acceptability of the resources used by broadcasters; such verbal hygiene is of direct consequence for public discourse. And complaints about the language used to by broadcasters are a frequent

source of news coverage. In recent British news, to take two examples, have been complaints about the comedian Frankie Boyle's use of *nigger* and *paki* (*The Guardian*, 23/12/10), and the television presenter Carol Thatcher's backstage comparison of the tennis player Jo-Wilfried Tsonga to a *golliwog* made front page news and lead to her sacking by the BBC (*The Guardian*, 03/02/09).

So, the meaning potential of semiotic resources is a product not only of use but of reflection. Language users actively discuss the meaning and use of the resources of the language, and this active reflection, far from being superfluous, has great consequences for the resources that we use. This is what Cameron calls 'verbal hygiene' (1995). In what follows I consider how the use of semiotic resources – discourse – figures in the social practice of identification, and, specifically, of class identification.

2.3   Identification

In my study of the word *chav* I will be particularly concerned with the ways in which the word is used to talk about the similarities and differences between people, how it figures in the social practice of identification (Jenkins 2004). As noted above, one function of discourse in social practice is as Discourse, as the representation of elements of the world, including people (van Leeuwen 1996). In this section, I discuss Discourse from a sociological perspective, as one of the ways in which the social practice of identification (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000) might proceed. I distinguish between two general types of identification – group identification and categorisation (Jenkins 2004) – and I briefly discuss the social importance of identification, emphasising the contingency of its consequences.

Identification is the term I will use to describe the 'establishment and signification, between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of similarity and difference' (Jenkins, 2004; 5); the practice of establishing and knowing 'who's who (and what's what)' (ibid.; 6). Following Brubaker and Cooper (2000), I use *identification* rather than *identity* to emphasise the practice, and to avoid reifying the apparent end product. For Brubaker and Cooper, though 'identity talk' and 'identity politics' 'are real and important phenomena', it is a mistake to see these practices as resulting in fixed, final identities (ibid.; 5). Analysts, they suggest, should focus on the practices (ibid.). So, in my case, this means that I am not concerned with any such thing as *chav* identity, but with the ways in which *chav* is used as a resource in identification practices.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999; Ch.2) note that practices can be understood at various levels of abstraction, and, indeed, identification covers a diverse set of more concrete practices, from picking teams for a playground football match to writing a novel, from deciding seating arrangements for a wedding to developing a classification for tax rates. All of these things involve constructions of similarities and differences. One major distinction made by sociologists is between *group identification* and *categorisation*: 'Group identity is the product of *collective internal definition*' while categorisation is a matter of '*collective external definition*' (Jenkins 2004: 82). Group identification is the practice of people defining themselves in relation to others who they feel are similar to themselves. Categorisation is the identification of other people as being similar to each other, whether or not they identify themselves in equivalent ways, and thus has the potential to construct 'collectivities that cannot speak, do not in fact know their own name' (ibid.: 145). Jenkins makes the point that many identifying

practices employed in the social sciences are of this kind (ibid.: 83). Discourse might be a relevant moment of both categorising and group identifying practices.

Jenkins (2004) also discusses the kinds of consequences that identification can have. One consequence is the allocation of resources; on the basis of some identification practices some people might be identified as worthy of receiving resources, of any kind, and others not. So, when people apply to University, for a job, or for free NHS prescriptions, for example, how they are identified will have consequences for what they receive. Credit rating agencies like Experian sell products to companies who wish to decide who to offer credit to. How people are identified by credit ratings agencies will determine what products they are able to buy, or what services a bank is likely to offer them. These are all cases of *administrative allocation* (Batley, 1981, in Jenkins, 2004; 164). But identification is also important in less bureaucratic contexts in providing us with classifications of social life for everyday activity, allowing us to make predictions about the world around us, not direct related to the distribution of resources. One mode of identification said to be important in this regard is *stereotyping* (Lippmann, 1932; Jenkins, 2004). For Lippmann, 'the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. … To traverse the world men [sic.] must have maps of the world' (1932; 16), and stereotyping others is a kind of map making. Stereotypes as mental constructs have been extensively studied from a social psychological standpoint (Tajfel 1981; Leyens et al. 1994), but rather less attention has been paid to how stereotypes enter into, or are formed of, actual identifying practices (Rampton, 1998). Rampton and Hewitt (1986) both make the point that the dominant concept of stereotyping is not, as Rampton would have it 'socially

embedded' (1998; 14), and that there is room for a conception of stereotypes that places greater emphasis on the practices of *stereotyping*. For Hewitt:

> stereotypical roles are, of course, not simply given, but are culturally achieved through perceptions of social relations – class, ethnic, racial, gender – achieved productively through ideological struggles over power, and hence represent refracted social definitions
>
> (Hewitt, 1986; 173)

From a Social Semiotic standpoint, any concept of stereotyping should take this remark of Hewitt's as central. Stereotyping is a social practice, subject to social-historical forces. And Hewitt's 'perceptions of social relations' (1986; 173) might well be seen as suggesting that stereotyping should be understood in relation to Discourse(s) – ideologically invested 'ways of representing' (Fairclough, 2003; 124) – and to the manifestation of such Discourses in discourse, in semiotic activity.

To relate *administrative allocation* and *stereotyping* to the Social Semiotic framework I have been developing so far in this section, it might be useful to view each as, at a fairly abstract level, a Genre of identifying discourse. Each is oriented towards different ends; stereotyping towards 'everyday' social identification, and administrative allocation towards the distribution of resources. At a more specific level, perhaps, administrative allocation might be also associated with very different Genres to stereotyping. Government papers, marketing reports, credit rating documents are elements of administrative allocation practices, while television programmes, novels, lifestyle journalism are Genres that contribute to stereotyping practices.

But although we can draw a rough distinction between these modes of identification and the kinds of consequences they are likely to have, they are certainly not independent. For Herzfeld, there exists 'a close relationship between popular stereotypes and

bureaucratic classification' (1993; 71, quoted in Jenkins, 2004; 165), and Jenkins himself states that 'stereotyping is inherent in institutionalisation' (2004; 165), citing the popular distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving poor' as a scheme of stereotypical identification that informs British social policy (see also Levitas, 2005; and below). There might be similarities of Discourse, with both administrative and stereotyping practice adopting similar representations, and there might be similarities of Genre – newspaper discourse, for instance, seems likely to be a potential site for the mingling of administrative and stereotyping identification practices.

2.4   Class and classification

What role does discursive identification – the use of semiotic resources to say things about the kinds of people that exist in society – have in the development of *class*? The answer to this question depends on what stance is taken on the nature of class. Is it an objectively measurable material phenomenon, or a subjectively felt social construction?

From the *objectivist* perspective (terms taken from Bourdieu, 1987), discourse is of very little consequence for class. From this point of view, class is an objectively measurable phenomenon, determined by material factors indicating an individual's (or a family's) relation to capitalist systems of production. From such a perspective, class is a categorical quality, and the schemes of identification employed by people are of no consequence; it doesn't matter what I call myself or what others call me, class is an objective fact. For Westergaard, for example, 'class structure is first of all a matter of people's circumstances in life as set by their unequal places in the economic order … Thereafter – but only thereafter – comes the question of whether, and how, … this may translate into political or quasi-political group divisions' (1996; 142). The British

National Readership Survey's ABC1C2DE classification system is an example of an objectivist way of looking at class. In this system, people are classified according to occupation. Those who work in 'higher managerial, administrative or professional occupations' are in social grade A. 'Casual or lowest grade workers, pensioners and others who depend on the welfare state for their income' are in social grade E (NRS 2010). The Weberian concept of class (1983), and the dominant version of the Marxian concept are both objectivist accounts of class of the kind described here, as are those adopted by many British sociologists (particularly those, like Westergaard above, in 'the second wave of class sociology'; see Rampton 2010). Such accounts might make room for a more 'cultural' element, which Weber (ibid.) called *status*, but see this either as dependent on economic class, or as a subjective misreading of true class realities.

An alternative to the objectivist perspective is the *subjectivist* (this term, too, from Bourdieu, 1987) position, from which class is seen as a culturally constructed phenomenon; 'agents construct social reality, which is itself understood as the product of the aggregation of these individual acts of construction' (ibid.; 1). From this point of view, class is purely a matter of Discourse – it is people's subjective perceptions that are to be understood, and there is no room for an account of the objective conditions under which such experience arises; any account of apparently objective conditions has to be seen as an unacknowledged account of social constructions. The social historian Cannadine associates this perspective with the 'linguistic turn' in the social sciences and humanities, and is sceptical, writing:

> Whatever the devotees of the 'linguistic turn' may claim, class is not *just* about language. There is reality as well as representation. Go to Toxteth, go to Wandsworth, go to Tyneside, go to Balsall Heath, and tell the people who live in the slums and the council estates and the high-rise ghettoes that their sense of

social structure and social identity is no more than a subjective rhetorical construction, that it is nothing beyond a collection of individual self-categorisations. It seems unlikely that they will agree. Nor, for that matter, would the inhabitants of Edgbaston or Eastbourne, Belgravia or Buckingham Palace. … [L]anguage is a necessary, but insufficient guide, both to social circumstances and social consciousness.

(Cannadine, 1998; 17-18)

Rampton (2006; 234-5), too, expresses the concern that too heavy an emphasis on discourse results in a superficial analysis of class, and in a society like contemporary Britain in which life expectancy varies according to occupation (Charlesworth et al.; 2004), discourse alone is surely not enough.

A third position refuses to commit to either of the two extremes outlined above. It might be called a *culturalist* (based on Turner's 2004b use of this term to describe the cultural studies of Raymond Williams) perspective on class, emphasising both the material and the meaningful. From this position, material differences are not seen as irrelevant but they are not, in themselves, seen as the determining factor in a person's class identification. A classic statement of this position is made by E. P. Thompson:

> By class I understand a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. I emphasize that it is a *historical* phenomenon. I do not see class as a 'structure', nor even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships.
>
> More than this, the notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship. Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomize its structure. The finest-meshed sociological net cannot give us a pure specimen of class, any more than it can give us one of deference or of love. The relationship must always be embodied in real people and a real context. Moreover, we cannot have two distinct classes, each with an independent being, and then bring them *into* relationship with each other. We cannot have love without lovers, nor deference without squires and labourers. And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.

(Thompson, 1980; 8-9)

For the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, too, class is both subjectively and objectively experienced (1987); social classification depends on the subjective interpretation of objectively distributed materials as forms of capital – economic, but also cultural and symbolic (1984; 1991). Objectively distinct ways of speaking associated with objectively different people, for instance, become forms of symbolic capital in class societies, when they become associated with cultural values; articulacy, sophistication, 'correctness'. The subjective representation of these objective differences is subject to struggle, and has social consequences (Bourdieu, 1991; Wacquant, 1992). People, or social actors, use these differences to classify themselves and others and classes – as for Thompson (1980) – are thus never fixed, always in a process of flux and struggle, determined both by the material and the symbolic.

So, this culturalist position, like the subjectivist, makes room for the schemes of identification that people deploy in talking and writing about the relations between themselves and others (Rampton, 2010). As such, class can be related to discourse, and the study of semiotic resources, so long as these are fully socially situated has the potential to shed light on practices of classification. But it is worth making three points regarding this relationship between discourse and class. First, as already noted, discourse always exists as part of social practice, and is always socially and historically situated and oriented towards particular activities; it is not possible simply to 'read off' class relations from discourse (Cannadine, 1998). The ways in which semiotic resources are used to talk and write about class are likely to have various consequences depending on who is using them, and to what ends; always as elements of material practice (Rampton, 2006). Second, discourse is meaningful only because it is subject to

interpretation (Volosinov, 1973), and as such, we might expect a great deal of ambivalence about when and where semiotic resources are being used 'about' class. Since there are no fixed categories or objectively identifiable set of class criteria, the nature of class itself is open to negotiation from this perspective. Any attempt to identify instances of discourse about class is therefore also an attempt to say something about class itself, and a contribution to class relations. Third, the domain of discourse does not exhaust the domain of subjectivity; not all of the subjectively felt experience that we might see as related to class is discursive, and much might be too deeply felt to represent in discourse. Sennett and Cobb (1972) describe the barely articulated 'hidden injuries of class'. Williams writes of 'structures of feeling' (1977; 128-135). For Bourdieu (1977; 1984), it is the unspoken, implicit classifications embodied in what he calls the *habitus* that are of greatest social consequence. The practical experience of living in class societies provides people with an implicit, embodied sense of what is 'up' and what is 'down', of class as a felt hierarchy (1984). For Bourdieu, discourse is relatively useless in shaping subjectively felt experience of the social world when compared to the material reality of that world. In fact, it might even work against *naturalisation* of this experience; if we can talk about something we can reflect on it, and it might thus appear to us to be less natural, more amenable to change. Discourse has the 'capacity to *objectify* unformulated experiences, to make them public' (1977; 170-171), and thus to draw them into question. 'Words wreak havoc when they find a name for what had up to then been lived namelessly' Bourdieu (1977; 170) quotes Sartre as saying, a havoc that raises new questions about meaning and about the ways in which we talk and think about the world around us.

A particular consequence of the culturalist position that can usefully be taken up from a Social Semiotic perspective is that the very resources used to talk and write about class are themselves subject to debate; attention is paid to their semiotic potential and attempts made at regulation (van Leeuwen, 2005). This arises theoretically from Bourdieu's (1977) claim that it is that which enters the 'field of discourse' that is furthest from naturalisation. In a pluralist society such as contemporary Britain, all manner of resources are used to articulate class relations, and these resources themselves are subject to debate. This debate is perhaps part of the 'havoc' that words wreak. The word *class* itself might serve as an illustration here (see Williams, 1983; 60-69 on the historical semantics of the word). One of the fundamental projects of the Thatcher government of the 1970s and 80s is often said to be the elimination of the language of class (see Milner, 1999; Ch.1 on 'The Strange Death of Class'). '[S]he was determined,' Cannadine writes, 'to drive the language of class … off the agenda of public discussion, and this was something she very successfully accomplished' (2000; 175). As Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Harriet Harman, in 2008, gave a speech to the TUC conference in which she was scripted to say that 'class' was the most important factor in determining life chances: 'The equalities minister had been expected to say that social class rather than gender, race, sexual orientation or disability was the main reason why people failed to reach their full potential. "What overarches all of these is where you live, your family background, your wealth and social class"' (*The Guardian* 11/09/2008). This passage was ultimately dropped from the speech, and Harman did not explicitly mention *class* at all. However, she was attacked by Conservative politicians and newspapers for, in the words of the then Shadow Leader of the Commons Theresa May, being 'stuck in the class warfare rhetoric of 20 years ago'

(quoted in numerous newspapers, including *The Independent* 11/09/2008). For *The Telegraph*, in a story based on the advance script of the speech, Harman was to end 'a decade long Labour cease-fire in the class war' (09/09/2008). No doubt, the use of the word *class* in particular was what was important here.

Cases such as Harman's (planned) use of *class* indicate that it is not simply social life itself that is subject to discursive struggle, but the resources used to represent life; in Bourdieu's terms, Harman's use of *class* might be seen as a 'stake' in a social struggle (Wacquant, 1992; 14). And, though such resources cannot be said to stand in any deterministic relationship with class as felt, or embodied, experience, they do provide us with means to understand the world around us and thus to act on it. Taking a *culturalist* stance on class allows this to be seen, while also emphasising the importance of material practice and felt, or embodied experience.

So, in summary, I regard class as a material and a semiotic phenomenon, a social relationship produced by people in particular historical contexts, and subject to those contexts. Semiotic activity – as Discourse and as Genre – has a role to play in this, but I do not view class as wholly constructed in discourse; specific semiotic resources may be used in identifying practices that contribute to, or challenge class relations, but so might non-semiotic phenomena; as Bourdieu has it class is both a mater of felt experience and of discourse (1977; 1984). The potential for semiosis to contribute to classification is, I believe, recognised by the producers of British public discourse, and the language of class is thus subject to some degree of metalinguistic attention, to verbal hygiene. And this potential for discourse to act in classification, finally, is a particular way in which

discourse might be *ideological*, a particular way in which it might contribute to the reproduction of inequalities of power.[9]

2.5   Contemporary class Discourses

In my discussion above I have already mentioned a number of ways in which class has been represented in contemporary Britain. The National Readership Survey Social Grade classification, for instance, identifies people according to their occupation (which is already subject to discursive representation), and uses the resources of the first five capital letters of the alphabet to represent the categories. This then plays a role in *administrative allocation* (Jenkins, 2004). In this section, I discuss a number of related Discourses – ways of representing the world (Fairclough, 2003) – that are particularly dominant in cotemporary British class identification. The intention here is to outline these Discourses and how they are implicated in practices of classification in an attempt to provide a point against which to compare the use of *chav* in my analysis. In outlining these Discourses I provide a framework against which to ask the question; how is *chav* implicated in the representation of class?

The two Discourses that I discuss here are a *lifestyle* Discourse, and an *underclass* Discourse. Both of these Discourses have been implicated in the development and use of *chav* (Moran, 2006; Hayward and Yar, 2006; see Chapter Four), and, both can be seen as central to what Milner calls 'the strange death of class' (1999; Ch.1); that is, to the increased representation of social inequalities in private terms, to be understood as

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[9] This is not to say that all semiotic classifications are ideological – some may resist domination; the possibility of classifications that resist domination is what makes critique of those that do not a worthwhile enterprise.

caused by personal differences between people, and not as social or historical phenomena.

As this section is focused on 'ways of representing' class, it is semiotic activity as Discourse that is my concern here. But it is worth making a preliminary comment about Genre, about the ways in which these ways of representing figure as ways of doing things. Both Discourses are used primarily in the practices of institutions concerned with *categorising* others, and not with *self-identification* (Jenkins, 2004): Lifestyle being associated with market research and credit rating agencies, and Underclass with political discourse, and the categorisation schemes of the welfare state. The Genres on which I, and the authors I cite, draw in outlining these Discourses are thus those associated with these practices. The Underclass Discourse, for instance, is described in relation to political speeches and reports and academic writing. So, to adopt the terminology introduced above, these Discourses tend to be found in the categorising Genres of *administrative allocation* (Jenkins, 2004).

2.5.1 Lifestyle

In this section, I outline what I view as a Lifestyle Discourse, one that identifies people in terms of patterns of (consumer) behaviour rooted in *personality*, without giving this personality social explanation. This Discourse is prevalent in the lifestyle classifications of market research in its various guises, but also in discourse that makes use of 'style tribes' (York, 1980) and 'subcultures' (Jenks, 2005).

Moran lays the word *chav* at the feet of market researchers and lifestyle writers:

> The origins of the chav phenomenon lie in the Thatcher era. From the late 1970s onwards, a new form of consumer profiling emerged in the advertising and

marketing industries, termed 'lifestyle research' or 'psychographics'. A key assumption behind this new research was the declining importance of class, and the subsequent fragmentation of markets into social tribes and niches, which were defined by taste and lifestyle choice, rather than income or occupation

(Moran, 2006; 568)

He mentions the work of the journalist Peter York, who, in the late 1970s, wrote a series of articles in *Harpers & Queen* magazine documenting what he saw as the fragmentation of mass culture into a plethora of style 'tribes', most notably the 'sloane ranger' (York and Barr 1982). Many of York's articles on these 'tribes' were published as a book entitled *Style Wars* (1980). Moran writes that 'York's notion of the social "tribe" – encapsulated in neologisms like "Sloane Rangers" and "Neurotic Boy Outsiders" – offered an interpretation of the behaviour of certain groups which erased questions of social and political agency' (2006; 568). For York, the fragmentation of style in the 1970s amounted to a fragmentation of older forms of 'mass culture'. He saw his time as an age of fragmentation, a cacophony of styles, with no structural relations to each other, or to anything but their 'owners'. The 'awakening' of style 'was about developing your own style and then *legitimising* it' (York, 1980; 11, emphasis original). People were responsible for their own 'styles', and these styles were seen not as related to older, structural groupings, as, for example Max Weber's *status* had been related to *class* (Weber, 1983), but as corroding them.

Related to York's 'social tribes', as Moran (2006) and York himself (1980; 12) point out, is 'market segmentation'. For York, this was one of the 'great business philosoph[ies] of the 1970s':

> The vogue word for it was *segmentation* – define your group (get under their skins) and their (style) aspirations and then gear up to service them. In America there is this service discreetly called environmental analysis which is a euphemism for honing on the segments. Month by month, using psychological

scales in mass surveys, these figures chart the growth and decline of the 'attitude configurations' in the population or, in other words, what kinds of people are coming off the production line now (lifestyle trends). This way General Foods, say, gets a read-out on who's going to be in the market for organic, compost-grown health food, or C.B.S. about solaria or safaris. The ideology was *go with it*, whatever it is. New opportunities in Goods and Services.

(York, 1980; 12)

York's account of market segmentation now sounds rather quaint. What was 'In America' is now worldwide – the credit agency Experian sells Mosaic Global, a product that 'classifies 380 million households from all of the world's most prosperous economies including North America, Europe and Asia Pacific' (Experian, 2007). What was 'a euphemism' is now stated explicitly – 'Mosaic Global helps you target, acquire, develop and manage profitable customer relations throughout the world' (ibid.). But quaint though it may be, York was writing long after the concept of market segmentation was beginning to develop in the 'motivation research' of early Twentieth Century USA. Understanding these origins sheds a considerable light on the relationship between 'personality' and 'lifestyle'. It is worth giving a brief account of this development. I begin my account with the development of the idea that consumer behaviour is fundamentally 'personality' motivated; not based on rational choice, and not motivated by socially structured dispositions, but by the kind of person doing the buying. For a considerably longer scale historical perspective on the rise of the concept of 'personality', see Sennett (2003).

According to Gunther and Furnham (1993), the development of 'lifestyle' research began in the 1930s with an emphasis on *personality* as a factor motivating people to buy particular products. At this stage, large-scale lifestyle classification was not used, but the focus on qualitative investigation of consumer 'personalities' began. Sidney Levy was an influential figure in this movement, writing on the symbolic meaning of

consumer objects (1959). For Levy, consumer behaviour was an expressive, or symbolic, action, not a matter of rational, utilitarian choice. Levy prefaced his 1959 paper 'Symbols for sale' with the line 'The consumer is not as functionally oriented as he used to be – if he ever really was' (1959; 117). As people moved 'further and further from grubbing for subsistence', Levy argued, 'marketing managers must attend to more than the relatively superficial facts with which they concern themselves when they do not think of their goods as having symbolic significance' (ibid.). In the marketplace of the 1950s 'modern goods are recognized as essentially psychological things which are symbolic of personal attributes and goals and of social patterns and strivings' (ibid.: 118). Buying, for Levy, was something that people did to satisfy deeply rooted individual needs and these needs were seen as deriving from the individual's personality. It is notable that Levy describes a 'class' as formed on the basis of individual needs that *precede* the group:

> Like it or not, there are social class groupings formed by the ways people live, the attitudes they have, and the acceptance and exclusiveness of their associations. Most goods say something about the social world of the people who consume them. The things they buy are chosen partly to attest to their social positions.
>
> (Levy, 1959; 121-122)

As this suggests, Levy did not see symbolic meanings just as isolated, individual interpretations of goods, but as parts of linked sets of meanings associated with social groups. 'Some comparatively well-defined modes of living and taste patterns tend to combine individual symbols into large clusters of symbols', he writes; 'The Ivy League cluster of symbols affects the kinds of suits, ties, and, to a lesser degree, the cars and liquors certain people buy' (1959; 123). It is these 'clusters' that, though not

systematically investigated in any depth by marketers in Levy's time, would later be called 'lifestyles'.

Lifestyle researchers introduced a quantitative element to investigations into consumer behaviour/motivation, using statistical analysis to develop categories of consumer. Using data drawn from large scale questionnaires (combined with some of the smaller scale motivation research techniques) classification proceeded along the lines of demographic categorisation, statistically mapping consumer types as is done to define age groups, nationalities and other demographic categorisations. Where motivation research offered 'snapshots', lifestyle research could be used to draw large-scale 'maps' of different consumer groups, or lifestyles. 'With these techniques, marketing researchers were able to compose psychological portraits of consumers' (Gunther and Furnham, 1992; 32) and to make categorise people according to these portraits. The technique by which personal lifestyles are 'measured' and 'mapped' is often called *psychographics*. Solomon and Englis sum up the process, deliberately laconically:[10]

> Lifestyle analyses as typically conducted follow this pattern precisely: a set of immutable categories is generated statistically and consumers are clustered in terms of their goodness of fit with each. These categories are duly named (e.g. Shotguns and Pickups, Slatherers, Oceanic Drinkers), and in their incarnation as market segments then go on to take on a life of their own – to the point that even religious congregants (or potential ones) are described in terms of such labels as 'seekers', 'true believers' etc.
>
> (Solomon and Englis, 1997; 323; religious examples from Lewis, 1996)

Psychographic techniques vary slightly, although they share a focus on quantifying qualitative aspects of human life which are conceptualised as related to the 'personality'.

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[10] Solomon and Englis are sceptical about the validity of lifestyle research; they express understandable concerns about positivistic, statistical classifications of human behaviour as human types, but they are less concerned about the investigation of 'consumer behaviour' more generally. In fact, they are positively in favour of 'put[ting] the consumer back into consumer behaviour' (1997; 347).

The concept of personality is certainly not a rigorously theorised one. For Gunther and Furnham 'it is true to say that no one psychological theory informs research on psychographics' (1992; 33), and Foxall et al. (1998) suggest that the focus on personality (of all psychological ideas) was due to its widespread familiarity. An early psychographic system called 'AIO research' involved giving people questionnaires asking about their 'Attitudes', 'Interests' and 'Opinions' and correlating and clustering their answers. AIO research, though, made no attempt to correlate personalities with actual consumer behaviour and thus was seen as having limited predictive power for marketers (Solomon and Englis, 1997; 326). In other words, AIO researchers could correlate different attitudes, interests and opinions, but these are all aspects of personality. The researchers did not correlate what they 'discovered' using their questionnaires with what people actually did, i.e. what they bought. Another system, which developed on the AIO research, was VALS (Values and Lifestyles). VALS was developed at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI), and was used to relate 'overt consumption practices to underlying values' (Solomon and Englis, 1997; 326). VALS was famously used by Arnold Mitchell, Director of SRI, in his book *The Nine American Lifestyles* (1983). John McAdams reviewed the book for The American Political Science Review:

> Arnold Mitchell, Director of the Values and Lifestyles Program at SRI International, is not a political scientist, and the ostensible purpose of this volume is to help people in marketing and advertising make money by correctly predicting changes in consumption habits. … What Mitchell has done is to isolate several lifestyles that are distinctive both in terms of their consumption habits and in terms of their political outlooks. Admittedly, his two poor "need-driven" groups, survivors and sustainers, do not have the resources (either psychic or economic) to be very important in the political arena. The same cannot be said of the three politically conservative "outer-directed" groups: belongers (the traditional lower middle class), achievers (affluent persons likely

to be business managers), and emulators (young people who seem to want to be achievers).

Set against these latter three groups are the liberal "inner-directed" persons, whom other commentators have labelled "the New Class," and who include "experientials" (living more or less the Marin County hot-tub lifestyle), the "societally conscious" (representing the mainstream of liberal academics, bureaucrats, and political activists), and "I-Am-Mes" (young people who will become experientials or the societally conscious). Mitchell claims the existence of a ninth group, "integrateds," but doesn't have any data to support their existence.

(McAdams, 1984; 515)

McAdams' argument that lifestyle research has relevance outside the world of marketing, indeed that 'political scientists should have started to explore these issues long before Arnold Mitchell' (1984; 516), would prove an influential one in the coming years, which saw 'Third Way' politicians in the United States, and then Britain, making heavy use of lifestyle research in the 1990s (Curtis, 2002). And the ideas that people's political behaviour and affiliations can be understood with reference to their *personality*, itself needing no further justification, has been developed in Drew Westen's influential *The Political Brain : the Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* (2007). Key to all these applications of lifestyle classifications is a Discourse that prioritises personality; that explains social activity in individualised terms.

Since the 1980s, lifestyle classification has become yet more extensive. The credit reference agency Experian sells a product called Mosaic, 'a global network of segmentation that classifies a billion people worldwide, covering a third of the earth's surface' (Experian, 2007). In the year up to March 2007, Mosaic and Experian's other 'marketing solutions' accounted for $728 million (21%) of the company's international sales. In the UK this is the company's largest area of business, accounting for 39% of sales (Experian, 2007). Such marketing solutions have been purchased by a range of

clients including American Express, BNP Paribas, HSBC, Lego, eBay, Yahoo, Tesco and Royal Mail, and their function is described succinctly by Experian:

> Marketing solutions acquires, processes and manages large and comprehensive databases containing geographic, demographic and lifestyle information on consumers to help clients acquire new customers and manage existing ones.

(Experian, 2007)

Mosaic 'solutions' are available or in development from Experian (or in some cases via a third party) in twenty six countries, and a Global Mosaic is also available, categorising the world's population in accordance with a Lifestyle Discourse. These products are produced by purchasing large databases, collating these and appending various other pieces of information, some of which are collected by the agency directly. On the basis of this, classification of types of consumers are produced and sold on to clients. So, for example, one of the categories identified by Mosaic UK is 'Urban Intelligence':

> Urban Intelligence people are young, well educated and open to new ideas and influences. They are cosmopolitan in their tastes and liberal in their social attitudes. Few have children. Many are in further education while others are moving into full-time employment. Most do not feel ready to make permanent commitments, whether to partners, professions or to specific employers. As higher education ahs become internationalised, the Urban Intelligence group has acquired many foreign-born residents, which further encourages ethnic and cultural variety.
>
> These neighbourhoods typically occur in inner London and in the inner areas of large provincial cities, especially those with popular universities. The growth in student numbers has led to their dispersal from halls of residence into older working class communities and the areas of large Victorian houses that typically surround the older universities.
>
> Other inner city areas have also been taken over by recent graduates and young professionals who want to live close to their work and the facilities of the inner city. Demand for flats is outstripping supply, and developers are now building new flats as well as refurbishing older houses, particularly in locations close to old canals and docklands. In London, this extends into previously lower middle class suburbs such as Wandsworth and Hammersmith. Outside Londonm 'dinky' developments – new town houses and small flats, often on brownfield sites – cater for this group.

In terms of values, this is the most liberal group; it also has the most catholic tastes and the most international orientation.

Learning how to use financial products, surviving on a budget and managing debt are concerns for many in this group. But other shave high levels of disposable income – mindful of career uncertainties, this creates an interesting market for various forms of high risk investment, whether in short term trading or in the buy-to-let market.

(Experian, 2004)

This category, like other Mosaic categories, is described in terms of values, tastes and aspirations as well as geography and economic status. Each category is given a label, and this label is used to articulate relations between particular areas and the kinds of people that live there. On an online interactive piece of Mosaic software (Experian, 2009), users can input a postcode and be told what category of person lives there, what their beliefs and values are, what their names are likely to be, what they buy, what kinds of houses they live in. So a given postcode might be an 'Urban Intelligence' place, or 'Suburban Comfort' or 'Twilight Subsistence'.

So, as Adam Curtis argued in his BBC documentary series *The Century of the Self* (2002), the apparent 'instrumental rationality' of market research is based on very particular beliefs about the nature of human life; that we are of different personality types, fundamentally different, driven by desires. My point here is not to question the theoretical validity of these ideas – they are certainly not 'wrong' simply by virtue of their association with the marketing industry – but to show how they have contributed to an increasingly prevalent Discourse for social identification.

Motivation research, I suggested above, might be seen as related to the adoption of new Discourse in the identifying practices of the marketing industry and beyond. New legitimations of consumer practice were introduced by writers like Levy (1959).

Lifestyle research folded this legitimation into the representations of human beings, categorising people according to what they buy and why. In considering why a particular person would buy a particular object, attention was turned onto the person: they would buy it because of the kind of person they are. In the terms of the linguist Michael Halliday, what might appear to be ideational meanings are seen as interpersonal ones. When we make our choices from the range of 'strongly/slightly agree/disagree' boxes in response to statements like 'Just as the bible says, the world literally was created in six days' or 'There is too much sex on television' [11] the researchers do not reappraise their theory of creation or write a letter to broadcasting standards on our behalf; our opinions are taken to provide information about ourselves, not the world. Similarly, when we buy things we do so because of who we are, or who we want to be, not simply because this car is better or cheaper than that car. So people who differ in their opinion about how much sex there is on television are represented as different kinds of people, as are people who buy different kinds of car. As Machin and van Leeuwen (2007) have argued this gave rise to new identifications of people, a new Discourse for identification.

It is these representations that lifestyle writing like York's (1980) draws on, and that, for Moran (2006) have gone on to shape the discourse in which *chav* is used. The implication is that *chav* is used to construct a type of person for whom (as for all lifestyle groups) structural relations to the state, to production or to other social groups are irrelevant; it is the supposed personal dispositions of *chavs* that govern their behaviour.

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[11] A question from the current Stanford Research Institute internet VALS questionnaire (http://www.sric-bi.com/vals/survey.shtml)

Closely related to York's 'style tribes' and to Mosaic's 'lifestyle segments' is the idea

of *subculture*. In both the research of Nayak (2006) and McCulloch et al. (2006) *chavs,*

or *neds* or *charvers,* are conceptualised in this way; as members of a *subculture*.

McCulloch et al. argue that 'subcultural affiliation is in large part an expression of class

identity' (2006; 540) and demonstrate that those who they identify as *chavs* are likely to

be from similar geographical areas, and are more likely to have parents out of work or

in manual occupations than members of other 'subcultures' identified by the authors.

But there are two problems with this argument. The first is that those who the authors

call *chavs* do not call themselves this (they identify themselves in terms of the areas in

which they grew up and live); 'subcultural affiliation' is in fact merely the authors'

categorisation – there is no element of *group identification* (Jenkins, 2004). The second

problem is perhaps more fundamental and has to do with the very concept of

'subculture'. Reminiscent of Milner's 'strange death of class' (1999), Jenks implicates

the concept of subculture in an 'erosion or death of the social', also evident in both

'contemporary rightist and centrist political ideologies, vaunting self-help, free will and

the powers and responsibilities of the individual' (2005; 3). Subculture fits in to this

scheme in that it 'is one of the ways in which social theorists either fail to or simply

avoid explaining the social in terms of the social' (2005; 131). Like *lifestyle*s

subcultures are said to come from within; they occupy an ambiguous position in relation

to wider social and historical phenomena. Jenks (ibid.; 9) cites Yinger's claim that

subculture 'has been used as an *ad hoc* concept whenever a writer wished to emphasize

the normative aspects of behavior that differed from some general standard' (1960; 625-

6). That is, *subculture* has been used to emphasise what is seen as behavioural

difference, without having to address the question of the relationship between this

apparent difference and society as a whole. McCulloch et al.'s argument, intended as a reinsertion of 'the social' into the concept of subculture, fails in its formulation of this relationship, in its suggestion that subculture is 'an expression of class identity' (2006; 540). Better to jettison the notion of subculture and enter into more rigorous analysis of the social.

2.5.2   Underclass

For Hayward and Yar chav represents 'a popular reconfiguration of the underclass idea' (2006; 10). In this section, I recontextualise this 'idea' as a Discourse, and describe the features of this Discourse, drawing, in particular on Levitas' (2005) description of what she calls a Moral Underclass Discourse.

Underclass was a word with brief currency in British politics in the 1990s. It was introduced by the American political commentator Charles Murray, who was invited to Britain in 1989 by *The Sunday Times* to assess whether Britain, like Murray's USA (where an underclass Discourse was much more established and accepted) had an underclass (Murray 1996a; 1996b). Murray argued that it did, and, what was worse, that it was spreading, and it was unstoppable:

> So, Britain, that's the bleak message. Not only do you have an underclass, not only is it growing, but, judging from the American experience, there's not much in either the Conservative or Labour agendas that has a chance of doing anything about it.
>
> (Murray, 1996a: 53)

Underclass was briefly used by the Labour party in the early 1990s but dropped in favour of a Discourse on *social exclusion* around the time of their 1997 election win (Levitas 2005). But Levitas suggests that many tendencies of Discourse on the

underclass remained relevant to New Labour discussion of social policy. She outlines

the tendencies of what she calls the Moral Underclass Discourse (MUD) as follows:

- It presents the underclass or socially excluded as culturally distinct from the 'mainstream'.

- It focuses on the behaviour of the poor rather than the structure of the whole society.

- It implies that benefits are bad, rather than good, for their recipients, and encourage 'dependency'.

- Inequalities among the rest of society are ignored.

- It is a gendered discourse, about idle, criminal young men and single mothers.

- Unpaid work is not acknowledged.

- Although dependency on the state is regarded as a problem, personal economic dependency – especially of women and children on men – is not. Indeed, it is seen as a civilizing influence on men.

(Levitas, 2005; 21)

So, MUD is a Discourse in which some people, called an *underclass*, are categorised as

being distinct from the 'mainstream' society by virtue of behavioural and economic

differences that are represented emerging from the nature of this ostensibly distinct

group itself. The causes of these differences are not relational, but originate in the

underclass itself. For Westergaard:

> 'Underclass', in radical-right usage designates a segment of the population whose life-style, of indiscipline, is dangerous; whose precise numbers are less important than the contagious spread of their example; and whose material poverty, in so far as acknowledged, is self-induced. Illegitimate births and single parenthood are the prime signs of such underclass deviance from family morality. Crime, and unemployment in consequence of unreadiness to work, are both main results and proxy indicators of that deviance. … The argument is reminiscent of the 'culture of poverty' hypothesis of the 1960s, the spin-offs from that into 'cycle of deprivation' theorizing, and many Victorian characterizations of the down-and-out poor. But this newer variant is distinct by

the resoluteness of its conception of class as a matter of voluntarily adopted life-styles – good versus evil – essentially unconditioned by economic structure.

(Westergaard, 1995; 117)

Westergaard details a number of ways in which the apparent failings of the underclass are representing as being 'self-induced', and, as he points out, in this respect, the underclass Discourse shares much with older distinctions between the deserving and the undeserving, or, as Westergaard puts it, 'down-and-out' poor (ibid.). This historical continuity is emphasised by Morris (1994), too. She lists some past conceptions of the undeserving poor – 'the redundant population, the lumpenproletariat, and the social residuum' (1994; 157) – arguing that what these share is that they are all 'constructed in terms of a basic immorality manifest variously in sexual abandon, criminality, vagrancy, the abhorrence of labour, and an inclination to dependency' (ibid.). It is the last item, *dependency*, 'explained as a defect of character' that 'has been the main focus for concern, both in Victorian England and in contemporary Britain and America' (ibid.). The 'undeserving poor' are unable to live self-sufficiently, because of who they are. And, as Levitas (2005) points out, this claim is often used to argue against welfare benefits, which are framed as 'handouts' that only serve to encourage dependency.

The distinction between the underclass and 'mainstream' society noted by Levitas (2005), alongside the representation of the underclass as responsible for its own failures, means that the underclass Discourse represents social problems as the fault of a few people who live a different – and deviant – way of life. Bauman (1998) argues that, where older languages of class represent classes as complementary, as being classes, at least in part, by virtue of their relationship to each other, '"Underclass" evokes an image of a class of people who are beyond classes and outside hierarchy, with neither chance nor need of readmission; … beyond redemption' (Bauman, 1998; 66). The Underclass

Discourse takes diverse kinds of people and '[p]lung[es] them into one category … condensing them into one entity, charging them all, collectively, with uselessness and with harbouring awesome dangers to the rest of society' (ibid.; 67). This is a Discourse, then, that gives priority to apparent personal differences between people and represents 'class as a matter of voluntarily adopted life-styles … essentially unconditioned by economic structure' (Westergaard, 1995; 117). 'The underclass,' Bauman writes, is represented as 'the aggregate product of wrong individual choices; proof of the "choice incompetence" of its members' (1998; 71).

So the underclass Discourse shares with the lifestyle Discourse a suggestion that differences between people are the result of different choices, made on the basis of different personal preferences. But while there is a relativism to the lifestyle Discourse – as York puts it '[t]he ideology [of market researchers] was *go with it*, whatever it is' (1980; 12) – this is not the case for the underclass Discourse. As Bauman puts it, the representation of an underclass 'is an exercise in *value choice* and *evaluation*, not a description' (ibid.; 67-68). Levitas calls the tendencies she identifies a *Moral* Underclass Discourse precisely because there is seen as being something *wrong* with the underclass. Both Morris (1994) and Westergaard (1995) suggest that the Underclass is represented as 'dangerous'. For Levitas, this combination of individualism and conservative 'moral' judgement is a feature of the New Right from which the Underclass Discourse developed, or at least found its contemporary resurgence. For the New Right, neo-liberal economics, Levitas claims, are in a 'symbiotic' relationship with 'neo-conservatism … concerned with order rather than freedom, with family, nation and morality' (2005; 15). Charles Murray, for instance, as Levitas notes (2005; 18)

advocated increasing the cultural stigma attached to single mothers as a positive policy decision (Murray, 1996b).

It is finally worth mentioning, given my emphasis on debates over the semiotic resources of identification, that the word *underclass* was not only used by those on the right, but by many on the left who felt that it could be used to draw attention to the extreme poverty of some members of society and to the structural causes of this poverty, ignored in right wing use of the term (Lister, 1996). However, '[t]he danger is,' writes Ruth Lister in her foreword to a collection of essays including and commenting on Murray's, 'that the more that certain groups in poverty, or the poor generally, are described in the value-laden language of the "underclass", the easier it becomes for the rest of society to write them off as beyond the bonds of common citizenship' (1996; 10). In terms of identification, the word's proponents on the left suggest that there is utility in the *nominal* value of *underclass*, i.e. in the descriptive identification value of the resource, or 'label', itself (Jenkins, 2004; 76), but that the *virtual* value, 'what a nominal identification means experientially and practically over time' (ibid.; 77), should be resisted. The word, they suggest, can be used to identify a certain category of people without putting it to the kind of uses that have been made of it by the political right. But, from a Social Semiotic perspective, as from Lister's, it is difficult to see how the nominal and the virtual uses of a semiotic resource can be distinguished – all meaning is a matter of experience and practice.

2.6   Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced social semiotics and critical discourse analysis, as well as my culturalist view of class, and outlined the place that such a perspective makes for

discourse. Discourse is one element of the identification practices of class societies, but not the only one, and, as Bourdieu and others suggest, it may well be a relatively superficial one in terms of class as felt experience. Nonetheless, discursive identification has consequences for the resources we use to describe, explain and act on the world around us, including those we use to identify ourselves and others in class terms. Struggles over identification often take place in discourse, and the semiotic resources of discourse are themselves often subject to such struggles.

I went on to describe two Discourses relevant to my analysis of *chav*. These Discourses – the Lifestyle Discourse, and the Underclass Discourse – were felt to be important for two reasons: first, because they have been implicated in the development of *chav*; and, second, because they are prevalent in contemporary Britain. These Discourses share an individualist representation of social difference. Both tread the 'path to individualistic reductionism … by arguing that an event occurred "because this subculture is unique", "because that's the kind of guy he is" or "because one or more individuals are mad"' (Jenks, 2005; 12). These two Discourses will serve as reference points in my analysis.

The work of the authors discussed in this chapter directly informs my own theoretical stance, which is as follows. *Chav* is a semiotic recourse, and as such its meaning is subject to its use and to more or less explicit regulation (what I have called, following Cameron (1995), 'verbal hygiene'). *Chav* is used in particular Discourses and particular Genres as part of more general ways of semiotically representing and acting in the world. The Discourses that I suggest might be relevant are those that individualise class relations, and the Genres that I select are those of public discourse (though *chav* is of course used in many Genres not discussed in this work). To the extent that its use in

these Genres and these Discourses contributes to social processes of domination, then *chav* can be said to be ideologically motivated.

From this stance, then, I ask; how does the semiotic resource *chav* contribute to class identification practices in a number of Genres of public written discourse? Does it contribute to Lifestyle or Underclass Discourse, or any other way of representing class? In terms of Genre, is it oriented towards stereotyping, or towards administrative allocation? And how is the resource itself regulated? What is said about it? What verbal hygiene practices focus on the word? In the next two chapters, it is such practices of verbal hygiene that I discuss.

3.   *Chav* and dictionaries

3.1   Introduction

The first Genre of public written discourse that I consider is the dictionary. *Chav* entered a number of dictionaries in 2004, and this was, as will be shown, a precursor to its more general use in the public discourse of the media. My intention in discussing dictionary definitions is to interpret the ways in which ostensibly metalinguistic claims made about *chav* contribute to particular meanings for the resource and thus serve to create or at least lend authority to particular semiotic resources for representing the world. I also intend to discuss the Social Semiotic consequences of defining *chav*, and, in particular, its promotion by Oxford University Press as 'word of 2004' (Dent, 2004).

This chapter is organised in two parts. In the first, I discuss a number of dictionary definitions of *chav*, taken from general English language as well as slang and idiom dictionaries. In all of these *chav* is defined as a kind of young person, identified by clothing and behaviour, and all give some indication of the derogatory nature of the word, but generally make no stronger critical challenge than this. In the second part, I focus on the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), and relate its definition of *chav* to a number of other texts: the Oxford University Press (OUP) publication of the 2004 Language Report (Dent , 2004); a press release advertising this book; and a number of newspaper articles reporting on the OED's definition of *chav*. My argument will be that *chav* was promoted by the OUP as evidence of the dictionary's 'up-to-dateness', and as part of a more general promotion of the study of words as, in itself, the study of social history. The OED's decision to include a new word is, in being associated with a press

release which is then recontextualised in a number of newspaper articles, represented as a news event.

3.2   Authority and novelty in dictionaries

Dictionaries are what Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) would term highly *reflexive* texts; they represent the social practice of language use. More specifically, they represent the social practice of language use as being the use of a particular, limited language, which is comprised of *words* with fixed, definable meanings. If a word is included in a dictionary of a language, then it is represented as part of that language (although it might be marked as being specific to some social variety or register). Dictionary producers have to make choices about what a word is, what particular words go to make up a language, what words should be included or excluded, and how they should be defined, thus dictionaries are selective representations of linguistic practice. Though it is not the place here to subject the practice of lexicography to detailed scrutiny, some critical assessment of dictionaries as a social semiotic Genre is necessary.

Two points are generally made about dictionary production and use as a metalinguistic activity. The first is that it is a prescriptive activity: whatever descriptive claims might be made by lexicographers and publishers, dictionary sales rely on prescriptive use. As Cameron puts it 'despite their rhetoric, [dictionaries] are actually prescriptive, not descriptive' (1995; 49). Roy Harris writes that 'if the public ceased to believe in lexical perfection … the financial consequences [for the publishers] would be dire' (1983; see also Green 1996; Mugglestone 2000; or Harris and Hutton 2004, who stress the 'stipulative' nature of lexicography). The second point is that dictionaries are not engaged in 'objective' prescriptivism, but a selective practice of bestowing status on

some words and not others. And the choices made about what words should be accorded this status (and indeed how they should be defined) has often been regarded as motivated by the identities and ideologies of those who produce dictionaries (Willinsky 1994; Brewer 2005). Williams writes that 'to work closely in [the OED] is at times to get a fascinating insight into what can be called the ideology of its editors' (1983; 18), and these editors, others have commented, have historically been 'men, mainly bourgeois men' and their ideology appropriately patriarchal and bourgeois (Hughes, 2010; 89; see Hughes's Chapter 3 on this topic). So well established are critiques of the ideological selectivity of mainstream dictionaries that Green feels able to write that '[t]o criticise the OED … as overly middle-class, masculinist, chauvinist, imperialist and insulting to minority groups, is to batter down an open door' (1996; 373). So, dictionaries are said to serve a prescriptive function, and on the basis of a partial, ideologically motivated, representation of linguistic practice.

A connection can be drawn between these two points – the prescriptive activity and the ideologically motivated selective reflexivity. Dictionaries are prescriptively useful to millions of people in a world in which language works as a kind of 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 1991) precisely because their creators select words associated with prestige varieties, and serve to lend increased prestige to whatever forms they select. '[D]ictionaries enjoy a strange and privileged status as cultural monuments' (Cameron, 1995; 49) and their editors can bestow some of this status on certain words. That they represent the language of relatively privileged groups is part of the reason that they enjoy this status, and part of the reason that they are used. As Harris puts it, 'you would be wasting your money on a publication which was not authoritative (and putting your children's education into jeopardy in the bargain)' (1983).

But it is also true, and particularly relevant to the present case, that dictionaries like the OED include a large number of entries marked as 'slang', and that there exist a number of slang dictionaries. Can these be seen as prescriptive? Do they serve to endow their selections with prestige? It might be expected that 'slang' in dictionaries serves a rather less prescriptive function. It is difficult to imagine anyone turning to their OED to decide whether a friend is rightly a 'pleb' or a 'plank'.

Harris interprets the inclusion of slang entries in dictionaries as being driven by a modern concern with appearing 'up-to-date':

> There is a balance which publishers need to strike between being 'authoritative' and being 'with-it'. The dialectic of the marketplace, combined with the tradition of the English dictionary-compilation, made it inevitable that the challenge to the lexicographical establishment should come from those who offered a more up-to-date product
>
> (Harris, 1983)

So, just as dictionary sales rely on the appearance of authority and the maintenance of prestige forms, they also rely on the appearance of modernity. The representation of a contemporary, 'cutting-edge' vision of English is a desirable trait in dictionary publication. This point will be taken up below in my discussion of the OED and its publishers designation of *chav* as 'word of the year' in 2004.

In summary, then, dictionaries are a Genre of language use that reflects on language itself as part of a prescriptive, verbal hygiene practice, concerned with telling their readers what the resources of a language are and how they should be used. More specifically, it has been argued that they lend authority to the resources of white, middle-class males as *the* English language. Increasingly, though, as Harris (1983) points out, dictionaries like the OED are concerned with representing the 'cutting-edge'

of language as a bid to demonstrate a commercially desirable grasp on contemporary culture.

3.3   Definitions of *chav*

The definition of *chav* in English dictionaries is motivated not by a concern with prestige, but with novelty – this is a new word, and a relatively informal one, and its inclusion is a sign that dictionary publishers are keeping up with the changing English language. How this novelty was advertised when the OED's producers decided to include *chav* will be discussed in more detail below, but here I discuss the definitions given to the word in four dictionaries: *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED, 2010); *The Collins English Dictionary* (Collins, 2010); *The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (Dalzell and Victor, 2008), and *Brewer's Dictionary of Modern Phrase & Fable* (Ayto and Crofton, 2006). The first two of these are traditional English dictionaries, while the latter two are both more specialised, focusing respectively on slang and on a vaguely defined notion of idiomacity.

A few features are shared by the dictionary entries for *chav*:

1.   Definition as a kind of person

2.   Reference to youth

3.   Reference to clothing, and, in most cases, behaviour

4.   Reference to status/class, with varying determinacy

5.   Designation as slang

6.   Indication of offensiveness, to varying degrees

7. Etymological link to Romani *chavvy*, and indication of 'false etymologies'

In terms of my central research question, there is, in most of the definitions, no explicit indication that *chav* necessitates any particular stance on class, but in all, there is some indication that the word names a kind of person whose social status is relatively low, in a variably determinate sense.

3.3.1 The OED definition

> Brit. slang (derogatory).
> [Prob. either < Romani Chavo unmarried Romani male, male Romani child (see CHAVVY n.), or shortened < either CHAVVY n. or its etymon Angloromani chavvy.
> It has also been suggested that this word is a colloquial shortening of Chatham, the name of a town in Kent where the term is sometimes said to have originated (cf. quots. 1998 at main sense, 2002 at main sense), although this is prob. a later rationalization.]
> In the United Kingdom (originally the south of England): a young person of a type characterized by brash and loutish behaviour and the wearing of designer-style clothes (esp. sportswear); usually with connotations of a low social status.

A nominal group is given as the definition of *chav* here, with *person* as its head – a *chav* is a type of person. This person is *young* and *characterized by brash and loutish behaviour and the wearing of designer-style clothes*, that is, by visible behaviour and appearances. There is no formulation of a class group that a *chav* belongs to, but the word, or the person, has *connotations of a low social status*. So a rough distinction is made between something like the word's denotation – an identifiable kind of person – and the connotation – the low social status.

An indication is given that this word is *slang* and was used *originally* in *the south of England*. But no further detail of who uses the word is given – it is not represented as the slang of any particular social group, just as a kind of general British English slang.

The word is also designated as *derogatory*, but not *offensive*. The OED indicates that some words – *paki, pikey*, for example – are *offensive*, a stronger claim than that they are *derogatory*. The designation as *derogatory* is difficult to interpret. It seems likely to give the reader some sense that this word is unkind, but perhaps no more than this.

3.3.2   The Collins Definition

Chav entered the Collins English Dictionary before it did the OED, but its inclusion was comparatively inconsequential in terms of the metalinguistic discussion it generated in the press. The dictionary is a less prestigious one, and does not undertake the self-promotion that the OED does (to be discussed below).

> **chav** N (BRIT SLANG DEROGATORY)
> a young working-class person who dresses in casual sports clothes
> As 'chav' has sprung into widespread use, various explanations have been proffered – abbreviations of Chatham Average or Cheltenham Average, or an acronym of Council House And Violent, for example. The word has a much older origin, in fact, deriving from the Romany term for a youth or boy: *chavi*. 'Chav', therefore seems to have been around for a long time, but has only recently come to prominence in the media.

So the Collins definition, like the OED, gives youth and sports clothing as characteristics of a type of person called a *chav*. Behaviour is not mentioned. Unlike the OED, where a vaguer 'usually with connotations of low social status' is given, a *chav* is 'working-class' in this definition. Being 'working-class' is part of what it is to be a *chav*. A relatively specific framework is referred to in indicating the status position of a *chav*, but 'working-class' is itself a contested term and might elicit any number of understandings. Nonetheless, a fairly well established language of class is used here to define *chav*, and it is *working-class*, not *underclass*, that is chosen.

In terms of etymology, the Collins dictionary dismisses the blended and acronymic rationalisations, giving the Romani derivation. Again, though these rationalisations are ultimately false, their creation reveals ways in which the meaning of *chav* has been worked on, and they are likely to be of some significance in many people's understanding of the word.

3.3.3   The Partridge Slang Definition

The 2008 edition of *The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (Dalzell and Victor, 2008) defines *chav* as follows:

> **chav** *noun* any member of a subcultural urban adolescent group that dresses and acts older than their years. Variants are 'chava', 'charva', 'chavster' and 'charver'. Usually derogatory, even contemptuous; possibly derived from an abbreviation of Chatham, the town in Kent where the genus is reputed to have originated; possible from, or influenced by, Romany *chavvy* (a child) *UK, 2003*

The definition in terms of 'a subcultural urban adolescent group' is rather vague. It seems likely that readers are to take this as meaning any member of a *particular* group and not any member of any such group, but it is interesting that the properties of this group – other than being *urban* and *adolescent* and dressing and acting *older than their years* – are unarticulated. It seems significant, though, that it is dressing and acting that are the relevant practices here, given the emphasis on particular ways of dressing and particular ways of acting in previous definitions. In *older than their years* there is perhaps a class-related meaning, but it is relatively implicit – even more so than reference to designer clothes and sportswear – as there might be in *subcultural urban adolescent group*. Where *chav* is called *derogatory* in the OED and Collins definitions, here it is *even contemptuous*.

3.3.4   The Brewers Phrase and Fable definition

Chav is given an extensive entry in the second edition of *Brewer's Dictionary of Modern Phrase & Fable* (Ayto and Crofton, 2006; 145). The definition begins:

> A materialistic British working-class youth with a fondness for fashionable clothes and ostentatious jewellery.

This definition – in its focus on youth, class and appearance – is similar to those discussed above. It is notable here though, that readers are not directly told what *chavs* look like but about a mental disposition, a *fondness*. Reference is made to such dispositions a number of times in the remains of the definition:

> a distinguishing sartorial feature of the chav is his/her **fondness** for Burberry … Another sartorial affectation of the chav is the **fondness** for tucking the legs of his tracksuit into his Umbro socks, while the chavette **delights** in large hooped earrings and hair done in a Croydon facelift. **Popular** accessories include baseball caps and Staffordshire bull terriers.

So, the appearance of the *chav* is represented in terms of personal preference. This is somewhat ironic though; for instance in the positioning of a *Staffordshire bull terrier* as an *accessory*. This tendency towards the ironic representation of appearances as personal preferences is one that will recur and be discussed in greater detail in the Genres discussed in later chapters.

The *Brewer'*s discussion of the word is rather more difficult to regard as consistently metalinguistic than the other dictionary definitions discussed; it is much more easily interpreted as a 'real definition' (Harris and Hutton, 2004) than the others, its relative emphasis being on the encyclopedic – the things we know about *chavs* in the world. A reader seems unlikely to read 'the phenomenon … has given rise to a number of jokes' as being a claim about the phenomenon of people using the word *chav* and not about the

existence of *chavs*. Much more likely, we are not being told about use of the word but about the characteristics of the people. This is clear at the end of the definition, where the reader is given a number of regionally distributed synonyms. These are not presented as synonyms because they occupy the same role within a linguistic or representational system, but because they are other words for the same thing in the world:

> In some parts of the UK chavs are known by different names, for example, 'ned' (Glasgow), 'scally' (Liverpool) and 'TOWNIE' (London).

3.3.5 Summary

Chav is defined in each case as a type of person. This person is identifiable by their youth, by appearance and by behaviour, as well as by a variably articulated class/status position and, in the *Brewer's* definition, by personal dispositions. There is an implicit reification to these definitions, as there is to dictionary definition more generally, that suggests a connection between the word *chav* and a particular kind of person in the world. As such, these definitions serve to articulate such a connection, to suggest that to understand *chav* we have to understand the properties of something in the real world. The Brewers definition in particular tells the reader about something that they might encounter in the world.

3.4 Genre chain – The OED, *The Language Report* and the press

Here I discuss the OED's definition of *chav* in terms of a *Genre chain*, 'different genres which are regularly linked together, involving systematic transformations from genre to genre' (Fairclough, 2003; 31). This is a chain that links the OED's definition to a

popular book and press release and to newspaper articles in the national press.[12] The definition of the word, in the OED's online edition, was accompanied by it being called 'word of the year' in Susie Dent's *Larpers and Shroomers: The Language Report* (2004) and in an OUP press release advertising this book (released on the 18th October 2004). The book and the press release both also gave a retrospectively compiled list of the hundred 'words of the year' from 1904 to 2004. On the 19th October, 2004, a number of national newspapers ran stories reporting on the new word of the year, along with its past equivalents (see below). There is an intertextual chain relating these newspaper texts back to the OED's definition, which can be represented as follows:

> OED online definition
>
> Larpers and Shroomers: the Language Report
>
> 'Chav: the Word of 2004' press release
>
> Newspaper articles
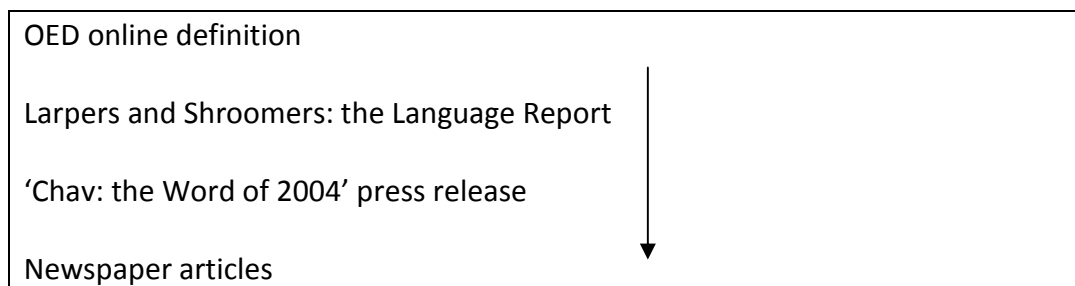
The headlines of newspaper articles published on 19th October 2004, and reporting on *chav*'s 'word of the year' status are listed below:

> BUZZWORD OF THE YEAR IS. . . ER, CHAV; NEW EXPRESSION TO JOIN LANGUAGE
> The Express
>
> Get hip to chav as this year's wizardword
> The Guardian
>
> The year of the Chav
> *The Daily Mail*
>
> AFTER GANGSTAS, BLING BLING, HAVING IT LARGE AND SEXING UP BRITAIN'S LATEST BUZZWORD IS.. CHAV

---
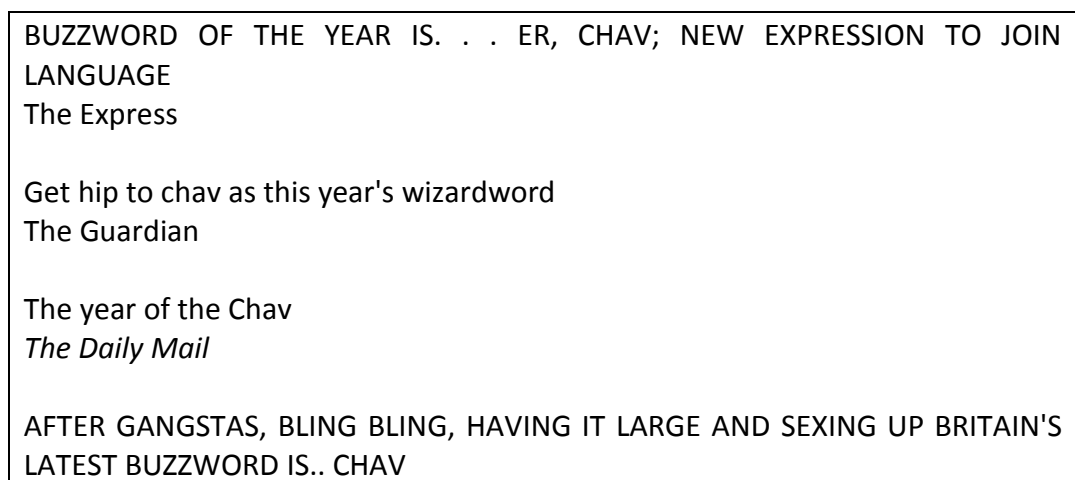
[12] Though this particular chain can hardly be said to have been 'systematic' in 2004, it has since become so. The OED's 'words of the year' are annually accompanied by a *Language Report* book and press release, the latter of which is then worked into newspaper stories.

> *The Mirror*
>
> Good news for chavs: they may be cool people soon
> *The Times*
>
> THE CHAV DICTIONARY ...INNIT!
> *The Sun*
>
> 101 WORDS THAT SEXED UP THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
> *The Sun*
>
> RETROSEXUALS; SCRUFFS AND SLOBS ARE THE NEW TRENDIES, EXPERTS SAY
> *The Daily Star*
>
> The cool century - 100 years of being hip Celebs earned megabucks during the Second World War but sex did not exist before 1929
> *The Daily Telegraph*
>
> All 19/10/2004

I have discussed the OED's definition itself above. In what follows, I discuss the remaining texts in this intertextual chain in turn; *The Language Report*, the press release, and the newspaper articles. I ask how these recontextualise each other, and how *chav* is defined and evaluated in each.

3.4.1   The Language Report

The Language Report is a popular non-specialist English Language book, a genre which has been highly successful in recent years. First published in 2003, with new 'reports' released annually until 2007, it can be seen as relating to such publications as Bill Bryson's *Mother Tongue* (1990) and *Troublesome Words* (1997), Melvin Bragg's *The Adventure of English* (television series and book, 2003) and the mass market publication of numerous books on idioms such as Nigel Rees' *A Word in Your Shell-Like* (2004). *The Language Report*'s author, Susie Dent, is most famous for her role on the Channel

4 afternoon quiz programme, 'Countdown', where she resides in 'dictionary corner'. She is likely to be known by many as a popular expert on English.

The *Report*'s blurb advertises the book as giving 'us the language report from the frontline', and, in the introduction, Dent sets out her stance on language change:

> Developments in slang, new turns of idiomatic and euphemistic phrase, and colourful creations in contexts as varied as business and sport all reflect the undiminished momentum of a language which, far from looking backwards, continues to evolve at a strikingly fast pace.
> 2004; 1

Her book is an attempt to report on this change, to provide the reader with an account of how language is at the moment. And in the 'a word a year' list (see below), the reader is presented with words that 'collectively … give a distinct picture of the shifting preoccupations of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st' (Dent, 2004; 158), purporting to show not only how the language was, but something of how *society* was during each of these years. Dent is fairly cautious about reading too much into this list, describing the choice as 'inevitably subjective' and the social clues given by the words as 'faint', but the force of its inclusion is to suggest that we are being given a kind of social history through words.

> **'A word a year'** (Dent, 2004; 158-165)
> 1904 hip 1905 whizzo 1906 teddy bear 1907 egghead 1908 realpolitik 1909 tiddly-om-pom-pom 1910 sacred cow 1911 gene 1912 blues 1913 celeb 1914 cheerio 1915 civvy street 1916 U-boat 1917 tailspin 1918 ceasefire 1919 ad-lib 1920 demob 1921 pop 1922 wizard 1923 hem-line 1924 lumpenproletariat 1925 avant garde 1926 kitsch 1927 sudden death 1928 Big Apple 1929 sex 1930 drive-in 1931 Mickey Mouse 1932 bagel 1933 dumb down 1934 pesticide 1935 racism 1936 spliff 1937 dunk 1938 cheeseburger 1939 Blitzkrieg 1940 Molotov cocktail 1941 snafu 1942 buzz 1943 pissed off 1944 DNA 1945 mobile phone 1946 megabucks 1947 Wonderbra 1948 cool 1949 Big Brother 1950 brainwashing 1951 fast food 1952 Generation X 1953 hippy 1954 non-U 1955 boogie 1956 sexy 1957 psychedelic 1957 psychedelic 1958 beatnik 1959 cruise

> missile 1960 cyborg 1961 awesome 1962 bossa nova 1963 peacenik 1964 byte 1965 miniskirt 1966 acid 1967 love-in 1968 It-girl 1969 microchip 1970 hypermarket 1971 green 1972 Watergate 1973 F-word 1974 punk 1975 detox 1976 Trekkie 1977 naff all 1978 trainers 1979 karaoke 1980 power dressing 1981 toyboy 1982 hip-hop 1983 beatbox 1984 double-click 1985 OK yah 1986 mobile 1987 virtual reality 1988 gangsta 1989 latte 1990 applet 1991 hot-desking 1992 URL 1993 having it large 1994 Botox 1995 kitten heels 1996 ghetto fabulous 1997 dot-commer 1998 text message 1999 google 2000 bling bling 2001 9/11 2002 axis of evil 2003 sex up 2004 chav

It is in *The Language Report* that *chav* is claimed to be 'word of the year', and briefly defined as 'a group of people pejoratively described as delinquents and members of an underclass' (Dent, 2004; 165), a definition which implies a distinction between *the group of people* and how they are *described* – they are not necessarily *delinquents* or *members of an underclass*, but this is how they are apparently *described* using the word *chav*. This definition is also interesting in that it makes no mention of youth, appearance or behaviour, unlike the OED definition of the same year, focusing much more on class.

In fact, though *chav* is discussed over two pages by Dent, no mention is made of the OED definition at all. Dent focuses on the etymology of the word, its Romani origins, its Kentish associations, its use on the internet, and its recent (at her time of writing) adoption by the media. Dent also expresses criticism, but she attributes this criticism to others – to *liberal circles* – avoiding identification of this point of view with herself or with the OUP. The purpose of this book is not to criticise the language, but to celebrate its continuing diversity and change, a purpose which supports the promotion of the OUP as the world's leading tracker of the English language and publisher of the most up-to-date dictionaries.

> If the intention behind the creation of 'chav' was light-hearted, the label has caused alarm in liberal circles who see it as a resurgence of class prejudice. Descriptions of the phenomenon, however, continue unabated, with the result that the word 'chav' is becoming further entrenched in the language.

Dent, 2004; 143

Overall, Dent's discussion of *chav* is cautious. She is critical, though she attributes this criticism to others, and the formulation of her definition of *chav* draws attention to the word as part of a *way of describing*. Though she does not explicitly criticise this way of describing, this implicitly suggests at what I call in the next chapter a *representational* tendency in metalinguistic comment – *chav* is to be understood as part of a way of representing the world, not as a thing in the world. However, in naming *chav* 'word of 2004', and in representing this list of words of the year as evidence of the dynamism of English and of the 'shifting preoccupations' of its speakers, there is something celebratory about *The Language Report*. These celebratory tendencies are brought to the fore on the blurb, where 'Susie Dent gives us the language report from the frontline' and 'English is the fastest-moving language in the world. It changes every day'. And this is even more so in the OUP's press release, accompanying the publication of Dent's book.

3.4.2   The press release

The Language Report was advertised in an OUP press release with the title 'CHAV: THE WORD OF 2004?':

What is it that defines the language of the moment? Is it that curious word **CHAV**, virtually unknown until this year and used to describe loutish young people exhibiting **COUNCIL ESTATE CHIC**? Or is it the creeping of text and chat-room language into every aspect of our written life? Are our favourite TV programmes and **SLEBS** now directing our choice of words? Or are they all **SHTUPID**? Word on the **SHTREET** is that this is the latest trend in pronunciation. Grammar, too, is on the move - or are you **SO** not liking that?

…

English is the fastest-moving language in the world, and the largest. Around one third of the world's population uses English in their daily life and some 80% of the world's websites are in English. Tracking its course is a huge and

> important task, but **Oxford University Press**, with the largest language research programme in the world, is in prime position to undertake it.
> OUP, 19/10/04

Chav is, according to the OUP, 'used to describe loutish young people exhibiting council estate chic'. *Council estate chic* is included here in a bid to fit as many 'word of the year' contenders into the press release as possible, but in its reference to appearance and status, this definition, which also mentions youth and behaviour, fits the form of the definitions analysed in 4.3. The caution of Dent's definition in *The Language Report* is lost: *chav* is a word used to describe a type of person who actually is *loutish*.

The Language Report is promoted here as capturing 'the language of the moment'. It is an up-to-date 'report' on all that is new in English – 'the fastest-moving language in the world'. It is not the prescriptive authority of the OED that is foregrounded here, but the vitality and up-to-dateness of the OUP's language research. Its 'largest language research programme in the world' is dedicated to 'tracking' the latest developments in English, and *chav* is one such development. The claims made about the changing language and the OUP's capacity to track these changes are more forcefully made in this press release than in *The Language Report* itself (though they are very similar to the promotional claims made on the book's blurb), where Dent is relatively cautious, as noted above.

The list of words of the year is reproduced in the press release. 'Each word,' it reads, 'tells a tale about its environment … Each of them says something about the preoccupations of their time' (OUP, 19/10/04). This idea that words tell us something about their times is a key one in so much metalinguistic discussion of *chav*. For example, the BBC's *History of Now* (2010b), a series of programmes reviewing the

'noughties' from the decade's end, made heavy use of words as a device around which to organise the programmes – talking head celebrities discussed particular words and words were used as a point of departure from which to move on to cultural phenomena – and as a visual device – the decade was represented as a three-dimensional space full of words and phrases, and *chav* was one such word.

And words were central to another BBC project; an attempt to create 'a portrait of the decade', based on BBC website viewers suggestions for 'words, people, events, objects and cultural highlights which … defined the Noughties' (BBC, 2010a). Susie Dent's name was put to the call for suggestions for words, on a webpage beginning as follows:

> Language, as an American lexicographer once neatly put it, "is an uncompromising mirror… an untouched record of the thoughts, feelings, successes, failures, and intent of the people".
> We are what we say, and as a shorthand summary of a single event or period in time, a word or phrase that came into prominence is hard to beat.

Again, words are promoted here as historical documents, as, in themselves, saying something of the times in which they were used, and, again *chav* was suggested to be a particularly salient word – indeed, among the twenty most important words of the decade – and included on the BBC's 'portrait of the decade' poster.

The idea that words can define a time – that the study of words is in itself a kind of social history – is central to the promotion of *chav* by the OUP. It is this idea that is promoted by the OUP press release, along with the more specific claim that Oxford University Press is particularly well positioned to undertake such study, to give us a 'report' on the language. *Chav*'s inclusion in the OED, as it is represented by OUP, is mediated by this concern with 'newness', represented as a news event and promoted in a press release. And the news, as promoted in the OUP press release, is not primarily

that there is anything interesting about *chav* itself, though that is part of it, but that OUP

is at the cutting-edge of the language. This is an example of the balance that Harris

(1983) writes of, 'between being "authoritative" and being "with-it"', being tipped in

the direction of being 'with-it', and the effect of this is that the relative caution of

Dent's discussion in *The Language Report* (2004) is lost in favour of an uncritical

celebration of *chav* as simply a cutting-edge, novel word.

3.4.3   The newspaper articles

On 19th October 2004, *The Sun, The Daily Mail, The Express, The Mirror, The Times,*

The Telegraph, The Independent, and *The Guardian* all ran stories reporting on the new

'word of the year'. The extent to which these articles focused on *chav* or on the past

words of the year varied, though all made some reference to both.

3.4.3.1 Definitions

Many of the articles give a definition of *chav*, but in none of them can this be seen as a

direct recontextualisation of a definition given in any of the OUP publications.

Young louts who wear cheap gold jewellery and Burberry baseball caps … [chav] refers to someone who wears "prison white" trainers and heavily branded sportswear and appears on ITV1's Trisha, perhaps like loutish lottery winner Michael Carroll. (The Mirror)

They are young, of course, and they hang around shopping centres and wear baseball caps, trainers, branded shirts and thick gold chains. (The Times)

Chavs are youngsters who love designer labels, especially Burberry caps, and wear fake bling-bling jewellery. (The Sun)

used for a low class youngster (The Sun)

> used to describe teenage louts who wear cheap gold jewellery, fake Burberry check and baseball caps as they swagger around shopping centres in gangs. (The Daily Star)
>
> a pejorative term for council estate fashions (The Daily Telegraph)
>
> used to describe youngsters who loiter in shopping centres and have a penchant for Burberry clothing, "prison-white" trainers and huge gold accessories (The Express)
>
> the term for baseball-capped, gold-chain-wearing habitués of shopping precincts (The Independent)
>
> Chav was a word coined to describe the spread of the illmannered underclass a rival to the American trailer trash which loves shellsuits, bling-bling jewellery and designer wear, especially the ubiquitous Burberry baseball cap. (The Daily Mail)
>
> Chav is the noun which describes young men who wear cheap gold jewellery and baseball caps and hang around in shopping centres all over Britain. (The Guardian)

Though these definitions vary, they do so primarily in terms of specificity. In a number of these definitions, for instance, the appearance of the people named by *chav* is further articulated in references to *Burberry*, *baseball caps*, *shellsuits*, *bling-bling*, *cheap gold jewellery*. This information is not from any of the OUP publications, so other sources – general knowledge, perhaps other texts such as the Chavscum website or *The Little Book of Chavs* (Bok, 2004) – have been drawn on in the newspapers' articulations of *chav*'s meaning.

The Sun and *The Daily Mail* both refer to class. For *The Sun*, a *chav* is *low class*. For *The Daily Mail*, a *chav* is a member of the *underclass*, a real group of people whose *spread* the word has been developed in response to. Again, this is additional information not in any of the OUP texts. More implicit references to class might be found in the references to appearances, and in what is a novelty in this intertextual chain as I have

constructed it, the frequent claims that a *chav* is someone who *hang[s] around in shopping centres* (claims which show the influence of Wallace and Spanner's *Chav!*, 2004; to be discussed in Chapter Five)

The OED's definition is not taken as authoritative in the newspaper reports; there is very little to suggest that these newspaper definitions draw on it at all. In most cases, the meaning of *chav* is articulated in relation to cultural references too specific to be used in a dictionary definition. The dictionary is not represented as an authority on the word's meaning, though its inclusion of *chav* is news nonetheless.

3.4.3.2 Buzzwords

What of the OUP's promotion of its research as cutting edge, and of its 'word of the year' list as revealing something of the social history of the past century? How is this represented in the newspaper articles? Four of the articles reproduce the OUP wordlist and all mention the 'words of the year', or the 'buzzword'. The OED's lexicographers, and Susie Dent, are represented as authorities on the direction of the language. Dent is directly quoted in six of the articles. And in each case the headline, which for Bell (1991) can be seen as the abstract of a news narrative, refers either to the OED's inclusion of *chav* or to its list of 101 words of the year. Certainly the OUP's promotion of itself as able to report on the cutting-edge of English is reproduced in the news articles.

3.4.3.3 An honour for *chavs*

A number of newspaper articles take the OUP's 'word of 2004' award as a tribute to real people. This is most apparent in *The Sun*: 'Chav culture is here to stay – after

blagging a tribute from dictionary compilers'. This is followed by a list of 'chav words' preceded by the words 'Here we offer a glimpse at how dictionaries might look in a decade'. The inclusion of *chav* in the dictionary is jokingly reformulated as the invasion of 'chav culture' into the supposedly authoritative work. Even the great OED has succumbed to the influence of the *chav*, *The Sun* article implies. A similar formulation of the word's inclusion in the OED is used in other articles:

> Love them or hate them 2004 officially belongs to Chavs – and they're word of the year.
> The Express
>
> It is enough to make a Chav feel so proud that he might even take up reading.
> Daily Mail
>
> Young louts who wear cheap gold jewellery and Burberry baseball caps are honoured in a book on English language out today.
> The Mirror
>
> Good news for chavs: they may be cool people soon (Headline)
> Chavs may be bad news for some. They are young, of course, and they hang around shopping centres and wear baseball caps, trainers, branded shirts and thick gold chains. But help and immortality of a sort are at hand.
> The Times
>
> Chav culture is here to stay – after blagging a tribute from dictionary compilers.
> …
> Here we offer a glimpse at how dictionaries might look in a decade by printing The Sun's guide to chav words.
> The Sun

Here, there is a representation of the OED as prestigious, not as an authority on word meaning – its definition of *chav* is ignored – but as a social authority, an arbiter on the prestige accorded to a social group. The inclusion of *chav* is represented as an ironic legitimation of a type of person, and this is a kind of person, as *The Daily Mail*'s comment implies, that is apparently very far removed from the status of the OED.

Neither the OED's prestige, nor the *chav*'s new found honour, though, are to be taken entirely seriously.

3.4.3.4 Critique

Susie Dent's discussion of *chav* in *The Language Report* is a cautious one. As noted above, she attributes criticism of *chav* to 'liberal circles' (2004; 143). But she is reported as putting forward stronger views on the problems with the word in a number of the newspapers. For instance, David Ward, in *The Guardian*, writes; '"I think it's a really horrible word, but it is quite a good example of a word that has burst out onto the scene," Ms Dent commented. "It is quite surprising in a way. It is one of quite a few social class labels that have emerged."' Dent's attributed reaction to *chav* is, at first personal – she considers it 'really horrible' – and later based on a judgement of the word's social reference. In *The Daily Mail*, Dent is represented as saying that *chav* 'is just one of the many new classist labels that have exploded this year'. So criticisms of the word are reproduced, but are not prominent in any articles, and are certainly less prominent than they are in Dent's *Language Report* discussion.

3.4.4 Summary

Chav was promoted, in late 2004, by the OUP as evidence of their up-to-date language research. This promotion was reported in a number of articles as a news event – the event being the OED's inclusion of *chav* and its attendant 'word of the year' status. In a number of articles, this was then represented as suggesting that the apparent social group to which *chav* was said to refer had been somehow officially recognised. *The Daily Mail*'s headline *Year of the Chav* provides an indication of this – the 'award' given by the OUP to a word is transferred to people.

There was no representation of the OED's definition of *chav*, suggesting that the dictionary's authority was used rather more strategically, exploiting the news value and humour in the bathetic clash between the prestige of the OED and the supposed referent of *chav*, rather than as an absolute authority on what *chav* means.

3.5   Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have discussed four dictionary definitions of *chav*, suggesting that these share a basically reocentric definition of *chav* as a particular type of person – a young person, who dresses and acts in a particular way, and is of variably determinate, but always low, social status – and that in the Brewer's definition in particular, more information about the word took the form of further encyclopedic description of this apparent type of person. In this respect the dictionary definitions – texts of a Genre ostensibly concerned with language itself – serve to legitimise a resource used in social identification, and thus a particular Discourse of classification, one that draws links between class, age and appearances, but, in most cases is not much more specifically articulated than this. An exception to this lack of Discursive specificity comes in the *Brewer*'s definition, where more particular elements of both the Underclass and Lifestyle Discourses are articulated, specifically the representation of public difference as personal choice, perhaps as what Bauman calls 'choice incompetence' (1998; 71).

The OED definition was of particular importance, since it was accompanied by Dent's *Language Report*, in which *chav* was named 'word of 2004'. In the second part of this chapter, I discussed the intertextual relations that brought this claim into the newspapers, arguing that, through the OUP's promotion of *chav* as a new and important word, and the newspapers reproduction of this claim (and, in some cases the reformulation of this

as an ironic claim about a particular type of person) *chav* was promoted as a 'buzzword' for a new social phenomenon. Whether the consequences of this promotion extend further than the articles printed on 19th October 2004 is another question, and one to be considered in the coming chapters. What is clear though is that in defining *chav* the OED's lexicographers did much more than simply reflect on linguistic practice, they played an active role in the historical semantic development of the resource.

This chapter has highlighted the role of the dictionaries, and particularly the OED as an 'elite' institution (Van Dijk, 2008), in making *chav* the resource it became and thus in shaping public discourse. From a social semiotic point of view these publications contributed to the development of *chav* as a resource, promoting and legitimising its use in public discourse more generally, and thus promoting and legitimising a particular resource for identification.

4.   Critiques of *chav*

4.1   Introduction

In the previous chapter, on dictionaries, I discussed a particular kind of 'verbal hygiene' (Cameron, 1995) that took *chav* as its focus. The significant force of this attention was somewhat celebratory, promoting the word as a novel, humorous resource for the identification of people in contemporary Britain. Very little of this attention was *critical* in the sense used in critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2001); that is to say that there was little comment on the ways in which the resource might be seen as ideological, as contributing to social domination. In this chapter, though, I turn to the more critical verbal hygiene found in both academic and media discourse.

In concentrating on critical commentary I aim to establish the grounds on which public criticisms of *chav* are made, and I wish to do so for two reasons. First, because these grounds are interesting in themselves – they provide a way of understanding ideas about why language might be bad, specifically, why we might object to particular words, and as such, might be seen as related to more general ideas about how language functions in society. Second, I expect that, in my analysis of a broader sample of newspaper uses of *chav*, I will come across a great deal of metalinguistic use, and my analysis in this section is thus intended to provide a framework for the analysis of these cases.

My data in this chapter comes from academic articles that comment on *chav* (some of which are also discussed in Chapter Two), as well as a number of other pieces of writing on the word. These other pieces include broadsheet opinion pieces from *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Guardian*, papers published by the Joseph Rowntree

Foundation, an article from the *Fabian Review* and a popular cultural studies book. These are listed, in chronological order, in Table 4.1. I offer these pieces as fairly representative of the 'liberal circles' in which Dent (2004) claims the word has caused 'outrage', though, as will become clear, they are by no means politically homogeneous.

Table 4.1. Texts discussed in Chapter Four

Title	Author	Publication	Date
'Sneer nation'	Oliver Bennett	*The Independent*	28/01/04
'Who are you to laugh at chavs?'	Johann Hari	*The Independent*	05/11/04
Mind the Gap	Ferdinand Mount	[Book]	2004
'Yeah but, no but, why I'm proud to be a chav'	Julie Burchill	*The Times*	18/02/05
'Milk Bars, Starbucks and the Uses of Literacy'	Joe Moran	*Cultural Studies*	2006
'The "chav" phenomenon: consumption, media and the construction of a new underclass'	Keith Hayward and Majid Yar	*Crime, Media, Culture*	2006
'Displaced masculinities: chavs, youth and class in the post-industrial city'	Anoop Nayak	*Sociology*	2006
'Understanding attitudes to poverty in the UK: getting the public's attention'	Sarah Castell and Julian Thompson	*Joseph Rowntree Foundation*	2007

'So now we've finally got our very own "white trash"'	John Harris	*The Guardian*	06/05/07
'Stop using chav: it's deeply offensive'	Tom Hampson	*The Fabian Review* (also published in *The Guardian*)	Summer 2008
'Constructions of the working-class "Other" among urban, white, middle-class youth: "chavs", subculture and the valuing of education'	Sumi Hollingworth and Katya Williams	*Journal of Youth Studies*	2009
'The bubble of privilege. Young, privately educated women talk about class'	Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton	*British Journal of Sociology of Education*	2010

I have selected these texts as relatively powerful interventions in debates about *chav*. Each comes from a field – academia, the national print media – that has a degree of power over the agenda of public debate. In Van Dijk's terms, these are all instances of 'elite' discourse (2008). Just as the inclusion of *chav* in the OED was a metalinguistic act of some linguistic significance, it might be expected that the commentary of academics and the national media is of significance for the use and meaning of semiotic resources.

4.2   Verbal hygiene

As discussed in Chapter Two, *verbal hygiene* is something that happens 'whenever people reflect on language in a critical (in the sense of "evaluative") way' (Cameron 1995: 9); it is the practice of evaluating and commenting on the resources and practices that we and others use to communicate. This is a practice that is prominent in both

academic and media social commentary, where, as Cameron (1995) points out, debates about language are common. In Chapter Two, for instance, I discussed the case of the word *class* in a draft of a speech by Harriet Harman. Such debates perhaps indicate a widespread acceptance that the resources we use to communicate have consequences, that discourse has actual social effects. And such debates provide a field exploitable by newspapers, increasingly sold as sources of commentary on the cultural issues of everyday life (Keeble, 2001; Conboy, 2007; see Chapter Six).

The critical metalinguistic opinions of the left-wing and liberal media are often referred to as 'political correctness' (Hughes, 2010). However, I avoid this as an analytical term for the same reasons as Cameron (1995). Firstly, this is because in so much discussion of 'political correctness', a contrast is set up between 'natural' language use and the artificial attempts at 'linguistic engineering' of the politically correct. Hughes, for instance, contrasts 'symbiotic change', referring to 'semantic and lexical changes that reflect changed realities', with 'mediated changes', 'brought about by vested interests exploiting the power of the media to introduce new words or meanings' (2010; 26). 'Virtually all' of the changes associated with political correctness 'are mediated: words like *abled*, *waitron*, and *wimmin* had no semantic history prior to their induction into the vocabulary of political correctness' (ibid.; 27). Such a position is not acceptable from a Social Semiotic standpoint, from which no distinction can be made between 'natural' and 'engineered' language change; communication is a fundamentally social phenomenon and thus always affected by the actions of people (Hodge and Kress, 1988). Secondly, the phrase 'political correctness', though it is generally held to have originated in left-wing politics, has, for most of its recent history, been one more likely to be used by opponents of the supposed phenomenon than by the feminists or anti-

racists advocating linguistic change, and it thus has strong negative connotations, and is largely defined against such progressive groups (Cameron, 1995; 122-127). This, in recent years, seems to have been the case despite the fact that metalinguistic criticism has certainly not been restricted to the political left; as mentioned in Chapter Two, hostility to the word *class*, for example, has come from the right (Cannadine, 1998).

In academia, the recognition of the socially constitutive function of communication is sometimes referred to as the 'discursive- ' or 'linguistic turn', and it extends beyond departments dedicated to languages and linguistics to the humanities and social sciences more generally. Many of the Social Semiotic concerns discussed in Chapter Two, for instance, are common to research in other fields (as pointed out by Stubbs, 1997). Berger and Luckmann's (1991) social constructionism, Foucault's notion (1972) of discourse, and Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory have all been influential.[13] Such research, though, tends not to focus on the material-semiotic production of the socially-constitutive Discourses with which they are concerned, and thus to offer much less detailed explanations of how language use comes to have its constructive role than Critical Discourse Analysis or Social Semiotics (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002) Despite this, the arguments made about the importance of *chav* are entirely continuous with the kinds of arguments made in Social Semiotics and Critical Discourse Analysis.

4.3   The criticisms

There are four main critical arguments made in opposition to *chav*:

1.   It is *offensive* to a particular group

---

[13] Certainly these ideas from the humanities and social sciences have been highly influential on certain fields of linguistics too, particularly Critical Discourse Analysis and Social Semiotics. See Phillips and Jorgensen 2002, or Stubbs 1997 for accounts of the ground shared by CDA and other theories of social construction and discourse analysis.

2.   It is *symptomatic* of a social or personal problem

3.   It is *instrumental* in class conflict or discrimination

4.   It is an element in a problematic *scheme of representation*

These arguments are certainly not mutually exclusive – they are often closely related to each other – but, in what follows, I use them as a guide for my discussion of the metalinguistic opposition.

Related to these arguments is variation in the extent to which criticisms of *chav* take or challenge a *reocentric* stance to the word (Hutton and Harris, 2007), whereby the word is taken to refer directly to a particular kind of person in the world. Some writers are critical of those who use the word, but take it to fairly straightforwardly identify a particular kind of person; others challenge this reocentricity.

4.3.1   Offensiveness

It is common to find criticism of *chav* on the grounds that it is offensive to a particular group of people. This criticism underpins Hampson's (2008) call to *ban* the word. Hampson, editor of the left-liberal *Fabian Review*, as part of the publication's 'manifesto on class', writes that *chav* 'is deeply offensive to a largely voiceless group'. There exists a 'hierarchy of offensiveness', Hampson claims, and somewhere in this hierarchy, a 'threshold of acceptability'. So Hampson suggests that the acceptability of a word relates directly to how offensive it is. *Faggot* and *pikey* are both above the threshold and highly offensive, and *chav* 'is way above that threshold'; it is 'sneering and patronising'. The offensiveness of *chav* is particularly problematic for Hampson for three reasons. First, it is very widely used, 'and very often used by people who are

otherwise rather progressive in their politics'. Secondly, it is offensive about a 'voiceless group'; when people are offensive towards gay people 'we do at least have Stonewall to defend us,' Hampson writes; 'who does the white working class have?' Thirdly, 'it is distancing'. I will return to this third point when discussing *instrumental* criticisms.

It is not only those on the political left who find *chav* problematic. The conservative writer Ferdinand Mount, in his book *Mind the Gap*, sees the word as 'malevolent' (2004; 45). Of the Chavscum website, he writes '[t]he hatred almost explodes off the computer screen' (2004; 45). Mount's criticism of *chav* appears in the context of a book length argument on class in contemporary Britain, his specific argument being that economic equality is unfeasible, but that equality of opportunity is desirable, and that one of the impediments to such equality is the fact that the people who he calls 'the uppers' see the people who he calls 'the downers' as inferior, and dislikeable. Using words like *chav* is one of the ways in which the uppers are rude to the downers, and thus one of the ways in which 'the gap' is maintained and widened. So, though Mount is concerned with civility, his is an ultimately *instrumental* argument.

Cameron writes of the appeals to 'civility' made by many non-radical advocates of feminist verbal hygiene. The idea that language 'should not give offence to actual and potential addressees', she claims, is a belief 'that most people can be expected to hold already' (1995: 134) and thus appears to be a sound basis on which to argue for linguistic change. This is the principle on which the arguments discussed in this subsection are based. But in none of my texts does the argument stop there. Civility, for

both Hampson and Mount is important for instrumental reasons; using offensive language creates distance. I will return to this below.

4.3.2   Symptomatic

The symptomatic argument draws attention to the word's user, suggesting that use of *chav* is the result of some underlying insecurity, either personal or social.

Julie Burchill puts forward a clearly symptomatic argument, writing: 'I've noticed that calling people "chavs" says far, far more about the caller than it does the called. And, amusingly, it pinpoints the exact area which the name-caller is most anxious about' (*The Times* 18/02/05). Burchill lists a few such areas: those who 'hiss on ceaselessly about how slaggy chavs are' are likely to be sexually frustrated; those with easy, well-paid jobs 'will bang on about how idle chavs are'. In each case, a particular area of shame or frustration is represented by Burchill as being the cause of use of the word. Here, using *chav* is a symptom of a personal condition, one that Burchill does not conceptualise in terms of social conditions. Someone calls another person a *chav* because they are personally insecure.

Other writers suggest use of *chav* is symptomatic of 'class hatred' or 'snobbery'. For Hampson the use of *chav* reveals hidden class feeling; 'it betrays a deep and revealing level of class hatred' (2008). Johann Hari, in *The Independent* (05/11/04), writes 'whenever I hear the term chav, I hear naked and defensive class hate'. But the word's users, for Hari, avoid explicit recognition of this hate: '[o]nly a handful of privileged people will ever admit to themselves that they fear and hate poor people'; *chav* is one of the 'words and phrases that make it possible for privileged people to laugh at and hate the poor without admitting to themselves that this is what they are doing.' The hate is

not recognised by those that hate. *Chav*, for Hari, allows the hate to be expressed without being recognised as such. Writers who identify use of *chav* as a personal symptom thus place themselves in the role of the popular psychotherapist, able to read the signs of the inner states of others, while claiming that those that they read are unaware of, or unable to admit to this state.

Other writers read *chav* as a social symptom. The website Chavscum, for Bennett in *The Independent*, is 'a vent for society's toxins'. This is a symptomatic position with a slightly different emphasis. The condition is not a personal one, as it is for Burchill, but a social one. And this social symptomatic tendency is developed in academic form in Nayak's (2006) ethnographic research in Newcastle. Nayak studies a group of young men who he identifies as 'Real Geordies', and identifies with the 'respectable' working class. The men use *chav* (it is, in fact, more often *charver*, but Nayak treats the two words as simply dialectal variants so his arguments apply to *chav*, the word chosen for the article's title, too) to refer to the 'rough' working class. This use, and the scheme of representation associated with it (discussed below), arises because of the precariousness of the *real Geordies*' position within a changing class structure:

> For if the Charvers are portrayed as dirty, violent, impoverished and undeserving this is precisely because the *Real Geordies* are attempting to be understood as clean, thrifty, skilled and upwardly mobile….
>
> … [T]he Real Geordies only serve to reveal their own class insecurity, clinging on tooth and nail to the last vestiges of white respectability in the post-industrial moment. … [T]he sophisticated performance of class disavowal only served to illustrate their own class pretensions and seemingly unarticulated fears of slipping back materially, culturally and spatially into non-labouring lifestyles.
>
> (Nayak, 2006; 825)

In Nayak's article, the representational, to be discussed below, is subordinated to the symptomatic, but it is a much more sophisticated symptomatic analysis than Burchill's,

understanding personal insecurities as being ultimately social insecurities, in a manner consonant with Sennett and Cobb's (1972) *Hidden Injuries of Class*. For Nayak, class categorisation using *chav* is a symptom of class as a real, lived-in phenomenon.

4.3.3   Instrumental

From the instrumental perspective, *chav* is a problem because it is used to do something – specifically to create social distance either between people or between groups.

The 'distancing' effect of *chav* is an element of Hampson's (2008) account. It is, he claims 'perhaps [the] most dangerous' effect of the word; 'the middle classes have always used language to distinguish themselves from those a few rungs below them on the ladder' and this is what *chav* is used to do. Hollingworth and Williams (2009) and Maxwell and Aggleton (2010) adopt a similar interpretation of use of *chav* by middle-class teenagers, the former's informants state-educated, the latter's private. For Maxwell and Aggleton, *chav* is a means by which 'young women … demarcate[] themselves from others' (2010: 7). In one case, this demarcation is made between one of the young women and her past self, before she moved to the private school in which Maxwell and Aggleton's interviews take place. The young woman, who they call Ellie, says '[when] I came I was a bit of a chav to be honest' but that she had recently become 'really posher' (ibid.). Hollingworth and Williams present use of *chav* as a means by which young people 'create classed boundaries between "us and them"' (2009: 468), suggesting that aesthetic, performative and moral boundaries are created in the construction of a 'working-class "Other"' (ibid.: 479); *chavs* are said to look different, behave differently and have a distinct value system. In making this argument, Hollingworth and Williams are subordinating the *representational* to the *instrumental*. A particular representation is

important, they suggest, because of the 'Othering' work it performs. Some of Hollingworth and Williams' interviewees – those who go to school in multicultural London – do not use *chav*, and the authors suggest that this is because they have no need for it; 'the presence of larger numbers of minority ethnic young people in the schools almost acts as a 'buffer zone' between the white middle classes and their classed Other, the white working classes' (ibid.: 471), a buffer zone that renders *chav* instrumentally useless.

Returning briefly to Nayak's (2006) research in Newcastle, *chav* is instrumental for his informants too, serving to distinguish the 'respectable' from the 'rough' working class, but as discussed above, the very need for such an instrument is portrayed as a symptom of class by Nayak.

Instrumental arguments see *chav* as a way of doing something and thus use a framework that has much in concept with the CDA concept of Genre (Fairclough, 2003; see Chapter Two). Though this notion of language as action is not so theoretically developed in the media or in the social science texts discussed here as it is in CDA work, the concept is there implicitly. This suggests a continuity between the concepts of CDA and those of less theoretically developed[14] forms of verbal hygiene.

4.3.4   Representational

What I am calling representational arguments are those that situate *chav* within some scheme of representation and argue that this representation is problematic because it is false. (It might also be problematic for offensiveness, symptomatic or instrumental reasons.)

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[14] At least in terms of semiotic theory.

John Harris, in *The Guardian* (06/03/07), asks; 'How else to understand [*chav*] than as more evidence of our embrace of an increasingly American social model, in which there is opportunity for all – apart from the undeserving rump too feckless to seize it?' This is one of the key representational tendencies criticised by critics of *chav*; one that suggests that there exists a kind of person – the *chav* – who does not, and does not want to contribute to mainstream society. For Castell and Thompson (2007), *chav* takes a particular position within the public's perceptual map of British society, as a word to refer to those who have a 'free-rider mentality' and are driven by their own actions, unlike the 'deserving poor' who are seen as driven by wider social forces. The position taken by *chav* is a 'contradiction' for Castell and Thompson, and needs to be challenged.

For Nayak (2006), too, *chav* is part of a scheme distinguishing between the respectable and the undeserving, or 'rough' poor – conceptualised as distinguished by 'free rider' or 'contributor' mentalities by Castell and Thompson (Fig.3.1.). And for Hayward and Yar (already mentioned in Chapter Two), *chav* 'represents a popular reconfiguration of the underclass idea' (2006; 10):

> The current discourse on the 'chav' finds its ideological mode of articulation by attributing to *individual cultural choices* what in fact can be seen as the outcome of a cruel capitalist perversity: the production, on the one hand, of a social strata excluded from full productive participation in the neoliberal economy, and on the other the relentless dissemination of messages that link social worth and well-being to one's ability to consume at all costs. It is precisely this dissimulation at the heart of the 'chav' discourse that, we hold needs to be exposed and critiqued.
>
> (2006; 24-25)

Moran (2006) shares this criticism. *Chav* is used to name 'a figure conjured up by others to suggest that the poor are stupid, feckless and profligate, and therefore deserve their poverty' (ibid.; 569). But where the above authors relate this to distinctions

between the deserving and undeserving poor, for Moran, it is also the prevalence of lifestyle segmentation related ways of representing social difference that is particularly problematic (as discussed in Chapter Two).

The models of language and the Discourses about society that underlie the representational critiques here have been discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. Here I give them a briefer treatment, in order to set them alongside the other tendencies in critical metalinguistic discourse on *chav*.

The representational critique, like the instrumental, is continuous with the concepts of CDA, in this case, with the concept of Discourse. Again, non-CDA work implicitly adopts the ideas about relations between language and social life that are used in CDA. Of course, these texts are from critical broadsheet newspaper commentary and academic work and thus, in terms of social practice, close to CDA research. In Chapter Six, it will be one of my aims to assess the extent to which such forms of criticism are found in newspapers more broadly.

4.3.5   Reocentricity

Some critics of *chav* challenge *reocentric* assumptions regarding the word. This is most clear in Moran (2006). Moran, as quoted above, writes that *chav* 'is … conjured up' (2006: 569). *Chav*, for Moran, can not be identified as a real-world phenomenon, an actual type of person.

Julie Burchill (18/02/05), on the other hand, in her defence of *chavs*, does not reject reocentricity. She comes close to an attempt at reclamation of the word, writing; 'When Dominic Mohan – of The Sun, no less! – says … that I'm defending chavs because I am

a chav, I felt a deep glow of pride. My people! – right wrong, or falling down drunk with vomit down their velour'.

Johann Hari's piece in *The Independent* is one of the most consistently and powerfully critical attacks on the word. His argument that *chav* is part of a false myth used by 'the privileged' to protect their own positions takes in the *symptomatic*, *instrumental* and *representational* positions. However, he writes:

> Britain's biggest social problems – from poverty to addiction and unemployment – have been played out on chavs, and they have coped as best they can. The "underclass" routinely derided by rich politicians and journalists is the direct product of the decades of Thatcherism that rolled out unemployment and slashed school budgets and provision for the poor across Britain. If one of their coping strategies is to fetishise a few silly designer labels, isn't that forgivable.

> (Hari, *The Independent* 05/11/04)

Here, the *chav* is not simply a word, nor is it a figment of anyone's imagination; Hari uses it to refer to a particular kind of person, and instead of, or as well as, challenging the word, he defends the person. It is notable that, in doing so, Hari refers to '[t]he "underclass"', distancing himself from this term, and attributing it to 'rich politicians and journalists'. But when he writes that this is the product of Thatcherism, it is not the idea but the apparent real-world phenomenon that he is naming.

McCulloch et al. (2006) also adopt *chav* in their own discourse. Theirs is an anthropological study of the social class backgrounds of groups that the authors call 'youth subcultures' in Edinburgh and Newcastle. One such subculture, they call *chavs*. They find this group to be from lower socio-economic class backgrounds (based on parents' occupations) than the *goths* and *skaters* that they identify, and, importantly, that, unlike the *skaters* or *goths*, '[m]embers of this [chav] group did not associate themselves with the name and did not feel that they were one homogeneous group'

(ibid.; 548). Despite this inconsistency in identification, the authors continue to refer to their *chavs* as *chavs*, writing, for example, 'There is a wide range of social policy areas encompassing education, welfare, housing and concerns with crime and social order, where a fuller understanding of 'Chav culture' may be helpful' (ibid.; 554). To some, though, this social concern must be undermined by the fact that when identifying their participants it was the terms of the socio-economically 'higher' *skaters* and *goths* that were reproduced, while a reocentric notion of *chav* identity was constructed that did not correspond to the self-identification of the apparent group that it was used to categorise.

In Hari's and Burchill's accounts, some distinction is made between the representational utility of the word and something like its evaluative accent (Volosinov, 1973), or between the word's *nominal* and *virtual* value (Jenkines, 2004). *Chavs* exist, but the negative connotations, or the specific kinds of negative connotations given to the word are wrong. For others – Moran (2006), for instance – *chav* is absolutely problematic. A similar debate can be found in relation to the words *underclass* and *white trash*, both frequently mentioned in relation to *chav*. *Underclass* is a politically contentious word; as discussed in Chapter Two, it is associated with a neoliberal political stance, and the existence of such a phenomenon is contested by many on the left (Newman 1996; Bauman 1998; Levitas 2005). However, Lister (1996) claims, there are also those who suggest there is some utility in the word, in highlighting the depth of inequality in contemporary societies, and that it should be reclaimed by the left, but as a structural, rather than an individual phenomenon. Lister (1996) criticises this position, suggesting that the term carries too many representational associations that can not be adopted by critics on the left and should thus be avoided altogether.

4.4   Proposals for change

Most criticisms of *chav* make no explicit positive proposals for change, though an implicit warning against using the word is likely to be apparent to most readers. The two exceptions to this are Castell and Thompson's (2007) paper for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and Hampson's (2008) article for the *Fabian Review*. Both of these make explicit proposals.

Castell and Thompson (2007), as discussed above, adopt a representational view of *chav*. The word is problematic for them because it contributes to the promotion of the idea that 'the disadvantaged in society are freeloading' (2007; 16). Countering this view, they claim, represents a 'communication challenge': 'to present, in a motivating way, a person who is minded to be a "contributor" but who is nonetheless poor, someone who is personally driven and motivated, but suffers adversely as a result of wider social forces' (ibid.).

> We suggest creating an overarching, shared definition of the kind of person who suffers from current social ills. A new collective noun might help, though we will need to avoid victimising those we describe (such as the pejorative 'chav'). An example of a head-turning, lighter approach might be the character of a 'LOLI' (low opportunity, low income) in the popular imagination, through blogs, the press and other channels. Where the rest of us get opportunities, this character would simply not get the breaks the rest of us get, or not be in a position to take advantage of them when they occur.
>
> (Castell and Thompson, 2007; 24)

For Castell and Thompson, representations of social difference matter, as do the particular words used in such representations, and it should be a matter of public policy to create more favourable representations of the poor by introducing a 'new collective noun'. From a materialist perspective, such an argument is easily criticised: it is superficial, addressing not poverty but how we see poverty; and, in any case, the

meanings of words cannot be guaranteed – in a society such as ours, how could pejoration of *LOLI* possibly be avoided? Perhaps such idealism is also counter-productive, harmful to the lengthy, difficult process of political change. This is a concern expressed by Hall (1994), for whom the effect of such relatively superficial change might be to turn people against progressive politics. But perhaps this is a risk worth taking. The success of the New Right, for Hall, is in part the success of a cultural strategy that did precisely such things as seeking to alter representations (see, for instance, my discussion of the underclass in Chapter Two). It seems to me that, though politically intended semiotic regulation is certainly not the *only* way to bring about change, there is no need to reject it outright. Rather, what is perhaps needed is, as Hall (ibid.) suggests, an approach that understands the cultural and material location of semiotic activity. The relative success of the verbal hygiene practices of feminism as a broader political movement might perhaps be testament to this (Cameron, 1995), though the extent to which linguistic strategies have contributed to increased social equality, if at all, remains an open question.

Hampson (2008) makes the strongest call for action. His suggestion comes as one of the points of the *Fabian Review*'s four point manifesto on class. His piece is titled 'Stop using chav: it's deeply offensive' and he concludes it with the following:

> The BBC should specify the word in its guidelines for programme makers and take class discrimination seriously. The new Commission for Equality and Human Rights should show that they understand class discrimination is an issue that can have effects as detrimental as racial or gender bias.

> But more importantly, we must stop using it ourselves. From now on – embarrassingly PC though it may seem – I shall audibly 'tut tut' and wince whenever I hear it used. You should too.

> (Hampson, 2008)

So Hampson advocates official recognition of class discrimination, and implies that use of *chav* should be seen as a form of such discrimination. This official recognition, though, he subordinates to the action that 'we' should take, showing disapproval whenever it is used. It is worth noting that Hampson advocates nothing more powerful than this disapproval; he doesn't suggest, for instance, that his readers should argue with anyone or explain why using *chav* is wrong, or break off all contact with the user of the word. Rather, it is something that should be subtly disapproved of. For Hampson, then, it is through our everyday interactions that *chav* can be most usefully challenged, and this reflects his argument that it is everyday use of *chav* itself that is dangerous.

Hampson also notes that this reaction might seem 'embarrassingly PC'. 'Political correctness' is something that Hampson, then, is not keen to align himself with, though he is keen to advocate linguistic change.

The *Guardian* columnist Zoe Williams, while herself critical of use of *chav*, argues that proposals such as Hampson's are counter-productive. She asks why comedy based around the word has been so successful: 'It's not the deprivation that's hilarious,' she argues, 'it's the leftwing delicacy, the many taboos. So the last thing we should be doing is reinforcing those taboos, it just makes these snobbish words even more powerful, even more delightfully transgressive and even more destructive'. For Williams, use of *chav* is not an attempt to establish superiority but to break taboos, and legislating on the word or complaining about its use only strengthens such taboos and thus makes use of the word more enjoyable. Williams' argument is similar to Hall's (1994) concern that progressive verbal hygiene might be politically counter-productive, but it is more specific, and what she proposes echoes something like a Freudian account

of tendentious jokes. For Freud (2002), such jokes work by release of repressed feelings, repressed either within the individual psyche or by social authority. We don't recognise jokes as being such because we think there is something funny about the form itself, but this is really just a 'trigger' for the release of our repressed feelings. So, Williams suggests that the more *chav* becomes socially repressed, the funnier it will become, the more there will be to be gained by relief from repression. But it is worth asking whether Williams would make the same case against disapproving of *nigger* or *faggot*. Are jokes about *chavs* ultimately jokes about 'leftwing delicacy'? This is surely difficult to determine, but the issue of *chav* 'humour' will be one to which I return.

4.5   Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed a number of prominent public criticisms of the word *chav* made by academics, think-tank researchers and cultural commentators employed by the media. The different arguments taken by these critics suggest that it is not just how the social world is that comes to the fore in such verbal hygiene practices, but also what the role of language is in the world. And no one stance on what this role is dominates. I have argued that four, very broadly defined and not mutually exclusive positions are discernible in the texts discussed in this chapter. Criticisms of *chav* are made on the grounds that it is offensive, symptomatic, instrumental in social relations, or part of a problematic scheme of representation. The first of these arguments is, in these texts, not made alone but as part of an instrumental criticism of the use of chav, though it is intuitively not difficult to conceive of it being used alone. The other tendencies intertwine in such ways as to be dependent on each other in various ways. For Hayward and Yar (2006), for instance, a false scheme of representation is ultimately problematic for instrumental reasons.

My intention, in analysing the tendencies in academic writing on *chav* alongside print journalism has not been to suggest at any equivalence between the two fields other than in the areas discussed, where very similar arguments are made about the word. However, my media texts have been limited here to those that I identified as making the significant arguments in establishing liberal disapproval of *chav*. How representative of, or influential on media discourse more generally such views have been is not clear from the texts themselves. So, though, continuities have been identified between the critical terms of CDA, those used in academia more generally and the grounds on which some in the media have critiqued *chav*, it is difficult to assess how widespread influential the verbal hygiene practices discussed in this chapter might have been. This question will arise again in Chapter Six.

As with chapter Three, this chapter has demonstrated the existence of practices of semiotic regulation in public discourse. Where the use of *chav* in the dictionaries added to the stock of resources for domination of those identified as *chavs*, legitimising the word and promoting it into widespread public use, the use of *chav* in these texts was largely to question such domination. As Bourdieu (1984, 1991) and others suggest, the resources in which class is made are here being negotiated, the resources of class identification themselves subject to struggle.

5   *Chav* humour books

5.1   Introduction

The previous two chapters have been concerned with uses of *chav* that are, at least ostensibly, metalinguistic. I now turn to a Genre in which *chav* is not used in this way, but as a resource for *stereotypical identification* (Jenkins, 2004); a shift from discourse about language to discourse about people. These are short, inexpensive books of jokes or 'humorous' pastiche sold in the humour section or close to the till in high street shops – what the publishers of some of these call 'impulse-buy humour books' (Crombie-Jardine, 2010). In this chapter, I investigate the use of *chav* in two of these books; *The Little Book of Chavs* (Bok, 2004) and *Chav! A User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class* (Wallace and Spanner, 2004).

I aim to highlight the following tendencies:

- The articulation of the social semiotics of *chav*; clothing, ways of speaking, material behaviours are all articulated as semiotic resources which ostensibly say something about the people with whom they are associated, about *chavs*.

- The implicit and explicit suggestion that *chavs* are rule-governed; a number of textual strategies are used which suggest that the behaviour of *chavs* is entirely predictable and rule-governed.

- The ironic representation of the *chav* point of view; *positive shading* (Simpson, 1993) is used to represent an ostensibly *chav* point of view, which serves to

suggest that the internal properties of the *chav* are as predictable and knowable as the external.

- The distinction between readers and *chavs*; for the most part, readers are aligned with 'normal people' who are distinguished from *chavs*, but this relationship is not fixed.

All of these are tendencies that might be seen as making a contribution to identification through stereotyping, but, as noted in Chapter Two, stereotyping is often closely related to the Discourses of *administrative allocation*, and I discuss this here in relation to a final tendency:

- Engagement with contemporary Discourses on class and exclusion; the above tendencies all contribute to the books' stereotyping, but this stereotyping is also related to particular identifiable Discourses on class.

Before discussing each of these points, I discuss the texts in relation to Genre.

5.2   'Impulse-buy humour books'

'Impulse-buy humour books' is the description of this Genre provided by Crombie-Jardine, publishers of *The Little Book of Chavs* series. Crombie-Jardine 'a very small publishing company specializing in impulse-buy humour and gift books for the adult market' (Crombie Jardine, 2010), published *The Little Book of Chavs* (*TLBOC*; Bok, 2004a) in 2004. This title sold extremely well and was republished in 2005 as a second edition. Much of the material within *TLBOC* was reproduced in the 2006 *The Chav Guide to Life* (Bok, 2006b). Crombie-Jardine have also published *The Little Book of Chav Speak* (Bok, 2004b) and *The Little Book of Chav Jokes* (Bok, 2006a). All of these

books are listed on the publisher's website as 'topical and fun Little Books' (ibid.), alongside such publications as *The Little Book of Neds*, *The Little Book of Goths*, *The Little Book of ASBOs,* and *Shag Yourself Slim* and *The World's Rudest Place Names*. Such books are very inexpensive. I bought my copy of *The Little Book of Chavs* for 50 pence, in a high street discount bookshop.

The Little Book of Chavs is the Crombie-Jardine book on which I will focus my analysis. I choose this text because it was the first of the impulse-buy *chav* humour books, and because it is broader in scope than *The Little Book of Chav Speak* or *The Little Book of Chav Jokes*. It was also the biggest seller of these publications.

I also investigate the discourse of another book, *Chav! A User's Guide to Britain's New Ruling Class* (Wallace and Spanner, 2004). This is a longer book, published in hardback and more expensive (RRP £9.99). *Chav!* is written by the creators of the Chavscum website, mentioned in Chapter One, and much of the material within it is based on, or directly copied from, material on that website. Though the price of this book means that it is slightly less 'impulse-buy', it too is marketed as 'humour' by its publishers Bantam Press. Bantam is an imprint of Random House that specialises in 'Humour' books, including, alongside *Chav!*, titles such as *Pussy: for cats that should know better, Men: a user's guide,* and *The Parental Advisory Manual*.

In analysing these books, I am analysing texts that form part of a Genre that is explicitly marked as humorous, and related to other texts in which this humour derives from the rudeness, or inappropriateness of the material within. In the case of the particular texts at hand, it would seem that their humour derives largely from their stereotypical representations. The covers of both books clearly display stylised stereotypical features

of 'chavs' (Fig. 5.1 [image of *Chavs*! cover redacted]). The immediately relevant identification practice here is not one of administrative allocation, but of stereotyping, and it is one of extreme, perhaps self-conscious stereotyping – a Genre that can be seen as implicated in what Hutcheon (1994) calls *ironic discursive practice*. Readers of these texts to fully participate in the discursive practice of which they are a part – to 'get' them – must understand them as *ironic*, not to be taken seriously.
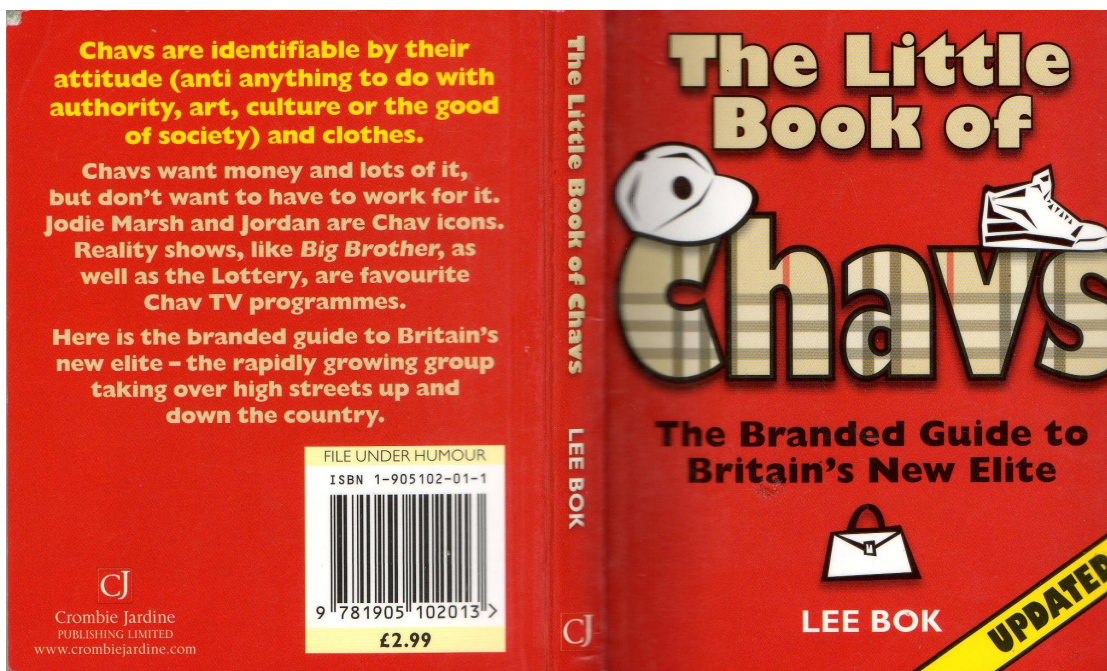
Fig 5.1 The Little Book of Chavs (Bok, 2004a), front and back cover

At the time that these books were published they were by no means the only representations of such 'ironic' stereotypes. The television sketch comedies *Little Britain* (BBC 2003-2006) and *The Catherine Tate Show* (BBC 2004-2006) both included hugely popular characters that, though not explicitly identified as *chavs* by their creators, were often called *chavs* in the media. In the extract taken from *The Express*, below, the *Little Britain* character Vicky Pollard is identified as *the Queen of Chav*:

> And, of course, the Queen of Chav herself, single teenage mum and persistent shoplifter Vicky ("yeah but, no but, yeah but…") Pollard.
> *The Express* 25/10/04

The BBC's webpage for *Little Britain* displays a picture of Vicky Pollard and the description of the character below.

> Vicky Pollard is your common-or-garden teenage delinquent, the sort you can see hanging around any number of off licences in Britain, trying to persuade people going inside to buy them 10 fags and a bottle of White Lightening.
>
> BBC, 2005

Though she is not explicitly identified using the word *chav* by the BBC, the similarities between the image and description of Pollard and those used to represent *chavs* (see, for more detail, section 5.3.3 below), as well as the identification of her as such in newspapers suggest that these 'chav humour' books have to be seen as part of a wider phenomenon, a tendency in comedy towards class stereotypes that has been commented on by Tyler (2008).

Since the publication of these books, and the peak in the media's use of *chav* in 2004 and 2005, similar comedy characters have been created and explicitly identified as *chavs* by their creators. The BBC's *Armstrong and Miller Show* (2007 to present) includes such a sketch:

> Miller is particularly fond of "the chav pilots", moustachioed Second World War fly-boys talking Nough- ties street slang: "That came about when we were thinking what if teenagers today were the teenagers of the Battle of Britain. The result was this brilliant mix of two random ideas that suddenly tessellate."
>
> *The Times*, 20/10/07

5.3   Analysis

My analysis is organised as follows. I discuss the titles and the blurbs of the books, before going on to an analysis of the text within. These three types of discourse – title, blurb, and text – each perform different functions and are thus worth considering separately.

5.3.1 The titles

Chav is in the title of both books. In a sense, it effectively *is* the title of both. This is clear in the case of *Chav!* where the word stands alone before the subtitle. In the case of *TLBOC*, *chav* is the most semantically salient word, the word that distinguishes this title from others in the series, from *The Little Book of Neds*, or *The Little Book of Goths*.

It seems unlikely that such books could have been published without a fairly compact linguistic resource to catch potential customers' attention. Towards the end of my PhD research, I attended a workshop for aspiring academic monograph writers. One of the exercises we were asked to complete was to come up with a title for a book based on our PhD research. Having done this, I was told by the workshop leader, someone with a great deal of experience in academic publishing, that she could not envision my book selling well to academics, but that another book, aimed at a wider market and simply called *Chav*, well, that was a possibility.

For Labov (1972a), a label is an essential element of a stereotype; it is that which distinguishes 'stereotypes' from 'markers'. Labov gives such labels no real constitutive role – though they are necessary in the identification of stereotypes, they are, themselves, of little real consequence. Here it seems, though, that the word is useful in itself – it gives publishers a resource with which to promote their product and likely plays a crucial role in the development of that product.

5.3.2   The Blurbs

It is worth, I think, analysing the blurbs of both books as distinct texts, since they differ from the text within in terms of purpose, their function being primarily to encourage sales (Verdonk, 2002). In the blurbs, I identify three main tendencies: the identification of *chavs* in terms of appearance and attitude; the articulation of the internal point of view of *chavs*; and a bathetic irony undermining the importance of *chavs*.

5.3.2.1 Appearance and attitudes

Chav's blurb begins by constructing *chav* as an abstract property:

> **Chav** is an attitude, a way of life, a tribal thing, and those in it (or 'innit') have chosen to be there. But how chav are you? Check out your chav rating here…

A striking feature about this text is that *chav* is used as an abstract noun, and one that is cohesively linked in this extract from the blurb to *an attitude, a way of life, a tribal thing*. It is abstracted from reference to specific people, and readers are invited to measure themselves up against this abstracted property. It is also a gradable adjective; the implication of *how chav are you?* is that it is possible to be more or less *chav*. It is not a discrete identification.

TLBOC's blurb is shorter. It reads:

> Chavs are identifiable by their attitude (anti anything to do with authority, art, culture or the good of society) and clothes.
>
> Chavs want money and lots of it, but don't want to work for it. Jodie Marsh and Jordan are chav icons. Reality shows, like Big Brother, as well as the Lottery, are favourite Chav TV programmes.
>
> Here is the branded guide to Britain's new elite – the rapidly growing group taking over high streets up and down the country.

Chav is used here in the plural to name a group of people, who potential readers are told how they can identify – *by their attitude … and clothes.* So, it is both personal, internal traits (*attitude*) and externally observable behaviour (*clothes*) that characterise *chavs* here. What this attitude is is articulated further, defined negatively as *anti*, as in opposition to, *authority, art, culture or the good of society*. Here, *chavs' attitude* is a negative reaction to these abstract nouns; it consists of nothing positive. The listing of these nouns also serves to draw connections between them, between *art* and *the good of society,* and, I suggest the list serves to signify high ideas more generally, in the sense of those associated with the dominant classes by Bourdieu (1984).

5.3.2.2 *Chav* point of view

The blurb of *Chav!* asks a series of bullet pointed questions all stemming from an initial *Do you:*. For example:

> Do you:
> fancy yourself in a bit of 'bling' – big 9-carat-gold hollow-hoop earrings, faux-gem-encrusted chunky crosses, chains and sovereign rings?
> …
> like to tune in to a good daytime TV fight with Trisha, a late-night one with Jerry Springer – and a bit of Hollyoaks in between?

In each case, some sort of apparent *chav* behaviour is represented as a preference, something that the reader might *fancy*, *have a taste for*, *like*, or *have a penchant for.* In terms used in literary stylistics, this seems to be *internal focalisation* (Fowler 1996) – evaluation of phenomena from a hypothetical *chav* point of view. Each observable phenomenon that can be associated with those identified as *chavs* is represented as a personal preference.

Returning to the initial paragraph of the blurb, though, it might be said that the relationship implicitly constructed here between doing and liking is made explicit in the clause *those in it … have chosen to be there.* The writers are quite explicit, as well as quite implicit, about *chav* being something that is chosen; a personal preference.

In the *TLBOC* blurb, *chavs* are positioned as participating in what Halliday would call Mental Processes (1985), or what would more widely be identified as *verba sentiendi* (Simpson, 1993); it tells readers what *chavs want*. The internal desires of *chavs* are thus articulated, and this continues in the use of the words *icons* and *favourite*, both of which imply knowledge of how *chavs* view the world. The specific desires of *chavs* are to be recognised as materialistic (*money*, *the Lottery*), and their preference for entities that carry associations of 'trashiness' (the models *Jodie Marsh and Jordan*), can perhaps be seen as holding implicit class meanings. The construction of a relationship between *chav* and ideas of class is given specificity in *chavs want money and lots of it, but don't want to work for it*.

5.3.2.3 Bathos

The final paragraph of the *Chav!* blurb reads:

> **Welcome to the world of CHAV!** – the amazing cultural phenomenon that is sweeping Britain, and a shopping centre near you…

Again, *chav* is an abstract, mass noun, expanded now as *the amazing cultural phenomenon that is sweeping Britain, and a shopping centre near you…* There is a mix of hyperbole – *amazing* – and bathos – *shopping centre* – here that both jokingly promotes the book as reporting on an important cultural phenomenon, while also undermining its importance.

In *TLBOC*, the final paragraph recasts *chavs* as *Britain's new elite* and as *the rapidly growing group taking over high streets up and down the country*. This locates *chavs* in time – they are *new*, *growing* and *taking over* – and space – they are *Britain's*, on *high streets up and down the country*. To some extent this temporalisation and spatialisation can be related to the marketing aims of the blurb, and seen as an attempt to stake a claim for the newness and national relevance of *chavs*. But is also ironic. Associations have already been established between *chavs* and the 'low culture' of the model *Jodie Marsh* and *reality shows*, so their identification as an *elite* clashes with this. There is also bathos in the location of this *new elite* within Britain – they are on *high streets*.

The blurb, then, establishes an ironic sense of the importance of *chavs*. Ostensibly, they are represented as an *elite* of national importance, but this is very clearly undermined by their association with the banal and with 'low culture', and their explicit identification as those who do not want to work. A tendency also evident in both blurbs is that readers are given access to the apparent mental world of 'chavs'; as well as statements about the external appearances, the internal is articulated too. This is a tendency that is developed within the books themselves.

5.3.3 The covers

Many more people will see the covers of these books than will read their contents. On both covers (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2), the word *chav* is prominent and in this section I discuss the ways in which the visual design of the covers might contribute to the meaning potential of this resource. To do so, I adopt the analytical tools of Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual grammar.

5.3.3.1 Modality

'Visuals can present people, places and things,' write Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 161) 'as though they are real, as though they actually exist in [the way they are represented], or as though they do not – as though they are imaginings, fantasies, caricatures, etc.' The images on the front of *Chav!* and *TLBOC* display people and objects in a kind of heightened realism that suggest not real people but properties abstracted away from people; the properties that constitute the stereotype of the *chav*.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) describe a number of scales which serve as markers of modality. The relevant scales for the covers of these books are those to do with *colour*, *contextualisation* and *representation*.

5.3.3.1.1 Colour saturation and modulation

Both *Chav!* and *TLBOC* use very high colour saturation; their colours are saturated beyond naturalism. Neither uses a great deal of colour modulation. For example, the cartoon on the front of *Chav!* uses only two shades of each colour – one for light and one for shade. This bold, simplistic use of colour suggests that these images represent not specific entities but hyper-real entities abstracted from everyday life. Such bold colours also suggest a brashness and a sense of 'fun' that suggests at the intended humorous tone of the books.

5.3.3.1.2 Contextualisation

TLBOC is completely decontextualised. The cap, trainer and handbag are shown against a bright red background. There is a little more contextualisation of the cartoon figures on the front of *Chav!*, but not a great deal. They are placed against a photograph of the inside of a shopping precinct. The high street fashion chains Miss Selfridge and

Topshop can be seen behind them. Though this photograph is highly modulated and recognisable as a photograph of an actual shopping precinct, in terms of contextualisation, its modality remains low. The shopping precinct is extremely generic – it could be anywhere in Britain. Machin (2004) suggests that such generic backgrounds are typical of photographs produced for and distributed by global image banks such as Getty Images, and that an effect of this extreme decontextualisation is to bring connotation to the foreground. I believe that this is the case here; viewers are not to know which particular shopping precinct this is, but they are to grasp the connotations of shopping precincts. I will return to connotation below.

5.3.3.1.3   Representation

Both covers use highly stylised images; simplistic cartoons. The cartoons on the front of *Chav!* show people, while those on *TLBOC* show only fashion items; a cap, a trainer and a handbag. In both cases these images are simplistic; they are stylised representations that serve to represent that *type* of thing rather than any specific trainers or handbags.

5.3.3.2 Analytical representation

The front cover of *Chav!* can be understood as what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) call a *conceptual representation*. The *chav* characters are not represented as *doing* anything but as *being* something. More specifically, these images represent *analytical processes*, whereby a *carrier* figure is represented as having *possessive attributes* (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; 89). The carrier figures here are the *chavs* and the attributes their clothes and behaviours.

The female 'chav' at the front of the image holds a baby, a handbag. So the attributes are not just clothes but behaviours like drinking and blowing bubblegum and less canonically 'semiotic' phenomena like having a baby or a dog. All of these practices – fashion and otherwise – are displayed as attributes and thus constructed as equivalent, suggesting that we might interpret someone having a dog in a similar way to how we might interpret their choice of a particular brand of clothing; all these attributes are articulated as semiotic resources.

5.3.3.3 Connotation

Chav! displays decontextualised stylised people carrying the various attributes of the 'chav'. *TLBOC* decontextualises these attributes yet further, displaying them in black and white against a bright red background and without any representation of their carrier. Above I mentioned Machin's (2004) claim that in such decontextualised images, it is the connotations of the entities on display that come to the fore. In making this claim he draws on Barthes, for whom 'objects are accepted inducers of ideas' (1977; 23). Images of objects, for Barthes, do not only denote those objects, but also have much less tangible, but no less real, *connotations*. And it is the intangibility of connotation that for Barthes, makes it such a powerful instrument of what he calls 'myth', the ability of images to naturalise meanings. Connotations communicate meaning without making theses meanings explicit, thus viewers miss the social constructed nature of the meanings of images and think of these meanings as simply natural. Myth, Barthes writes, 'transforms history into nature' (1993; 129).

There are a number of elements of these images which an understanding of connotation can help to analyse. I now deal with each in turn.

5.3.3.3.1 Clothes and behaviours

I said above that the figures on the *Chav!* cover serve as carriers of attributes and that those attributes are various types of clothing and behaviour. The decontextualised nature of these phenomena foregrounds their connotations, connotations of 'trashiness' and low culture. Large jewellery, baseball caps, sports clothes, bubblegum, trainers, babies in trainers all have connotations of 'trashiness', connotations, I suggest, which derive from the sense of *taste* of people living in class societies like contemporary Britain. In fact, for Bourdieu (1984), *taste* works in a very similar way to Barthes' *myth*; as a socially constructed value that people attach to various social actions and phenomena that relies, for its force, on its naturalisation. Bourdieu calls this *misrecognition*; we recognise, he says, various activities and objects as having 'high' or 'low' social value but misrecognise the fact that this value is socially constructed. Thus taste, like myth, appears natural, and, I think, the covers of both of these books draw on this – readers are encouraged to negatively evaluate the attributes of the *chavs* as *tasteless*.

5.3.3.3.2 Burberry

Both books display the Burberry check on their covers. The fashion brand Burberry came to be associated with the word around the time of their publication. Various stories were printed in the press suggesting that Burberry's declining profits were due to the brand's increasing association with 'chavs' (see, for example, those discussed in Chapter Six). And, in particular, it was the beige check pattern displayed on both of these covers that the association centred on.

Burberry, as these books were published, was becoming codified as a *symbol* of chav. Texts such as these work to articulate this meaning for the resource. This is not a matter of shared social convention, but of semiotic work on the part of those producing *chav* stereotypes. The same process applies to baseball caps, trainers and the other attributes displayed on the covers of these books. Their stylisation and deployment on these texts serves to articulate them as symbols of *chav*, while, at the same time, this symbolic potential, as discussed above, relies on their 'misrecognition'.

5.3.3.3.3   Fonts

My analysis so far has focused on how the book covers represent the *chav* stereotype. I have said less about how they represent themselves. The low modality – especially in terms of colour saturation and modulation – serves to suggest that this is a cartoony, 'fun' take on *chavs*, and the fonts used on both have similar connotations of bold, brash 'fun'. The playful use of the Burberry check within the word *chavs* on *TLBOC* and the large, bold, sans-serif, capitalised *CHAV!* on *Chav!* suggest that these texts are not to be taken seriously, but as humorous, fun books – as 'impulse-buy humour books'.

5.3.3.4 Interpersonal representation

The front cover of *Chav!* shows a number of people. They stand at oblique angles to the point of view from which the image is drawn, but look directly at the viewer. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that these factors are relevant to the interpersonal relationships constructed between viewers and represented participants in images. The direct gaze makes this what they call a *demand* image, whereby the represented participants ask something of the viewer; they are represented as if they are interacting with the viewer. In this case, it seems that this demand is to be seen as a fairly

threatening one; many of the 'chavs' have scowling eyes without pupils, including the baby, whose eyes, like the dog's, are red. The dog strains at its leash and salivates as it looks directly at the viewer. On the other hand, the oblique angle suggests something less than full confrontation; the chavs might stare at viewers, but they do not face them head on. This, I think, suggests that the threatening stare is ultimately a harmless one, that the 'chavs' might try to look threatening but they are not actually dangerous.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that the distance from which we view represented participants is also important. Here the 'chavs' are viewed from what Kress and van Leeuwen, following Hall (1966), call 'far social distance', the distance from which we can see a person head to toe. This suggests that we are not in a personal relationship with these people, but that we are not complete strangers either; they are perhaps people with whom we have come into brief, unspoken contact in a public place (indeed, like a shopping precinct). The image thus tells viewers something about the kind of people they might encounter but not interact with in public. Theorists writing about stereotypes have suggested that this is precisely what stereotypes are for – to allow us to come to quick judgements of people that we come across briefly in public (Lippmann 1932; Hudson 1996). For the sociolinguist Wells, for example, stereotypes are ready means by which we can discern what other people are like in public; 'we deal with … casual or transient contacts by slotting them into preconceived stereotypes' (1982; 28-9). This image represents not only stereotypical people, but a situation of stereotyping; the kind of interpersonal distance between people that is said to give rise to the use of stereotypes. Furthermore, it constructs this situation of stereotyping; so, this is not simply a *representation* of a pre-existing stereotype but a text that *promotes* the use of stereotypes in public encounters.

5.3.3.5 Summary of cover analysis

Literary scholars commenting on the use of stereotypes in fiction have suggested that heightened details of appearance are often used to develop stereotypes. Sennett suggests that Balzac's inflation of the details of appearance, an inflation which serves to make characters stand for social/melodramatic-narrative types, to make them 'larger than life', is central to what Sennett calls the 'symbol-making' procedure (Sennett, 2002; 157; based on Brooks, 1976; Ch.5). The images on the front of these texts work in a similar way, by articulating the symbols of 'chav'. In doing so, and in foregrounding the connotations of the symbols created, existing taste values are implicitly brought into play, and the meaning potential articulated for the symbols of chav come to appear natural; to work as *myth*.

But, the covers are also overtly brash and 'fun', using flat, bold colours and fonts, which suggest that these texts are not to be taken seriously, and mark them as 'humorous'.

5.3.4   The texts

I will suggest that the two books are characterised by five main tendencies. These are:

- the articulation of the apparent social semiotics of chav;

- the implicit and explicit suggestion that 'chavs' are predictable and rule-governed in their behaviour;

- the representation of the chav personality through the ironic incorporation of 'chav' voices;

- the distinction between a normative position taken by the authors and 'imagined readers' and the behaviour and point of view of chavs;

- the articulation of relationships between the personal world view of 'chavs' and apparent problems that are salient in contemporary political discourse.

5.3.4.1 The social semiotics of *chav*

As discussed in Chapter Two, my research is heavily influenced by the social semiotics of Halliday (1978), Kress and Hodge (1988) and van Leeuwen (2005). From a social semiotic perspective, materials can be understood as resources with meaning potentials that are articulated in particular ways in social activity; everyday life can be read as a kind of text. For van Leeuwen (2005; Ch.1), for instance, the ways in which people walk is discussed as a semiotic resource. And this is a perspective shared by more semiotically oriented approaches to cultural studies. For example, Hebdidge, in his seminal study of punk as a subculture writes that: 'Style in subculture is pregnant with significance …Our task becomes … to discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style, to trace them out as "maps of meaning"' (1993; 367).

In this subsection, I discuss the ways in which *chav* humour texts serve to perform a similar task, to describe, and thus to articulate, 'the hidden messages [apparently] inscribed' (Hebdidge, 1993; 367) in *chav* style. For instance, *Chav!* begins as follows:

> Well you might not be able to describe them, but you know who they are and you know what they look like. You've seen the baseball caps, the Mr T. jewellery, trackie bottoms and trainers.
> But Chav is so much more than this! It's an attitude…

In the first paragraph *them* is used, with anaphoric reference to *chavs* in the title of the chapter, to refer to a particular group of people, people that readers are positioned as being familiar with. And this familiarity is a visual one – readers *know* who *chavs* are by virtue of having *seen* various phenomena. What is missing from readers knowledge of *chavs* is the ability to *describe them*. The implication of this is that this book will provide readers with the resources to do this – the resources to talk about their observations.

> But Chav is so much more than this! It's an attitude, a way of life, a tribal thing, and those in it (or innit) have chosen to be there. Now, in this invaluable guide, you can check out the culture, the lifestyle, the language, the loves, likes and dislikes of this unique phenomenon – a phenomenon that began in Chatham and which is sweeping Britain – and a shopping centre near you every Saturday afternoon!

But the second paragraph changes its use of *chav* in two ways: (1) *chav* becomes the non-count noun of the blurb; it loses its obligatory determiner; and (2) *chav* becomes textually linked to other abstract phenomena – *culture, lifestyle*… This paragraph articulates an apparent abstract phenomenon that lies behind the observations of concrete instances of *chavs* that readers are suggested to be already able to make. The suggestion is that *Chav!* will serve as a guide to the meanings of the semiotic resources that are represented as typical of *chavs*.

5.3.4.1.1   Appearances

The first chapter of *Chav!* is dedicated to 'Chav-spotting'. It is a pastiche of the kinds of 'I spy' books (published by Michelin) that *Chav!*'s readers may have encountered as children, in which readers are rewarded points for 'spotting' certain phenomena. In the 'I spy' books these phenomena are usually types of animal, trees, or modes of transport;

entities out of direct control of children, that can only be interacted with by 'spying'. This, I think, is the significance of the adoption of this genre here; *chavs* are positioned as an unalterable, but observable, phenomenon of the natural world.

The 'Chav-spotting' chapter lists a number of phenomena. Each phenomenon is titled and given a brief description:

> **Baseball Caps…** You can almost disregard those worn at a jaunty angle – and even the ones worn back to front. Real chavs like to use their caps (and hoods) to enhance the sense of mystery and danger they hope you will feel when you're around them, and, of course, to avoid being clocked by CCTV cameras! To score maximum points, you have to spot the right kind of chav cap! A plain-coloured cap will get you 5 points…one sporting a fake designer logo will get you 10, but if you sport the 'genuine' fake Burberry cap – the ultimate chavster accessory available on a market stall near you – give yourself a massive 15 points.

There are a number of points to be made about this extract, and, in making them I will refer to other, similar examples from the 'Chav Spotting' chapter.

First, the points system might be seen as a means by which material phenomena are graded for how *chav* they are; a Burberry cap is worth more, and is thus more *chav*, than other baseball caps. These phenomena are suggested to be *indexical* of chav identity, but in being articulated in this way, they also become *symbolic*. That is to say that this is not simply an description of the features of 'chavs', but an attempt to create meanings for these features. The points system serves a discriminatory purpose within this strategy, distinguishing between those phenomena that are very 'chav' and those that are not so 'chav'.

Second, as on the blurb, these phenomena are represented as motivated in particular ways by their wearers. The construction of meanings for these resources goes beyond

simply indexing or symbolising a particular kind of person; the apparent desires of this kind of person are articulated too. So, in the case of the baseball cap, readers are told *why* 'chavs' wear caps – to *enhance the sense of mystery … to avoid being clocked… –* and we are given access to chavs' personal desires – *Real chavs* <u>like</u> *… they* <u>hope</u>*….* In Hallidayan (1985) terms, these are Mental Processes. This interpretation of observable phenomena in terms of personal preferences has, I think, two main functions: (1) it serves to add to the sense that to observe people is to know their personalities – that the internal desires of chavs are as knowable as their appearances; and (2) it serves to imply that being a *chav* is a matter of choice, of following a desire, or a particular set of values. *Chavs* are like they are, it is implied, because they *like* to be that way. This relates directly to that individualised strand of thinking that I discussed in Chapter Two as being central to Discourses of the Underclass (Levitas, 2005) and of Lifestyle. In each case, behaviour is explained in terms of personal preferences and choices. As Westergaard puts it, Discourse on the *underclass* is characterised 'by the resoluteness of its conception of class as a matter of voluntarily adopted life-styles' (1995; 117). Bauman calls this 'choice incompetence' (1998; 71). This conception is found here, in the articulation of the internal desires of *chavs*.

Finally, it is interesting that 'The essential guide to chav spotting' moves from clothes, jewellery and other phenomena widely regarded as the objects of fashion to non-fashion phenomena. Following *Make-up*, for instance, is the following:

> And talking of unsightly blemishes, score 5 points for every **Love Bite** you spot. (This is where you can double your score because chavs love nothing more than displaying their bruised bits!) **Smoking** will also help you notch up your score. Score 10 for every chain-smoker you spot, and a further 10 if you catch them lighting their next fag from the butt of their first.

> **The Chav Snog** is a thing to behold – and behold it you will in every shopping centre, pub or park – in fact anywhere public! Score 10 for snogging sessions lasting more than 10 minutes (easy-peasy) and a further 10 for any fondling that goes on whilst the snog is in progress!

This serves to expand the semiotic sphere, to represent these behaviours as phenomena that are readable in the same ways as fashion. Barthes (1983) analyses what he calls 'the fashion system' (*système de la mode*), in terms of the meanings articulated for items of clothing in written captions. For Barthes, as summarised by Culler, the written captions are important because they bring out 'meaning that was merely latent in the object' (1975; 33). In *Chav!*, this 'system' is expanded; it is not only items of clothing that are articulated as meaningful, but behaviours too. Material activities are articulated as readable, as having semiotic potential.

In *TLBOC* too, there is a chapter entitled 'Chav Spotting'. Unlike the I-spy pastiche of *Chav!*, this gives a gendered description of the *Chavette* and the *Chavo*. Here is the description of the *chavette*:

> According to the *Daily Mail*, the female of the species *pull their shoddily dyed hair back in that ultra-tight bun known as a 'council-house facelift'*, wear skirts that would be better described as wide belts and tops that expose too much. It is true that stilettos are the favoured alternative to trainers. Mark One and New Look outfits are always, and most definitely, in.
> Hair tends to be bottle-blonde and scraped back into a ponytail, with lots of mousse and / or hairspray, scrunchies, etc.

Of the *Chav Male / Chavo*:

> He wears an England shirt at least three times a week (unless, of course, he's a Ned!), spanking white trainers, trackie bottoms, and a hard, shifty expression. Atitude is everything, as is the latest cap (the cap logo changes on a regular basis).
> A shaved head is good. Otherwise, hair stencilling is equally popular – with free styles as well as football team logos and favourite brands like Nike all the rage. Other favourites include slick partings, fringe flicks, curtains, and loads of hair gel.

> Sorted!

A later chapter of *TLBOC* deals specifically with chav clothes. This begins with an account of the brand names most commonly worn by chavs and then goes on to list specific items of clothing. Though the entries for each item are shorter than they are in *Chav!*, similar tendencies can be identified in the articulation of their meanings. In particular, these items are often the Phenomena of *chavs*' Mental Processes (Halliday, 1985).

> Trackie bottoms tucked into football boots are much loved.
> Chavs love flashy, trashy jewellery and lots of it.

5.3.4.1.2   Names

Both books include sections on *chav* names. In a chapter of *Chav!* entitled 'Name your chav baby', the *top twenty chavster names* are listed for boys and for girls, along with an ironic *origin*, *meaning* and list of related names. Again this is a pastiche of another genre, or perhaps group of genres centred on the origins and meanings of names.

Here are the top three girls and boys names:

> 1.   Bethany
> Origin: Old Ned / Corrie Kid
> Meaning: Maker of bitchy comments
> Also: Bethanie, Beffany, Beff
>
> 2.   Chantelle
> Origin: Old Chatham / Medway
> Meaning: Wearer of bling and caked in make-up
> Also: Chantel, Chanteal, 'Elle, Shantelle, Shant
>
> 3.   Brandi
> Origin: MTV / Off-licence
> Meaning: She of the slurred speech and vague memory
> Also: Chardonnay, Babycham, Brand, Logo
> …

1. Jordan
Origin: Basketball Icon / Popular Make of Trainer
Meaning: Spitter of phlegm
Also: Jordann, Jord, Jordy, Puma, Reebok-Classic

2. Brooklyn
Origin: Beckham Offspring
Meaning: 'Gangsta' wannabe
Also: Brookelin, Romeo, Manhattan, The Bronx (Not to be confused with Queens!)

3. Brandon
Origin: Old Romford
Meaning: Seeker of benefits/Recipient of evil looks from pensioners
Also: Brandonn, Brand, Logo

Firstly, each name is given an origin. Name origins are commonly evoked to add meaning, legitimacy, a sense of history to our personal identities. Here, there is an irony to this; only from a 'chav' point of view would these origins be positively evoked. This irony seems to derive from the expectations of the mimicked genre and the negatively evaluative origins given for the names. The implication is that these are not only things that *chavs* are, but things that *chavs* value.

Secondly, each name is given a *meaning*. It seems to me that these meanings are rather less likely to be interpreted as positively evaluated from a *chav* point of view than the origins, and that these in fact thus serve to articulate the meanings of these names from the normative authorial point of view; that is, that it is suggested that these names are indices of these personal properties.

Thirdly, semantic associations are developed between these names and others. These, again, are the associations of the apparent 'chav mind'. So the name Jordan is associated first with abbreviated versions of that name and then with *Puma* and *Reebok*

Classic, on the basis that *Air Jordans* are a style of Nike trainer named after the basketball player Michael Jordan. The implication behind this is that, from the constructed *chav* point of view, the name Jordan is associated primarily with sports clothing. A similar strategy is used in the Brandi and Brooklyn *Also* entries, the former being associated with the lexical field of alcohol and the latter with areas of New York.

Fourthly, there are a number of orthographic indicators of non-standard phonology and spelling – *Brookelin, Beffany*. These indicate a concern with *chav* language that is much more thoroughly articulated elsewhere in *Chav!* and *TLBOC*.

The section on 'chav names' in *TLBOC* consists just of a list of names. The more sophisticated stereotyping of *Chav!*'s name chapter is absent here, and these names are simply articulated as symbols of *chav*.

5.3.4.1.3   Language

The names mark a concern with language which continues in *Chav*!'s 'Chavspeak: the phrasebook' chapter and *TLBOC*'s 'Chav talk'. Both include stylisations of 'chavspeak' as well as explicit descriptions and evaluations of this apparent variety, with the effect of suggesting that 'chavspeak' exists as a kind of *antilanguage,* the language of an 'antisociety', 'a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it' (Halliday, 1978; 164). In my analysis of the construction of the stereotype of 'chavspeak' it is possible to discuss in greater detail the semiotic potential of the resources articulated, than it has been so far in this analysis; the literature on language variation and stereotyping in Britain provides a resource against which the stylised forms of 'chavspeak' can be compared (a methodology that Rampton, 2006 adopts in his analysis of stylisations of 'posh' and 'cockney' accents).

> There are many different chav dialects around the country, but by far the most popular is 'Fuckwitspeak'. This dialect is spoken by chavs in East Anglia, London and the Home Counties but is spreading fast to the South West and the Midlands. Broadly speaking, it is a combination of Jamaican Yardie and Estuarine English – a sort of hybrid cockney.

The authors' evaluation of this supposed dialect is absolutely explicit. 'Fuckwitspeak'; the language of 'fuck wits'. The descriptive claim that this is 'a sort of hybrid cockney', 'a combination of Jamaican Yardie and Estuarine English' gives us our first suggestion of what this language might be like. This description will be reinforced in the stylised 'examples' of Chavspeak we are shown, which will be discussed below. TH-Fronting, the cockney MOUTH vowel (Wells, 1982) and lexical items borrowed from (stereotypes of) Black Englishes are all presented as being typical of Chavspeak. These are clearly stigmatised forms.

In the following extract, from *Chav!*, Chavspeak is suggested to be indecipherable, not simply because it is *different* from standard English but because it is *deficient* – because it is little more than noise, not really a language at all.

> You should by now be getting an 'ear' for Chavspeak. However, during an argument, when situations get a little heated, Chavspeak can become almost indecipherable. In these circumstances, it is important to remember that chavs will say whatever it is they need to say in one long stream of vocalization. They will not pause for breath or stop to think about exactly what it is they are trying to say. As there is *nothing* a chav likes better than a row, in all the excitement they may actually forget to form coherent sentences and what comes out may just be a kind of screeching – or white noise!

This commentary on 'chavspeak' might be seen as continuous with the representations of working class English discussed by Crowley (2003). In his discussion of the class-based distinction between the 'articulate' and the 'barbarians' in early Twentieth century discourse on language, Crowley writes that 'the language of the barbarians was

viewed as a cacophony, a discordant clash of sound that evokes abhorrence, fear and exclusion' (2003; 184). In the work of Masterman (1902), Crowley claims 'the working-class speakers make noise but are not counted as engaging in discourse because the noises they make are not part of the 'standard language' system' (ibid.: 185). Interrogating claims about the linguistic degeneracy of the poor and the 'uncultured' is a staple of sociolinguistic discussion (Mugglestone, 1995; Cameron, 1995), and here, 'chavspeak' fits into that specific and long running tendency that goes further than claiming that the poor speak an inferior language, to claiming that they don't speak a language at all. It is also worth noting that this noise is represented as being irrationally motivated – 'chavs' say 'whatever it is they need to say', without thought.

Both *Chav!* and *TLBOC* include orthographic stylisations of 'chav speak'. As Raymond Williams writes, '[i]t has been one of the principal amusements of the English middle class to record the hideousness of people who say *orf,* or *wot* … The error consists in supposing that the ordinary spelling indicates how proper people speak' (1961; 245). Of course, English spelling is by no means an adequate representation of *anyone*'s phonology. Orthographic representations indicate not a deviation from pronouncing everything as it is written – no one does that – but from standard English pronunciation. Ronkin and Karn (1999) give 'asytematic graphemic representations of phonetic segments' as a strategy of 'mock Ebonics' in the US.

The phonological forms – glottal stops, zero h-variants, the Cockney MOUTH vowel (Wells, 1982) and TH-fronting – might all be seen as stereotypes, in Labov's (1972a) terms, of basilectal South East forms. They are represented graphologically, a strategy which is taken to extremes in *Chav!* in representations of the Cockney MOUTH vowel

like *Abaaaht, Taahn* and *Paaand mate*, glossed as 'about', 'town' and 'That will be one pound, my good friend'. TLBOCS includes no representations of this feature, but *The Chav Guide to Life* (Bok, 2006b) does. In a section on 'The Native Chav Lingo', the 'examples' *paahh* (power)*, aahh* (hour)*, abaahht* (about)*,* are given, as well as the instruction 'use the vowel sound as often as you can'. Wells writes:

> Asked for examples of the differences between Cockney and an ordinary working-class London accent –popular London – people often point to the pronunciation of MOUTH words. Genuine Cockney, it is felt, uses a monophthong, [mæ:f ~ ma:f]. cockneys go 'aht and abaht'.

> (Wells, 1982: 302)

It seems likely that this long front monophthong is what the 'aaah' is supposed to represent. More important perhaps than the regional nature of this is the class basis of this representation. Though the popular London accent described by Wells is a largely working class accent, Cockney 'constitutes the basilectal end of the London accent continuum, the broadest form of London local accent' (1982; 302). Cockney is an abstraction of an extreme class form. Wells cites the stereotypical use of it by Dickens in *Pickwick Papers* (also mentioned by Labov, above) and George Bernard Shaw in 'Captain Brassbound's Conversation' and, most famously, 'Pygmalion'. For Shaw, the Cockney 'pronounces ow as ah' (stage directions to 'Captain Brassbound's Conversation' cited in Wells, 1982; 334).

I have suggested that the stereotyping of basilectal dialect forms is notable because these forms have class meanings. But they are also regional; does this mean that *chavs* are represented as regional? In April 2009, I visited a comedy club in Edinburgh, for a night of sketches written by unknown writers (members of the audience were invited to submit their own sketches) and performed by a fixed cast of actors. The show was a

monthly one. On each night, the audience were to vote for their favourite of the ten or so sketches performed, and the writer of that sketch asked to create a longer version to be performed at the end of the next month's show. The winning sketch on the night I was there was called 'South Pole Chavs', and involved a pair of 'Chavs' surprising Sir Edmund Hilary in an Antarctic tent as he worried about failing provisions and worsening conditions, conditions to which the Chavs were oblivious, asking for sausages, wearing only shellsuits and leaving their Burberry-clad baby out in the cold. One of the Chavs defecated in the eminent explorer's tent. The important point for the present discussion is that the Chavs' accents were not English but Scottish; both actors using stylisations of a roughly Glaswegian accent. In this case it was another working class urban accent that formed the basis of the stylisation. It seems likely that regionalised representations of 'Chavspeak' would make use of other urban working class accents; those that are consistently ranked lowly in terms of prestige in perceptual sociolinguistic research (Coupland and Bishop 2007).

At the lexical level, *TLBOC* lists a number of *Favourite sayings.* Most of these are individual words, but a few are longer constructions, included with the implication that they are fixed expressions in 'chav talk'.

As discussed above, Chavspeak is said, in *Chav!*, to be influenced by 'gangsta rap' and 'Jamaican Yardie'. In fact, though, no clear examples of features associated with Black Englishes are found in the examples in the 'phrasebook' of *Chav!*. There are, though, examples in *TLBOC* (and many more in *The Little Book of Chavspeak*, but these will not be discussed here). *Diss*, defined as *to disrespect*, and *homeez*, defined as *friends*, are both included in *TLBOC*, and are both words with origins in Black Englishes.

The *TLBOC* list of *favourite sayings*, is a list of *chav* words and fixed expressions with 'standard' glosses:

"Bitch" (woman /girlfriend)
"Blazin" (very good)
"Bone" (erection)
"Brethern" [sic.] (brothers and close friends)
"Buzzin" (expression of approval)
"Check it" (look at it)
"Chuffed" (pleased with oneself)
"Coffin dodger" (old person)
"Cushty" (cool – a term first used by Del Trotter!)
"Diss" (to disrespect)
"Dob on" (inform on someone – to the police)
"Fit" (attractive)
"Floor it" (drive very fast)
"Givin it large" (overdoing things)
"Gov" (authority figure)
"Homeez" (friends)
"Innit" (Isn't it?)
"Knob jockey" (homosexual)
"Maccy D's" (MacDonald's) [sic.]
"Minger" (a very ugly person)
"Not a prayer" (no chance)
"Preggers" (pregnant)
"Rat-arsed" (blind drunk)
"Solid" (referring to a strong / reliable person)
"Spark up" (to light a fag)
"Steamin" (drunk as a skunk)
"Talent" (good-looking girl)
"Trek" (go on a long journey)
"Wheels" (a car)
"Wire it" (start a car without a key of the owner's permission)
"Wot u fuckin' say?" (pardon)
"Wot u lookin at?" or "Wot da fuck you lookin at?" (Is something the matter?)

Chavspeak is constituted in the representations discussed thus far as a kind of folk version of a Hallidayan 'antilanguage' (1978). It is worth substantial sections of Halliday's writing on antilanguages, to allow the similarities to become clear.

> The simplest form taken by an antilanguage is that of new words for old; it is a language relexicalised. … Typically this relexicalisation is partial, not total: not all words in the language have their equivalents in the antilanguage. … The principle is that of same grammar, different vocabulary; but different vocabulary only in certain areas, typically those that are central to the activities of the subculture and that set it off most sharply from the established society. So we expect to find new words for types of criminal act, and classes of criminal and of victim; for tools of the trade; for police and other representatives of the law enforcement structure of the society; for penalites, penal institutions, and the like.

(Halliday, 1978; 165)

Halliday goes on to write that, regarding the semantic fields of criminality, an antilanguage 'is not merely *re*lexicalised in these areas; it is *over*lexicalised' (ibid.). The stereotyped Chavspeak is overlexicalised in this manner, in the fields of petty crime and public confrontation.

At the pragmatic level, TLBOC lists *Topics of conversation:*

> Football, fighting, sex, *Big Brother*, being bored, winning the Lottery, Argos catalogues, the latest Nike advert on the box, Kung Fu, *Coronation Street, Bad Girls, Footballers' Wives, Eastenders,* Trisha, sex, money, becoming rich by doing nothing, being spotted by the producer of a reality TV show and becoming famous, sex, money, being bored …
> zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz

And *Chav!* includes stylisations of utterances associated with shopping, junk food, drugs, alcohol, and confrontation (including with children). The implication here is that these topics are indicative of *chav* personality.

Language, then, is one of the semiotic resources articulated as symbolic of *chav* identity. Along with appearances and material behaviour, language is implicated in stereotyping. Observable behaviours are articulated as indexical of a particular kind of identity. But in the very articulation of this indexicality they become more than this – they become *symbolic*, subject to Discursive mediation. This is not just a matter of reporting on an existing stereotype but of actively engaging in the practice of *stereotyping*. Though

many of the resources and strategies deployed in this stereotyping might be quite old, this is nonetheless a continuous constructive process of articulating meaning. As Halliday writes '[t]o imitate the pronunciation or grammar of another group at the same time as taking on particular roles and attitudes that are thought to be associated with that group is a powerful means of creating stereotypes, and of upholding those that already exist' (1978; 160).

5.3.4.2 The predictability of *chavs*

One of the features of these texts is the use of linguistic strategies that suggest that *chavs* are highly predictable and rigid in their behaviour.

The following is an extract from 'The chav world of sport':

> Even those chavs who have no interest in sport make an exception when the national team is playing – the idea that they can show foreigners how crap they are is too much to resist. (If they thought they might win, a chav would happily get right behind the national tiddlywinks team.) To demonstrate their national pride and support for the team, they will hang flags out of the windows of their home and from their car aerials. These flags will then be left in place for several months and, tattered and filthy, will still be in place for the next major international event – which is handy.

Will is frequently used in *Chav!* to indicate a high epistemic modality. The implication is that is possible to predict with a high degree of certainty how a *chav* is likely to behave. Readers are encouraged to view their behaviour as predictable. And there are other linguistic resources deployed in *Chav!* that contribute to the sense that the behaviour of 'chavs' is completely predictable. These resources are: adverbs like *invariably*; rule like formulations of 'chav' behaviour; procedural accounts prescribing 'chav' behaviour'; and the use of anaphoric nouns to indicate that descriptions of behaviours are to be understood as description of rules. I will explain each in turn.

A.   Adverbs indicating usuality.

> there is <u>always</u> at least one fight on the [wedding] day and it <u>usually</u> involves a drunken brawl between the male members of the bride's family versus those from the groom's family. Or, if the bride and groom are from the same family, which is <u>often</u> the case, old family grievances are aired, <u>usually</u> resulting in one almighty punch-up!
>
> Today, this is the pattern sports fans <u>invariably</u> follow

These adverbs suggest a predictability to chav behaviour, that readers can know what 'chavs' will do. But there is an interesting point about this modality worth considering. Clauses with such explicit markers of epistemic modality as identified here might be understood as *less* epistemically certain than clauses without any markers at all. A 'bare' declarative is read as certain, and to add any markers of modality to this, however strong, might be to raise the question of how certain we are that this is true.

> Although it might appear that a statement is strengthened by putting the proposition that it expresses within the scope of the operator of epistemic necessity, this is not so, as far as the everyday use of language is concerned. … It is a general principle, to which we are expected to conform, that we should always make the strongest commitment for which we have epistemic warrant. If there is no explicit mention of the source of our information and no explicit qualification of our commitment to its factuality, it will be assumed that we have full epistemic warrant for what we say.
>
> (Lyons, 1977; 808-9, quoted in Simpson, 1993; 49-50)

Following this analysis, the use of adverbs and *will* in this text is likely to diminish the sense of certainty about 'chav' behaviour, not strengthen it. But, rather than jeopardising my analysis, I think that this in fact leads to a more subtle understanding of the use of markers of epistemic modality in this text. *Chav!* is not oriented towards truth but towards a stereotypical notion of truth, and it seems likely that this is what these markers serve to indicate – they serve to say both 'these are very predictable people that we are describing' and also 'we are being stereotypical about them'. In this sense then, they are markers of a meta-modality; not of how certain we should be about

these facts, but of how certain the authors wish to *appear* to be about them. They are, then, indicators of reflexive awareness of stereotyping as much as they are indicators of stereotyping itself.

B.   *Chav* behaviour is often described in a rule-like manner using conditional subordinate clauses:

> If a chav is indoors then the TV is going to be on.
> If a chav should ever miss an episode of [Eastenders], they must promise to 'watch it on Sunday' or will be forever banished from the chav community.
> If a Chav can get by on the dole, s/he will.

These constructions suggest that given the conditions it is possible to predict what *a chav* will be doing.

C.   On occasion, anaphoric nouns are used that refer back to earlier formulations of chav behaviour as 'rule[s]':

> Kebab shop owners are usually in the front line for this kind of treatment in the post-pub world and will usually suffer if England has been beaten. The exception to <u>this rule</u> is if the chav happens to live in a multicultural community, in which case they are likely to be confronted by a lot of no-Brits who are much bigger than they are.

Here, the description of what 'chavs' *usually* do is recast as *this rule*. This is a rather more explicit indication that *chav* behaviour is governed by rules than those mentioned above.

D.   Procedural discourse (Longacre, 1976), indicating how to act as a *chav*, is common in *Chav!*. A number of chapters and sections pose not as descriptions of 'chavs' for the purposes of 'spotting' but as prescriptive guides to 'chav' activity; *Name Your Chav Baby*; *The Chavster's Good-Grooming Guide*; *The Chavette's Guide to Beauty*; *The Chavster's Guide to Gardening*.

Here is a in-set text box from 'The Chavette's Guide to Beauty':

TRACY AND SAVANNAH'S TIPS TO LOOK T'RIFIC:
Wear whatever is cheapest and brightest on sale down the market.
Find a mate who will make a good stab at your hairdo.
Stretch your eyes back so that you can achieve that essential scary face.
Put as much make-up on as possible.
Use orange fake tan to contrast with pale eyes and lips.
Pluck out those eyebrows completely then pencil them back in very high.
Wear loads of bling.

One example of this procedural discourse is the *Dear Shanice – The Chav Agony Aunt* section.

Dear Shanice,
I have been married for eighteen years and have two wonderful children, but feel unfulfilled in my life. I have been a housewife since my children were small and now wonder if there is more to life than this. I need to stretch my mind and intellect further in order to feel like I have achieved something more in life than being just a wife and mother. What can you suggest?
Sharon, Luton

Dear Shazza
Eighteen years and two kids? No wonder you feel unfulfilled. No one can be expected to wake up to the same moosh in bed for that long, love! My advice to you is to leave 'im, find someone new and have a couple more kids. You won't have time to worry about anything with two more kids hanging about and causing you grief. And if you're still 'unfulfilled' after that then go back to 'im and split up again. nothing like an on/off relationship to 'stretch the intellect'.

There are a number of similar examples, in which a correspondent addresses 'Shanice' with such typical agony aunt column concerns and 'Shanice' replies with what is patently to be read as bad advice. Here, she advises 'Sharon' to deliberately disrupt relationships and have more children in order to improve her life. In other responses, 'Shanice' gives similar advice. In one, a woman is told to 'go straight down to where [her husband] works and pull one of his colleagues'; in another, a mother is told to 'Hit [her children] round the 'ed if they even so much as step out of line'. This is the advice

of a 'chav', and is clearly not meant to be taken as sensible advice but as a description of the kinds of things that *chavs* do. It is not just a description, however, since the generic form used is that of a prescriptive genre – the agony aunt column – and the implication of this is that *chav* behaviour can be prescribed in this way; that it is predictable and governed by rules that can be understood by 'outsiders', and also that it is a matter of choices about what is best; that apparent *chav* behaviour ultimately derives from a particular set of values, or idea about how best to live life. Such discourse supports the view that what is being represented here is a 'lifestyle choice'.

In the case of Shanice and many other prescriptive sections, the prescription comes from an ostensibly *chav* point of view (this is discussed further below), suggesting that the predictable behaviours of chavs are driven by predictable attitudes towards the world. An exception to the tendency for procedural discourse to be aligned with an apparently 'chav' point of view comes in the guide to *chavspeak*, where readers are given *helpful hints in case* [they] *want to converse with a chav*:

> Try to make your voice sound as nasal as possible.
> Try not to open your mouth too much. (Chavs are like dogs: if you expose your teeth, they see it as a threat!)
> Try to make your words sound as whiney as possible. This is essential, as you will find that chavs will often replace a consonant with a slow, monotone whiney sound!

This procedural discourse represents *chavs* as people whose behaviour is predictable. I suggested above that the use of epistemically certain adverbs indicated not epistemic certainty itself but a self-conscious willingness to appear so certain. Further evidence of this kind of meta-awareness is found in *Chav!*'s section on weddings:

> it is here that we cannot stereotype the chav bride

Ironic stereotyping, then, is the dominant mode of this text, and readers are explicitly told when its authors will *not* be stereotyping.

In this respect, *Chav!* is part of an overtly stereotypical social practice, and to point this out on the basis of linguistic analysis is unlikely to register as a criticism; *of course* this text is stereotypical, that's what it's for. The word *chav* is the locus around which this stereotyping is able to take place, and, as such might be seen as a *keyword* (Williams, 1983) in the activity of the text. For Labov (1972a), a label is a necessary element of a stereotype, and *chav* provides such a label.

5.3.4.3 The articulation of a *chav* point of view

In both *Chav!* and *TLBOC*, as mentioned above, readers are presented with insights into the internal world of *chavs* through the use of Mental Processes (Halliday, 1985) and indicators of evaluation that appear to come from a *chav* perspective. In such cases, readers are presented with what Simpson (1993) terms *positive shading*. Simpson lists the features of this technique as follows: 'deontic, boulomaic systems foregrounded; generics and *verba sentiendi*' (ibid.: 75).

This articulation of the internal properties of 'chavs' through the positioning of 'chavs' as Sensers in Mental Processes is reminiscent of a strategy of *focalisation* identified in stylistic analyses of literary texts, whereby narration is aligned with a character's point of view through insights into their internal world (Simpson, 1993). Simpson calls the strategy used here, where point of view is indicated by Mental Processes and deontic and boulomaic modality, 'positive shading'. What is particularly striking about the positive shading of the 'chav' world is that it is typically evident in clauses in which the Senser Participant is not one person but all 'chavs'. That is to say that, in van

Leeuwen's (1996) terms, the Senser is not *individualised* but *assimilated*; a group. This use of assimilation in Senser position is unusual, and serves to suggest that *chavs* not only all look the same but all think and feel the same too.

5.3.4.3.1 Modality and evaluation

In the following extracts, phenomena are positively evaluated from the 'chav' point of view.

> A shaved head is good
> 'Prison white' Nike trainers are great for that permanently 'brand new' look. Red Adidas, or desert boots are good. White socks go without saying.

Often this positive evaluation is mixed with the authorial point of view, as in the following.

> the medallion ring. This <u>classy</u> piece of hand furniture <u>is supposed</u> to make the wearer look rich, but also <u>comes in handy</u> for giving the missus a backhander!

The *comes in handy* in this extract seems to be readable as an evaluation from the apparent point of view of the 'chav', who, it is implied, would favour particular items of jewellery for their utility in domestic violence. But *is supposed to* is associated with the point of view of the authors, suggesting doubt that it does *make the wearer look rich*.

As well as evaluations, these representations of 'chav' point if view include markers of strong deontic modality. Indeed, all of the explicit moralising of the book comes from the perspective of the chav: when readers are explicitly told what one *should* be doing, this is from a representation of the ostensible perspective of the 'chav'. The representation of 'chav' point of view is thus a means by which the authors can further

articulate the values of 'chavs', and suggest that there exists a personal orientation towards the world that characterises 'chavs'.

> But remember, if [a shellsuit]'s white you've just <u>gotta</u> wear shades and plenty of bling!
> And like all chav attire, a prominent, chav-respected brand name is <u>a must</u>!

On occasion, the representation of the chav point of view blurs into representation of a chav voice, as in the *Shanice* agony aunt section and the following:

> Why don't you switch off your television set and go and do something less boring instead? <u>Yeah? Like what?</u> As everyone knows, if a chav is indoors then the TV is going to be on. From dawn (about 9 a.m.) till <u>the leccy runs out</u>, the TV will be tuned in and, apart from short bursts of channel hopping through the 153 satellite channels, it will be tuned to ITV Chav, the channel of choice, where a chav knows they will never get stimulated of challenged <u>or anyfing</u>!

This extract from the beginning of 'Chav TV Times' includes a number of representations of chav voice. This begins in the constructed dialogue between a voice representing the authors' point of view and another, representing that of the chav. For the chav, there is nothing else to do other then watching television. The choice of the word *leccy* represents a shift in voice. In the final underlined example, a chav voice is represented in the evaluation of television channels. From the chav point of view ITV is good because its viewers *will never get stimulated*. The addition of *or anyfing* is significant in two ways. One is that it serves as a sign of the inarticulacy and (in the orthographic representation of TH-fronting) linguistic deficiency of the chav. The second way in which it is meaningful is that it serves to align the evaluation of ITV as good because it is not stimulating with a 'chav' point of view.

The above example places *about 9a.m.* in appositional parentheses following *dawn*, suggesting that, from the chav point of view, this is the time of dawn. Here it is not the

modality, but the semantic-lexical classification scheme of language that is used to suggest a 'chav' point of view, a strategy used again in *Chav!*:

SUMMER... This is the chav's most favourite of the two seasons

And, again, the change in point of view is also aligned with a non-standard language voice – the hyper-superlative *most favourite*.

5.3.4.3.2 Procedural discourse

Above I suggested that there is a great deal of procedural discourse in *Chav!* and that this serves to imply that chav behaviour can be easily prescribed. Much of this discourse makes use of a represented 'chav' point of view for sustained periods – whole chapter or sections within them.

In such procedural discourse, the chav point of view is, unlike elsewhere, associated with an *individualised* social actor (van Leeuwen, 1996). The fictional agony aunt Shanice is such an actor. In each case, the individualised actor is a 'chav' version of some source of popular culture authority. 'How Filthy is Your House? The chav guide to housework' is written from the point of view of *Kelly and Maggie*, an intertextual reference to the Channel Four television programme 'How clean is your house?' and its presenters Kim Woodburn and Aggie MacKenzie, known for their strict, thorough approach to house cleaning. This is inverted for 'How filthy is your house?', which begins:

The first thing we like to see upon entering a truly filthy chav house is an overflowing bin. The best way to keep the bin festering throughout the year is either o get yourself a large, slavering dog or to ensure that you block the bin men's way with a huge item, such as a rotting sofa or a broken-down old car.

Similarly, Chav! includes 'The Chavette's Guide to Beauty … Or, Tracy and Savannah's tips on what to wear to make you look not 'orrible!'. Again, this is an intertextual reference to the BBC television programme 'What not to wear' presented by Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine. The 'first thing' advised in this chapter is as follows:

> The first thing you 'ave to do is find out what body shape you are, see what colours suit or don't suit you, and then totally ignore all that and where whatever is cheapest and brightest on sale down the market.

This chapter also includes a list of 'tips', summarising the ironic advice of Tracy and Savannah:

> Wear whatever is cheapest and brightest on sale down the market.
> Find a mate who will make a good stab at your hairdo.
> Stretch your eyes back so that you can achieve that essential scary stare.
> Put as much make-up on as possible.
> Use orange fake tan to contrast with pale eyes and lips.
> Pluck out those eyebrows completely and then pencil them back in very high.
> Wear loads of bling.

In these procedural sections, the advice is an inversion of that of the 'experts' to whom the names intertextually refer – e.g. *How Clean is your House?* becomes *How Filthy is your House?* – suggesting that 'chav' behaviour is driven by an attitude to the world that is the inverse of the 'mainstream'.

5.3.4.3.3   Point of view and irony

Positive shading of the chav point of view might also be seen as an ironic strategy. The irony, I suggest, derives from the incongruity between the objects of chavs' apparent positive evaluations and desires and the normative evaluation of these objects that is largely latent but sometimes textualised. In the following, for example, there is a clash

between the chav-evaluation (italicised) and the authorial evaluation (underlined) of the same object:

> A baseball cap – *preferably* in Burberry check (if you can still get one) – is a *must-have* accessory, put on at a <u>very weird</u> angle. Or a woolly Benny is *good*.

More commonly, though, this clash is latent, relying on evaluations that are not textualised but assumed. This kind of irony is identified in literature by Louw (1993). For Louw, irony arises when we encounter a clash of semantic prosodies, as in the description of a group of conference attendees as *bent on self-improvement* that Louw identifies as ironic in a novel by David Lodge. *Bent on*, Louw shows using corpus evidence, has negative semantic prosody; that is, *bent on* is used to talk or write about negative things, people are *bent on* bad things. This contrasts with the positive associations of *self improvement*, and thus, in this incongruity, readers are likely to find ironic humour. Significantly, Louw does not cite evidence that *self improvement* is positive; it is assumed in his article to be self-evident that this is so. I suggest, then, that many of the objects of chavs' desires can similarly be taken to be latently evaluated in this way.

> the Belly Button Piercing is an absolute must have
> what your average chav-about-town likes to be seen in is branded sportswear
> the Medallion ring. This classy piece of hand furniture

In such cases the ironic incongruity seems to derive from readers' assumed sense of *taste*. From the 'chav' point of view, these are positively evaluated as *must have*, *like*[d] and *classy* items but, even though there is no explicit normative evaluation of these items, there is an assumed reading of them as tacky, as tasteless. Taste, for Bourdieu (1984) is a social, not a purely aesthetic phenomenon, describing the distinctions made by social agents between 'high' and 'low' art, or 'unique' or 'common' music. Such

distinctions are embodiments of the objective class structure of society in the subjective dispositions of agents; 'the social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds. Social divisions become principles of division, organizing the image of the social world' (1984; 471).

The incongruity between normative negative *taste* evaluations and the positive *chav* evaluation of the same phenomenon seems to serve two functions. First, it reinforces *taste*; by relying on implicit taste judgements but not making these explicit, they are further naturalised. Second, this incongruity adds to the sense that *chavs* see the world in a deviant way; that they desire things that are quite patently trashy and tasteless.

5.3.4.4 Distinction between *normal people* and *chavs*

Readers of *Chav!* are positioned in interesting ways in relation to the 'chavs' that they are reading about. At times the book purports to be an outsider's guide to 'chav' culture; at other times a guide to how to be a *chav*; and at others a means by which readers can ascertain whether or not they are *chavs* themselves.

5.3.4.4.1 The normative stance

> As everyone knows, there are four seasons to enjoy each year. For chavs, there are but two: the height of summer or the depths of winter.
>
> To most people, the cinema is a haven of artistic expression, which uses all the technologies of the modern age to tell stories to enrich our lives, and a place for escapist entertainment and amusement. To a chav it's simply a place where you can go to start a fight, text your mates or snog your bint.
>
> A chav's idea of personal hygiene and grooming will vary wildly from what most people might imagine is personal care

In these cases a distinction is drawn between *everyone* or *most people*'s view of the world, and that of *chavs*. This distinction is not so explicitly drawn throughout the book,

but exists implicitly; readers are expected to be *most people*, and not *chavs*. An example of the way this is textualised comes in *Chavspeak: the phrasebook*, where *chavspeak* utterances are given 'standard English' glosses:

Abaaaht – About
Giss – Give
Shaaarup – Shut up

Got me trackies daahn primarkinnit. Well nice innit?
(I purchased my fetching tracksuit bottoms from Primark. They're lovely, aren't they?)
Do yerr know where I caaan score raaand 'ere, moosh?
(Would you happen to know where I can purchase some drugs?)

The implication of these glosses and of the adoption of the generic forms of dictionaries and phrasebooks more generally is that *chavs* are a different culture who readers will need a guide to communicate with.

Similarly, *chavs* are ironically provided with their own versions of a number of semiotic genres that will be familiar to readers. Tracy and Savannah, for instance, are *chav* experts and use the language of expertise to give advice that inverts that of their mirror-image Trinny and Susannah. Where Trinny and Susannah perform the role of popular culture fashion experts for *normal people*, Tracy and Savannah apparently do the same for *chavs*.

The distinction between *most people* and *chavs* is reinforced in the repeated inversion of what is to be understood as common sense in guides to being a chav.

So buy the plants on a warm day in March and then plonk them straight in the ground without water or any further attention.

> The first thing you 'ave to do is find out what body shape you are, see what colours suit or don't suit you, and then totally ignore all that and wear whatever is cheapest and brightest on sale down the market.

If the text is descriptive of chavs, and sometimes professes to speak (ironically) from the position of chavs, it often addresses the reader directly. This *you* is aligned with the position of *most people* and an understanding of the text relies on a great deal of assumed shared evaluation; specifically taste judgements.

5.3.4.4.2   Readers as spotters

In my discussion above, I have regularly referred to strategies that foreground the supposed point of view of 'chavs'. But, more subtly, we can also identify a normative, authorial point of view. This is the perspective from which the 'spotting' takes place. *Spotting* is, here, a Mental Process and it is one that does not take *chavs* as its Senser but *you*. It is, for Halliday, a different kind of Mental Process to those associated with *chavs*. Chavs *like* and *want*. These are Processes of *Affection*. You *spot*, a Process of *Perception* (Halliday, 1985; 111). *Chavs*' perceptions of their world are thus suggested to be more subjective, more emotionally oriented than the detached, objective stance of the texts' producers and readers.

This difference in the representation of mental interaction with the world reinforces, I think, the incongruity between the explicitly positive chav-aligned evaluations given to the phenomena described in the texts' *Chav spotting* sections, and the implicit, untextualised *taste* evaluations of these same phenomena that readers are assumed to share. The explicitly positive chav evaluations are, so to speak, *on-record*, where the implicit taste evaluations are *off-record*. In this respect, the taste evaluations of the

resources constructed as representing *chav* are naturalised, or, to use Bourdieu's term, *misrecognised*.

5.3.4.4.3   Lifestyle relativism

The final chapter of *Chav!*, 'Chav quiz time', marks a shift away from the normative distinction between *most people* and *chavs*:

> It's all very well knowing how to spot chavs in the wild, but what if – by some bizarre coincidence – you've started to suspect that you have chav tendencies – or heaven forbid, that you actually are a chav?

And what follows is a personality-test type quiz, distinguishing between 'middle-class muddler[s] with no chav tendencies', 'worthy hippy-dippy type[s]', and 'chav[s]'. Readers are invited to answer ten questions, each with three possible answers. The questions work through the course of a day, from question one about waking up to question ten about going to bed. Questions six and seven can serve as examples here:

> Question six: It's lunchtime and you fancy a treat. But where do you go?
> a) Anywhere that can offer me the type of food sold in Marks & Spencer – and where I can treat myself to a nice cream cake and then tell everyone how naughty I am for eating it!
> b) A vegan wholefood café that serves nutritious, delicious green-looking food – and where I can meet the rest of my pressure group there [sic.] and plan my letter writing campaigns.
> c) Maccy D's where I will make a Happy Meal last two hours so that me and my blinged-up mate can bitch about all the other customers.
>
> Question seven: Back home, you put some music on. What are you listening to?
> a) Norah Jones, or perhaps some cool jazz sounds.
> b) Some folksy music from Peru, or create 'energy' sounds of my own with my bongos, panpipes and tambourine.
> c) Some banging 'choons'. Doesn't really matter what, but the baseline [sic.] must be pounding and loud enough to crack the house foundations.

This quiz is interesting in the distinctions it draws between 'chavs' and others for two main reasons. The first is that it does not simply distinguish between chavs and *normal people* in the manner of the rest of the book, but between 'chavs' and two other particular kinds of people. And the second reason that this distinction is interesting is that these other kinds of people are also stereotypes, constructed in relation to similar kinds of resources as chav has been throughout the book.

There is thus a shift from a conception of 'chavs' that looks very much like Levitas' (2005) Moral Underclass Discourse – one in which there is a mainstream of *normal people* and then a single deviant group of *chavs* – to a representation that looks much more like a Lifestyle Discourse in which *chav* refers to one of many lifestyle options. It is possible to identify each of the possible identities here in terms of consumer habits, and no one is identified as being any more 'normal' than the other.

There is a different kind of irony at work here to that discussed earlier, and irony now that seems related to Sperber and Wilson's concept of *echoic mention*. For Sperber and Wilson irony 'involves echoic mention of a real or imagined utterance or opinion' (1981; 312). There are, of course elements of this in the use of the *chav* point of view, which is to be understood by readers as *echoic* of the kind of thing a *chav* might say, partly because it contrasts with the normative assumed stance of the readers. In this quiz, it is not simply the ostensible *chav* point of view that is represented through echoic mention, but the *middle-class muddler* and the *worthy hippy-dippy type* too. The discourse associated with each of these is to be recognised as the kind of thing a particular kind of person might say, thus the irony associated with the chav point of view extends to these other 'types' as well.

One consequence of this is that, where elsewhere taste (of everyone except *chavs*) has been an implicit evaluative force, latent in the discourse but not explicitly foregrounded, here it *is* foregrounded. For instance, the idea that food from Marks & Spencer might be 'better' than food from McDonald's is associated with a particular kind of person, *the middle class muddler*. In other words, taste here is *relativised*, where, elsewhere in these texts, it is highly normative. An ironic stance is taken not just to the apparent tendencies of 'chavs' but to those of other ostensible groups too.

5.3.4.5 *Chav* and society

5.3.4.5.1   The Underclass Discourse

In a number of ways, the stereotypes of the chav developed in these books is similar to the idea of the underclass as identified by Levitas (2005). These ways are (bold is direct quotation from Levitas, ibid.; 21):

It presents the underclass or socially excluded as culturally distinct from the 'mainstream'. This distinct culture is developed through the articulation of the social semiotics of *chavs*, and the emphasis on the behaviour of 'chavs' and the apparent value system that drives this behaviour. Language is particularly important here; the pastiching of dictionary and phrasebook forms suggests that understanding *chavs* is a matter of understanding a distinct culture. Emphasis is placed, both implicitly and explicitly, on the idea that to behave like a chav is a matter of personal *choice*, and particular observable phenomena – clothes, jewellery, language, behaviour – are articulated as symbols of this choice.

It focuses on the behaviour of the poor rather than the structure of the whole society and inequalities among the rest of society are ignored. The focus of these texts is, clearly *chavs*, and, the dominant distinction drawn between chavs and others is a dichotomous one assuming homogeneity on the part of *normal people*. Recognition of the humour relies on an assumed homogeneity of *taste* and the you of the texts is aligned with a homogeneous *normal people*.

It implies that benefits are bad, rather than good, for their recipients, and encourage 'dependency'. These texts are much more culturally oriented than the political discourse that Levitas investigates but, nonetheless, 'dependency' is an issue addressed in both. The blurb of TLBOC reads *Chav want money and lots of it, but don't want to have to work for it* and the book includes a section on chav jobs, which begins:

> Generally, chavs spend most of their time unemployed but still manage to get hold of the latest trainers, have plenty of cigarettes and generally succeed in drinking to their hearts' content.

Syntactically, both of these sentences make central use of *but*, implying an incompatibility between the conjoined elements. This assumption of incompatibility relies on a particular conception of work and welfare, one that views paid work as the only legitimate source of income.

Chav!'s focus is generally much more cultural, but in this book too there are representations of state dependency. In a section on 'The Four ages of Chav', the authors write of 16-45 year olds:

> Chavs in this age range may miss having a place to hang out, and instead of the swing park they will usually choose the Social Security offices or the Job Centre

So the issue of concept of dependency is not one that is explicitly used in either of these texts. The construction of unemployment as a *choice*, though, is apparent, and the evaluation of this choice as being contrary to normative expectations is also apparent.

It is a gendered discourse, about idle, criminal young men and single mothers. TLBOC distigusishes between the *chavo* and the *chavette*, attributing to each a particular appearance. Gender differences, though are not developed to the extent of Levitas' MUD. They are in fact at their most developed in two lists of chav jobs, female – *trainee hairdresser, trainee beautician, cleaner* and *barmaid* – and male – *cowboy builder/plumber/roofer, market stall trader, mechanic,* and *security guard*. Though this is clearly strongly gendered, it seems difficult to claim that this is similar to the very specific kind of gendering identified by Levitas.

As Hayward and Yar (2006) suggest, this discourse is not explicitly politically oriented; it is the cultural sphere that is its focus. But it is precisely one of the features of Levitas' MUD that politics becomes personal.

5.3.4.5.2   Issues of public concern

These texts, I have argued, articulate a particular relationship between public appearances and private personalities. *Chavs* are represented as having a particular kind of personality that underlies their public behaviour. In some cases, this personality is brought into discussions of issues of current public concern, such as education and welfare.

In a few other cases issues of particular political concern are addressed. The clearest example of this comes in 'The Chavster's Guide to Education'.

> **Chavs and Homework…** In years gone by it was noted that homework would be done either on the bus on the way to school or in the playground on the way to the lesson. Nowadays, homework is binned on the way *out* of the lesson or ignored entirely. One reason for not doing homework is that if you actually do it you might look as if you were trying to achieve or learn something (which is a no-no in all areas of chav society). The most important reason for *not* doing it, however, is that you can't be *made* to do it by the teacher. This gives the chavling another good opportunity to remind the teacher of their unique power. After all, if you can totally disrupt every class you attend and then fail all your exams, that will *really* show the teacher up, eh?!

In this extract, the ironic representation of *chav* point of view is clear, especially in the final sentence. The use of this point of view offers a personality based explanation for educational underachievement. This is interestingly also temporalised – *in years gone by* is contrasted with *nowadays*.

Similarly, the personality of the *chav* is represented as being responsible for alcoholism, petty crime and domestic violence.

5.3.4.5.3   Class

It would be misleading to suggest that the Underclass Discourse is the only representation of class that is relevant to these texts. Much older, more general class representations are also implicated in the discourse. In the sections on 'Chavspeak', for instance, stylisations of stereotypes of basilectal Cockney (Wells, 1982) are used, and the metalinguistic comments on 'Chavspeak' share much with the comments made about working-class speech cited in Crowley (2003).

Similarly, evaluative judgements on the appearances and preferences of *chavs* rely on a classed sense of *taste*. Readers, I believe, are likely to read implicit classed meanings into many of the objects and activities associated with *chavs*, not because such meanings are made explicit but because these texts rely on readers' embodied

classifications – their sense of what items of clothing, types of music, ways of behaving are 'up' or 'down', on their sense of *taste* (Bourdieu 1984).

Both texts suggest that *chavs* are in some sense the *elite* (TLBOC – *ruling class* in *Chav!*). I have discussed the irony of this above, suggesting that it plays a role in a bathetic incongruity between *chavs*' apparent aspirations and their lack of standing. But in TLBOC *chavs* are also *non-educated delinquents* and *the burgeoning peasant underclass*. The use of the word underclass here might superficially seem to tie discourse on *chavs* to the Underclass Discourse. But it would be difficult to make the equivalent claim that the use of *peasant* here implies a feudal perspective on class. It seems more plausible to me that both words are included here for their connotations of social 'lowliness'.

5.3.4.5.4   Lifestyle

I noted earlier in this chapter that Moran (2006) draws parallels between discourse on *chavs* and the market segmentation schemes of companies like Experian (Experian, 2007). In Chapter Two I also noted some of the similarities between the lifestyle discourse of market segmentation and Levitas' MUD; both are individualised accounts of social difference – both put public differences down to personal disposition.

The Chancellor George Osborne, interviewed on BBC News in September 2010 about Conservative cuts to welfare spending distinguishes between those for whom welfare payments should continue and those for whom unemployment is a *lifestyle choice*. The Discourses of lifestyle and of the underclass clearly mix here.

Nick Robinson	Are you saying that people on unemployment benefit, job seekers allowance, people on invalidity benefit may get less money?

> George Osborne   Look, what I'm saying is we're going to reform the out of work benefit system so that there is a very strong incentive for people who can work to get work. Of course, people who are disabled, people who are vulnerable, people who need our protection will get our protection and more. But, I tell you, people who think that it's a lifestyle choice to just sit on out of work benefits – not someone desperately looking for a job and really making the effort to go out there everyday to try and find work but *the person who sits there and says you know what this is a lifestyle choice for me – that lifestyle choice is going to come to an end*.
>
> Nick Robinson   Forgive me, I've heard lots of politicians of all parties make this point. I'm inviting you to say what's different. I mean the rhetoric's the same…
>
> George Osborne   Because the money won't be there to support that lifestyle choice
>
> (BBC, 2010d; transcription and emphasis mine)

The stereotype of the *chav* might be seen as adding flesh to the bones of this supposed lifestyle, articulating the habits and tastes of *chavs* in much the same way that market segmentation adds cultural information to economic data.

5.4   Summary

Here I wish to return to the word *chav* itself; what role does *chav* play in these texts? In both books, I suggest, it provides a resource around which a stereotype can be constructed, a resource for naming a type of person, their culture and traits abstracted from these people. For Labov (1972a) a label of some kind distinguishes stereotypes from less socially salient *markers* of group identity; differences between people's speech become stereotypes when a speech community starts to talk about them, and naming them is part of this process. Though the stereotype I am dealing with here is not just a sociolinguistic one, Labov's claim remains useful. It is though flawed in that, for Labov, such names are resources merely for labelling stereotypes, not for creating them. Here, the word chav is part of an active process by which a stereotype is developed, and articulated.

The stereotype of the *chav* is located in relation to Discourses on class. In this sense, Labov's account of stereotype, mentioned at the beginning of this subsection, is somewhat less useful. For Labov, a stereotype is almost entirely *indexical*. But in articulating a stereotype in discourse it becomes *symbolic*. And it is a principle of critical discourse analysis that disocurse is structured according to Discourse; that all language is implicated in some way of representing the world. *Chav* is closely related to Discourse on class, to Levitas' MUD and to Discourses representing educational underachievement as the result of failed personal-cultural aspirations. The construction of the stereotype also relies on non-discursive classifications, on readers' sense of *taste*. Ways of talking about and ways of feeling class are both implicated in the symbolic meaning of chav. This stereotype is no index of experience of other people. As Hewitt puts it:

> stereotypical roles are, of course, not simply given, but are culturally achieved through perceptions of social relations – class, ethnic, racial, gender – achieved productively through ideological struggles over power, and hence represent refracted social definitions

> (Hewitt, 1986; 173)

Chav is such a 'refracted social definition', refracted by *ways of talking about and ways of feeling* class; by Discourse and by *taste*.

Furthermore, the articulation of relationships between the public appearances of *chavs* and their private personalities challenges the idea that stereotypes derive from experience of the public world. In these texts, where we find *Chavs <u>love</u> flashy, trashy jewellery* it is clear that a relationship between appearances and personality is constructed *in discourse.*

But this stereotype is also associated with a great deal of irony. Much of this irony is textual, indicated, or at least cued by the repeated incongruity between chav and authorial point of view. But it is also clear from the context that the these texts are to be understood ironically. They are marked as being 'humour', and with stylised cartoony images. This is what Hutcheon (1994) calls irony as a *discursive practice*; the way that these texts are used presupposes an ironic stance, a readiness to see it all as just a joke.

The comedian Jo Brand has been reported as saying (*The Guardian* 27/07/09)), of the Vicky Pollard character in the BBC comedy 'Little Britain': 'I'd say half the population are taking it in the way it's intended. Others are just laughing at someone who's poor and slaggy'. Oliver Bennett, in *The Independent*, interviews the creator of Chavscum (and joint author of Chav!):

> *It's office fun, "a laugh"* and it identifies the taste divide in society. "People immediately had a handle on it," says Chavscum's webmaster. But in its rather vibrant forum, Chavscum has drawn plentiful criticism. "There's this idea that I'm some middle-class person *laughing* at the working-class population. Well, I'm working-class, so it's not that. Nor is it about having a pop at people on benefits. I see chavs as distinct from the traditional working class. I'm *criticising* their attitude problem."
>
> …
>
> Yet the webmaster has had to delete posts from extreme right-wing groups, and as of this week has appointed a moderator. "I'm not pleased about the direction. The forum is out of hand. You can't expound physical violence and eugenics, and from now on, we will explain that, and *bring it back to humour*."
>
> (Bennett 28/01/04, in *The Independent*; my italics)

The website is explicitly identified here as humorous, and this is represented as being its true aim, not to espouse violence but to be humorous, as if the latter provides some assurance against the former. The use of the website to abuse like 'just laughing at someone who's poor and slaggy' is represented as an inappropriate activity, as a

misreading of the genre. But if we look in more detail at this first paragraph I have extracted from Bennett's interview, Chavscum's webmaster defends himself against claims that he is *laughing at the working-class population* by questioning not the activity – he is reported as making clear that the site is intended to be *a laugh* – but the target of this activity. In this text, the slip from *laughing at* to *hav*[ing] *a pop at* to *criticising* does not indicate an alternative activity but suggests that to laugh at *is* to criticise; that the two are one and the same thing.

In *Chav!*'s 'About the authors' section, though:

> In a recent mission statement Mia likened herself to Sigourney Weaver in the film *Gorillas in the Mist*, because she tries to integrate herself in the chav community and gain their trust in order to observe their behaviour. Strangely, Clint also likens himself to Sigourney Weaver. However, he connects more with her role in the film *Alien* as he tries to locate the queen chav's nest so that he can get rid of her eggs and call her a bitch.

So laughing at is not innocent – this humour is explicitly and knowingly politically engaged. The humour is not an excuse for stereotypical representations but much more intimately related to the stereotyping than this. Billig (2001) interprets racist joke websites associated with the Ku Klux Klan in America in a similar way. The fact that these are jokes is not an excuse for expression of controversial content in an innocent way – part of the 'fun' comes from knowing that such stereotypes are unacceptable and revelling in this.

This irony is not all-pervasive, though. Indeed, the irony *relies* on there being none ironic meanings too. This seems to be the case where the *chav* point of view is made explicit and juxtaposed with a normative, taste-based point of view that intended readers are expected to share. In such cases, laughter at *chavs* may well be felt as ironic, but the

implicit comparison between them and what is normal is not – it is reinforced, naturalised.

Such uses of *chav* as discussed in this chapter are intimately related to the Genre in which they occur – a Genre that is to be recognised as ironic (Hutcheon, 1994). The extent to which such use is limited to this Genre, though, will be addressed in the following Chapter, which investigates the use of *chav* in a number of Genres of newspaper discourse.

My findings in this chapter can be related back to my research questions as outlined in Chapter One. The Discourse is overtly and self-consciously ideological, knowingly representing extreme class stereotypes, in terms congruent with the Underclass Discourse, representing poverty as choice. The striking feature of the Genre here is the humour, and this too, I suggest has its ideological function, in making the position of the poor subject to overtly ideological joking, and thus avoiding issues of political action or responsibility.

6 Chav in newspapers

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the use of *chav* in British national newspapers, based on an analysis of a large number of newspaper texts taken from the Octobers of 2004, 2006 and 2008. There are many different newspaper Genres in which *chav* is used, and these are typically not the 'hard' news genres traditionally afforded attention by linguists (e.g. Bell, 1991; Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1995b). I organise my analysis according to these news Genres, and discuss each as a Genre – i.e. as a way of doing things with discourse (Fairclough, 2003) – before discussing the specific use of *chav* in each. The news Genres I will discuss are as follows:

- Feature articles about 'chavs'

- Personal columns

- Political opinion pieces

- Celebrity news

- Cultural reviews

- Other Genres in which *chav* rarely occurs

6.2 Methods and data

My analysis is based on a sample of texts taken from three, non-continuous months; October 2004, October 2006, and October 2008. I collected, using the Nexis UK database, all of the national news articles in which *chav* was used from each of these

months. This was 243 articles in total. I deleted duplicates (Scottish and English editions, or morning and evening editions, for instance), and was left with 220 articles – 86 from October 2004, 69 from October 2006, and 65 from October 2008. Table 6.1 shows these articles broken down into the nine national publications that go to make up my data. I have also included here annual totals for 2004 to 2009. The number of articles including *chav* in these newspapers is uniformly low in 2004, increases massively in 2005, and then decreases to 2009 (with some fluctuations). Despite this, it is from October 2004, and not 2006 or 2008, that the most articles including *chav* were returned. This huge increase in frequency in late 2004 can be related to the OED's inclusion and promotion of *chav*, discussed in Chapter Three.

Table 6.1 Newspaper articles including *chav*, 2004-2009[15]

		2004	2005	**2006**	2007	**2008**	2009
The Times	**October**	**11**		**13**		**9**	
	Whole Year	57	202	149	131	86	93
The Daily Telegraph	**October**	**9**		**1**		**8**	
	Whole Year	40	84	66	52	58	24
The Independent	**October**	**11**		**2**		**4**	
	Whole Year	69	140	66	45	37	24
The Guardian	**October**	**8**		**6**		**14**	
	Whole Year	28	129	125	87	74	49
The Daily Mail	**October**	**8**		**13**		**5**	
	Whole Year	36	114	104	100	105	30
The Daily Express	**October**	**6**		**5**		**5**	
	Whole Year	13	99	54	50	33	27
The Daily	**October**	**5**		**7**		**5**	

---

[15] The 'Whole Year' numbers here may include duplicates, and are thus somewhat unreliable. From my removal of 23 duplicates from the 243 October articles, I estimate that around 10% of articles reported here might be duplicates, but this might vary with time and with publications.

Mirror	Whole Year	33	138	98	53	53	74
The Sun	**October**	**16**		**9**		**8**	
	Whole Year	65	187	156	95	99	86
The Daily Star	**October**	**11**		**10**		**6**	
	Whole Year	38	257	175	273	106	73
Whole Year totals		379	1350	993	886	651	480

This is a large number of texts to analyse manually. My purpose, though, is not to analyse each as a whole, but to look specifically at the use of the word *chav* and its use in context. One way of achieving this would have been to use a corpus analysis programme to provide me with concordance lines for the word, such that I could look to the left and to the right of *chav* in a string of text and identify recurrent patterns of use. I have not done this because this would have limited me to an understanding of meaning in use as a very restricted phenomenon. Firth is often cited as influence in corpus linguistic work, as saying that 'you shall know a word by the company it keeps' (1957; 179, quoted in Whitsitt, 2005; 300). Though, as indicated in Chapter Two, I agree that meaning emerges from use, I would not like to restrict use in this way, to prioritise the words immediately next to another word as *the* relevant feature of use. I would like to promote a much wider and more flexible conception of a word's 'company', one that also includes discursive elements – the kinds of text in which *chav* is used, where it is used in them, and what it is used to do. The interpretation of such meanings requires reference to larger stretches of text, and, crucially, understanding of texts in terms of Genre.

6.3   Newspaper discourse at the Discourse level

In this section, I discuss the newspaper Genres relevant to my analysis of *chav*. Most articles returned by Nexis UK cannot be understood in terms of the traditional 'hard' news story (Bell 1991), and it is necessary to refer to the more limited literature on other, 'softer' news genres. I also discuss some of the differences between the newspapers in my collection, referring to readership and to political stance.

6.3.1   Genre

I have not chosen newspaper discourse as a representative of any broader type of discourse. As Richardson points out, newspaper discourse is a specific kind of practice, and discourse analysts should not '"concertina" together discursive genres' (2007; 76-7); the language of newspapers cannot be understood as representative of any more general idea of *the* language, and certainly not of discourse that might be used by any of its readers. Cameron (1998) provides a specific example of how this is the case. The *Today* newspaper, she writes;

> banned its journalists from using the word *toilet* (instead it prescribed *lavatory*) precisely because *toilet* was thought to have lower middle class connotations and *Today*'s target readership was lower middle class. The ban thus reflected not readers' actual usage but the social aspirations attributed to them by *Today*'s editorial staff.
>
> (Cameron, 1998; 43)

It is not only such specific editorial decisions that make newspaper discourse distinct, but the generic forms themselves. The genre of 'hard' news reporting has been a central concern of (critical) discourse analysts for some time now (Bell, 1991; Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1995b; Richardson, 2007), but, as will be discussed below, the vast majority of my texts cannot be seen as part of such a genre. Much more commonly, *chav* is found

in opinion pieces, personal columns, and celebrity gossip pieces and profiles. Each Genre will be discussed as introduced in my analysis below. These Genres have been the focus of much less attention from critical discourse analysts (though see Conboy, 2006), and, in my discussion of them, I will draw on the more developed literature of cultural and media studies.

6.3.2 Readership

British newspapers are diverse in their readerships, with different newspapers produced for sale to different kinds of people. Advertising, a major source of newspaper revenue, is sold on the basis of the kind, not only the size, of readership that a publication can provide (Richardson, 2007). Table 6.2 shows the social class of British newspaper readerships. The letters A to E designate occupational groups as follows (Ipsos-Mori, 2009; 3): A, 'higher managerial, administrative or professional', represents 4% of the population; B, 'intermediate managerial, administrative or professional', represents 23% ; C1, 'supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional', 29%; C2, 'skilled manual workers', 21%; D, 'semi and unskilled manual workers', 15%; E 'state pensioners, casual or lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only', 8%. So, the majority of the Financial Times readership are drawn from occupational groups A and B, occupying 'higher' social positions according to their occupation, while the majority of the Daily Star's are from 'lower' groups D and E.

Table 6.2 Social class of British Newspaper Readerships (Worcester 1998, in Richardson 2007: 81)

	Social class of readership (%)			
	A/B	**C1**	**C2**	**D/E**
Financial Times	57	28	9	5
The Times	55	27	9	9
Telegraph	47	31	13	10

Independent	45	32	13	10
Guardian	39	33	13	15
Broadsheet Avg.	**48.6**	**30.2**	**11.4**	**9.8**
Daily Mail	23	32	24	21
Daily Express	22	31	24	21
Mid-market Avg.	**22.5**	**31.5**	**24**	**21**
Daily Mirror	7	16	37	40
The Sun	6	15	38	41
The Star	4	15	39	43
Red-top tabloid Avg.	**5.7**	**15.3**	**38**	**41.3**

6.3.3 Political stance

These newspapers are also oriented differently in political terms. Of the broadsheets, *The Times* and especially *The Telegraph* are relatively right-wing, while *The Guardian* and *The Independent* are to the left. All of the other newspapers are to the right, with the exception of *The Mirror*, which is a left-wing paper. To some extent, these trends can be seen in political party support at election time, where the right-wing papers have supported the Conservatives (*The Sun* and *The Times* both lent support to Tony Blair's more New Labour government but returned to the Conservatives for the 2010 general election), and the left, the Labour Party or Liberal Democrats. Despite these differences, none of these papers is particularly radical politically, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, for instance, taking generally a left-liberal and not a left-socialist position. Managing their own political opinion is a key concern for newspapers, and this is particularly evident in opinion columns. As Conboy (2007) suggests, newspapers increasingly focus on giving views; television, radio, the internet are all faster sources of news, thus contemporary newspapers sell themselves as sources of opinion.

6.4 Analysis

In presentation of text, I will use the following notation for referencing: (XXDD/YY), where X represents the name of the newspaper, DD is the date of publication in the month of October, and YY is the last two digits of the year. So, an article published on October 15th 2006 in the Guardian would be (GD15/06). The two letter codes I use are as follows:

The Express	EX
The Guardian	GD
The Independent	IN
The Daily Mail	ML
The Mirror	MR
The Sun	SN
The Daily Star	SR
The Daily Telegraph	TL
The Times	TM

6.4.1 Feature articles

In October 2004, following the OED's promotion of *chav* as 'word of the year', a number of newspapers published feature articles about the word, and about the kind of people that it was taken to identify. These ran alongside the articles reporting on the OUP press release discussed in Chapter Three.

In features on *chav*, the word is used in stereotyping. The word provides a resource by which public appearances can be related to personality type. These articles thus further develop the tendency identified in the 'chav humour' books discussed in Chapter Five.

And, as in the 'chav humour' books, I suggest that this is a stereotype that is intended to be recognised as such; to be understood as ironic.

6.4.1.1 *The Sun* – 'Proud to be a Chav'

Prominent among the early feature articles were a series of articles in *The Sun* that ran under the heading 'Proud to be a chav'. *The Sun*, as indicated earlier in this chapter, has a largely working class readership according to the National Readership Survey's social grade system. The 2008 National Readership Survey estimates that 23% of adults classified as being in social grades C2DE read *The Sun* (NRS, 2010).[16] The 'Proud to be a Chav' campaign might therefore be seen as an attempt at reclamation of the word on behalf of this readership. Bell (1991) emphasises the importance of audience design in journalism, and this campaign might be seen as an attempt to appeal to what was perhaps seen as an emerging scheme of working class self-identification. If such an attempt was made, however, it was short-lived and apparently unsuccessful; *The Sun* soon stopped using *chav* in positive or self-identifying ways, as shown by articles discussed elsewhere in this chapter. Here, though, it is the 'Proud to be a Chav' articles that are my focus.

In Chapter Three, I noted that the OUP's decision to name *chav* 'word of 2004' is represented in *The Sun* as a 'tribute' to 'Chav culture'. The newspaper's article on this ends with a *Chav dictionary*. *Chav words* are listed with definitions and translations for the newspaper's readers:

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[16] That is 23% of 'skilled manual workers' (C2), 'semi and unskilled manual workers' (D), and 'state pensioners, casual or lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only' (E) (Ipsos-Mori, 2009). The NRS categorises 44% of the British population over 15 as belonging to these groups.

Here we offer a glimpse at how dictionaries might look in a decade – by printing The Sun's guide to chav words:

BLAZIN' (adjective) 1. excellent, very good. 2. an expression of admiration or respec' indicating that things are sorted. as in: "That's a blazin' set of wheels."

BRETHREN (noun) 1. family. 2. close friends or associates. 3. like-minded individuals who have formed a bond of friendship in shopping centres. 4. homies.

BLING (noun) 1. expensive and bulky jewellery. 2. large quantities of these items, especially chains. 3. products sold at jewellery counters in Argos or Index.

COFFIN DODGER (noun) 1. an old age pensioner. 2. a person over the age of 50. 3. a person who is seen in public not wearing a piece of clothing made by Adidas or Burberry.

DISS (verb) to treat with disrespect or contempt. Used especially as a verbal insult.

DOB IN (verb) to report wrong-doing to police or other authorities.

GIVIN'IT LARGE (expression) 1. enjoy recreational activities to the maximum. 2. behaving as the life and soul of the party, as in: "Kevin is really buzzin' tonight - he's givin'it large."

GOV (noun) 1. a killjoy authority figure likely to attempt to prevent vandalism, shop-

lifting or anti-social behaviour. 2. traffic warden, community beat officer, social worker, council official, security guard, as in: "Floor it, he looks like he's gov."

INNIT? (abbreviated sentence) 1. it is. 2. question seeking confirmation of an obvious fact. as in: "It's borin' on the dole, innit?"

LEZZA (noun) a term of admiration or respect for a gay female prepared to take part in group sex.

LUSHINNIT? (abbreviated sentence) 1. a positive expression of satisfaction or contentment not requiring a reply. 2. a boast designed to draw attention to a flashy item recently purchased or shop-lifted.

MACKY D'S (noun) 1. a wholesome and satisfying meal 2. a popular meeting place for a social gathering.

MINGER (noun) 1. a very ugly female deemed too unattractive for a sexual relationship. 2. opposite of "talent."

SOLID (adj) 1. reliable and trustworthy. 2. earning the unfailing respect of your peers through a long record of exemplary behaviour.

TREK (verb) 1. to go for a walk. 2. to leave the lounge for any reason. as in: "Do you fancy a trek out to get a Chazzz burgaaa?"

TWOK (verb) to steal or hotwire a motor vehicle (derived from police offence "taking without owner konsent").

WOT U F***IN' SAY? (abbreviated sentence) 1. excuse me? 2. pardon? used especially in conversation with authority figure.

YERLOOKIN'FERASLAP? (abbreviated sentence) 1. exclamation indicating lack of patience. 2. a threat of violence. (SN19/04)

Three features of this list – which is very similar to those published in *Chav*! (Wallace and Spanner, 2004) and *TLBOC* (Bok, 2004a) – are particularly interesting.

(1) It is significant that language should be represented as a property of 'chav culture' at all. It seems that language, as an observable phenomenon, is something that can be articulated in the construction of a stereotype. Sociolinguists have, of course, made use of the concept of stereotype in relation to language (Labov, 1972a; Hudson, 1996), but, as Rampton (1999) points out, they have paid little attention to the construction of such stereotypes, assuming that they emerge from everyday interaction, and paying less attention to the social historical forces behind their emergence (Hewitt, 1986; Leyens et al., 1994). More generally, and as argued in Chapter Five, language is closely related to culture in the popular imagination; different cultures have different languages, and such languages are represented in dictionaries. It might therefore be that in the construction of cultural difference, language provides an important resource. Here this culture is one within Britain, and thus the implication that *chavs* use a distinct language that needs translating into English might be seen as an implication that they employ something like an anti-language (Halliday, 1978). This is undermined somewhat ironically by the likely familiarity to most British English speakers of most of these words and phrases – readers are encouraged to 'alienate' themselves from such expressions.

(2) These words, like those deployed in the 'chav humour' books, are heavily weighted towards particular lexical fields; criminality, sexuality and recreation. Again, popular linguistic beliefs might be relevant here. In this case, there seems to be some implication that, just as Eskimos are popularly thought to have an abundance of words for snow (Pullum, 1991), 'chav culture' has many words for theft and sex. This is

furthered by the definitions given for some of these words, which adopt the apparent world-view of 'chav culture'. For instance, 'COFFIN DODGER' is defined as 'an old age pensioner', 'a person over the age of 50' and 'a person who is seen in public not wearing a pieces of clothing made by Adidas or Burberry', implying that, for 'chavs', being over 50 and not wearing these brands is enough to qualify someone as old.

(3) Many of these words are included with indications of linguistic deviancy. This is apparent in the 'dropped g' of 'BLAZIN'', the lack of spaces between words in 'YERLOOKIN'FERASLAP', and the spelling of 'WOT U'. The implication of this is that this is a language that deviates from the some normative English standards. As Williams puts it 'It has been one of the principal amusements of the English middle class to record the hideousness of people who say *orf*, or *wot*, even though these can spell the standard pronunciations. The error consists in supposing that the ordinary spelling indicates how proper people speak' (1963; 245), and the implication that follows is that those whose speech is transcribed in this 'orthography of the uneducated' (ibid.) are not 'proper people'.

The day following the 'guide to Chav words', *The Sun* published a feature *to translate those baffling hand signals your kids resort to when they simply cannot be bothered to speak*. *Chav* here is used to identify someone who might be the child of one of *The Sun*'s readers. This contrasts with uses in which *chavs* are strangers encountered in public, or a problematic social group. Here *chavs* are young people who readers might know, not a 'class' but a *generation*, and it is implied that readers' children – *your kids* – might be part of this *generation*. What follows is *a manual for parents explaining how to interpret the signs used by teenagers on the street*; a name for each sign and

description of what it means, followed by instructions for making the sign. Each piece

of body language is, in fact, a hand gesture.

CHAV is the "in" word of the year and yesterday we revealed the meaning of key terms used by the Burberry-mad bling bling generation.

Today it's time to translate those baffling hand signals your kids resort to when they simply cannot be bothered to speak.

Here, SALLY BROOK offers a manual for parents explaining how to interpret the signs used by teenagers on the streets - and how to copy them if you're over 20 and want to look really daft.

SUN Agony Aunt DEIDRE SANDERS advises parents: "Don't feel threatened by teen culture or mock their language. Their slang words are a code to show they belong to the right gang - oldies keep out. But it is a good idea to ask casually what words mean and to keep up with the latest terms for being drunk, drugged and having sex - just in case."

LOSER: (You are an embarrassing specimen in every way). GUIDE:Extend index finger and thumb to make "L" shape, then put hand against your forehead.

TALK TO THE HAND 'COS THE FACE AIN'T LISTENING. (You're boring me). GUIDE:Extend your arm, palm forwards, in the direction of the speaker.

LOSER WHATEVER WAY YOU LOOK AT IT: (You are beyond help). GUIDE:"L", then "W", then look through a square of thumbs and index fingers.

TUNE:(Used to tell fellow clubbers or gig-goers that you like the music). GUIDE: Make a "T" by pointing fingers of one hand into palm of the other.

BIG TUNE:(Again, when it's noisy and if you love the music in the club or at the gig. GUIDE:With fists closed, make the "T" by using your forearms.

WHATEVER

TRANSLATION: I'm simply not interested in whatever you have to say.

GUIDE:Extend thumbs and index fingers and touch thumbnails together to form a "W" shape.

SAFE:(I like that, it's really cool). GUIDE:Bend your three middle fingers into your palm, stick out your

little finger and thumb, then give hand a wiggle.

BLAZIN': (That is very good). GUIDE:Here's one that's so simple your granny could master it. Just close your fist and bang it against your chest.

WEST-SIDE:(I'm from the west side of the city). GUIDE:With thumb in palm entwine middle two fingers then spread fingertips upwards to make a "W".

EAST-SIDE:(I'm from the east side of the city). GUIDE:Make the west side symbol and - you'll like this bit - tip it on its side to make your "E" shape.

WHATEVER, MINGER: (I'm not interested in whatever you have to say - and you're ugly). GUIDE:Make "W" (main pic) then swivel fingers down to make "M". (SN20/04a)

This article clearly relates to the 'chav words' one that precedes it, and the represented discourse of *Sun Agony Aunt Deidre Sanders*, explicitly describes the apparent communication of the young as a kind of anti-language (Halliday, 1978): *Their slang words are a code to show they belong to the right gang - oldies keep out*. This piece of apparently expert commentary is in contrast with the humour of the explanations of the signs that follow.

Both of these articles are guides to the translation of the behaviour of a group of people called *chavs*. These people are represented as culturally different from *The Sun*'s readers, but also as familiar to them, as potentially being their *kids*. There is thus an irony to this construction of cultural difference, reinforced by the fact that much of the language being translated will be familiar to readers, and the fact that these are printed as part of the newspaper's 'proud to be a chav' campaign – clearly no straightforward, serious-minded reclamation is made. The irony here is familiar from the humour books discussed in the previous chapter, where an ironic bathos is constructed between the associations of cultural difference and respect held by dictionaries and guidebooks, and the banal, everyday familiarity of the subject matter.

A few days after the *chav words* and *body language* features, *The Sun* published a piece with the headline 'GOOD CHAV OR BAD CHAV'.

> GOOD CHAV OR BAD CHAV
> CHAV culture is the newest yoof phenomenon sweeping the country.
> If you are a fab chav like Wayne Rooney's girl Coleen McLoughlin, who owns a blazin' collection of bling, or if you are happy to strut round in a blindin' set of Burberry threads, then The Sun salutes you. But, alas, while most chavs are "safe" there are some whose loutish behaviour threatens to tarnish the movement's crown (bling bling, of course). (SN26/04C)

The reader is directly addressed in the sentences detailing the *fab chav* but not in the sentence about the *bad chav*. If the distinction seems to be made here on the basis of criminality, then this continues when readers are asked to answer a set of questions. The Genre itself, also borrowed at the end of the book *Chav!*, is important here. Personality tests of this kind are fairly ubiquitous in lifestyle magazines and newspapers. Readers are asked to answer a series of questions, and on the basis of their answers, to categorise themselves as particular types of people, to reveal their hidden personalities. Here, the types of personality are *good chav* and bad chav. This is a rare case in which it is possible to be a _good_ chav.

1. Have you ever had an ASBO?
 a) My behaviour is nothing but anti-social.
 b) Had one once but it was definitely not blazin' so I've stayed out of trouble since.
 c) ASBO -is he a MC?

 2. Have you ever been electronically tagged?
 a) A new tag sets my white Reeboks off a treat.
 b) Not yet but it would make a blindin' ankle bracelet.
 c) Electronic tag -no thanks. My bling is heavy enough as it is.

 3. Where are you planning to spend your summer holidays?
 a) Young Offenders' Institute.
 b) Shagaluf, sunshine and sangria -what a combination.
 c) Ayia Napa -the best place to check out the hottest MCs.

 4. Is your Vauxhall Chav-a-lier...
 a) Driven without tax or insurance?
 b) In the pound -it got towed when I parked outside Chinawhite.
 c) Souped up to the max with spoilers, alloy wheels and a kickin' set of speakers.

 5. How do you earn a living?
 a) Selling old cars that have been clocked.
 b) The dole -why would I complicate life by getting a job?
 c) As a 21st Century Del Boy. Wheeling and dealing.

6. How do you spend Saturday nights?
a) I can't go out on the weekend. I have a curfew.
b) Knocking over your neighbours' dustbins.
c) Trying to blag your way into Chinawhite.

7. Where did you get your Burberry cap?
a) Off a bloke who knows a bloke who knocks out blindin' counterfeits.
b) Down the market.
c) Saved up for weeks for forty quid must-have fashion item.

8. Who is your chav hero?
a) Lottery winner Michael Carroll. He knows how to 'av it large. Minted.
b) Ex-E17 singer Brian Harvey -what was all the fuss about the Ecstasy?
c) Roooooooo-ney - legend.

9. Your hooded top is perfect for...
a) Keeping your face hidden from CCTV cameras.
b) Keeping warm when hanging round street corners on a cold winter night.
c) Looking cool when you're out with your brethren.

10. What's your favourite TV show?
a) Crimewatch UK -I love seeing myself on telly.
b) Trisha -it's the only way I can keep up with my family.
c) I can't wait for Jordan's new show to start.

HOW YOU RATED
MOSTLY A: Your behaviour is despicable and nothing to do with being a chav. Sort yourselves out. Your give honest chavs a bad name. Carry on like this and you will end up being jailed for a very long time -and deservedly so. You are nothing more than a yob in chav's clothing.
MOSTLY B: Watch out, you are on the slippery slope. You are dabbling on the fringes of criminal behaviour and if you don't change your ways you could find yourself in court faster than you can say "yerlookin'feraslap."
MOSTLY C: You are sorted. As a fine, upstanding member of the chav community we urge you to reach out to your more misguided brethren. Wear your Burberry baseball cap with pride! We salute you.
(SN26/04c)

In each case, the a) answer implies criminality, and a reader who gives this is *nothing more than a yob in chav's clothing*. A relationship is articulated here between *chav* and *yob*, the former having a potential to be *good*, that the latter does not have. Criminality is the distinguishing feature of the *bad chav*; *Carry on like this and you will end up*

being jailed for a very long time – and deservedly so. The *good chav* is free from criminality. It is consumerism that is central to the *good chav*, and *The Sun* articulates a set of attributes that are elsewhere negatively evaluated.

How does the distinction between the *good* and *bad chav* relate to the Underclass Discourse (Levitas, 2005)? For Bauman (1998), it is an inability to participate in the consumer economy that is central to constructions of the underclass in contemporary societies. For Hayward and Yar (2006), on the other hand, the *chav* is constructed as a member of an underclass that *over-consumes*. In this *Sun* feature, *chav* is both of these. The under-consuming criminal *chav* is 'bad', and the over-consuming *chav* is 'good'. *Chav* is used to identify both. However, it is ultimately the latter, the *good chav* who is truly a *chav* and not simply a *yob*. This article represents the clearest attempt at reclaiming the resource for positive self-identification in my collection.

The article ends with a list of celebrities:

CHECK out these celebrity chav heroes and villains to make sure you are following the right path.
 GOOD CHAVS
 WAYNE ROONEY: His skills on the pitch make him a national treasure.
 COLEEN McLOUGHLIN (above right): Her ex-chav-agant spending sprees are keeping the UK economy afloat.
 BRITNEY SPEARS: Inventor of the ultimate chav wedding.
 MIKE SKINNER (below right): Has penned the best chav anthems.
 DANNIELLA WESTBROOK (above, centre): A Burberry babe and proud of her image.
 PRINCE HARRY: Upper-crust chav of the first order.
 IN-BETWEEN
 DEAN GAFFNEY -Ex EastEnder and early chav role model on the slide.
 BAD CHAVS
 JODIE MARSH (below left): Misses the fine line between chav chic and tacky.
 BRIAN HARVEY (above left): Boasting about drugs is not big or clever...
 or chav.
 (SN26/04c)

As will be discussed in more detail below, coverage of celebrities is a means of writing about the kinds of people that it is possible to be, the kinds of identification available to people in Britain (Turner, 2004a; Conboy 2006). This function is made explicit with the instruction to *Check out these celebrity chav heroes and villains to make sure you are following the right path*; readers are told to compare themselves to celebrities. Of course, whether or how they do so is not a matter that I can comment on in this work, but it remains an important point that readers are provided with *chav* as a resource for identifying themselves and others in comparisons to celebrities.

Overall, *The Sun*'s 'Proud to be a chav' campaign implies that there is such a thing as 'chav culture' and articulates the properties of this culture. This culture is not a distant social problem, but something that is implied to be close to readers – something that they or their children might 'belong to'. But it is also heavily stereotyped, and likely to be read as humorous; not as a serious-minded dissection of contemporary Britain, but as mediated gossip, light-hearted discussion of the kinds of people it is possible to be. This combination of extreme stereotyping and ironic playfulness is found elsewhere where *chav* is used, and is an established feature of stereotyping (Stott, 2005). However, in no texts beyond *The Sun*'s 'Proud to be Chav' campaign, is this ironic stereotyping used in the identification of a newspapers' readers and, indeed, *The Sun*'s campaign was brought to an end within a week.

6.4.1.2 The Chav Rich List

In October 2006, *The Daily Mail* published a feature headlined 'The Chav Rich List':

THE CHAV RICH LIST;

> As glamour model Jordan claims to be an (almost) billionaire, who wins the battle of the Chavs and the Chav-nots ...
>
> THEY'RE the celebrities taste forgot - the chavs who flaunt fake tans, false boobs and mock Tudor houses.
> But what isn't fake are their millions. As the model Jordan boasted last week, they're very rich. She even claimed she was close to making a billion.
> So was she exaggerating? Here, NATASHA PEARLMAN estimates the wealth of the Chav Rich List.

The rich *chavs* in this list are introduced as *the celebrities taste forgot* and attributed to them are *fake tans, false boobs and mock Tudor houses*. No references are made here to welfare dependency or to violence or crime; it is a wealth of economic capital and an apparent dearth of *taste* that is important here. In the introduction to the article above *the model Jordan boasted* of her wealth, despite all her cultural assets being *fake, false* or *mock*. Top of the 'Rich List' are David and Victoria Beckham. For reasons of space, I will concentrate on their entry, which is representative of tendencies apparent in the rest of the article.

> 1 David & Victoria Beckham £87m
> UNDOUBTEDLY the King and Queen of planet Chav, Vic and Dave are the ultimate in nouveaux riches.
> But as Becks has proved with lucrative deals from Adidas, Pepsi, Police sunglasses and Diesel, not passing exams at school doesn't equate to a poor business sense. In fact, Brand Beckham has earned a whopping £17.3 million in the past year alone.
> Becks signed a three year £40 million promotional deal with Gillette in 2004.
> Add this to his £116,000-aweek contract with Real Madrid (£6 million a year) and you're looking at £50 million generated for the Beckhams' company Footwork - directors of which include Victoria and her father, Tony Adams.
> Posh has a personal fortune of £10 million from her Spice Girls days, the royalties of which bring in £1.5 million a year, meaning there are still an awful lot of people out there playing her records.
> She also designs a range of jeans for Rock & Republic worth £250,000 a year - bringing the family's total worth to £87 million.

David and Victoria Beckham are explicitly identified as *the ultimate in nouveaux riches*. This alignment of 'chavs' with 'the nouveaux riche' clearly doesn't contribute to an

Underclass Discourse, but does have moral connotations, suggesting disapproval of those with more money than *taste*. It might be that this is condemnation not of the 'undeserving poor', as in the Underclass Discourse, but of the 'undeserving rich'. However, it is unclear that *David & Victoria Beckham* here are represented as being 'undeserving' – *there are still an awful lot of people out there playing* [Victoria Beckham's] *records*, and David *prove*[s] that *not passing exams at school doesn't equate to poor business sense.*

6.4.1.3 Chav-spotting

In Chapter Five, I discussed the guides to chav-spotting published in *Chav!* and *The Little Book of Chavs*. In my collection of newspaper texts, there are two attempts at 'chav-spotting', the pursuit ironically encouraged by such guides. One of these is discussed later as a personal column. The other, which I discuss here, is a weekend magazine feature, published in *The Daily Mail*.

In the article below, the journalist Petronella Wyatt, 'wearing the full chav getup', 'set[s] out to find out if chavs really exist and, if so, what they are about'. The article is a largely narrative piece, printed in a weekend supplement the week after the OUP's 'word of 2004' declaration. Given the extended attention paid to *chavs* in this article, I reproduce it here in its entirety, with paragraphs numbered.

> ABSOLUTELY CHAVULOUS
> (1) They are described as the new ruling class. Their culture involves ignorance, fecklessness and a penchant for wearing Burberry, flashy gold jewellery, tracksuits and white trainers. Their heroes are off-the-list celebs such as Coleen McLoughlin (Wayne Rooney's girlfriend), Daniella Westbrook and Jim Davidson. Apparently, they have their own sexual habits, slang including 'large', 'diss', 'dob in' and hand signals.

(2) Who are they? If you haven't guessed, you must have been on a Pacific island for the past few months. And you are certainly not 'solid', a 'blazin' Louis Vuitton addict or a supporter of 'Engerrrlund.' We are, of course, referring to chavs the chosen buzzword for 2004. Chosen by no less than the Oxford University Press because it describes such a large section of the population.

(3) Not since the Iraq war began has the nation been so divided. To chav or chav not. You either 'luv' them, like The Sun, which calls itself 'proud to be chav', or want to murder them like the satirical website ChavScum.

(4) But who are these people? And what is their provenance? The word is said to come from the old Romany expression for a gypsy child, chavi, although others argue it emerged in Chatham, Kent, where council estate chic was first identified. Some insist it is all just hype and there is no such group.

(5) With this burning issue in mind, I set out to find out if chavs really exist and, if so, what they are about.

(6) Thus I find myself sitting on a train to East Croydon, spiritual home of the chav. Indeed, the preferred hairstyle of the chavette which involves pulling the hair back so tightly that the face resembles a wax doll is known as the 'Croydon facelift'.

(7) I am not very happy. This is mainly because I am wearing a tracksuit. I haven't worn one for ten years and this one is white. Chav joke: What do you call a chavette in a white tracksuit? The bride.

(8) Apart from my lovely tracksuit, the trousers of which are regulation baggy and keep revealing my underpants, I am wearing the full chav getup. This consists of white trainers, a fake Burberry cap, a fake Fendi handbag and lots of 'bling'. That means tasteless gold chains, huge gold hoop earrings and something called a sovereign ring, formerly reserved for gangsters and Italian homosexuals.

(9) This is so large that were it to come into contact with someone's face it would do a great deal of damage. I don't know what my late father, Tory peer Lord Wyatt, would have made of it all.

(10) It is not long before I encounter my first set of chavs. So they do exist and these are right out of my chav handbook. They are sitting a few feet away; four young men in tracksuits, caps and bling. One of them is called Tyrone, a typical chav name. He looks nothing like Tyrone Power. He is eating a 'Macky D' that's a wholesome satisfying meal for the chav and a vile McDonald's burger for the rest of us.

(11) His friend Wayne is talking with pride about the previous night. He'd been 'givin it large', that is, enjoying his recreational activities. I whip out my notebook like Professor Higgins and take it all down: 'I 'ad five Stellas, but I were fine. I wasn't f*****, but I threw up a bit.' Wayne notices me writing. He gets up and stalks towards me waving hairy be-ringed white hands.

(12) 'What you writing?' he asks. He is wearing one of those sovereign rings.

(13) I feel it best to dissemble. 'Er, just doodling.' 'Are you dissin' me?' he asks.

(14) Oh dear. One thing a chav hates is to be 'dissed' that is, insulted.

(15) Luckily the train reaches East Croydon station and I rush for the exit. As I run across the road someone shouts: 'Chav!' Thank goodness, I am blending in.

(16) Then I realise they did not shout 'chav!' but 'tram!' which I am about to be hit by.

(17) Pulling my Burberry cap over my eyes I make my way to the Whitgift shopping centre, where chavs go for recreation. It is extremely large, full of Macky Ds and clothes shops. One shop sells everything a chavette could possibly want, including Kappa sportswear. In fact, teen chavettes are known as Kappa-Slappers because of their fondness for the brand and their lack of discretion in sexual partners.

(18) A chavette who has reached the age of 15 without at least two badly behaved children by different fathers is known as frigid.

(19) It is half term and these chavettes Beyonce, Chardonnay and Tiffany are wheeling their squalling offspring about in buggies. Some toddlers are screaming. Their mother lifts her fake Vuitton handbag and bashes one of the kids on the head. That's him 'sorted'.

(20) I wander around trying to make friends. But chavs are not very friendly people. I smile and wave at one young woman with a whopping Gucci bag and she gives me some hand sign which, when I consult my handbook, means: 'I'm not f****** interested.' Okay, so my bag's only fake Fendi.

(21) Miserably I slink off to Waterstone's bookshop. It's empty. I ask the salesgirl, who has a definite Croydon facelift, for Caligula by Allan Massie.

(22) Her jaw drops as far as it is able. She points to a table. It is covered in piles of Feel: Robbie Williams. I give up.

(23) Next I wander round the dress shops.

(24) There is a Wallis, whose window displays a smart tweed knee-length skirt and a sign saying A Return To Elegance. Why are there no customers?

(25) By this time the centre is filling up.

(26) Chavettes with bare midriffs hold hands with chavs wearing the contents of King Solomon's Mines. I spot two chavs with their tracksuit hoods up.

(27) This can be a bad sign. It might indicate they are chav thugs relatively speaking. Chavs who joyride in a Mercedes that would never pass an MoT.

(28) 'Do you mind having your picture taken with me?' I ask rather rashly.

(29) 'F*** off, lezza,' they yell. (Lezza is the chav term for any woman over 18 without a child in tow.) I make for McDonald's. I have never seen such a packed outlet nor observed so many people linger for so long over one Big Mac. But this is a chav's 'blazin' (excellent) idea of a meeting place.

(30) At the next table is a whole chav family, including two teenagers. The boy's hooped earrings are bigger than mine and his ring is the size of his hamburger. I ask him for a picture but he declines, scowling. His sister, Charlotte, is more obliging. She is 16. I ask her who her role models are and she replies: 'Garage.' Does she like old Mercedes, too? 'Eh?' By now I am pulling up my tracksuit bottoms every few minutes. I'm jostled, yelled at and felt up as more chavs pour into the shops. It's time for a breather outside.

(31) Here there are two chav males who don't look as threatening as the others. I make one last attempt at a conversation lasting more than 15 seconds. I notice they are minding a baby girl.
(32) 'That your child?' I ask.
(33) The chavs' waxy complexions turn pink. 'Er, no, not really.' Not really?
(34) They look shifty. It's only chavettes who have babies. One chav story tells how a single mum goes to claim benefits for her six sons, all called Kev.
(35) 'Doesn't that get confusing?' asks the official.
(36) 'Nah, it's great,' says the chavette. 'If I wanna call 'em down to dinner, I just yell "Kev!" and they all come runnin'.' 'But what do you do if you only want one of them?' asks the official.
(37) 'That's easy,' says the chavette. 'I just call 'em by their surnames.' My new chav friends, Daniel and Peter, are only 17 and 18.
(38) They are the first chavs I have met who don't look as if they want to run me over. I ask them to join me for a photo and they grin sheepishly. 'But you look so nice.
(39) We're not so good. We haven't got our academics on, like you.' Academics?
(40) 'Yeah, top gear.' They acquiesce, none the less. I am cheered. This is the first time anyone has described me as academic.
(41) Perhaps chavs aren't so bad after all.
(42) If only they would look a bit more cheerful.
(43) After all, these days nobody can tell a fake Burberry from a real one.
(ML31/04a)

Paragraphs one to five constitute an introduction to the narrative (which itself begins in paragraph six). Wyatt begins with a paragraph describing some of the characteristics of the as-yet unnamed *chavs* and *their culture*. Some properties are attributed to this culture – *ignorance, fecklessness and a penchant for wearing Burberry*. The over-consumption of a particular brand – represented as a *penchant*, a personal preference – is combined here with underclass-like personal properties.

In paragraph two, Wyatt addresses the reader directly, suggesting that those that do not know about 'chavs' are ignorant of contemporary Britain. In this, she implicitly reformulates the OUP's promotion of the word as an up-to-date buzzword, knowledge of which is indicative of knowledge of contemporary British society. She represents the OED's decision to include the word, however, as motivated by the apparent fact that it

'describes such a large sector of the population'. This is not a reason put forward by the OUP in any documents, though, as discussed in Chapter Three, she is not alone in representing the decision as motivated by the prominence of 'chavs' as a kind of person.

The narrative begins with an orientation, introducing readers to Wyatt herself, in her *full chav get up*, and to East Croydon *spiritual home of the chav*. It is significant that Wyatt travels to East Croydon; the identification of people as 'chavs' is also an identification of place, and Wyatt, a Daily Mail journalist whose father is *Tory peer Lord Wyatt*, has to not only transform her appearance but also move places to engage in 'chav spotting'; to encounter 'chavs'. Wyatt's description of her *bling* is worth noting. *That means tasteless gold chains*, she writes. The evaluation in *tasteless* is fairly explicit, but perhaps more interestingly, her claim that sovereign rings are something *formerly reserved for gangsters and Italian homosexuals* constructs her as a someone able to interpret the meanings implicit in appearances. Similarly to the spotter position constructed for the reader of *Chav!*, Wyatt is apparently able to objectively identify the normative meanings of the items of clothing and jewellery she sees, while 'chavs' mistakenly like these *tasteless* objects. This construction of herself as expert observer is repeated later when she writes *I whip out my notebook like Professor Higgins and take it all down*, a reference to 'Pygmalion'/My Fair Lady. Other relatively 'high brow' cultural references include *Caligula by Alan Massie* and *King Solomon's mines*. The readership's implied shared knowledge of these references distinguishes them from the 'chavs', from the *salesgirl* whose *jaw drops as far as it is able*.

Wyatt's pseudo-ethnographic narrative continues with her positioning herself as observer and interpreter of the 'chavs' she encounters. This interpretative role is clearest

where she translates the language and gestures of the 'chavs' she describes herself as encountering – *Macky D*, *givin it large*, *some hand sign*. She is also apparently able to represent the opinions and desires of 'chavs'; McDonald's, she writes is *a chav's 'blazin' (excellent) idea of a meeting place*.

Wyatt recounts a *chav story* (paragraphs 34-37), which represents the *chavette* as sexually promiscuous. In this respect, Wyatt's use of *chav* can be seen as contributing to an Underclass Discourse. As Levitas (2005) points out, it is a feature of such a Discourse that men are violent and women are promiscuous, the roles taken by each in Wyatt's narrative. The *chav story* is a joke, but the *chavette* in the story is likely to seem no more of a ridiculous characters than any other *chav* apparently encountered by Wyatt. *All* of this is a joke, with exaggerated characters that conform to well-established stereotypes of the undeserving poor.

In Wyatt's article *chav* is a resource used for the articulation of a public stereotype; a word used to categorise a kind of person that might be encountered in public. I believe that the imagined reader of this article is intended to 'see' the humour; to realise that this is a stereotypical representation, and an ironic one. The bathetic contrast between Wyatt's apparently anthropological aims and the 'lowliness' of her environment is perhaps key to this. It seems unlikely to matter much to readers of the pieces whether Wyatt ever did actually visit Croydon at all, what they are being told by Wyatt is not a specifically contextualised narrative but a generic, self-consciously stereotyped vision.

6.4.1.4 Features summary

Chav is central to a number of 'humorous' features articles. In these articles, it is used to articulate an ironic stereotype. In the case of the 'Proud to be a Chav' campaign, this

is a stereotype that readers are encouraged to jokingly identify with. In the case of Wyatt's article in *The Daily Mail*, this is a stereotype of other people, in other places, but it remains intended to be humorous, her use of *chav* riddled with hyperbole and bathos. The features of this stereotype are somewhat fluid, but centre on a lack of *taste*; this is a feature even of *The Sun*'s *good chav*. Overall, the humorous stereotyping of these features articles is reminiscent of the use of *chav* in the books discussed in Chapter Five.

6.4.2   Personal columns and opinion pieces

Many of the texts in my collection are personal columns or opinion pieces. Such columns are published by all daily newspapers and written by named journalists who comment on events already in the news, or on their own personal lives. McNair sees the development of opinion pieces in newspapers as 'a direct consequence of the commodification of the public sphere which makes it necessary for news organisations to brand their output' (2000; 64, cited in Keeble, 2001; 217). Opinion, by this account, becomes a property of a brand – a trait that consumers use to distinguish between competing products, and that newspaper publishers use to promote their products. Such opinion branding – in Conboy's words, newspapers as 'viewspapers' (2007; 86) – is said to be a commercial necessity in an age when print journalism is a relatively slow news medium (compared, for instance, to the internet, television and radio):

> Readers appear to approve of newspapers as places to turn to, not just for reports on what has happened – most of this is available at least a day earlier through other channels – but for explanations from trusted sources, the columnists, of what the news means, and to suggest a range of appropriate opinion for their readers to engage with.

(Conboy, 2007; 87)

In my collection, as well as pieces giving commentary on relatively 'hard' news stories, I have a number of articles in which journalists write about their personal lives. Articles about the authors' personal lives have received very little attention indeed in the literature on news discourse. I suggest, though, that if opinion pieces on the news agenda of the day can be seen as giving 'a range of appropriate opinion for their readers to engage with' (ibid.) on political and economic issues, then personal columns suggest a range of attitudes to everyday experience.

In opinion pieces, subjectivity is foregrounded; 'The "I" speaks loud and clear' (Keeble, 2001; 216). The same journalists, often well known names, write regular columns, often accompanied by head-and-shoulders photographs. My collection includes texts written by the comedian Dom Joly, and the television presenters Jeremy Clarkson and Fiona Phillips, as well as well-known regular columnists like *The Star*'s Dominik Diamond and *The Mirror*'s Tony Parsons. When readers encounter *chav* in a newspaper, they are therefore relatively likely to do so in a context where the individuality and subjectivity of its user are apparent. (The extent to which its use is actually subject to editorial decisions and institutional guidelines is not particularly relevant here – the use has the appearance of subjectivity.) This suggests that the word is likely to be associated with the personal representation of experience, and not with the illusion of impartiality that analysts such as Chibnall (1977) attribute to hard news.

In the following, I distinguish between personal columns concerning (apparent) events in journalists personal lives and hard news related opinion pieces. This is not a firm distinction, though; many texts are something of both.

6.4.2.1 Personal columns

When *chav* is used in personal columns it is often used in the representation of a real or imagined public encounter, to identify a type of person who causes the writer a problem.

The text below is a column written by the television presenter and regular columnist Fiona Phillips, for *The Mirror.* This text can be understood in terms of a Labovian (1972b) narrative of personal experience. The first paragraph provides the orientation, and what follows is the complicating action. The resolution comes where the 'ignorant woman' 'screeched', in paragraph (4), and this is followed by a coda, a reflection back on the events from Phillips' current position. It is in this coda, this reflection on public experience, that *chav* is used.

SHE DROVE ME MAD

(1) EVEN if I say so myself, I am a courteous driver. On Wednesday, for instance, I pulled into a gap and waited for around 10 minutes letting other cars drive down a narrow road in South London.

(2) Once they'd all gone I drove up the road only to be encountered three-quarters of the way up by an ignorant woman who refused to reverse or move forward.

(3) I wound down my window and asked her if she'd mind moving back so I could drive on.

(4) "Don't you f***in' come all that, 'Don't you know who I am?' with me," she screeched. So "lady", just to let you know who I am - I am polite, considerate and thoughtful. Think about it, you foul-mouthed, inconsiderate chav. (MR30/04)

Chav is used as a pejorative vocative. This comes at the end of a narrative account of the writer's encounter with *an ignorant woman* who did not give way to her on a narrow road. *Chav* is used in the coda to this narrative, in the reflection back on it from a later time, suggesting that the resource is used in reflecting on public experience.

Another text in which a public encounter is reflected on is printed at the beginning of October 2004, in *The Times*. The following [redacted from this work] comes from the personal column of Kate Muir. It is a recount of a visit to a restaurant, at which Muir

finds 'an extended chav family out for someone's birthday'. After a description of the appearances and public behaviour of this family (4, 5), Muir goes on to interpret this behaviour in psychological terms. *Chav* is used by Muir not only as a word to describe people with particular appearances, but to link these appearances to their causes, to represent them as symptoms of a particular condition (6). The implication of Muir's use of *chav* in this column is that there exist a particular set of people who exhibit particular public behaviours which can be interpreted in particular psychological terms.

The chavs in Muir's piece are chavs because of their conspicuous consumption, particularly of high technology. Alongside the expensive gadgets, many of the behaviours that are presented by Muir are likely to be read as implying that these are relatively wealthy people – they are at a restaurant, they are tanned, *the children have posher accents than the adults, and subtler, expensive clothes*, they are drinking champagne, they will *no doubt watch a seat-back DVD movie in the Porsche SUV*. These chavs are not poor; they are certainly not members of an 'underclass'. But they are, nonetheless, a public nuisance, and one that Muir presents herself as an expert observer of – diagnosing them as schizophrenic and as having various insecurities on the basis of her public observations. Just as chav-spotting guides encourage readers to position themselves as readers of the private personalities that lie behind public appearances, Muir positions herself as a public psychiatrist, able to understand her subjects better than they are able to understand themselves, and without even interacting with them.

There is a reference at the beginning of paragraph 4 to 'Chav-spotting' which, in directly quoted secondary discourse, is said to be 'a sinister new form of snobbery'.

This quotation comes from an article in *The Independent* by Oliver Bennett from January 2004 (discussed in Chapter Four). Muir's presentation of Bennett's criticism is distanced somewhat from the primary discourse of her piece (Fairclough, 1995) through this use of direct quotation, and of the word *apparently*, but it is not explicitly criticised. Rather, it is followed by *but you can't help yourself, can you?* In the use of 'you' and the tag question, this might be read as an appeal to the reader, to an imagined shared sense that such *snobbery* is an inevitable reaction that all readers might have to such people. Muir does not deny that this is *snobbery*, but does imply that such criticisms as Bennett's are irrelevant to people's actual behaviour. This move is repeated in a number of articles in my collection, some of which will be dealt with below; I will call it the *cynical metalinguistic* position. Simon Hoggart, in a personal column in *The Guardian* (GD02/04), for example, expresses the reservation that *chavs* is *very snobbish, but it's also quite funny*, which is followed by the reproduction of a number of jokes.

The following extract comes from an article by the comedian Dom Joly in *The Independent*. Joly uses *chavs* to name a kind of person represented as an inevitable feature of a family trip to the cinema. Along with the high prices, the *chavs* are a problem likely to be encountered on this trip, *screaming into their mobile phones and sniffing glue*.

> This meant a trip to the dreaded Multiplex in Swindon – a place where a father can be bankrupted on popcorn and soft drinks alone. All this while surrounded by Burberried chavs screaming into their mobile phones and sniffing glue. (IN05/08)

Here the *chavs* are an inevitability and a nuisance, as they are in the following hypothetical account of a trip to a wildlife park, in which the likely behaviour of the chavs is something that you know:

> And you know that as soon as they are finished, the chavs in front of you will be chucking their rubbish out of their car windows just like they always do, while you look on, waiting to flash your lights in disapproval but not daring to do so in case you fall victim to some terrible Kenneth Noye style road-rage incident. (TM30/04)

This is the first time in this text that these *chavs* have been mentioned, and the use of the definite article thus suggests that these people are identifiable on the basis of shared contextual knowledge; *chavs* are represented as one of the things that the reader might be imagined to expect given the context. As in the case above, it is their behaviour, *chucking their rubbish out of their car windows*, that is the nuisance.

In each case here, *chav* is used to identify a kind of person encountered in public. In Muir's article, it is used as part of a reading of public behaviour in terms of private selves, used to articulate a link between the two. Phillips uses the word in a coda, reflecting back on her narrative. And the remaining articles both suggest that *chavs* are an inevitable nuisance to be encountered on family outings.

6.4.2.2 Opinion pieces

I draw a distinction between personal columns and hard news oriented opinion pieces like editorials, or the kinds of pieces found in the commentary sections of broadsheet newspapers. In opinion pieces, chav is *used* to identify a category of people who share features with *the underclass*, and are often explicitly identified with *the underclass*. *Chav* is also used in secondary discourse in opinion pieces about inequality and class relations, and metalinguistic comments as made about the use of the word. These comments can be interpreted in the terms introduced in Chapter Four.

Not surprisingly, it is in opinion pieces that the most explicitly politically oriented uses of *chav* are found; *chav* is used in discourse oriented to questions of *administrative allocation* and not simply *stereotyping* (Jenkins, 2004). Rampton (2006) suggests that it is useful to ask whether class representations are explicitly politically engaged; are they articulated as part of recognised political Discourses? Where it is used in opinion columns, *chav* is explicitly politically engaged, with respect to different Discourses. It is in the right-wing press that *chav* is used in an Underclass Discourse (Levitas, 2005), while in the left-liberal press it is used in metalinguistic commentary. There are also a number of cases in which both of these tendencies are apparent.

6.4.2.2.1   Underclass

Use of *chav*, in a number of articles can be viewed as contributing to an Underclass Discourse (Levitas, 2005). There are various more specific emphases, though, within these texts. The first is placed on the 'whiteness' of the Underclass that *chavs* make up. This is a tendency of a number of pieces of socio-political commentary in right-wing newspapers. The second emphasis is on disruptive public behaviour, petty criminality of the kind that Levitas (2005) suggests is attributed to male members of the Underclass. The third is on state dependency, a tendency of Levitas' Moral Underclass Discourse, and, for Morris (1994), the pre-eminent aspect of representation of the undeserving poor.

The following is an editorial from *The Express*, commenting on research claiming that white working class boys perform badly at school. The writer makes reference to the claim by Trevor Phillips, made in 2005 as head of the Commission for Racial Equality, that Britain was 'sleepwalking into segregation'. Phillips' claim was widely reported at the time, as an attack on 'multiculturalism' and a suggestion that Muslims were

segregated from other communities. *The Express* writer, though, uses Phillips' well-known claim to argue that it is in fact *an underclass of illeducated, jobless white chavs* who suffer from segregation.

> Three years ago, Phillips raised the alarm again, drawing on academic research to warn that the UK was "sleepwalking into segregation" which could see the creation of ghettos similar to those in the US.
>
> Was he right? Of course he was – but none of us then understood the ghettos would consist of an underclass of illeducated, jobless white chavs, spiralling towards drugs, crime and homelessness. (EX30/08)

This is a striking use of *chav*. Contrary to what might be expected given Hampson's (2008) claim that *chav* is used to discriminate against a white working class with no public voice, the writer uses *chav* in an article arguing that seems to be aiming precisely to voice white working class concerns. It is clear though that these are concerns not *of* the *white chavs*, but *about* them, concerns shared by *us*.

Grammatically *chavs* here is subject of the non-finite *spiralling towards drugs, crime and homelessness*; there is little sense of agency in this clause, which contrasts with other uses of *chav* in which apparent internal desires are highly articulated (see Chapter Five). *Chavs*, in this formulation, are relatively passive victims of forces outside their control, not the makers of their own fate. It is not clear from the extract above what these forces might be, but across the editorial, it is more so. It seems that it is the forces of liberal multiculturalism. The *underclass of … white chavs* are represented as an *ethnic group* who have been neglected in comparison with other *ethnic groups*:

> JUST how badly we have been betrayed by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown is shown by the staggering situation we find ourselves in today - when the head of the equalities watchdog is driven to call for positive action to help the white working class improve their education so they can compete with foreign migrants.

> Just how far we have tipped the balance the wrong way is shown by Phillips's warning that we need more white youngsters at universities in London and Birmingham which have populations comprising more than 50 per cent ethnic minority students.
> Racial special pleading by the burgeoning human rights industry has blinded those in authority to the results of their ill-conceived social engineering and incompetent governance.
> What is dangerous is that a generation has grown up believing that political correctness and human rights have stacked the odds against them.
> Every other ethnic group's needs come before theirs. (EX30/08)

So it is not so much class dimensions that the writer foregrounds, as the 'ethnic'. The argument is that 'white' people have been neglected by the Labour government, and *chav* is used in making this claim; *chavs*, as a 'white' group, are suggested to be the victims of *ill-conceived social engineering and incompetent governance*.

Two other opinion pieces in my collection of texts foreground the 'whiteness' of *chavs*. The first of these makes a critical metalinguistic claim that to call *the white teenage underclass* 'chav scum' is to stereotype:

> Among the groups who are missing out and who suffer genuine discrimination is the white teenage underclass. Such people are fashionably dismissed as "chav scum" or "trailer trash". But to say such things is to be as guilty of stereotyping as those who say that all Muslims support terrorists. (ML05/08)

But the writer's criticism of those who use the phrase 'chav scum' does not involve criticism of the idea that there exists an underclass, only criticism of *discrimination* against this underclass. The phrases *chav scum* and *trailer trash* are distanced from the primary discourse while *the white teenage underclass* is not, the implication being that these are offensive words for a real, identifiable phenomenon – the Underclass.

Another article argues against discrimination, but, in this case, using 'chavs' without any indication that it is not to be understood as part of the writer's primary discourse.

Here, it is not calling people 'chavs' that is criticised, but the fact that such people are *an easy target for abuse*, and, as in the two articles above, *chavs* are *white*.

> Everyone accepts that it is no longer acceptable to be rude to racial or ethnic minorities; even Mr Bush's conservative Republicans go out of their way to avoid insulting Islam. The one group that is considered fair game, however, is the kind of "white trash" who can be branded ignorant racists. White trash chavs from, say, Essex are an easy target for abuse over here. (TM20/04b)

In these three texts, a comparison is made between a 'white' group who are identified, either in primary or secondary discourse, as 'chavs', and other groups identified in terms of religion or ethnicity – *racial or ethnic minorities* or *Muslims*. These journalists, who write in favour of *chavs*, or in favour of not calling *the white underclass* 'chavs', do so on an ethnicised basis, classifying the *working class* in terms of ethnicity, and arguing that it is the *'white' working class* that has been the victim of discrimination. Though such arguments are not directly implicated in the Underclass Discourse as outlined by Levitas (2005), they can be seen as a general tendency towards the identification of class in ethnic terms. In 2007, the BBC ran a series of programmes that they called 'White' asking; 'Is white working class Britain becoming invisible?' (BBC, 2011), including a Newsnight interview with Nick Griffin, leader of the British National Party, speaking as representative of the 'white working class'. A Nexis UK search for the exact phrase 'white working class' in British national newspapers conducted in October 2009, is suggestive of an increase in newspaper identification in terms of whiteness, returning 46 articles for the year 2000, compared to 97 in 2004, and 553 in 2008.

In a comment piece by *The Star*'s regular columnist Dominik Diamond, *chav* is implied to be synonymous with *yob*, and represented as a phenomenon of the *inner city* and

trouble areas. Getting rid of these people would be a way of solving *our* apparently shared *problem*. In this respect, Diamond's use of *chav* can be related to the Underclass Discourse; he focuses on a group of people who are represented as distinct from the mainstream, and attributes social problems to them.

> Spy planes are going to be used to try to stop our inner city yob problem. They will fly over trouble areas to seek out offending chavs and communicate this with police on the ground. Not bad. But only halfway there. Surely the next step is to round up the yobs and drop them from the plane. (SR18/06)

Chavs are also a shared problem in the following, from *The Sun*:

> IT'S very difficult for someone who doesn't live here to understand the problem we have with neds.
> Chavs, hairies, spides...call 'em what you will -we all know exactly what you are talking about. (SN01/06b) [ellipsis dots in original]

The particular way, or ways, in which *chavs* are a problem is not articulated; it is presented as a kind of shared knowledge.

A key element of Underclass Discourse as identified by Levitas (2005; see also Morris ,1994) is the idea that the underclass is in a dependent relationship with the state, and that this is a moral failing, indicative of an inability to support oneself and one's family.

> A younger generation of Britons – overtaxed, tolerant and modern – can smell the hypocrisy of political correctness. … They know that the welfare state's raison d'etre is to ensure that "chavs" are supplied with Burberry caps and hooded tops. (TM28/04)

In this article *chavs* are similarly dependent on the state. This is a case of what Fairclough (1995a) calls 'slipping'. *"Chavs"* is part of a secondary discourse, the supposed discourse of *a younger generation of Britons*. But the 'slipping' does not

imply criticism, rather it is part of a secondary discourse positively evaluated by the writer as being true, especially through his use of the factive *know* (Coulthard 1994).

THE RISE OF THE ANGRY YOUNG CHAV

…

It is difficult also to discuss this without sounding snobbish, but there is, clearly, a crisis of value among the poor in Britain.

…

      Chavs are conspicuously yobbish, white urban proles, and Chavscum, as Mount says, drips with hate, while claiming to be funny. (Actually, some of it is funny: "Argos bling" for cheap jewellery, "Croydon face-lift" for the ultra-scraped-back hairdo we south Londoners often admire.) You don't have to agree with any of this to agree that the social phenomenon being described exists.

      Chav styles and mores seem to take up more and more space in the public sphere, and more and more seem to be a focus of imitation by non-Chavs: baseball caps, tattoos, swearing, spitting, fighting, calling your children Armani and Lexus. (I wish I had made that up, but I didn't.)

      Are the chavs a ruling class or an underclass? Clearly, the latter, though they are one to whom everyone is keen to pretend to defer. When John Reid, the health Secretary, was discussing his reasons for not wanting to ban smoking in public places, he said he "worried about the unanimity of middle-class health professionals" on the issue, and wondered what other sources of pleasure were available to a single mother in a tower block. (TL30/04b)

Chavs here are evidence of *a crisis of value among the poor in Britain*; they are *conspicuously yobbish, white urban proles*, an *underclass*. For Westegaard, as mentioned in Chapter Two, 'underclass' 'designates a segment of the population whose life-style, of indiscipline, is dangerous; whose precise numbers are less important than the contagious spread of their example' (1995; 117), and this is clearly true of the *chavs* in this article; their *styles and mores seem to take up more and more space in the public sphere* and *everyone is keen to pretend to defer* to them. In this last respect, this use of *chavs* differs distinctly from those discussed above, where *chavs* are the victims of discrimination, not a group to whom anyone *defer*[s].

Simon Hoggart, in *The Guardian*, expresses the reservation that *chavs* is *very snobbish, but it's also quite funny*, which is followed by the reproduction of a number of jokes, including the following:

> Two chavs in a car, but no music. Who's driving? The police.
>
> Or this: A chav walks into a jobcentre and announces, "Oi, I'm looking for work." The official says, "You couldn't have come at a better time. We've just had this in: chauffeur for a millionaire who needs his nymphomaniac twin daughters driving round in his Mercedes.
> "Full board is included, and you have to accompany the girls on their many foreign holidays. The salary is £100,000 pa."
> The chav says, "You're having me on!"
> "Right," says the clerk, "but you started it." (GD02/04)

The humour here relates to the idea that the *chav* might actually be *looking for work*. The implication is that *chavs* do not want to work.

6.4.2.2.2   Metalinguistic commentary

Opinion pieces that use *chav* often do so to comment on other people's use of the word. In these pieces, the metalinguistic tendencies identified in Chapter Four can be found. Some of these tendencies have already been discussed in relation to the opinion columns above, in which using *chav* was represented as discrimination against the Underclass. Where most of the criticism discussed in my chapter on verbal hygiene was firmly associated with the left – Tom Hampson writing that 'You cannot consider yourself of the left and use the word' (2008) – in these articles the word was criticised as discriminatory by commentators on the right. It is already clear that metalinguistic commentary and political commentary stand in complex relations.

Tony Parsons, in his column in *The Mirror* (MR25/04), presents an instrumental and a representational reading of people's use of *chav*.

> TONY PARSONS: A WIDE GAP BETWEEN CHAVS AND CHAV-NOTS
> …
> Only last week, "chav" was named as the buzzword of the year by the publishers of the Oxford English Dictionary.
> But chav is just a new name for the same old stick that has long been used to beat the poor old proles.
> Beyond all the jokes about Croydon facelifts, Burberry baseball caps and sovereign rings, the message is simple – the women are whores and the men are thugs. (MR25/04)

Chav is used here in an article on a socio-political topic; class relations. Though *chav* is used in the headline's wordplay, it is not used in the main body of the article until several paragraphs in. Criticism of *chav*, in Parsons' article, is part of a more general criticism of social inequality, focused on the media treatment of Prince Harry following his reported fight with a press photographer. *The prince versus the paparazzi was a skirmish in what is this country's increasingly vicious class war*, Parsons writes. He discusses the word *oik* before turning to *chav*, an element of this class war, but not a new one; for Parsons, though *chav* is *buzzword of the year*, it is ultimately *the same old stick*.

In an article in *The Guardian*, John Harris locates *"chav" jokes* on one side of a divided Britain:

> We're all going to be keeping down with the Joneses now: Britons are being nudged closer together by debt, job insecurity, and the realisation that the welfare state has its uses
> …
> Consider … a caricatured dichotomy that still defines too much of the national conversation – the one that separates the property-owning, conspicuously consuming Britons who allegedly want to "get on", from the millions who live more precariously, and at least in part depend on benefits. On one side, weekend visits to the shopping centre, "chav" jokes and an attachment to Tesco's Finest; on the other, the rattle of small change and regular trips to the local Poundstretcher. (GD22/08)

Again, a metalinguistic comment is made about *chav*, or, more accurately, *chav jokes*, in the context of an article that is about much more than simply language. *"Chav" jokes*, here, are part of the behaviour of the relatively wealthy – it is the language practices associated with *chav* that Harris comments on, and he relates these practices to a dichotomised view of class. It is also worth mentioning that Harris puts conspicuous consumption on the privileged side, the side of this dichotomy that makes the *"chav" jokes*, and *the rattle of small change* on the less wealthy side. In other articles, it has been chavs that have been associated with conspicuous consumption, not those that make jokes about *chavs*. Again, metalinguistic commentary on *chav* is related to writers' positions on class in complex ways.

Deborah Orr, columnist in *The Independent*, criticises *chav* as a word. She approvingly evaluates others who *point to the unashamed adoption of the word "chav"* to claim that *snobbery … is more widespread than ever*. But she also criticises those who call others *snobs*, arguing that *anyone who is not [called] a chav is [called] a snob*, which *doesn't leave an awful lot of room for manoeuvre*. But Orr's apparently equivalent treatment of the two – *chav* and *snob* – belies a view that being the kind of person who gets called a *chav* is a bad thing, while being the kind of person that gets called a *snob* is good. *Chav* denotes, she writes, *the type of ignorant crass oik that no one wants to live next door to*, while *a snob* is someone who *thinks that casino gambling is a waste of time and money* or *that celebrity culture is moronic* or *that soap operas are third rate*. Gambling, soap operas and celebrity culture are then presented as entirely reasonably criticised, by being reformulated as *supposedly valuable "culture"*, and those called *chavs* are said to be those that *embod*[y] this. Orr introduces a dichotomy between *chav* and *snob* ostensibly in order to argue that those called both of these are equally criticised, while

implicitly constructing a representation of a *supposedly valuable "culture"* of the *ignorant, crass oik that no one wants to live next to*. In so doing, she articulates relationships between class, intelligence ('ignorant') and taste ('"culture"'), that undermine the apparent equality of those on both sides of the dichotomy.

> WHICH ONE ARE YOU – A CHAV OR A SNOB?
> …
> Some social commentators complain that snobbery, far from being absent in our meritocratic society, is more widespread than ever. They point to the swift, unashamed adoption of the word "chav" to denote the type of ignorant, crass oik that no one wants to live next door to, as evidence that they are right.
> They are. But this is only half the story. More or less anyone who is not a chav is a snob. Anyone who thinks that casino gambling is a waste of time and money is a snob. Anyone who thinks that soap operas are third rate is a snob. Anyone who thinks that celebrity culture is moronic is a snob. Yet anyone who actually embodies all of this supposedly valuable "culture" is a chav, and is ripe for ridicule. Frankly, it doesn't leave an awful lot of room for manoeuvre.' (IN30/04a).

In each of these pieces – Harris' and Orr's – *chav* is implicated in a 'two-nations' representation of class in Britain (Cannadine 1998), as a resource used by the 'higher' of the two nations to talk about the 'lower'. This contrasts with the view of the articles discussed earlier, in which *chav* was seen as a word used about an underclass. Whether or not this usage was evaluated negatively as stereotypical, it was an underclass – and a specifically 'white' underclass – that it was claimed to identify. This distinction is one of political stance. In the opinion pieces taken from *The Mirror*, *The Independent* and *The Guardian*, *chav* is commented on as an element of dichotomous class relations – a word used by one group about another, less well-off than itself. In *The Mail*, *The Telegraph* and *The Times*, *chav* is a word used about an underclass. Of course, these texts are not numerous enough to establish this as a general pattern of usage, but this difference might at the least serve to highlight the fact that use of and commentary on

chav is embedded, in opinion pieces in commentary on social issues more generally, and a metalinguistic critique of *chav* itself implies no necessary position on social relations.

A final case comes from *The Telegraph*. In this piece, written by the headmaster of a private school, *chav* is called a *euphemism*. As in the pieces above, a dichotomy is presented, between *the state sector* and *the independent sector*, and those in the independent schools call those in state schools *chavs*. The writer's use of *euphemism* suggests that this might be a polite way of saying something more unkind about children who go to state schools. Also, calling *chav* a *euphemism* is contrary to some of the articles already discussed, in which it was said to be an especially offensive word, a dysphemism; in ML05/08, for instance, *chav scum* is a phrase used to *dismiss* the *white teenage underclass*.

> People in the state sector sometimes regard independent school kids as all terribly stuck up, while those in the independent sector sometimes look at kids in the maintained sector and regard them, to use the euphemism, as "chavs". But when you look at these kids, their value systems and outlooks are very similar, so what needs addressing is their perceptions, because they are not real. (TL04/08a)

Use of *chav* in this article is an index of *perceptions*, and it is these that should be tackled, *because they are not real* and because both groups' *value systems and outlooks are very similar*. This argument can be seen in terms of the representational view discussed in Chapter Four, though here it is not specifically the word *chav* that is problematic in representational terms, but more abstract *perceptions*; *chav* is simply a word used to euphemistically express such perceptions. This representational argument is aligned with a thoroughly subjectivist view of social class. The writer does not take issue with the actual educational or material inequalities between state and privately

educated children, but does find the perceptions of each group about the other to be problematic. From a culturalist view, this is overly subjectivist, highlighting differences in representation, without questioning deeper inequalities.

6.4.2.3 Summary

In personal columns and opinion pieces, *chav* tends to be used in a number of ways. One of these is to name a kind of person that is a feature of everyday public life, and whose public appearance can be read in private terms. This is a feature of personal columns, discussed at the beginning of the section, whereby *chav* provides readers with a resources for the interpretation of their own everyday life, a resource for thinking and talking about the kinds of people they might see in public. In this respect, this is a resource for stereotyping, for the identification of people according to a pre-determined framework, and thus, though these pieces are ostensibly about their writers' encounters in public, they provide resources for the withdrawal from public encounters.

Another use of *chav* is to name a kind of person who, in representations of social relations oriented towards issues of administrative allocation, is very similar to a member of the underclass as identified by Levitas (2005). It is in this use that *chav* is most explicitly oriented towards political Discourse, to contest how people should be identified by those in political power. *Chav* is a resource used by journalists writing on the welfare state and multiculturalism, and, though these writers do not use *chav* without distancing it from their own primary discourse, and may even criticise the word as an offensive term, they articulate relations between it and the terms of political Discourse, between *chav* and *class* in particular. The tendency to use *chav* in politically oriented comment is one mostly restricted in my sample to the right-wing press.

Finally it is used to comment on and criticise the kinds of words that people use to talk about social relations. In comment pieces on social and cultural inequalities, including some of those that represent an Underclass, *chav* is subject to metalinguistic comment. In this respect, the discussion of a semiotic resource is intrinsically related to the discussion of issues of social and political significance. Crowley quotes Gramsci as saying that 'Every time the question of the language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore' (1985; 183-4, in Crowley, 2003; 230), and this is clearly the case here. But so too is Cameron's (1995) rejoinder that this does not mean that nothing about language itself is also at issue when such questions arise; as discussed in Chapter Four, very particular ideas about what discourse does in social life are variously implicit in such articles. In these texts, three of the metalinguistic positions identified in Chapter Four can be found; civility in TM20/04b, representational in TL/04/08a and instrumental in MR25/08. In Orr's IN30/04b, there is also a kind of meta-discussion of the symptomatic position; the idea that using the word *chav* is a symptom of snobbery.

6.4.3   Celebrity news

Many of the texts I have collected are, as already discussed, 'soft' news stories, and, specifically, a great many are articles giving news about celebrities. Richardson sees the increased inclusion of such 'light entertaining copy at the expense of more weighty examinations or more expensive long-term investigative reporting' as the result of increased financial pressures on newspapers to appeal to an audience perceived to want immediately entertaining material (2007; 79). Newspaper sales have been in decline for decades and have reduced quite drastically in recent years, and all national newspapers

print lifestyle and celebrity oriented stories. The historical development of celebrity news is presented by Marshall (2006) as stemming from the spread of the mass media in a time of social fragmentation and alienation:

> The processes of industrialization, the migration of workforces to cities and internationally to new centres of manufacturing, and the general sense of disconnection and dislocation that had developed the architecture and organization of cities, helped create a sense of both anonymity and alienation. Profiles of celebrities provided a constellation of recognizable and familiar people who filled the gap and provided points of commonality for people to reconnect both with celebrities and with each other. Instead of a discourse that highlighted the distance and aura of the celebrity, celebrity journalism worked to make the famous more real and worked to provide a greater intimacy with their everyday lives.
>
> (Marshall, 2006; 317-8)

Turner, too, claims that '[i]n effect, we are using celebrity as a means of constructing a new dimension of community through the media' (2004a; 6), and, in another work, that 'celebrity now occupies an increasingly significant role in the process through which we construct our cultural identities' (2006; 499). News about celebrities from this perspective can be seen as a kind of cultural commentary, as a 'representation of Britain as a community of interrelated media celebrities' (Conboy, 2006; 185) against whom it is possible for readers to compare their own lives, and to understand the kinds of people that it is possible to be. In other words, celebrity news provides resources for identification.

Furthermore, celebrity itself is not simply a property of famous figures or a product of the way in which they are viewed by the public; it is something actively created by the media industry, 'a product,' Turner writes, 'of media representation' and 'understanding it demands close attention to the representational repertoires and patterns employed in this discursive regime' (2004a; 8). This is a particular kind of representation, one which

pays particular interest to the private lives of public figures. Marshall notes, for example, that a key element of the celebrity profiles printed in newspapers and 'glossy' magazines is the revelation of some private truth behind public appearances, 'of something that is against the grain of what is generally perceived to be the star's persona – something that is anecdotal but is revealing of the star's true nature' (2006; 320).

Stories about celebrities are not only produced by the tabloid press – which, according to Turner, they have 'completely dominated' (2006; 487) – but by the broadsheets and the mid-markets too. Here, though, different celebrities dominate, and the tendency is towards lengthier celebrity interviews and profile pieces. Such stories are often printed in weekend lifestyle or culture supplements, and are more likely to be staged, produced with the celebrity's permission. This difference in newspapers reflects the difference in magazines between the more expensive *Hello!* and *OK* magazines which publish staged promotional features, and the cheaper magazines like *Heat*, which are 'slightly trashier … cheekier, less-sophisticated and more news-oriented (that, is gossip)' (Turner, 2006; 489). For the cheaper magazines, as for the Tabloid press, celebrities are news, rather than the focus of lifestyle features, which is the role they play in broadsheet newspapers.

Chav is used in celebrity news both to make claims about what particular celebrities are (i.e. to identify them as *chavs*) and to make claims about the perceptions of other people about celebrities. In some cases, these tendencies are indistinguishable. *Chav* is thus used, I will argue, to comment on the kinds of identity it is possible for celebrities to

have and also to discuss the kinds of resources available for talking and writing about these identities.

Cases in which chav is used to identify a celebrity are listed below. With the exception of two cases in *The Times*, these are all from mid-market and tabloid newspapers.

Doesn't matter that she's moving into a half-a-million pound house, she's still Britain's Chav Princess and we love her for it. (SR09/04)

Word reaches us that the newly-married 22-year-old popstrel bought a "This is What Perfect Looks Like" sweater in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
    Unless "perfect" means "zitty chav" we think not. (SR20/04)

This week's big question: Do Americans know what a chav is?
    Answer: Thanks to Naomi Campbell shopping in New York last week – they do now! (SR26/04)

Pals say Chav teen Colleen has been in consumer dreamland all month. (SR29/04)

She is the Madonna of chav, the Shakespeare of inarticulacy, the Picasso of fake bake. (TM08/06)

It must be thrilling for an eminent scientist like Dawkins to have outsold that breathtakingly ignorant ur-chav Jade Goody (TM22/06)

How the wheel of fortune has changed for chav heroine Jade Goody. (EX09/06)

Big Brother reject Dale Howard is living the dream … of a sexually incontinent chav. (SR14/08; ellipsis marks in original)

I'LL LET VINNIE CHAV IT
…
    Jones, 43, challenged the "King of Chavs" to a £500,000 charity boxing match after it was revealed Carroll, 25, was launching his own movie career. (SR26/08)

The King of Chavs scooped his Lotto prize with a Lucky Dip ticket while electronically tagged for being drunk and disorderly. (SN14/08)

The chav star added that her begrudgers can "f*** off" as she is happier than she has ever been (SN25/08a)

> Former pop singer, now professional chav, Kerry Katona appears on TV slurring her words (ML25/08)

In some of these uses, attributes related to being a chav are articulated; over-consumption, being zitty, inarticulacy… fake bake, ignorance, sexual incontinen[ce], being drunk and disorderly. But what exactly it is that makes these celebrities identifiable in this way is generally left implicit. One thing that all of these celebrities share is that they might also be identified as the 'nouveau riche'; all – like David and Victoria Beckham, the King and Queen of Chav, discussed above – are from working class backgrounds and have achieved some wealth. The most prominent example of this is Michael Carroll, mentioned twice in my collection (SR26/08 and SN14/08). Carroll worked as a bin man before winning almost £10 million on the lottery in 2002. He is reported to have spent all of his winnings, and has been convicted for cocaine possession and affray. He is often referred to as the 'King of Chavs', as he is in both of the instances of his mention in my texts. Where chav elsewhere has been used as a resource to identify something like the undeserving poor, or the underclass, here it is wealthy celebrities, seen perhaps as undeserving of their fame or wealth, that the word refers to.

In the terms of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984), whose writing on class I discussed in Chapter Two, this identification might be seen as articulating a particular relationship between forms of capital – cultural and economic. These are celebrities who have acquired a great deal of economic capital, but not cultural capital. *Chav*, perhaps, is used to foreground this lack of cultural capital; a resource used not just to

talk and write about who might be classified as what, but also to negotiate what resources 'count' in classification.

The first celebrity identification in the list above, though, is an interesting case:

> it's great to see the photo in yesterday's paper of newlysingle Kerry McFadden returning home from shopping with a whacking great Matalan bag.
> Doesn't matter that she's moving into a half-a-million pound house, she's still Britain's Chav Princess and we love her for it. (SR09/04)

McFadden's move into a half-a-million pound house is implied to threaten her status as Chav Princess. But this threat is countered by the sight of her with a whacking great Matalan bag, implying that she shops at the discount clothes retailer. So there is some implication that to be a chav is to buy cheap clothes, here, and this is something that is great to see. Being a Chav Princess is something that the imagined we of The Star's readership love McFadden for. Thus the affective meanings imagined amongst the readership are positive, in contrast with SR18/06, a piece by the same author, where offending chavs are to be drop[ped] from [a] plane.

In a number of articles, *chav* is used to identify celebrities in secondary discourse. Marshall identifies as an element of the celebrity profiles published in glossy magazines and newspaper lifestyle sections '[t]he revelation of something that is against the grain of what is generally perceived to be the star's persona – something that is anecdotal but is revealing of the star's true nature' (2006: 320). Rather than being used in the description of the star's true nature, in the following, *chav* seems to be used in establishing what is generally perceived to be the star's persona.

> She was inevitably designated a quintessential "chav", replete with Burberry bikini and Croxteth address. (GD07/04)

But the identification of celebrities using *chav* in secondary discourse is not confined to this practice. More usually, there is no contradiction of this identification, and the secondary discourse is to some extent aligned with the primary (Fairclough, 199a).

Lee Hendrie … according to a bloke in the pub on Saturday evening: "a horrible little chav" (Google it). (TM18/04)

His Amazon website entry is littered with comments from disgruntled fans fuming about greed and betrayal. "I don't understand why anyone would buy a book written by a self-obsessed money-grabbing chav," spits one reviewer. (TM01/06b)

Yet it is Kate who evokes the Sloaney set while Chelsy is labelled the posh chav. (EX17/06)

At least the 20-year-old Liversponsoredpudlian millionairess once known as the Queen of the Chavs admits she needs to learn more about the poorer parts of the world. (ML25/06a)

This August, as the X Factor began, Julie Burchill wrote small opinion piece in the Sun – "Chav Cheryl Outclasses Snobby Lily" (GD05/08)

In truth, all most people were doing was laughing at the out-of-it chav. (GD26/08)

In her place is a woman who literally bears all for a tacky reality show that depicts her as a repellent, foul-mouthed chav lurching from one crisis to another (SN25/08b)

When Jade Goody revealed that she thought Cambridge was in London, it was front page news as we all wet ourselves with mirth, chortling: "God, these chavs are so STUPID." (TM02/08)

Since her 2002 brush with the law, Cole's promotion from chav noteriety to the Wag Premiership finds her third only to Posh and Coleen in *OK!* inches. (TM20/06)

In these cases, *chav* is aligned with the primary discourse of the newspapers to varying extents. In TM01/06b, for instance, an article about the prevalence of celebrity autobiographies in the publishing industry, no criticism of this use of *chav* is implied,

while in TM02/08, an article criticising the media for its over-critical reporting of working class celebrities, the (imaginary) secondary discourse's use of chav is part of the object of criticism. In other cases, there is greater ambiguity, for instance in EX17/06, or TM20/06.

The metalinguistic comment in many of these extracts demonstrates a tendency that is prominent in newspaper use of *chav* more generally; discussion not just of what people are, but of the resources that are used to identify them. If celebrity news 'occupies an increasingly significant role in the process through which we construct our cultural identities' (Conboy, 2006; 499), then it seems also to be significant in the negotiation of the potential of the resources with which we do so, in the provision and regulation of identificational resources.

In two cases, a celebrity is represented as being in danger of appearing to be a chav. Below, *The Express* comment on Hugh Grant comes from a celebrity gossip piece, accompanied by a photograph, while *The Guardian* article is from an interview with the poet Dockers MC.

> "I can't be doing with a disguise anymore. A baseball cap is just so unattractive." Hugh Grant would rather be hounded by the paparazzi than mistaken for a chav. (EX31/04)
>
> My performance name is Dockers MC and people expect to see a "chav" – I do like gold hoops so I have to be careful (GD13/08)

However, the danger here is not of actually being a *chav*, but of appearing to be one. Though appearance is frequently evoked in definitions and other accounts of what it is to be a chav, these appearances alone can clearly be deceptive – there is more to being a *chav* than simply looking like one.

Elsewhere, though, the appearances that might be taken to identify someone as a chav are ironically presented as confirming Prince Harry as 'Prince of Chav'. This early piece from The Sun – the news apparently being that Harry Windsor has been recorded using *chav* language – is worth reproducing in its entirety. This piece was produced during the newspaper's 'Proud to be a Chav' campaign, and ironically reformulates the numerous articulations of *chav* appearance and behaviour common at the time (October 2004) as descriptive of Prince Harry.

PRINCE OF CHAV
 HARRY WINDSOR is the new Prince of Chav -innit?
 The man third in line to the throne has become a flag-bearer for the Chav movement sweeping the UK.
 Harry's love of baseball caps and polo shirts has long been a giveaway that Britain's naughtiest Royal is a devotee of the latest youth culture phenomenon.
 Now the secret Watercolourgate tapes have confirmed him as the king of bling.
 In true Chav style, the 20-year-old is heard to ditch the Queen's English (his gran will not be amused) in favour of Estuary English.
 Chavs are youngsters who love designer labels, especially Burberry caps and Adidas tracksuits, tuck their trousers into their trainers and wear fake bling-bling jewellery.
 This week it was falsely claimed by Harry's former art teacher that some of his A-level coursework was written for him.
 But in a conversation taped by Sarah Forsyth, Harry can be heard using key Chav terms including "like". And rather than replying "Yes, Miss", he chose "Yeah, yeah".
 Yet Harry has had the best education money can buy -at Pounds 19,000-a-year Eton.
 The "cheating" allegations were fiercely denied by the school and the prince's representatives, and yesterday an investigation by exam bosses cleared him. But what cannot be refuted is that the young Royal would get an A in a Chav Level test without any help.
 On the right we look at the photographic evidence which proves that, like, Harry is the Prince of Chav.
 HEADGEAR
 If you own at least five baseball caps you are Chav -and Harry is repeatedly snapped in different caps. If the baseball cap fits, wear it. He loses points for wearing genuine rather than fake fashion but, in true Chav style, the peak of his cap is rounded to shade his face.

HAIRSTYLE
There are two types of Chav haircuts Harry favours -cropped or spiky with extra gel.
CLOTHES
Where do we begin? Harry likes to wear designer sportswear, particularly Ralph Lauren polo shirts -and not just when watching or playing polo. He also loves replica sports shirts. But he drops points for not buying Burberry or having prison-white Reeboks.
JEWELLERY
It don't mean a thing if you ain't got that bling. And while Harry hasn't gone for goldie lookin' chains just yet, he does love his beaded bracelets. Perhaps he could borrow some of his gran's priceless top carat gear to bling up.
SIGN LANGUAGE
It's not exactly the Royal wave, is it? The middle finger has become a popular way for Harry and other Chavs to greet the Press. Or perhaps Harry is trying to say one would like to be on one's own. His Chav gestures also include checking his crown jewels in public.
LIQUID REFRESHMENT
Lager, more lager -and then alcopops. Harry also likes a fag and even goes to the most sorted Chav nightclub -Chinawhite. Blindin'. (SN16/04b)

It is, first of all, significant that it is the Prince's language that defines him as *Prince of Chav* – it is the recordings that *have confirmed him as the king of bling*. Specifically, it was his use of *like* and *yeah yeah*, both represented by *The Sun* as markers of a *chav* identity (see also the use of *innit*). These apparently *chav* utterances are represented as surprising from someone in the Prince's position; the description of his use is followed by the adversative Yet Harry has the best education money can buy. As well as Windsor's language, his appearances justify the title 'Prince of Chav' – his love of baseball caps and polo shirts has long been a giveaway and readers are referred to photographic evidence which proves that, like, Harry is the Prince of Chav. The specific features of this photograph that are markers of Windsor's *chav* identity are then detailed. In other articles with a heavy emphasis on *chav*, there is a similar detailing of the characteristics that constitute being a *chav*.

Though there are a number of cases in which secondary discourse attributed to some known figure is represented as calling someone else a *chav*, there are only two cases of self-identification. The first comes from an interview with the actress Gemma Atkinson in *The Star* and the second from Kerry Katona in *The Mail*:

> "I'd love to be offered a part in another soap playing someone who was a bit of a chav.
> "In real life I'm a proper chav, so I reckon I'd have no problem." (SR01/06; SR05/06)
>
> Kerry, who described herself to me as "a fat chav, a slapper with stubby legs who never could sing a note", made it as part of the girl band Atomic Kitten. (ML26/08)

On the other hand, we also find denial of identification as a *chav*:

> "I mean, the punch-ups, going to court … I don't want to get involved – I'm no chav." Get her! (MR27/04) 3am

Here, the denial of identification as a *chav* is a denial of violence and criminality, and, in this text, carries the implication that someone else (the singer Cheryl Cole, who it is implied does want to get involved) is a *chav* and does want to fight and go to court.

In one celebrity feature, an interview with the interior designer Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen, *chav* is used by the celebrity to identify others.

> NOW THE DESIGN GURU AND HIS WIFE ARE TURNING ON CHAV CULTURE, WITH A NEW BOOK ON HOW TO BE POSH
> …
> Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen and his wife, Jackie, have come over all Janet and Ray, the Disgusted of Middle England couple on The Catherine Tate Show. "Top of the stairs she was, wearing trainers - and she had her tummy hanging out! With the prime ministers of history looking down on her!" says Laurence.
> He is recounting the time Cherie Blair received them at 10 Downing Street. "I would-n't turn up in trainers with my tummy hanging out," fumes Jackie. Laurence's indignation subsides into a snigger. "It was beyond muffin top. It was more like a Yorkshire pudding."

> Cherie's sartorial faux pas turned out to be the final straw in Llewelyn-Bowen's exasperation at the influence of chav culture. (IN01/06; similar in SN01/06a)

Chav culture here is not exemplified by working class over-consumption, but by the scruffiness of Cherie Blair. This is perhaps in contradiction to other uses of the word, though readers might also find some deeper homogeneity in the rejection of 'high' cultural standards by those identified as *chavs* – whether it is in their over-consumption or scruffiness, those identified as *chavs* are tasteless.

In celebrity news, *chav* is used to identify wealthy celebrities from working class backgrounds, to identify a potential, false, or ironic perception based on appearance and to discuss the resources themselves used to identify celebrities. It is thus a resource used in writing about the kinds of people that it is possible to be, and the kinds of ways in which readers can identify people in the public eye. Furthermore, meanings to with taste are prominent – celebrities chavs are tasteless, whatever their wealth. So there is an attempt to articulate the ways in which people are classified, to articulate the relationships between cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu 1984). Although no specific Discourse on class is identifiable here, at a more abstract level, the use of chav in celebrity columns involves an affirmation of a sense of social hierarchy, of 'up' and 'down'. Following the claims made about celebrity news as a Genre in the literature, it might thus be suggested that the use of chav in such articles provides ways for readers to identify themselves and others in their everyday lives, that chav is thus not simply a resource for the identification of celebrities but for everyday practices of stereotyping in accordance with ideas about taste.

6.4.4   Cultural review

Newspapers not only provide readers with opinions to engage with on political issues, or on everyday life, they also devote a great deal of attention to cultural products, especially television. Newspaper reviews give 'an opinion carrying some authority [for readers] to compare with their own' (Keeble, 2001; 222), in much the same way that newspapers increasingly provide opinions on other areas of life (Conboy, 2007). Recent research by Thinkbox, 'the marketing body for commercial TV in the UK', claims that the average British adult spends over four hours a day watching television (2011). This claim should be treated with some care, given that the research was conducted by a body with a great deal of interest in promoting the idea that television is a major part of daily life, but it also points to the fact that television is regarded as a major part of people's lives by many in the media; the report's findings were reported without comment in the Media Guardian, for example (The Guardian, 04/05/10). Another Thinkbox publication, 'TV: a Very Social Medium', claims that 'TV is arguably one of the most social forms of media; people love to watch, discuss and enjoy TV together … the need to share TV is powerful and important' (Thinkbox, 2010). Commentary on television can thus be seen as similar to commentary on other areas of life. But it is also important to note that commentary on television is commentary on mediated representations of other aspects of life (Silverstone, 1999). In this respect, it is similar to metalinguistic commentary, since language too, can be seen as a mediated representation of other elements of life.

6.4.4.1 Television documentaries

In 2008, the BBC broadcast a programme presented by John Prescott, former deputy prime minister, well known as a prominent politician with a working-class background,

called 'Prescott: the Class System and Me' (BBC, 2008b). During the programme,
Prescott visits three teenage girls in Lewisham, London. The girls are unemployed and
live in council housing. Viewers are shown a scene, apparently on the way to meeting
the girls, in which the programme's producer, Amanda Blue, asks Prescott whether he
knows what *chav* means. The girls that they then meet are never formally introduced as
chavs, and, even, in fact, deny that the word applies to them, yet in the programme's
promotion material, and much of the news coverage, *chav* is used uncritically. *Chav* is
used in the following ways in previews and reviews of this programme, as well as
associated articles:

Tonight, he and his socially aspirational wife meet an Earl who insists Prezza
has a "chip on his shoulder" and three young ladies whom he is given to
understand are "chavs". (GD25/08)

There is a hilarious scene when Prezza is taken to meet three chavs, and asks
the producer en route what chav means. She defines it as meaning 'council
house and violent' (news to me) but anyway, the girls he meets say they're not
chavs, they're middle-class. (GD26/08)

And the question now – raised most pungently this evening as Mr P sits in a
café with three young, appealing Lewisham chavs, girls who have never heard
of Gordon Brown, let alone Tony Blair – is whether that role retains any
resonance. (GD27/08)

Prescott, the working-class hero, was brought into contact with supposed toffs
or, in the case of thee teenage "chav" girls in Lewisham, with people he might
regard as belonging to a lower caste than himself (GD31/08a)

The former deputy PM meets toffs and chavs as he grapples with the issue of
class in Noughties Britain (SN27/08)

HELLO, CHAVS! PREZZA UPSETS GIRLS … BUT CALLS CHERIE A SNOB TO MAKE
UP FOR IT
Dozy John Prescott puts his foot in it on TV as he offends three girls on a council
estate with the greeting: "Hello chavs."
…

Prezza, 70, apologises for his chav gaff … He explains he has been told on his way to meet them in Lewisham, London, that a chav was someone who lived on an estate but aspired to wearing designer clothes – and had got muddled up.
…
Prezza on chavs: I don't know what that is supposed to mean. (MR16/08)

For his new series Mr Prescott he [sic.] steps out to discover whether class is still a dividing force by talking to a range of people – from hereditary peer Lord Onslow to "chavs" from a Lewsisham housing estate. (MR26/08)

The best bit is when director Amanda Blue wonders if Prescott would even recognise a working class person if he met one. You may have read how he didn't know what a chav was until he was taken to meet three Vicky Pollard types in South London. (MR27/08)

He had already said sorry for greeting three girls on a council estate as "chavs" during the BBC series (MR28/08)

In this two-part series, he meets people from all walks of life, from aristocrats to chavs, ostensibly to learn more about class (TM25/08a; TM27/08)

"Are you chavs then?" he greets them, with likeable bluntness.
"No!" they chorus, horrified.
"What is a chav anyway?" Prescott asks. "Is it a language of the internet?"
"Nah – it's like a pikey," one girl says. (TM25/08b)

But her coup was setting up a meeting with three unemployed bruisers from Peckham. These girls, she explained, over their objections, were chavs. (TM28/08)

Mr Prescott is also filmed eating fish and chips and having a chat with three unemployed young women on a south London council estate, during which he confesses that he does not know the meaning of the word "chav" (IN16/08)

John Prescott is a dinosaur who doesn't know what a chav is and rarely reads books, and sending him to investigate the class system resulted in pointless television (IN29/08a)

Prescott was introduced to a group of young girls described as "chavs" (IN29/08b)

> She described as "chavs" those she looked down upon, and, in her opinion, such people all lived in the north of England (EX28/08)

Chav is incorporated into the newspapers' primary discourse to varying extents. In some, the word is explicitly marked as belonging to the secondary discourse of others (e.g. EX28/08). In other articles (e.g. TM25/08a), it is fully incorporated into the primary discourse, used to identify the three girls, despite their denial that the word could be applied to them. The word serves the purpose of indicating how these girls, despite their own objections, fit into a representation of the kinds of people that exist in contemporary Britain. Some articles use the formulations 'from X to Y' and 'X and Y, where X and Y represent the opposing ends of a social hierarchy: *from aristocrats to chavs* (TM25/08a), *from hereditary peer Lord Onslow to "chavs" from a Lewisham housing estate* (MR26/08); *toffs and chavs* (SN27/08). *Chavs*, in this use, indicates a particular – low – position in a social hierarchy (Cannadine, 1998), and relates this position to the kind of people that these girls are. It is, in a sense, this kind, this category, that they are included in the documentary to represent, and a great deal of the coverage of the programme reproduces this.

The Mirror and Janet Street-Porter's article in *The Independent* both emphasise that Prescott was apparently unaware of the word *chav*. In *The Mirror*, this lack of awareness is represented as meaning that Prescott wouldn't *even recognise a working class person if he met one*. In *The Independent*, it is related to Prescott being called a *dinosaur; sending him to investigate the class system resulted in pointless television* (IN29/08a). Knowledge of a semiotic resource – *chav* – is represented as indicative of knowledge of something more, class, and Prescott is criticised for not having such knowledge. It is also implied that this lack of knowledge is related to his not being 'up-

to-date'. In Chapter Three, I described the ways in which Oxford University Press promoted its inclusion of *chav* as evidence of its 'cutting-edge' authority on the English Language, which was itself represented as a kind of authority on social change. Prescott here is criticised for not possessing such authority, and it is because he does not know what a *chav* is that this is the case.

Chav is used in the commentary on another documentary, in a pair of very similar articles in *The Express* and *The Star*. I reproduce the former below, *The Star*'s story being a reduced version of the same.

> This being an ITV documentary, we might have expected a chav-fest of Burberry-clad benefits cheats, unrepentantly dropping sprogs by several different fathers while moaning that the world didn't do enough for them (EX11/06; SR11/06, with some omitted material)

In this text, *chav* is used to identify an expected type of person, not actually present in the documentary. Some features of this type of person are articulated; they are Burberry-clad benefits cheats who *unrepentantly drop[] sprogs* and *moan*[]. The implication of the adverb is that there is something wrong with *dropping sprogs*, that there is something to repent, and the implication of the conjunction is that there is some contradiction between the activities the benefits cheats engage in, that having several children with different fathers is inconsistent with complaining about the world. If, in the coverage of the BBC documentary above, *chav* was used to indicate a lowly position on the social hierarchy, here it is used in something similar to an Underclass discourse (Levitas, 2005), the attention being on the problematic behaviour of *chavs* and not on society as a whole.

A final piece reviewing a television documentary quotes the discourse of one of the people featured in the programme:

> Illiterate single mum Natasha, who had started out as one of the chief Kebab Fiends, had begun to glow, and show great promise, and actually went off to Hull to cook, impressively enough, for the council leaders. She could hardly afford the fare, let alone the clothes. 'I feel like a chav. A ronker. I'm wearing Adidas in the mayor's. . . house thing.' (GD26/08)

Here, *chav* is used by 'Natasha' as a resource to identify a potential perception of herself, and this is reproduced in the newspaper article to indicate that she felt out of place cooking for council leaders. She cites her appearance, the fact that she is wearing Adidas as the cause of this discomfort. In the context of the newspaper article this serves to highlight the contrast between her social position and that of the council leaders, to represent her as 'low'.

6.4.4.2 Fictional characters

As well as being used to identify the real people represented in television documentaries in terms of social types, *chav* is used to identify fictional characters.

> And, of course, the Queen of Chav herself, single teenage mum and persistent shoplifter Vicky ("yeah but, no but, yeah but…") Pollard. (EX25/04b)
>
> Matt Lucas and David Walliams have pocketed the incredible sum by taking top characters such as chav teen Vicky Pollard and slimy Sebastian around the country. (SR09/06)
>
> She plays Candy, a single mum with a chav family. (SN15/06)
>
> In his latest incarnation, which begins tonight on BBC1, Robin, played by Jonas Armstrong, has become a chav with a mockney accent (ML07/06b)
>
> Whether Lauren the chav will be bovvered was unclear last night. (ML12/06)

> Desdemona is a midriff-baring blonde chav only too willing to retire to the toilets to gratify her lord and master (TL27/08)

In each of these cases the *chav* is a fictional character in a television programme, or, in the last case, a theatrical production. So *chav* is used to identify something like a stock character (Stott, 2005). Of course, such characters are already semiotic constructions and the word is thus used to comment on an already mediated representation, to further articulate the stereotype. The case of Vicky Pollard, in the BBC comedy Little Britain is of particular interest. Pollard was created before *chav's* widespread use, and is not identified as a *chav* by her creators, though she is regularly identified as a *chav* in commentary on the programme. In this case, the programme's producers and those commenting on their creation jointly articulate the stereotype of the *chav*. But it is also worth noting that the representation was possible before the word, that the word *chav* was not necessary for the creation of Vicky Pollard. Afterwards, it became used as a resource to talk and write about the character, and, perhaps, for others to use in the creation of their own characters; Armstrong and Miller's sketch-based BBC comedy, produced several year after Little Britain, included a sketch called 'Chav Pilots', for instance.

6.4.4.3 A Style

Chav is used to describe a character type that can be artificially constructed. In such cases *chav* is used not to evoke a particular type of person, but to describe a style that can be mimicked.

> MIKE'S CHAV NOIR
> …
> Their outfits will be inspired by a "chav wedding", with scruffy suits and untucked shirts accompanying shiny white trainers. (SN23/08)

> This week, it's "chav" style, which apparently includes cars, sportswear and fit "gawls" (GD11/08a)

This tendency is also represented in a number of texts reporting on a *chav* fancy dress party (e.g. MR29/06, SR29/06,), where *chav* is used to name a style that can be adopted by those that attend, and not to identify any particular person.

6.4.4.4 Summary

Chav is used in coverage of television to identify real people featured in documentaries as social types. In the BBC Prescott documentary, *chav* was used to identify a group of girls as a particular social type that it was necessary for Prescott to have contact with to understand class in modern Britain. In the coverage of this programme, though many newspapers distanced the word from their primary discourse, this identification of these girls in terms of an abstracted social type was reproduced. It is also used to identify fictional characters and to name a potential style, abstracted from specific people or fictional characters. *Chav* is used to identify real people as social types and to articulate fictional stock characters. It is also used, it seems, in the construction of such characters, as a resource for describing a particular style abstracted from specific people or representation of people.

6.4.5   Other news genres

In this section I discuss the use of *chav* in news Genres not discussed so far; reports on reports, fashion and business news, and crime news.

6.4.5.1 Reports on reports

I have already noted the metalinguistic tendencies in the opinion pieces in my collection, where the word is commented on as part of text on broader social issues. There are also two metalinguistic news stories, both of which are articles reporting on academic research.

> If this was Russell Brand, would we have cared?: Society seems to grant famous men a far wider licence to make mistakes, claim academics
> …
> Aberdeen University academic Alan Dodd believes gender is not the only reason for attacks on celebrities such as Katona and Goody. The 'class' issue also came into it as they were routinely depicted as 'white trash mothers' and 'chavs'. (GD26/08)
>
> LITTLE BRITAIN 'PANDERS TO PREJUDICE'
> …
> Researchers from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), said that the majority of characters in the BBC sketch show - from teenage "chav'' Vicky Pollard to proud homosexual Daffyd - are stereotypes produced from a sense of disgust at people of a different class, sexuality, race or gender. (TL29/08)

Both of these articles report on metalinguistic reports in which *chav* is implicated in problematic representations of celebrities and television characters. There are numerous levels of mediation here, and, as with the metalinguistic commentary in opinion columns, such stories serve not only to comment on, but to regulate use of *chav*, to provide readers with views on how the word is used.

Another story about research findings does not take such a metalinguistic stance. This article comes from *The Daily Mail*:

> UNCOOL 'COOL TO FAIL' CULT
> THE rise of 'chav' culture is leading to widespread underachievement in schools, a study has revealed. It suggests that bullies, who are likely to wear fake designer accessories and cheap jewellery, are intimidating others into failing exams on purpose.

> Pupils forming this chav 'cult' are aggressively antiauthority and make a conscious effort to fail at school to avoid being seen as uncool, delighting in ridiculing classmates who work hard and answer questions in lessons.
> The Government-funded research concludes that the problem of peer pressure in schools is far more serious than thought. (ML12/04)

In this text, *chavs* are identified as *bullies*, and as actively disruptive in schools. They *make a conscious effort to fail* and act *on purpose*. This use of *chav* is similar to that found in the opinion pieces discussed above, in which *chavs* are identified as a social problem – similar to the underclass – in discourse explicitly oriented towards political concerns. However, in contrast to the *chavs spiralling towards drugs* in EX30/08, *chavs* here are active in causing problems for others. They are identified as active trouble-makers in schools. The secondary discourse of the report is closely incorporated into the primary discourse of the newspaper, and the piece goes on to describe the appearances and behaviour of *chavs* in terms very similar to the *chav* features discussed in this section. The *chav* humour book *Chav!* (Wallace and Spanner, 2004) is explicitly cited as an authority on *chavs*, the apparent cause of real educational problems. Jenkins (2004) notes that the terms of identification of *stereotypes* are often closely related to those involved in *administrative allocation*, and in uses of *chav* such as this such relationships are articulated; politically salient problems are suggested to be the fault of a group of people identified using resources associated with stereotyped commentary on everyday life.

In a final case, the research reported by *The Express* is about the differing life expectancies between urban and rural bears in North America. *Chav* is used by the newspaper to identify the urban, *townie* bears.

> New York's World Conservation Society found townie bears weighed 30 per cent more than their country cousins, gave birth aged two and died on the

> roads before they were 10. Bears in the woods were slimmer, had babies at seven and lived well past 10. So there's a Chav divide in nature. (EX03/08)

Here, a dichotomy is constructed between town and country, with the unhealthy *chav* bears identified as *urban*. *Chavs* elsewhere have consistently been identified with the kinds of public encounters with strangers that happen in cities, and this article is suggestive of an association of *chavs* with not only a low class identification class but city life.

6.4.5.2 Fashion and business news

Chav is used in a number of specialist news stories on the fashion industry, specifically about the clothing brand Burberry.

> She admitted that the adverse publicity over the popularity of the group's trademark with "chavs" – an emerging class of twenty something urbanites who favour designer labels but lack the social status of traditional luxury goods customers – was probably behind the fall in demand. (IN14/04)
>
> Most of that set wouldn't wear the check in an obvious way, as the chav set do, who have adopted it as their own. … Indeed, alongside Burberry's iconic status in elite fashion circles goes the rather more dubious position of being the chav's brand of choice. (ML16/06)

Chav is used to name a consumer group in a number of stories about Burberry, and other products, such as Malibu, *every chav's favourite cocktail ingredient* (IN22/04). An article about mobile phones divides the market into groups and reviews a different phone for each. The *Siemens SL65* is *The chav's favourite*:

> The brand new Siemens camera phone comes with a high resolution screen and attachable flash, making it highly desirable among teenage chavs, who spend hours taking grainy images of each other and collapsing in fits of giggles. (TL26/04)

Moran (2006) suggests that this is the key to the word *chav*; that it is used to represent people as if they are a consumer, or lifestyle group. In these cases, that is precisely what *chav* is used to do. *Chavs* are a group of people – a *class* or a *set* – who buy certain things. In *The Independent* article, an explicit attempt is made to define *chavs* in these terms, as *an emerging class of twenty something urbanites who favour designer labels but lack the social status of traditional luxury goods customers*. Though other uses of *chav*, for instance, in the features articles, make clear the importance of particular consumer items in identifying *chavs*, in fashion and business news, *chav* is used specifically to identify a consumer group. Again, a resource generally used to *stereotype* is implicated here in *administrative allocation*.

6.4.5.3 Crime news

Chav is used in two stories, both about the same crime; the alleged murder of a mother by her daughter.

<div style="border:1px solid">

CONDEMNED BY KILLER'S HITLIST; SICK "CHAV" ADDED MUM'S NAME THEN KNIFED HER

…

While she was on the run sister Sara told a news conference: "The only way to describe her would probably be a chav" (MR24/06)

MUM STABBED TO DEATH BY HER OWN DAUGHTER

…

Her sister Sara, 20, had gone on TV begging Edgington, a mother of two, to give herself up.

   Asked about her, she replied: "The only way to describe her is a chav." (EX24/06)

</div>

In these stories, *chav* is marked as belonging to the secondary discourse of *sister Sara*, though *The Mirror* reformulates this in the headline, slipping into direct discourse for *chav*. Interestingly, even within the reported secondary discourse, Sara does not directly

identify her sister as a *chav*. Instead she is reported as saying that *the only way to describe her would probably be/is a chav*. Thus she seems herself to be attributing the use of the word *chav* to some unnamed possible discourse, to be commenting on the possibilities that exist for describing people like her sister. There is thus metalinguistic meaning in this use, but it is also fairly directly identificational, since *chav* is the *only* possibility she is reported as giving for the identification of her sister.

6.5   Summary

Chav in newspaper discourse is a resource for the identification of people in class terms, sometimes, but not exclusively, in relation to the Underclass Discourse. Sometimes these people are celebrities, who the word is used to evaluate as *tasteless* (Bourdieu, 1984). Sometimes these are groups of people, considered problematic in socio-political terms; disruptive in school, or dependent on the state. The former is, so far as my collection is representative, typical of celebrity news in the tabloid press, the latter of opinion pieces in the mid-market right-wing newspapers. The former oriented towards stereotyping, and the latter (relatively) towards administrative allocation. That *chav* is used in both of these types of identifying practice might be suggestive of a shared representation, a shared Discourse on class – one in which, in both administrative and stereotypical terms, publicly observable differences between people are articulated as private, personal properties.

Where stereotyping is at its most developed – in the features articles and personal columns – the discourse that uses *chav* shares much with the 'humour books' discussed in Chapter Six. Semiotic resources – language, clothing, behaviours – are articulated as symbols of *chav* to be observed in public, and to be read as indicative of personal traits,

but in a self-consciously ironic fashion. As with the humour books, to 'get' something like Wyatt's article in *The Daily Mail* readers have to recognise that this is ironic. And often irony is deployed in cynical metalinguistic comments, where writers effectively say 'I know this is stereotyping of the poor, and I know that's bad, but here I go anyway'. The irony in such cases, as in the *chav* 'humour books' and stereotyping features articles, is entirely without a critical dimension. It might even be said to evade the possibility of critique.

Chav is also a resource used to write about representations; television characters, and potential appearances and styles, abstracted away from particular people. I suggest, therefore, that it is often *metarepresentational*, used in the discussion of phenomena that are already mediated representations of social life. A great number of the articles that use *chav* do so in coverage of television.

Chav is often used in writing about the kinds of things that people say about each other and about society. A variety of metalinguistic and metasocial stances are taken by journalists, but *chav* is often mentioned in two in particular: in commentary on social inequality, in which *chav* is implicated in being a symptom and an instrument of such inequality; and in commentary on multiculturalism, in which meanings of 'whiteness' are articulated, and the use of *chav* taken as suggestive of discrimination against 'the white working class'.

Finally, to relate this chapter to my research questions and hypotheses, *chav* seems to be used in newspaper discourse to individualise class in a number of ways, related to Discourses of the Underclass and Lifestyle but also to a perhaps deeper or more generalised representation of *taste* as personal choice, representations which sustain the

domination of those in a variety of 'higher' social positions by representing the conditions of those 'below' them as the result of personal choice; of 'choice incompetence' (Bauman 1998). Variation in terms of Discourse is related to variation in terms of news Genres – taste being relatively foregrounded in celebrity news and the Underclass in opinion columns, for example. Generally, though, *chav* is used in Genres that relate to 'everyday life', through (often ironic) stereotyping, and thus serve to further articulate publicly observable social inequality (including that mediated by television) as private choice, and thus to address issues of class with no account of class as social structure, relationship or domination.

7   Conclusion

I have investigated the use of *chav* in a number of Genres of public discourse. On the basis of this investigation, I believe it possible to interpret the significance of the word in terms of both Discourse, or semiotic ways of representing the world, and Genre, semiotic ways of acting on the world. Here I discuss these conclusions, relating them to my research questions and initial hypotheses as laid out in Chapter One. I then discuss the theoretical implications of my research, before making some concluding remarks.

7.1   The significance of *chav* in terms of Discourse

7.1.1   Class identification

In my texts *chav* seems to be implicated in various Discourses of class identification. The Underclass Discourse and Lifestyle Discourse are prominent, but there are many more cases in which the word cannot be directly related to any such Discourse, in which it seems to have much less determinate class meanings associated with *naturalised*, and thus not explicitly articulated, *taste* evaluations, meanings that might be seen as drawing on and reinforcing a sense of 'up' and 'down' (Bourdieu, 1984). Before asking what I have found about *chav* and taste, though, I consider the ways in which *chav* does seem to be closely related to the Underclass and Lifestyle Discourses.

7.1.1.1 Underclass

For Hayward and Yar, as quoted in Chapter Two, *chav* 'represents a popular reconfiguration of the underclass idea' (2006; 10). So, to what extent does it seem to be the case that the word is used in an Underclass Discourse? Of the tendencies that

Levitas (2005) identifies in the Underclass Discourse, which I outlined in Chapter Two, I suggest that the following are found in my *chav* data.

(1) *Chav* does seem to contribute to a representation of cultural difference. This is prominent in the humour books and feature articles where *chavs* are suggested to speak a different language, use different body language and behave in ways that are motivated by deviant dispositions towards life, their own likes and dislikes. The Generic forms of cross-cultural communication – phrasebooks and dictionaries – are borrowed to present texts as guides to communicating with a distinct culture. And this cultural difference is made explicit in passages such as the following:

> It's an attitude, a way of life, a tribal thing, and those in it (or innit) have chosen to be there. Now, in this invaluable guide, you can check out the culture, the lifestyle, the language, the loves, likes and dislikes of this unique phenomenon – a phenomenon that began in Chatham and which is sweeping Britain – and a shopping centre near you every Saturday afternoon!
> *Chav!* (Wallace and Spanner 2004) Introduction

(2) Discourse on *chavs* certainly focuses on the behaviour of *chavs* and not the structure of society as a whole – in, for example, the guides to chav spotting – but are *chavs* the poor? Generally, the resources used to identify *chavs* are the resources of low cultural capital. Even where the people that the word is used to identify are recognisably wealthy celebrities, *chav* is used to question their *taste*. In most cases, though, *chavs* are not these wealthy celebrities but *an underclass of illeducated, jobless white chavs* (*The Express* 30/10/08).

(3) Where discourse using *chav* is oriented towards practices of *administrative allocation* it seems often to be used to write about welfare; *the welfare state's raison d'etre is to ensure that "chavs" are supplied with Burberry caps and hooded tops*

writes a columnist in *The Times* (28/10/04). And in the stereotyping of the humour books, *Chavs want money and lots of it, but don't want to work for it* (*The Little Book of Chavs*, Bok 2004, blurb). More often, though, welfare is not an explicit issue.

(4) *Chav* is not used in discourse that aims to construct a representation of society as a whole, and thus inequalities among the rest of society are certainly ignored. *Chavs* are a phenomenon *we* can all 'spot', or, in a number of articles a problem that *we* all share, *our inner city yob problem* (*The Star,* 18/10/06). *Chavs'* distinctiveness is constructed in relation to *our* homogeneity.

(5) *Chav* is certainly gendered, but variably so. In some cases, a morphological distinction is made between *chavs* and *chavettes*, with different appearances described for each. More generally, Levitas' claim that the underclass are represented as 'idle, criminal young men and single mothers' (2005; 21) can be upheld.

So *chav* can be seen as contributing to an Underclass Discourse. It is in those elements of this Discourse that might be seen as relating to stereotyping practices that this seems to be especially true; in particular, *chav* seems to be used in the construction of *cultural* difference between *chavs* and *most people*.

So while *chav* might be seen as contributing to an Underclass Discourse, it also seems to act transformatively on this Discourse. This seems to be the case in two ways: (1) it *ethnicises* the Underclass; and (2), as Hayward and Yar (2006) suggest, it *culturalises* the Underclass. The former tendency is apparent in those newspaper articles that use *chav* to identify a *white underclass*, a conservative move that seems to be found in articles arguing against multiculturalism.

The latter, culturalising tendency is perhaps a difference in emphasis that can be related to Genre. *Chav* is used much more frequently in 'soft' Genres about everyday life, than it is in 'hard' news or explicitly political discourse. It is a resource for the identification of the different kinds of 'everyday' people much more than a resource for the identifications of politically or economically relevant groups. In a sense then, this apparent transformation of the Underclass Discourse might ultimately be seen as a reinforcement of the Discourse's key property – the representation of socio-economic inequality as a product of personal dispositions. Soft news and stereotyping Genres are likely to be much more successful in creating such an impression than Levitas' political discourse. The culturalisation of Underclass Discourse that *chav* helps to perform seems then an extension of the Discourse into other Genres that might serve to better perform this culturalisation.

7.1.1.2 Lifestyle

For Moran (2006) it was not the Underclass Discourse, but the concept of Lifestyle that was most relevant to the use of the word *chav*. In a few newspaper articles from the business news, *chav* is used in a relatively technical, Lifestyle oriented manner, to identify a particular consumer group. In the book *Chav!* too, a personality-type test is deployed, and *chav* used to identify one among three personality-lifestyle groups to which readers might belong. As noted in Chapter Two, personality tests have long been central to Discourse on Lifestyle.

But more generally, *chav* is often used to identify a kind of person whose appearance – often identified in terms of particular brands – and behaviours – television watching habits, favourite music – are related to personal values. In this respect *chav* seems to

share much with the Discourse of Lifestyle segmentation. This is the case even in dictionary entries, for example. As seen in Chapter Three, *chav* was defined in relation to appearances and personal dispositions. And such dispositions represent being a *chav* as having made a choice. The blurb of *Chav!* states this explicitly – *those in it* [the chav lifestyle] … *have chosen to be there* – and elsewhere the suggestion that *chavs* have chosen to be as they are is made in the articulation of an apparent *chav* 'point of view', the use of *verba sentiendi* and evaluative language purporting to come from a *chav* perspective.

Where most uses of *chav* deviate from the Lifestyle Discourse, though, is in their normative implications. *Chavs* are not just one of many Lifestyle groups but *the* Lifestyle group, to be distinguished from us, the 'normal' people who read the newspapers. In this respect, *chav* might perhaps be seen as a resource used at an intersection between the Underclass and Lifestyle Discourses, for articulating the idea of the Underclass as if the Underclass were a Lifestyle group.

7.1.1.3 Class and taste

But, there seem too to be many uses of *chav* that cannot be, or might not be, read in the specific terms of Underclass or Lifestyle, and perhaps relate to classification at a much more abstract level, at Bourdieu's level of 'up' and 'down' of the dominant and the dominated, to *taste* (1984). *Taste*, is, for Bourdieu, barely articulated; and depends on this for its existence.. The clothing and behaviours of *chavs* are to be recognised by readers of the texts I have considered as *tasteless*, as being 'low'. This can be identified in the case of language, where the sociolinguistic literature can be drawn on to show that the features deployed in stylisations of *chavspeak* are stereotyped basilectal forms

(Wells, 1982), but clothing – sportswear and jewellery – and behaviours – drinking, watching reality television – are also implicitly 'low'.

In reproducing these naturalised *taste* assumptions, the texts that I have analysed serve to play a role in the construction of *taste*, thus there is a representation here of something much more abstract than a type of person. The texts in my collection help to represent what's up and what's down, to represent a vision of society in which appearances and behaviours have hierarchical symbolic values – in Bourdieu's (1977; 1984) terms, they serve as a form of *capital*. What is at issue here is not only the identification of people, but an attempt to articulate the resources available in identification, and the reproduction of a much more abstract hierarchical scheme underlying this identification in which these resources have value. *Chav* is not then just a word used to identify a particular group of people, or to represent a group in particular terms – it is a resource used to construct the very terms in which we classify.

But such resources remain *misrecognised* or *naturalised*, represented not as objects with socially constructed meanings but as personal choices. And it is this that allows for the close relationship between *taste*, Lifestyle and Underclass. All are schemes which emphasise choice; all represent public differences as personal disposition. And, in terms of Discourse, it is perhaps at the level that the Underclass, Lifestyle and Taste relate to each other that I ultimately feel the most vigorous critical challenge to *chav* needs to be made. Each of these – as Discourses, or as embodied classifications – rely on and serve to articulate an interpretation of the materials and behaviours of public life as symbols of private personality. Whenever *chav* is used, it is to identify some people as personally different, and to explain public differences in terms of this personal

difference. This is not novel – *chav* is not new in this respect; Sennett (2002) traces the idea that personal appearances reveal private selves back to the urban industrialisation and secularisation of the nineteenth century. But, I think in my data this articulation of the public as private is particularly dangerous because of the close relationship between this cultural Discourse and currently prevalent political Discourses; the representation of a kind of person called a *chav* serves to lend support to politically regressive claims such as George Osborne's argument that 'the person who sits there and says you know what this [unemployment] is a lifestyle choice for me – that lifestyle choice is going to come to an end' (BBC, 2010d). It is in this respect that *chav* can be seen as an *ideological* resource – it contributes to a classifying Discourse that foregrounds personal choice, a Discourse that lends support to the withdrawal from public responsibility for welfare, to a *laissez faire* response to social inequality (Clarke et al., 1987).

In summary, to relate this discussion to research questions one and three, *chav* seems to be used in the individualisation of Discourses about social class. The socially distributed resources of a capitalist society are represented as personal attributes. This relates clearly to Discourses on Lifestyle and Underclass but also to a much broader conception of 'up' and 'down', one in which *chav* is used to identify those who are 'down'. And thus it performs the ideological function of suggesting that the position of the poor is the fault of the poor, reinforcing the dominant official Discourses of contemporary politics.

7.2 The significance of *chav* in terms of Genre

7.2.1 Stereotyping and administrative allocation

Where the semiotic potential of *chav* is given its most extensive articulation, it is used in the construction of a stereotype. This is true of the Brewers definitions of *chav*, of the

features articles in the newspaper discourse that I have investigated, and of the 'chav humour' books. Numerous material resources – clothing, language, public behaviour – are articulated as symbols of an underlying character type; that of the *chav*. And readers are told of the *chav*'s own beliefs and values, which are implied to be interpretable in straightforward terms on the basis of public observation. The guides to 'spotting' *chavs* serve to articulate this stereotype most clearly. They serve as guides to using a stereotype to interpret the people readers encounter in public. *Chav* itself is central to this stereotyping. Although similar representations predate *chav* – the television character Vicky Pollard being the prime example – for Labov, it is the addition of a 'descriptive tag' that turns a representation into a stereotype; stereotypes 'have a general label' (Labov, 1972a; 314). *Chav* is this descriptive tag, and more than being simply descriptive I suggest that it is a resource that allows for an intensification of stereotyping; a 'buzzword' necessary for the publication of books such as *Chav!* or the printing of feature articles like *The Chav Rich List*.

Stereotypes provide people with descriptions and explanations of the behaviour of other people that *precede* interaction with those people, thus such developed stereotyping as exists in relation to *chav* can perhaps be seen as a kind of withdrawal from public engagement. Stereotypes provide an apparent means of knowing without interacting. The term was first developed in its current use by the early Twentieth century American writer Walter Lippmann, for whom, 'the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. … To traverse the world men must have maps of the world' (1932; 16). Stereotypes are these maps, and they are ideologically 'refracted' maps (Hewitt, 1986). The stereotyping of

the *chav* is refracted by Discourses on Underclass, Lifestyle and personal choice and by naturalised, latent *taste* classifications.

Sennett (2002), as I have discussed, sees the interpretation of public appearances in terms of private selves – a stage of selective representation taken for granted in all of the accounts of stereotyping that I have read – as a development of urban capitalist societies, and one that allows for withdrawal from public life: 'To know, one must impose no coloration of one's own, of one's own commitments; this meant silence in public in order to understand it, objectivity in scientific investigation, a gastronomy of the eye' (Sennett, 2002; 153). So much discourse on *chavs* serves to represent precisely such a situation; one in which it is possible to withdraw and only to observe (or 'spot') public life. For Williams, writing about the phrase *the masses*:

> There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses. … The fact is, surely, that a way of seeing other people which has become characteristic of our kind of society, has been capitalized for the purposes of political or cultural exploitation. What we see, neutrally, is other people, many others, people unknown to us. In practice, we mass them, and interpret them, according to some convenient formula. Within its terms, the formula will hold. Yet it is the formula, not the mass, which it is our real business to examine.
>
> (Williams, 1963; 289)

Chav is a resource in such a 'formula', a resource that finds its use in encouraging a particular relationship to public experience, a relationship of supposedly 'objective' withdrawal from people.

Furthermore, stereotyping, in its extreme form, says not only 'I know you', but 'You're easy. I could be you'. Hodge and Kress write that to stereotype the accent of another speech community is to claim 'that membership of that speech community is easy but worthless' (1988; 86). This is clearly relevant to the stylisations of *chavspeak* but other

elements of the extensive articulation of the *chav* stereotype also serve this purpose; writers purport to be able to represent the beliefs and values of *chavs*. *Chavs* can not only be described from the outside, but understood from the inside too. '[T]he chavette *delights* in large hooped earrings,' writes the contributor to *Brewer's Dictionary of Modern Phrase & Fable* (Ayto and Crofton, 2006; 145). 'One shop sells everything a chavette could possibly *want*,' writes Petronella Wyatt in *The Daily Mail* (ML31/04a).

From a critical perspective what makes this public withdrawal particularly dangerous is that it is a withdrawal by those with *more* from those with *less*. Though I certainly wish to avoid reocentrically equating the word with any real world referent, it is clearly used in the identification of people as 'low', and, I suggest, for withdrawal from such people. *Chav* as it is used in public written discourse, provides a resource for justifying this withdrawal. Evidence from investigation of the use of the word suggests that this might happen at a range of positions on the social scale; as suggested, for instance, by the false etymologies developed for the word, for some, *chavs* are *Council House and Violent*, while for others they are simply *Cheltenham Average*.

7.2.2 Irony

Many of the texts that I have analysed have to be understood in terms of irony as a discursive practice (Hutcheon, 1994). *Chav!* and *The Little Book of Chavs* are meant to be understood as humorous, as are many of the feature articles that most vividly articulate *chav* as a stereotype. For the discourse community for whom 'chav humour' books are intended, that *chav* is used to articulate a stereotype, and not in the accurate description of real life, is taken for granted; to 'get' these texts, you have to 'get' that this is an exaggerated representation. But it is an irony without critique. When

journalists indicate some discomfort with the 'snobbery' of a *chav* joke but go ahead and print it anyway, the irony serves no critical function. When stereotypes are so explicitly and self-consciously stereotypical that no readers of the text would fail to see them as stereotypes, but with no criticism, it seems to me that the practice can be called 'blank irony' or *pastiche* (Jameson, 1998; 5). Dyer gives the following, general definition of pastiche; 'pastiche is a kind of imitation that you are meant to know is imitation' (2007; 1). Here what are being blankly pastiched are existing stereotypes, elements of existing Discourses on social class, without criticism of these Discourses.

Such blank ironic practice has costs of its own. David Foster Wallace suggests that the effect of irony is often to ask 'How very *banal* to ask what I mean?' (1993; 184); 'The reason why our pervasive cultural irony is at once so powerful and so unsatisfying is that an ironist is *impossible to pin down*' (ibid.; 183). Bewes quotes Toby Young, editor of the early-1990s British magazine *The Modern Review* as saying that 'the ability to resist passionate political movements' is '[t]he greatest advantage that irony gives to those who possess it' (Bewes, 1997; 41), arguing himself that '[i]rony as an end in itself represents the rapid commodification of a strategy that once provided a legitimate means of challenging the dominant ideology' (ibid.) but is now apolitical and critically blunt, merely a means of avoiding commitment. For Zizek the situation is more dire still. He argues that ironic cynicism has replaced 'false consciousness' as the dominant ideological mode in contemporary societies; 'cynical distance, laughter, irony, are, so to speak, part of the game' (1989; 28).

Furthermore, the issues that discourse on *chavs* tackles ironically are often precisely those that need seriousness – the inequalities observable in British towns and cities and

the political action needed to alleviate such inequalities. Billig quotes Francis Bacon as giving a list of topics that should be free from humour: 'religion, matters of state, great persons, any man's present business of importance' (Bacon, 1902; 102 [1625] in Billig, 2005; 14). The philosopher Richard Rorty, keen on what he calls a liberal ironic stance in private lives, writes that he 'cannot … claim that there could or ought to be a culture whose public rhetoric is *ironist*' (1989; 87). Yet it is 'matters of state' and it is 'public rhetoric' about issues of public concern that are dealt with ironically here. And the blankness of this irony, its lack of critical edge, fails to question the representations put forward. The Underclass Discourse of contemporary right wing politics is adopted with ironic humour but without criticism. The concern here is thus that it is people who are damaged by the actual inequalities of contemporary societies, those without capital, economic or social, whose situation is treated with this kind of ironic humour by those – journalists, others with the resources to publish joke books, van Dijk's 'elites' (2008) – who are potentially in the position to bring about change. The irony, as Wallace (1993) and Bewes (1997) recognise, undermines the possibility of serious challenge to what is, in terms of actual social effects, a *very* serious Discourse. Newspaper articles such as Wyatt's *chav*-spotting trip to Croydon suggest a complete withdrawal from rational engagement with ideas about social difference, revelling in a stereotyped description and disregarding any commitment to truth. Similarly, Billig suggests that the creators of Ku Klux Klan affiliated racist joke websites use jokes – use the claim that they are not serious – in a bid for 'freedom from the demands of logical and factual argument. The jokers know that blacks are not gorillas or apes. They know that the stereotypes are exaggerations' (Billig, 2001; 286). Moreover; 'these jokes, that are not just jokes, mock restraints against racist violence. They celebrate such violence, encouraging that it

should be imagined as enjoyment without pity for the dehumanized victims' (ibid.). Perhaps, the ironic humour of discourse that uses *chavs* serves a similar purpose, mocking the demands of rational debate and mocking restrictions on violence, if not physical then symbolic, mocking restrictions on overtly ideological discourse.

The philosopher Thomas Hobbes proposed a theory of humour arguing that people laugh at those that they feel superior to – which is itself a common argument – not because they feel superior, but because they are worried about *not* being superior. We laugh at those below us to keep them below us, because we know our position is precarious and want to protect it. Similar arguments have been made about the ways in which people in contemporary societies feel about class. For Nayak (2006), as discussed previously, upper working class young men called their poorer contemporaries *chavs* to ensure that they did not fall to their position. And Sennett and Cobb (1972) in their *Hidden Injuries of Class* interpret class resentment in similar terms. So perhaps *chav* brings together these tendencies – the superiority laughter and the class resentment. Perhaps this provides a theoretical explanation for the ironic stereotypes of the poor – people laugh at and insult others to make their own claims for dignity in a precarious, competitive world scarred by class.

But the discourse that I have discussed is not the discourse of those in the kinds of precarious working class positions that Sennett and Cobb (1972) and Nayak (2006) discuss. Journalists on national newspapers call other people *chavs*. None of the working class young men in Nayak's study were in such a position. None of Sennett and Cobb's informants were either. Perhaps these journalists are designing their language for their audiences (Bell, 1991). A university educated *Sun* journalist might

not hate *chavs* but she might think her working class readership do. However, the word is not used significantly more in *The Sun* than *The Times*. While *chav* may be used by many people who do feel insecure about their status, people who are not afforded a great deal of respect, it is also used by those in positions of power, and in most of its uses, its meaning very much accords with ideas identified in the political discourse of the powerful (Levitas, 2005).

Withdrawal through stereotyping and irony seem to me to related to the use of *chav* to identify fictional people and the already-mediated representations of real people on television. I have argued that in using *chav*, writers are often positioning themselves as observers of everyday life, but not agents in it. Petronella Wyatt in *The Mail* goes undercover, and many others promote 'chav spotting'. This relationship is one that is similar to the relationship between television viewers and the people represented on the screen; viewers can observe and comment on these people without interacting with them. Perhaps the use of *chav* to identify both real-life strangers and television characters plays a role in making our experience of public life a bit more like our experience of television, a form of withdrawal congruent with ironic stereotyping.

I discuss stereotyping and irony in terms of Genre because both are ways of doing something with language; they are Genres at a very abstract level. And just as *chav* is ideological as Discourse, it is ideological as Genre. In contributing to these practices of withdrawal – stereotyping and irony – *chav* contributes to the reproduction of relations of domination.

So, to relate my conclusions to research questions and hypotheses two and three, *chav* contributes to Genres in which people encountered in public are identified in

stereotyped, ironic ways. If the word is ideological in terms of Discourse, it is even more so in terms of Genre. The ironic practice in which the word is so often used is at once highly political, reproducing the Discourses of the political right, and strikingly apolitical, ostensibly avoiding commitment to these ideas through ironic distance. But this contradiction is itself ideological, evading critique by removing the social from the field of politics.

7.3   Verbal hygiene

In the chapters in which I sought out metalinguistic commentary on *chav*, I found, perhaps unsurprisingly, a great deal. But, there was also a great deal of metalinguistic commentary in the newspaper texts that I collected. To some extent, this was because many of the texts I collected were from October 2004, when *chav* entered the dictionary and when it was promoted as a novelty, but metalinguistic comment was found throughout my collection. Here I briefly consider the significance of this verbal hygiene from a critical perspective.

As Bourdieu (1977) notes, that which is given representation in language becomes *objectified* and the possibility arises that it might be debated and questioned. The possibility then arises that in questioning the language we can develop arguments about more than simply language. For much the same reason as I was able to undertake (and secure funding for) this research project – because it had an identifiable focus, a word – writers are able to publicly comment on *chav* in arguments concerning class. Other very similar resources were previously available – *townie, scally* etc. – but *chav* was given special prominence, as discussed in Chapters One and Three.

To some extent, the extent of the verbal hygiene surrounding *chav* is to be welcomed, and the fact that it seems not to have been restricted academia and to the liberal broadsheets – the texts with the smallest readerships in my collection – especially so (though it was concentrated in these areas). Tony Parsons criticises the word in *The Mirror*, and, perhaps more surprisingly, criticisms are found in the right wing press. However, in such right wing uses, regrettably, they contribute to an ethnicisation of class identification, arguing against discrimination towards the *white* working, in the context of an essentially conservative Discourse against multiculturalism. So, from a critical perspective, the extent of verbal hygiene taking *chav* as its target can certainly not be wholeheartedly embraced. The word is critiqued from a variety of perspectives, including many that are highly conservative; linguistic critique is not the preserve of the politically radical. This metalinguistic commentary is critical 'in the sense of "evaluative"' (Cameron, 1995; 9) but not critical in the sense that it serves to challenge ideological relations of domination (Wodak 2001).

Another note of caution concerning the verbal hygiene that *chav* has attracted might be made here too. Stuart Hall (1994) suggests that political critique that focuses only on representation without addressing 'deeper' forces might be counter-productive, a suggestion made specifically in relation to 'chav humour' by Zoe Williams in *The Guardian*. Even where *chav* is criticised from a left perspective, perhaps the impression given by critiques of *chav* is that material issues are being ignored. Castell and Thompson's (2007) suggestion that *LOLI* should replace *chav* is an example of this, as is Hampson's implication that the inequalities of class can be overcome by *audibly tut-tut*[ting] at those who use *chav* (2008). A critique of *chav*, if it is to be an effective

social critique has to go further than this, but this does not mean, I feel, that it is necessary to take an all-or-nothing approach.

Where I feel that critiques of *chav* have been most convincing is where they have stressed what I called in Chapter Four the *representational* and the *instrumental* – the ways in which *chav* contributes to ways of representing the world and ways of doing things. These critical tendencies, of course, share much with the concepts of Discourse and Genre as I have been deploying them, and many of the interpretations of *chav* that I have developed in these terms can be seen as closely related to these tendencies. However, these lines of critique have been largely restricted to academia, and to the left-liberal press, and sidelined in, for example, the coverage of *chav* as 'word of 2004'. More widespread, fully critical attention on *chav* would be welcomed.

7.4   Theoretical implications

This work has taken a particular word, conceptualised as a semiotic resource as its object of analysis, or what Fairclough (2007) calls its 'semiotic starting point'. This perspective has been motivated by a focus on the ways in which material resources are made meaningful and deployed in semiotic activity such that the ways in which we use language to write about and act on the world are viewed as activities in the world.

I have hoped too to have demonstrated an interrelationship between Discourse and Genre. *Chav* is used to represent as it is in the context of particular kinds of semiotic activities. The development of 'soft', everyday material in newspapers has allowed *chav* to come to the fore as a way of personalising social difference, and thus Genre and Discourse are closely related. This is the case too for the *chav* 'humour' books, which require a Discourse that represents using extreme stereotypes for their 'humour'. Genre

has thus been important in my work as it has allowed me to avoid the reification of a *chav* Discourse independent of social practice. Henri Lefebvre writes that discourse 'enter[s] into the everyday, not as its loom, but as threads woven into its fabric' (2008: 284), and in focusing on a particular resource as it is used in particular Genres – that is, by conceiving of my object of analysis as a material deployed in activity – I have attempted to avoid conceptualising Discourse as a socially abstracted 'loom', and this is an emphasis that I believe could usefully be applied to other critical discourse analytic and social semiotic projects.

Furthermore, my work begins to address a number of issues that perhaps only begin to find articulation in this thesis but are of theoretical importance for future work in critical discourse analysis and social semiotics. It is these issues that I now discuss.

7.4.1   Irony

Much of the discourse that I have investigated is ironic, in the sense that the 'right' way to 'get it' is not to take it seriously (Hutcheon 1994). This irony is a potential problem for critical social semiotics, because it makes the question of meaning a difficult one. As Wallace writes, the effect of irony is to say 'How very *banal* to ask what I mean?' (1993: 184). But this is precisely the question that social semioticians seek to ask. This is not a new problem, and linguists have tried to address the problem of irony in various ways (see Farrow 1998 for a critique of these attempts). Traditionally, the problem with irony in linguistics has been how to account for the fact that *pragmatically* people are saying one thing while *literally* saying the other (Grice, 1975). The formulation of this problem rests on the idea that what is important in the analysis of language is propositional content, what people are saying *about* the world, or, in CDA terms, how

discourse works as Discourse. This assumption is difficult enough to deal with where irony is used to say something apparently opposite to what a speaker's words 'literally' mean (Farrrow, 1998; Toolan, 1996), but it is even more difficult when we are faced with the kind of 'blank irony' – irony without critique – typical of contemporary societies (Bewes 1997; Jameson 1998) and found in so many texts on *chavs*. So what seems to be needed is to view this irony in terms of practical activity – as Genre – and to develop a critique of such irony that goes beyond the question of 'what is being said?' to 'what is being done?'. Such a question might allow for irony to be viewed as a way of using language – a *way of speaking* (Hymes, 1974; Saville-Troike, 1989; 12) – and we might ask what functions this practice has, how it relates to other features of contemporary societies. That is, in dealing with irony, it is perhaps the *ethnographic* dimension that should be stressed.

7.4.2 Critique

Critical social semiotics, following critical discourse analysis, is *critical* because it aims to uncover the ways in which discourse operates in the service of power. This critique comes from the left – it is on the side of those who suffer most from symbolic and material inequalities. But, when teaching CDA, I have often been asked why the field is associated so distinctly with the left. Surely the possibility is there for a right-wing critique of discourse. My data shows this possibility realised. Though the framework in which the criticism comes is by no means as well articulated as the CDA framework, a few criticisms are made of *chav* from the right, from highly conservative positions. As discussed above, social critique of language does not necessitate a radical critique of

society. Verbal hygiene's evaluative criticism does not necessitate CDA's ideological critique.

It is for this reason that I feel van Dijk's (2008; 1) claim that CDA is a normative, moral project is a particularly important one. CDA researchers have to ask *what should be*. Linguistic critique itself does not guarantee any particular answer to this question. And it is not, of itself, a politically critical tool; it needs to be made so through use in politically engaged activity.

7.4.3   Semiotics and observation

The attempt to articulate observable behaviour and material objects as semiotic resources has been seen to be a major function of the '*chav* humour' books and newspaper features on the word. This task, the uncovering of the meanings of everyday life, is also that undertaken by Social Semiotics as a field of academic inquiry. As quoted in Chapter Six, Van Leeuwen, for example, suggests it possible to investigate the meanings in ways of walking (2005; 4), and Hebdidge describes his task as being 'to discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style, to trace them out as "maps of meaning"' (1993; 367).

Though such claims are, of course, theoretically much more careful than the discourse on *chavs* – van Leeuwen writing 'potential for meaning' (2005; 4), for example – there remains a suggestion that the meanings of social activities are there to be observed and uncovered that is shared by writers on *chavs*. At its worst this leads to critiques of *chav* of the kind given by Julie Burchill, for whom the idea that wearing a Burberry hat is a symptom of being a *chav* is criticised on the grounds that calling someone a *chav* is a symptom of being sexually frustrated or bored at work. From this perspective anything

that can be observed about a person can be put to down as a personal disorder, understood as a symptom. Of course, social semiotic analyses are more sophisticated than this, understanding the meanings of resources as a social phenomenon, but the problem of observation and interpretation still remains; how are the interpretations of 'experts', when they share so much with the kinds of interpretations of everyday life put forward in 'everyday' stereotyping of *chavs*, to be privileged?

And the social semiotics of *chav* presents a further problem. If the fact that discourse on *chavs* has such a semiotic emphasis is indicative of ongoing trends in social identification, critical analysts interested in representation of people might soon find themselves in the awkward theoretical position of developing the critique that discourse on social life is *too semiotic*, too obsessed with signs and meanings. Such critique might begin to undermine the value of semiotic critique itself as social criticism.

I think that the solution to both of these problems is again to emphasise the political in critical social semiotic work, again to foreground morality and normativity, to commit to sides and to deploy linguistic critique as a political strategy. If meaning seems to be being made in the service of ideology, then the task is to combat that, to make meanings *against* ideology.

7.4.4   My own work

And, in return, I feel that Social Semiotics makes calls to my own work.

The loudest of these concerns *multimodality*. In my analysis I have prioritised language. I have made occasional references to the other semiotic modes, but priority has been give to language in my understanding of what a text is, and what textual features are

relevant to uses of *chav*. My decision to focus on language was one made for the sake of analytical expediency, not on any explicit theoretical basis. Non-linguistic modes of communication are likely to have been central to the semiotics of *chav*. The Chavscum website, for example, invited photographs from users, giving a regular prize for 'chav of the month' and many of the feature articles discussed in Chapter Six used prominent photographs. It would be interesting to understand how the linguistic emphasis on observing, on spotting *chavs* would have been realised in images. The analysis of the covers of *Chav!* and *The Little Book of Chavs* seems likely to have been suggestive of broader tendencies, but, at this stage, this remains speculation.

Fairclough's (2003) concept of Style in use of *chav* has also been overlooked. In Fairclough's framework this is an element of the discourse level alongside Genre and Discourse, and captures the ways in which semiotic resources are used in the enactment of particular social identities. Though I feel that this is the least theoretically developed of Fairclough's discourse level concepts,[17] it does, nonetheless, capture what might be extremely important aspects of the way in which *chav* is implicated in social practice. For example, Hampson's (2008) claim that 'you cannot consider yourself of the left and use the word' might be understood in Style terms, as a claim that there is a contradiction between use of the word and a particular political identity. And, in terms of the newspaper discourse considered in Chapter Six, there are indeed differences between the editorial style guidelines on the use of *chav* in the newspapers discussed, with *The Guardian* (2010) being the only newspaper that encourages its contributors to 'avoid' the word. Questions about how use, or non-use, of *chav* served to enact particular social

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[17] Fairclough's Style covers a broad range of ways in which language is involved in social practice, from Halliday's (1978) interpersonal metafunction to sociolinguistic concerns of style and indexicality and discourse analytic ideas about stylistic variation and register.

Styles might have been interesting. This is especially the case in a situation, like contemporary Britain, in which differences in political opinion are often themselves represented as differences of Lifestyle, such that attitude towards the word *chav* might itself be represented as an expression of personal identity.

7.5   Final comments

Chav has come to the fore in a period of British history during which economic inequalities have been at their highest levels for many years (Stewart and Hills, 2005), during which research suggests that geographical segregation according to wealth has become increasingly stark (Dorling et al., 2007), during which political debate has become dominated by the laissez-faire Discourses of the new right (Levitas, 2005), during which regeneration of towns and cities has seen public space increasingly privatised (Minton, 2009), and during which marketers have developed increasingly sophisticated tools for distinguishing kinds of people and the products they can own (Experian, 2007). *Chav* has developed in these circumstances and it makes a kind of sense of them; it helps to describe and explain the apparent differences of a public life reduced to encounters with strangers and marked by high levels of inequality, and it helps as a resource for describing and explaining the apparent deficiencies of others at various (but always 'lower') positions on the social scale. But it makes sense in a manner that is deeply *ideological*.

In terms of Discourse, *chav* contributes to the individualisation of classification, to the explanation of public difference as private choice, a representation that reinforces the central claims of the political discourse of the right, and that draws heavily on implicit representations of class and taste. But it is in terms of Genre that *chav* is perhaps most

significant. It is a resource used to practice a withdrawal from public life, from the demands of serious political representation and from the demands of engagement with strangers. It helps to make the lives of those we see as we drive though the city or visit a cinema with our friends like the lives of television characters, just phenomena to observe. And it is in these respects that it is most profoundly ideological; in these respects it contributes to the reproduction of inequality, and plays a role in the withdrawal from responsibility for political action to address inequality.

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