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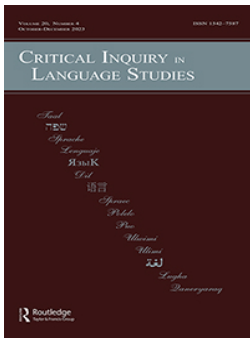
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Word rich or word poor? Deficit discourses, raciolinguistic ideologies and the resurgence of the ‘word gap’ in England’s education policy

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ABSTRACT

Educational linguists across England and the USA have long critiqued deficit-based language ideologies in schools, yet since the early 2010s, these have enjoyed a marked resurgence in England’s education policy as evident in discourses, funding, and pedagogical materials related to the so-called ‘word gap.’ This article conceptualizes the word gap as a realization of raciolinguistic ideologies in which the language practices of racialized, low-income and disabled speakers are characterized as deficient, limited, and indeed, full of gaps because they fail to meet benchmarks designed by powerful white listeners. With a genealogical approach, I trace how word gap ideologies and interventions are tethered to colonial logics and have (re)intensified in England’s education policy in recent years. I draw on a cluster of data, including education policy documents, Hansard records, political discourse, textbooks for teachers, research reports, media coverage and the work of Ofsted, the schools inspectorate. I discuss the durability of the word gap in England, newly marketed under seemingly benign guises of scientific objectivity, social justice and empowerment – despite decades of criticism exposing how it perpetuates racial and class hierarchies whilst blaming marginalized speakers and their families for their apparent failure to use the right kind of words.

Put simply, the word rich get richer, but the word poor get poorer. (Quigley, 2018, p. 18)

Without enough language – a word gap – a child is seriously limited in their enjoyment of school and success beyond. (Harley, 2018, p. 2)

The problem is often referred to as the ‘word gap’. On one level that relates to the number of words children know. [...] pupils with a limited vocabulary are held back not just in English, but right across the whole curriculum. These children arrive at school without the words they need to communicate properly. Just imagine the disadvantage they face, right from the start. Unable to follow what’s going on. Unable to keep up with their classmates. Unable to reach their potential. (Spielman, 2018)

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Mind the gap

Educational linguists across England and the USA have long critiqued deficit-based language ideologies in schools (e.g., García & Otheguy, 2017; Johnson & Johnson, 2021; Labov, 1970; Rosen, 1974; Snell, 2013), yet these have enjoyed a recent resurgence in England's education policy – evident in discourses, funding and classroom materials related to the so-called 'word gap' or 'vocabulary gap.' The three quotes which opened this article provide initial illustrations of these, in which 'language' is taken to be 'words,' and a perceived 'lack' or 'poorness' of words is taken to be a root cause of social inequality. The word gap is a deficit-based concept which, since the early 2010s, has been re-imported to education policy in England from the USA under the logics of raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa 2015). Raciolinguistic ideologies represent beliefs about language tethered to European colonialism and its ongoing legacies, within which low-income and racialized speakers' language practices are perceived as deficient, incomplete, and indeed, full of gaps when compared against the language practices of the idealized white middle-classes. Schools are a key space where raciolinguistic ideologies get turned into practices – such as through word gap interventions which position teachers as linguistic remediators whose role is to fix linguistic deficiencies by filling holes where there are 'absences.'

Raciolinguistic ideologies are as much about social class as they are race – especially in England, where working class racism and global capitalism have long shaped the fabric of society and schools (e.g., Preston, 2007; Shilliam, 2018). Ethnoracial formations, including whiteness, are not static nor monolithic and intersect with other processes such as classism and ableism. For example, (Shilliam's, 2018) genealogy shows how since the 1700s, state-crafted ideas about race and class in Britain have divided working class communities into the 'deserving white' and the 'undeserving non-white.' These are constructed categories of racialized othering, with both represented as idle and licentious – including in their use of language. Shilliam writes how the white working class was constitutionalized through empire, analogization with Black slaves, and what he calls a 'blackening of the poor' (Shilliam, 2018, p. 11) – concluding that '*class is race* [...] there is no politics of class which is not already racialised' (Shilliam, 2018, p. 178, my emphasis). Similarly, Rosa and Flores (2020) describe how a raciolinguistic perspective offers a 'raceclass' approach which simultaneously challenges the structures of white supremacy/global capitalism and the crafting of racial/class hierarchies. This race-class approach allows us to expose how proposed solutions to racial and socioeconomic disparities (such as word gap interventions) rely on transforming the individual behaviors of marginalized speakers so that they are deemed to comply with standards set by the white listening subject, rather than transforming oppressive structures (Rosa & Flores, 2017). The white listening

subject does not typically refer to individuals, but to institutions, policies, assessment instruments and other technologies of linguistic surveillance which perpetuate raciolinguistic ideologies through racialized, classed and ableist modes of perception.

Ideologies about the 'limited' vocabulary of marginalized speakers in Britain reach back to at least the 1500s, where British colonizers deployed such discourses in their representations of indigenous communities as part of their justifications for colonial rule (Gilmour, 2006; Smith, 2009). These deficit-based ideologies became further entrenched through 1950s British education research (e.g., Bernstein, 1958), and have long been prominent in the USA (e.g., Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966; Hart & Risley, 1995). The word gap as a named policy intervention, however, has been re-imported to England in the last decade as part of a broader transatlantic education policy trade route with the USA. Like existing critiques of word gap ideologies, including limited work from England (e.g., Burnett et al., 2020), my discussion foregrounds a 1995 study by Betty Hart and Todd Risley, which attributes low academic performance by Black children living in poverty to their purportedly diminished vocabulary size and 'suboptimal' child-directed speech.

Spanning decades and continents then, the word gap is a durable ideology which continues to be seductive to policy makers who look for quick-fix interventions which obfuscate structural inequalities pertaining to racism, classism and ableism. Put simply, it is another way of finding faults in the activities of working class, Black families – a manifestation of a culture of poverty theory (see Ladson-Billings, 2017) where it is deemed that the reason low-income, racialized children do poorly in school is not because of systemic inequality, but because their families have failed to equip them with adequate linguistic and cultural practices. These stances are readily reproduced in mainstream UK-based word gap research (e.g., Sullivan et al., 2021), where school is seen as a place where marginalized children will be compensated for their supposed deficiencies through seemingly benign interventions which change their behavior. Such conceptualizations of language and culture point to marginalized speakers' supposed lack of words as the root cause of social inequality, rather than the interlocking assemblage of white supremacy, racial capitalism and social class stratification (see Charity Hudley et al., 2020, pp. 213–214)

In the following section, I outline the methodological approach and data used to trace the (re)normalization of word gap ideologies in England. I then describe the transatlantic origins of such ideologies, before showing how these continue to inform contemporary practices. I show how word gap ideologies in schools get normalized, legitimized, and popularized through state-level financial support, teacher textbooks, academic literature, and Ofsted,¹ an institution who conduct inspections of all state-funded schools and teacher education programmes in England.

Raciolinguistic genealogy and transatlantic policy diffusion

This article combines a raciolinguistic genealogy (Flores, 2021; see also, Stoler, 1995) with tools from education policy diffusion (Shipan & Volden, 2008) to trace the resurgence of word gap ideologies and policies in England over the last 10 years or so. Flores offers a raciolinguistic genealogy as a method for revealing how raciolinguistic ideologies come to be enshrined, often under a guise of scientific objectivity which lend credibility to discriminatory policies.

A raciolinguistic genealogy provides a suitable tool for interrogating the durability of the word gap over time and space, given that it adopts a 'socio-historical perspective on language policy that locates contemporary debates within broader epistemological framings shaped by histories of colonialism' (Flores, 2021, p. 113). There are three components. The first, a genealogical stance, examines how contemporary policies are shaped by the past, uncovering traces of deeply embedded racializing discourses which frame racialized, low-income speakers and their language practices as deficient and requiring remediation. The second, a materialist framing, locates the denigration of such speakers as a foundational activity within global capitalism and European colonialism. It insists that white supremacy is crafted by deliberate design and that successive generations of its original architects continue to benefit from it, resulting in continuing racial and class inequalities through the unequal distribution of wealth, resources, and power – especially in schools (see also, Gillborn, 2005; Preston, 2007). Finally, a raciolinguistic perspective shifts attention away from the stigmatized language practices of marginalized communities, and toward the white listening subject, represented by racialized modes of perception including policies, screeners and assessment instruments (Rosa & Flores, 2017).

I use a raciolinguistic genealogy to analyze data which were generated through my own close observations of how word gap ideologies have (re)surfaced in England through contemporary policy initiatives. I collected texts spanning across political discourse, media coverage, academic research, popular classroom resources, and state education policy documents. This resulted in a corpus of searchable data allowing me to trace the emergence of word gap ideologies in contemporary policy and how they are tethered to ideas from the 'past.' These 'older' ideas were explored during archival work at the George Padmore Institute in London and the Gottesman Libraries in New York City. In the sections that follow, I move between these strands of data to show how recent policy initiatives in England work to perpetuate raciolinguistic ideologies under new disguises of scientific objectivity and social justice. I examine how the rhetorical appeal of the word gap continues to attract generous funding and public support whilst exacerbating harmful language ideologies by blaming low-income, racialized children for literally, not using enough words.

Historicizing the gap

Word gap ideologies are rooted in deficit perspectives of language which claim that minoritised speakers do poorly in school not because of structural inequality, but because of a cultural, cognitive and linguistic deficit located within the speakers, their families, and their communities. Whilst discourses around ‘limited’ language played a key part of British colonial education policy (e.g., Gilmour, 2006; Smith, 2009), gap ideologies were granted academic credibility under UK-based sociological work in the 1950s-70s and the writings of Basil Bernstein in particular (e.g., Bernstein, 1958, 1973). These were propelled under his theory of elaborated and restricted codes, which differentiated between working class and middle class speakers’ language practices based on their supposed simplicity/complexity (Rosen, 1974). Some psychologists of the time (e.g., Deutsch, 1967; Jensen, 1969) argued that deficits are genetic, perpetuating connections between language, racial hierarchies and biological racism. Jensen (1972, p. 8) pays a particular homage to the British eugenicist Cyril Burt in his writing, where he describes how in 1957 he visited London as a postdoctoral student and heard Burt speak, which he summarized as ‘the best lecture I ever heard.’

Similar to Bernstein’s proposals was the work of Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann, whose research continues to frame marginalized populations as suffering from ‘verbal deprivation’ (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966; see also, Riessman, 1962). Bereiter and Engelmann claimed that low-income African and Mexican-American children are restricted by a ‘limited grammar,’ having ‘not learned the language rules that are necessary for [...] drawing inferences; for asking questions, and for giving explanations’ (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966, p. 5). Their solution was the Direct Instruction programme, developed as part of the US-government funded Project Follow Through, which initially ran from 1968–1977 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s so-called War on Poverty. Direct Instruction provides teachers with tightly regulated classroom scripts to follow, with DeBose (2005, p. 66) showing how it characterizes marginalized children’s language in terms of ‘badly connected words and phrases,’ ‘not possessing the means for logical thought,’ gestures, one-word answers, and in some cases, the absence of any language at all (DeBose, 2005, p. 66; see also, Rosa, 2016). Despite a body of work which has long exposed the inherent racism within deficit-based perspectives and Direct Instruction (e.g., Labov, 1970), they remain durable concepts in England and the USA, disseminated to teachers through pedagogical textbooks under guises of scientific objectivity, empowerment, and ‘research-informed practice’ which overlook even the most well-known critiques.

Deficit perspectives were revived and rebranded in 1995 with the publication of Hart and Risley’s book *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Hart and Risley claimed that families

with higher socioeconomic statuses compared with those from lower statuses talk more frequently and with a wider variety of vocabulary, and that this caused them to face challenges in school. Based on monthly, 1-hour observations and recordings of 42 families in Kansas City from three different socioeconomic categories ('professional,' 'working class,' and 'welfare') and tracking children from 7–9 months to 3 years old, they claimed for the existence of a thirty-million-word gap between the 'welfare' group and the 'professional' group. This claim was based on calculating the average hourly rate of words spoken to children from their caregivers (~600 per hour for the 'welfare' group and ~2100 for the 'professional' group) and then extrapolating these numbers to predict that by the age of four, children from low-income families will have heard 30-million fewer words than their high-income counterparts. As well as the word gap being a construct derived from predictive modeling then, it is also flawed in its sampling: from the 13 families in the 'professional' category, just 1 of these were African American; from the 6 families in the 'welfare' category, all 6 were African American.

A huge body of US-based research has critiqued Hart & Risley's work (e.g., Aggarwal 2016; Avineri et al, 2015; Baugh, 2017; Figueroa, [under review](#); García & Otheguy, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Johnson et al., 2017; Johnson & Johnson, 2021; Rosa & Flores, 2017), showing how the alleged gap is underpinned by a raciolinguistic ideology which frames the language practices of minoritized speakers and their families as inherently deficient and the root cause of their poor performance in school. Baugh (2017), for example, shows how Hart & Risley construe the 'quality' of linguistic input as an objective measurement which is benchmarked against the language practices of white, middle-upper class communities. A raciolinguistic perspective (e.g., García & Otheguy, 2017; Rosa & Flores, 2017) shows how Hart & Risley's work has come to legitimize covert racial segregation by replacing genetic inferiorities (such as in the work of Arthur Jensen, discussed earlier) with discourses about the supposed linguistic deficiencies of low-income, racialized children.

The word gap then, is a durable ideology which licenses policy makers to point blame at minoritised speakers and their families, diverting attention away from educational inequalities produced by broader structures of white supremacy, global capitalism and European colonialism. It implies that children of color from low-income families are disadvantaged not because of such oppressive structures, but because their parents are unable to adequately raise their children which renders their home language practices as unsuitable for school.

The word gap as a raciolinguistic policy (re)import to England

In the following sections I trace the recent transatlantic (re)importing of word gap ideologies from education policy in the USA to England, showing how this is tethered to the same kinds of colonial, deficit-based and verbal deprivation narratives discussed in the preceding section. I conceptualize word gap ideologies as a raciolinguistic industry which attracts major funding, turns supposed linguistic defects into economic profits, and continues to overlook the root causes of educational inequalities by framing the most vulnerable members of society as having linguistic and cultural shortcomings.

Legitimizing and funding the gap

I begin by examining government support for the word gap in a cluster of data, including Hansard records,² language assessment tools, national curricula, policy manifestos and political speeches.

Hansard records are a reliable indicator of policy shifts, with my searches revealing how the earliest use of the phrase ‘word gap’ was in 2012, in a special session on ‘early intervention’ (Hansard, 2012a). The Labour politician Seema Malhotra asked what interventions were planned to ensure that schools were addressing the word gap for ‘disadvantaged’ children – with ‘disadvantaged’ here working as a proxy for economically and racially minoritised children. Responding, Sarah Teather (who at the time was the Minister of State for Children and Families under the Coalition government) pointed to early years foundation policy and new requirements for health visitor checks which were designed to ‘pick up some of those gaps.’ This policy, which would later become the Early Language Identification Measure (ELIM) toolkit (Law et al., 2009; Public Health England, 2020) conceptualizes the word gap as a public health crisis in its pathologisation of the vocabulary of marginalized speakers, using medicalized screeners and interventions as solutions. The ELIM toolkit foregrounds Hart & Risley’s study as part of its justification, presenting a list of fifty words which health visitors are instructed to listen out for, based on those that ‘you would expect almost all children to say’ (Public Health England, 2020, p. 10). Any score under seventeen is deemed to be a ‘concern,’ with children marked for remedial intervention by a referral to speech therapy, itself a system which routinely relies on the logics and technologies of raciolinguistic ideologies (e.g., Farah, 2022).

Returning to the Hansard, in October 2012 Seema Malhotra referenced Hart & Risley’s study when she said, without any criticality or context: ‘there is a 30-million-word gap between a child from a deprived household and one from an affluent household’ (Hansard, 2012b). Michael Gove, the then Education Secretary, responded by claiming attainment differences between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds are a result of ‘growing up

in households where they are not read to and where they do not have a rich literary heritage on which to draw.’ Similar to mainstream UK-based gap research which would follow (e.g., Sullivan et al., 2021), Gove locates the causes of social inequality within decisions that individual families make, pointing the blame at parents not just for failing to read to their children, but failing to read the *right kind* of literature. Whilst these discursive strategies of ‘broken homes’ and ‘lack of cultural capital’ have long been in place in Britain, especially for those who are poor and racialized (Shilliam, 2018), word gap discourses were increasingly utilized by politicians following the 2011 civil uprisings in which low-income, Black and white communities protested the police murder of Mark Duggan in Tottenham, North London. Deficit perceptions about vocabulary played a key role here – with the ‘inchoate street slang’ of young, marginalized speakers deemed by politicians from across the political spectrum to be the root cause of their disenfranchisement and struggles in school, as well as reproducing racist anxieties that working class white people were adopting Black language and culture (e.g., Johns, 2011).

Word gap ideologies were concretized in the 2014 National Curriculum for England, of which Gove was one of the chief architects. Within this curriculum, teachers are instructed to focus on vocabulary in ways which equate ‘knowing more words’ with ‘academic success’ – such as ‘increas[ing] pupils’ store of words’; ‘expand[ing] vocabulary choices’ and ‘develop[ing] vocabulary actively’ (DfE, 2013, p. 11). Other (white) architects of the curriculum, notably Nick Gibb, made regular references to the word gap around this time – such as in a 2016 speech where he cited Hart & Risley’s study as a mechanism for enacting social justice and empowering marginalized youth (Gibb, 2016). And even earlier, the then deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, referred to Hart & Risley’s study in a 2010 speech on social inequalities (Clegg, 2010), whilst a 2008 report by Jean Gross³ suggested that a lack of vocabulary and the ‘daily grunt’ of low-income, racialized speakers was a determinant of anti-social behavior, school exclusions and serving a prison sentence. Here, word gap ideologies are threaded together with the criminalization of young people, notably groups such as Black boys, who themselves are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system in England (see, Joseph-Salisbury, 2020; Cushing, 2020 for the links between literal and metaphorical language policing).

2017 onwards saw a spike in instances of the phrase ‘word gap’ in the Hansard records, which coincided with a cluster of heavily funded government initiatives worth over £100 million and statements from Justine Greening, the then Education Secretary, declaring that ‘closing the word gap’ was going ‘right at the top of my to do list’ (Greening, 2017). These plans were outlined in a manifesto, *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential* (DfE 2017), which claimed to alleviate social injustices by focusing on modifying the language practices of low-income and racialized communities. ‘Ambition 1’

within this is to ‘close the ‘word gap’ in early years education, centering on ‘tackling development gaps’ in ‘early language skills’ (2017: 8). From *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential* came at least two word gap schemes. The first was a £5 million project led by the Education Endowment Foundation designed to ‘give parents and carers the tools to widen children’s language, vocabulary and social skills in the pre-school years to tackle the ‘word gap’” (DfE & Hinds 2018). The second, an ‘Early Years Social Mobility Peer Review Programme’ was an £8.5 million behavioral change programme, targeted at changing the speech of low-income and racially minoritised children before they begin formal schooling. Similar to Hart & Risley, the report dichotomizes the language practices of marginalized families against those of the most socially and economically powerful, drawing on capitalist metaphors of language ‘richness’ to do so:

Children raised in middle and upper-income homes are more likely to experience a language-rich environment. By contrast, children from low-income homes are more likely to arrive at school with below-average language skills, leaving them at an educational disadvantage from the start. (HM Government & the National Literacy Trust 2018: 21)

These were soon followed by the ‘Hungry Little Minds’ programme, a public health campaign drawing on the WORDS ARE NUTRITION metaphor (see also, Johnson & Johnson, 2021), and whose website includes resources for parents geared around vocabulary development. The campaign also included adverts placed on billboards and bus stops around the UK, purposefully placed in areas of high economic deprivation which were home to a large proportion of racialized families. Media coverage surrounding the launch of Hungry Little Minds (e.g., Hogenboom 2019) centered on Hart & Risley’s study whilst making ableist claims that the word gap functions as a ‘lag which plays out in the brain.’ Also in 2018 was the launch of the £26.3 million government-funded English Hubs Programme, a network of 34 primary schools across England held up by the government as models of good practice – specifically around their use of word gap and Direct Instruction interventionist strategies.

Finally, one of the major programmes to continue to receive government funding is the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) programme. NELI, designed by a group of psychologists, is a 20 or 30-week oral language programme targeted at children who show ‘poor spoken language skills’ (Sibieta et al., 2016, p. 4) with its evidence stemming from a Randomized Controlled Trial from 193 schools in England – most of which are in areas of economic deprivation serving a high-proportion of multilingual children with special educational needs. One example session plan from the NELI website focuses on decontextualized vocabulary instruction, using scripts for classroom interaction which resemble the 1960s Direct Instruction programmes of Bereiter and Engelmann:

Vocabulary

- Introduce today's 'special words' **doctor**, **vet**, **healthy** and **ill**.
- **Doctor, vet, healthy** and **ill**: Say, "*Today we are going to learn some new words. Look at this picture. What is this?*"
- Reinforce correct responses and give the answer if no correct responses are given. "*Let's all say the word 'doctor'.*" Make sure all the children say the word. Repeat for **vet**. "*Who knows when you see a **doctor**, and when you see a **vet**?*"
- Reinforce correct responses and give the answer if no correct responses are given. "*That's right – we go to the **doctor** when we feel **ill** and we go to the **vet** when our pet is **ill**. Let's all say the word '**ill**'. Who can tell me what the opposite of **ill** is?*"
- Reinforce correct responses and give the answer if no correct responses are given. "*That's right – the opposite of **ill** is **healthy**. We do not need to see a **doctor** or a **vet** when we and our pets are **healthy**.*"

(TeachNELI, 2020, original emphasis)

For all the emphasis that the NELI programme claims to place on interaction and conversation, examples such as this offer a disembodied version of communication which confuses 'language' with 'vocabulary.' Closed scripts and routines are, however, easily rendered into testable and measurable 'evidence' of vocabulary improvement, providing an attractive solution to the government in demonstrating how their investments have addressed word gaps under a guise of scientific objectivity. NELI continues to receive major financial backing – in August 2020, the government announced an extra £9 million for NELI to 'help close the Covid language gap,' and in May 2021, it was announced that every single school in England with a reception class was to be offered the NELI training, at a cost of £8 million.

Popularizing the gap

Since the mid-2010s, teachers from across the political spectrum in England have been popularizing word gap ideologies through blogs and social media (e.g., Ashford, 2015). This was propelled in 2018, with the publication of a hugely popular book *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*, by the white writer and ex-teacher Alex Quigley. My criticisms here are not of an individual, but of a durable raciolinguistic ideology based on research which perpetuates racial and class hierarchies. Quigley's book, and his accompanying industry of blogs, classroom materials and teacher training, is simply a consequence of how attractive these ideologies are to teachers looking for quick-fix panaceas to social injustices.

From the title and very beginning of Quigley's book, emphasis is placed on vocabulary as the key factor which shapes people's lives – what Blum (2015, 2017) calls a Euro/USA-centric ideology of 'wordism.' This ideology construes language as primarily being about words, with the more words the better, and that naming things in the world is the main function of language. The NELI materials discussed above are good illustration of how wordism underpins pedagogical materials claiming to 'close the gap,' a stance which is also reproduced by Quigley:

We are surrounded by a vast wealth of words⁴ and they profoundly affect our lives – words we use and receive, hear and speak. From the cradle to the dinner table, the classroom to the boardroom, our wealth of words can determine our status in life. (Quigley, 2018, p. 1)

Quigley's use of wealth metaphors is common within gap discourses (Johnson et al., 2017, pp. 14–15), framing certain words as having material value, and stigmatizing the language practices of speakers from low-income and racially minoritised households as literally impoverished and of little worth. His focus on vocabulary as something which 'can determine our status in life' attributes success and failure to language (or indeed, words), with his suggestion being that the simple adding of words into a child's vocabulary is a solution to rife social inequality:

There are then thousands of small solutions to the damaging inequalities that we observe in our society and in our classrooms, and they can be found in the English dictionary. (Quigley, 2018, p. 2)

Capitalist ideas of 'word poor' and 'word rich' are woven into the book, drawing on dichotomous discourses of poverty and wealth to claim that 'put simply, the word rich get richer, but the word poor get poorer' (Quigley, 2018, p. 18). These same finance metaphors are deployed by the Department for Education and Ofsted in their recent language policies, who describe 'language-rich' and 'language-poor' homes in attempts to justify systematic synthetic phonics as part a word gap intervention (DfE, 2022; Ofsted, 2022). Finance metaphors are also used by Quigley to describe the 'limits' of marginalized children's language, and consequently their cognitive capacities, and their entire world:

Consider that fact for a moment: these 'word poor' children are left unable to describe their world. For our children then, the limits of their vocabulary really do prove the limits of their world. The evidence is stark and sobering. Though teachers' influences are limited to the classroom, we can still help children better develop a vast store of words and unlock the vital academic vocabulary of school. (Quigley, 2018, p. 6)

These lacunae discourses of language being 'restricted,' 'limited,' 'lacking' and 'missing' (see, Rosa, 2016) are central to gap ideologies, deployed as early as the 1500s by British colonizers in their descriptions of indigenous languages

(Gilmour, 2006; Smith, 2009), and recycled here by Quigley to frame racialized children living in poverty as incapable of producing any legitimate language – and by extension, questioning their legitimate personhood. These discourses are also used to describe the language practices of children labeled as having ‘English as an Additional Language,’ with Quigley deploying metaphors of physical disability to argue that they can be ‘debilitated’ by apparent absences in their vocabulary (see also, Henner & Robinson, 2021 for a discussion of ableism in word gap ideologies):

Though some EAL students can gain a precious linguistic dexterity from being in possession of more than one language, we know that a significant proportion of EAL students experience debilitating vocabulary gaps. (Quigley, 2018, p. 11)

Quigley bases the core of his book on Hart & Risley’s study, which he summarizes in two sentences within the opening pages and neglects details concerning methodology, participants and context. His description is based on a similarly uncritical summary from Horowitz and Samuels (2017):

From birth to 48 months, parents in professional families spoke 32 million more words to their children than parents in welfare families, and this talk gap between the ages of 0 and 3 years – not parent education, socioeconomic status, or race – explains the vocabulary and language gap at age 3 [. . .]. (Horowitz and Samuels 2017: 151, as cited in Quigley, 2018, pp. 4-5)

This summary explicitly rejects factors pertaining to class, race and parental education, once again locating the reasons for social injustices within the language practices of racialized communities living in poverty. Quigley points to four further studies as evidence for the existence of a word gap (Gilkerson et al., 2017; Marchman & Fernald, 2008; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Law et al., 2009), all orientated within psychology, psychometrics and laboratory-based evaluations of language. Three of these studies are summarized in a single sentence, and are evidence of work which Quigley claims ‘reiterate the findings that university educated parents talk more to their children and that such talk correlates with later language ability’ (Quigley, 2018, p. 5). An alternative view of these studies exposes how they are underpinned by racio-linguistic ideologies through norm-referencing idealized whiteness as the standardized linguistic benchmark.

Gilkerson et al. (2017) uses the Language Environment Analysis (LENA) system – a ‘talk pedometer’ which is strapped to young children’s bodies to audio record their speech – and can be thought of as a mechanical version of the white listening subject. Based on primarily white, monolingual families in inner-city Denver, the authors claim for an existence of a 4-million-word difference between socioeconomic groups, as well as writing that ‘intervention is probably unnecessary for many low-income parents’ (Gilkerson et al., 2017, p. 261; as cited in Johnson & Johnson, 2021, p. 44). Marchman and Fernald

(2008) studied 28 children from primarily white, university-educated families – a limitation acknowledged by the authors (Marchman & Fernald, 2008, p. 13), but not by Quigley. Children’s vocabulary size and speech processing speed were tested at 25 months old and then 8 years old using standardized IQ tests – themselves a technology of raciolinguistic ideologies which have their roots in eugenics and biological racism (see, for example, Charity Hudley et al., 2020, p. 215).

IQ and psychometric tests were also used in Cunningham and Stanovich (1997), which reuses data from 1984 in assessing 56 students aged 6–7 across ‘general intelligence,’ decoding speed, phonological awareness and listening comprehension. The authors extrapolate data to claim that reading ability and intelligence at age 16–17 can be predicted by ability at age 6–7. Of particular concern here are the tools used to measure ‘general intelligence’: Raven’s Progressive Matrices, a non-verbal IQ test which exhibits cultural bias against Black African communities (e.g., Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 2001), and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). Similar to the tools used in NELI as discussed above, PPVT is a receptive language test – the experimenter says a word, the participant is shown four images, and points to a picture which they perceive best matches the word. Responses are then compared against a standardized sample which is largely made up from white, middle-class participants. Various studies have shown how the PPVT is racially and culturally biased against African American and Hispanic speakers (e.g., Stockman, 2000), and I here conceptualize the PPVT as a listening technology underpinned by raciolinguistic ideologies. Finally, Law et al.’s (2009) study claims for the existence of a word gap based on data from the British Cohort Study, collected from 17,196 people who were born in a single week in 1970 and at then at 4–5 year intervals in their lives. Any participants whose home language was not English and whose ethnicity was not white-European were excluded, ‘because this group is likely to be at *risk*, at least in the early years, of *lower* language skills because of *competing linguistic input*’ (Law et al., 2009, p. 1403, my emphases). A related paper (not cited by Quigley) on the Millennium Cohort Study by Sullivan et al. (2021) uses parental vocabulary knowledge to claim for the existence of a word gap in contemporary Britain, locating linguistic and cultural deficiencies within the home and concluding that children whose parents are ‘less educated and those from particular ethnic minority groups may require additional input at school to support the development of a rich vocabulary’ (Sullivan et al., 2021, p. 227). Such studies, which use idealized white, middle-class behaviors as the normative benchmark, reify the existence of a word gap under a guise of scientific objectivity (Flores, 2021) whilst framing the language and cultural practices of marginalized families in need of interventionist-based correctives.

Whilst a continued critique of Quigley's book is beyond the scope of this article, this section has illustrated one way in which the word gap has been popularized and turned into material capital on the education marketplace. Quigley's work, widely used in schools, has been highly effective in (re)normalizing deficit discourses and raciolinguistic ideologies, under the logic that giving poor, racialized children more words will solve structural social inequities, and that 'more vocabulary' offers a panacea for educational disparities.

Institutionalizing the gap

This section examines a further mechanism which has (re)normalized word gap ideologies in England, propagated by Oxford University Press (OUP). In the same year as the publication of Quigley's *Closing the Vocabulary Gap*, OUP's Children's Language team (of which Quigley is associated with) published a report, *Why Closing the Word Gap Matters* (Oxford University Press, 2018a) based on their own research which surveyed 1,313 teachers about their observations of the word gap in schools and what they believed the root cause of this to be. The report was covered uncritically in the UK media, deploying ableist discourses such as in Adams (2018), which reported on the increasing presence of children's 'stunted vocabularies,' and in Eyre (2018), which suggested the word gap was 'stifling' children. OUP's research reifies the word gap and grants legitimacy to remedial interventions geared around explicit vocabulary instruction, whilst reporting statistics on teachers who claim that 'at least 40% of their pupils lacked the vocabulary to access their learning' and how 'teachers believe the word gap is increasing'. (Oxford University Press, 2018a, p. 2). OUP have since designed a series of marketed resources and invited schools to 'become a word gap partner school' through 'demonstrat[ing] your commitment to closing the word gap' (Oxford University Press, 2021), working to commodify word gap ideologies and convert them into economic profit.

The report references an internally distributed executive summary (Oxford University Press, 2018b), which I obtained through a private freedom of information request. This internal report shows how perceptions of 'vocabulary deficiencies' intersect with race, class, disability and gender, describing how although all pupils are 'at risk' of a 'vocabulary deficiency,' the 'most vulnerable' are those with special educational needs, multilingual speakers, students eligible for Free School Meals (i.e. those living in poverty), and boys. Quotes from teachers include methods on how to screen children for word gaps and other 'errors' in speech, and how to address these – such as by policing nonstandardised verb tenses, placing children into after-school intervention programmes, and referring children to speech and language therapy.

It is ironic that these interventions are often geared around the prohibition of certain language practices when the whole aim of word gap programmes is purportedly to increase vocabulary.

OUP published a follow-up report in 2020 (Oxford University Press, 2020), drawing on data from 3,589 survey responses (including those used in the 2018 report), five teacher polls and around 100 posts on an online forum. Oxford University Press (2020) focuses on the transition between primary and secondary education and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic – which also saw the sensationalization of word gap rhetoric in the UK national media (e.g., Civinini, 2020). The report includes a host of statistics which tie together the perceived increase of a word gap with the failure of parents to adequately talk to their children during the pandemic – such as ‘three quarters of teachers think school closures will contribute to an increase in the number of pupils with a vocabulary deficit’ (Civinini, 2020, p. 4) and ‘our findings raise the prospect of a worsened word gap as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown’ (Civinini, 2020, p. 19). These statistics reveal the shape-shifting nature of the word gap ideology, presented without discussion of how socioeconomic structures and inequalities were exacerbated during the pandemic, especially for racialized families living in poverty, or why parents might have struggled to balance their own work with educating their children at home.

Like Quigley, the Oxford reports lack attention to historical details about the word gap, presenting it as an audibly empirical entity which requires urgent and emergency attention. References to academic literature are sparse, with phrases such as ‘numerous studies,’ ‘abundant evidence’ and ‘research indicates’ used to craft a narrative of scientific robustness and academic legitimacy. Hart & Risley’s work is referenced as a ‘ground-breaking study’ which identified the ‘root causes’ of the word gap – a discursive strategy which, similar to Quigley, obfuscates structural issues of poverty, racism, ableism and classism. Instead, it is ‘poor vocabulary’ which is presented as determinants of various issues including mental health problems, unemployment, low self-esteem, poor discipline, low school attendance, and difficulty in making friends (Oxford University Press, 2018a). Not a single mention of race appears in the reports – apart from a coded reference to children who speak English as an ‘additional language,’ who, also like Quigley claims, are deemed to have a ‘limited vocabulary.’ These raciolinguistic ideologies of languagelessness (Rosa, 2016) permeate all the OUP reports, rendering racialized, low-income speakers as ‘incapable of producing any legitimate language’ (Rosa, 2016, p. 163). For example, reports state that ‘without enough language,’ children are ‘seriously limited’ (Oxford University Press, 2018a, p. 2), and that ‘a child without words will often [...] struggle to articulate their own needs [...] lack ideas and imagination for talk and creative play’ (Oxford University Press, 2018a, p. 11).

According to OUP, the solutions to fixing this perceived lack of language (and much like NELI, Quigley, and the Direct Instruction programmes of Bereiter & Engelman) lie in explicit vocabulary teaching, code-switching, demanding that students speak in ‘full sentences,’ policing ‘non-words’ such as ‘innit,’ and insisting on so-called ‘academic language.’ These remedial-based recommendations all work to perpetuate raciolinguistic ideologies because they require marginalized speakers to modify their supposedly inadequate speech. Flores (2020), for example, shows how ‘academic language’ works as a proxy for idealized, middle-class whiteness, framed as a checklist of empirical linguistic practices that are dichotomous with the home language practices of low-income, racialized students. Word gap programmes are one way in which the raciolinguistic ideology of academic language comes to be seen as a viable solution to broader social inequalities, through policing the supposedly less complex and specialized language of marginalized speakers.

Inspecting the gap

This section examines how Ofsted (see footnote 1) perpetuate word gap ideologies. Ofsted’s work includes monitoring language policies, based against their own inspection framework which sets out their minimum expectations (Ofsted, 2019a, 2019b). Ofsted, who have a majorit white workforce, have been criticized for their policies which are underpinned by deficit models and the imposition of white, middle-class epistemologies (e.g., Nightingale, 2020). In Cushing and Snell (2022), we also showed how the inspectorate’s work is governed by raciolinguistic ideologies which stigmatize those deemed to speak in ways which deviate from standardized English. These ideologies and discourses of language poverty were found to be a foundational feature of their work since their formation in 1839 and continue to shape their contemporary practice.

Since 2017, Ofsted have made an increasing commitment to word gap ideologies whilst simultaneously claiming that their work is motivated by social justice. For example, in a video presented by Ofsted’s (white) deputy director of schools, Matthew Purves, he claims:

This is about equity and it’s about social justice. You’ve heard in some of the other videos what we found about vocabulary. And that the most disadvantaged children are often those who have access to the fewest number of words heard in conversation and don’t have access to the most complex words in conversation. Well, that puts them at a disadvantage when they come to school. (Ofsted, 2018)

This same discursive strategy was deployed in a speech given by Amanda Spielman, a white woman who has been the Chief Inspector of Ofsted since 2017. In June 2018, Spielman referred to the word gap and what she called ‘unlucky’ children who ‘have less than a third of the English vocabulary of their peers.’ She continued:

The problem is often referred to as the ‘word gap’. On one level that relates to the number of words children know. And it’s accepted that there is a direct link between this number of words and children’s success at school. So if the early years doesn’t address that gap head on, we’re locking in disadvantage from a very early age. The studies on this are numerous. But a recent one from the Oxford University Press found that pupils with a limited vocabulary are held back not just in English, but right across the whole curriculum. These children arrive at school without the words they need to communicate properly. Just imagine the disadvantage they face, right from the start. Unable to follow what’s going on. Unable to keep up with their classmates. Unable to reach their potential. (Spielman, 2018)

Spielman’s rhetoric conceptualizes the word gap as a cultural and linguistic emergency which requires immediate intervention, with a failure to do so resulting in ‘locking in disadvantage.’ Similar to Quigley and OUP, ideologies of languagelessness are used to frame marginalized children as being ‘held back’ by their apparent lack of language, which is ‘limited’ and renders them ‘unable to follow,’ ‘unable to keep up’ and ‘unable to reach their potential.’ For Spielman, such children ‘arrive at school without the words they need to communicate properly,’ and that their families are responsible for this – with the ‘solution’ being interventions which require children to modify the way they speak. Spielman’s speech was widely reported on in the British media, such as Busby (2018), who uses a food metaphor in encouraging parents to talk to their children more in the same way that they ask them to eat more fruit and vegetables. Johnson et al. (2017, pp. 15–16) critique food and nutrition metaphors in word gap discourses, the use of which are ‘based on the perception that the language patterns of families in low-socioeconomic status communities causes direct physical detriments.’ Such metaphors imply that a supposed lack of vocabulary is not just linked to malnourished bodies – it is the root cause. These coalescent ideologies around biological and linguistic impurity are tethered to British colonial logics which crafted dehumanizing narratives about the speakers of non-European languages (Smith, 2009).

In wider policy, and similar to Quigley and OUP, Ofsted make regular use of phrases such as ‘research shows . . .’ and ‘studies suggest . . .,’ presenting their initiatives as ‘research-informed’ and ‘evidence-led.’ For example, a document on early years education policy, *Bold Beginnings* (Ofsted 2017), cites Beck et al.’s (2017) book *Bringing Words to Life* as ‘evidence’ for the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction. Beck and her colleagues’ work relies on an uncritical reading of Hart & Risley’s study and what they conceptualize as ‘tiered’ vocabulary – a system where words are hierarchically

organized according to apparently objective evaluations such as ‘sophistication,’ ‘importance,’ ‘complexity’ and ‘utility.’ Through this ranking system, the policing of words categorized as ‘simple’ and ‘basic’ is legitimized because they are not deemed to be adequate for school. Ofsted’s use of research to support claims for a word gap intensified in 2019, when they revised their methodologies for the inspection of schools and pre-service teacher education programmes. An early document in this process, *School Inspection Update* (Ofsted, 2019a) dedicated an entire section to ‘vocabulary’ – and citing Hirsch (2013), claimed that ‘the correlation between vocabulary size and life chances is as firm as any correlation in educational research’ (Ofsted, 2019a, p. 7). Citing Hart & Risley and ‘subsequent studies’ (none of which are referenced), Ofsted claim that this ‘confirms’ the ‘correlation between socio-economic status and volume of caregiver-to-child speech’ (Ofsted, 2019a, p. 7). Ofsted did not respond to my request for the references to these ‘subsequent studies.’

Ofsted’s revised inspection frameworks were introduced with an accompanying ‘overview of research’ (Ofsted, 2019b) which they stated offered an ‘evidence base’ for their inspection methodology. One section includes the assertion that:

There is clear and consistent evidence about the importance of vocabulary development. In addition, a range of studies highlight the extent to which there can be a vocabulary gap between children from disadvantaged families and their peers. (Ofsted, 2019b, p. 27)

This ‘clear and consistent evidence’ is made in reference to two studies – both of which uncritically cite Hart & Risley. One study (Huttenlocher et al., 2010) is a quantitative examination of caregiver talk in 47 Chicago families (based on just 810 minutes of video recordings per family) with a focus on lexical diversity and syntactic complexity. The study is based on a disproportionate number of white families, with 30 of the families being white, and *all* families being ‘native’ speakers of English, with English being the dominant language spoken in the home. The second study cited by Ofsted is Gilkerson et al. (2018), work produced by the LENA team discussed above and based on 329 families in Denver – all of whom were monolingual English speakers and 322 of whom were white. The study presents a predictive model of language experience based on word frequency in daily recordings over six months and follow-up testing using PPVT (see above for a critique). As the authors themselves point out, the ‘generalisability of results to those of other languages and cultures is unknown’ (Gilkerson et al., 2018, p. 9), yet Ofsted’s representation of the work suggests that linguistic differences between ethnoracial and economic groups as uncontestedly factual. Ofsted (2019b, p. 27) do go on to reference Hart and Risley (1995) but framed with the clause ‘while some older studies have been challenged.’ Here they cite Sperry et al. (2019), whose failed replication of Hart & Risley has casted further doubt on the validity and ethical

legitimacy of the original 1995 study. However, any critical engagement of Hart & Risley is negated by their references to other studies which are highly *uncritical* of it, including (OUP's 2018a) as discussed above. The research behind the inspection framework underpins the two manuals used during inspection work: the *School Inspection Handbook* (2021a) and the *Early Years Inspection Handbook* (Ofsted, 2021b). Similarly, a so-called 'research review' of English in schools (Ofsted, 2022) cites Quigley, Hart & Risley and the OUP reports as evidence for the existence of a word gap in low-income children. Policies and pedagogies related to vocabulary feature heavily in these handbooks, with inspectors being instructed to surveil how schools are, amongst other things, placing a 'sharp focus on ensuring that children acquire a wide vocabulary' (Ofsted, 2021a, n.p) and 'increasing children's vocabulary and cultural capital' (Ofsted, 2021b, n.p), so that 'children consistently use new vocabulary that enables them to communicate effectively' (Ofsted, 2021b, n.p). Again, vocabulary is framed by the inspectorate as a panacea for tackling educational disparities in ways which obfuscate social inequalities created by broader sociopolitical structures pertaining to white supremacy and global capitalism.

Since Ofsted's subscription to word gap ideologies in the mid-2010s, they have increasingly attributed praise to schools and teacher education programmes who reproduce these ideologies in their own work. For instance, a 2019 report of an initial teacher education partnership (graded 'outstanding') comments how:

Trainees are [...] aware of the importance of building pupils' vocabularies and understand the harmful impact that weak literacy skills can have on pupils' learning. [...]. Trainees understand the correlation between disadvantage and poor literacy development. They are committed to narrowing the educational divide by closing the 'word gap' (Ofsted, 2019c, p. 7).

Ofsted recommend explicit vocabulary teaching as a solution to addressing apparent linguistic deficiencies – a pedagogical strategy with close relations to Direct Instruction. This is named in Ofsted's 2019 *Core Content Framework*, a document which outlines the minimum content and standards that teacher education programmes must provide. This includes how pre-service teachers must demonstrate competence in:

- Teaching unfamiliar vocabulary explicitly and planning for pupils to be repeatedly exposed to high-utility and high-frequency vocabulary in what is taught.
- Modeling and requiring high-quality oral language, recognizing that spoken language underpins the development of reading and writing (e.g., requiring pupils to respond to questions in full sentences, making use of relevant technical vocabulary). (Ofsted, 2019d, p. 15)

According to the inspectorate, this represents ‘high-quality classroom talk’ (Ofsted, 2019d, p. 18), which they reference to Barak Rosenshine (2012), an educational psychologist who proposed 17 principles for what he calls ‘research-based effective instruction.’ This set of strategies – including explicit vocabulary teaching and choral repetition – is rooted in Direct Instruction and which looks to manipulate naturally occurring spoken discourse to produce so-called academic vocabulary. Similarly, the requirement that students ‘respond to questions in full sentences’ is reflective of a raciolinguistic ideology which has been critiqued since the original rejections of deficit discourses in the 1970s (e.g., Labov, 1970; Rosen, 1974). As such, Ofsted simultaneously reproduce raciolinguistic ideologies in their own policy discourse and coerce teachers/teacher educators into reproducing them by equating high quality talk with the language practices of the idealized white speaker.

The word gap as a durable ideology

Word gap ideologies operate on the myth that the language practices of white, able-bodied, middle-upper class communities are objectively higher quality than those of racialized, disabled and low-income communities. They are durable ideologies which are part of a long history of linguistic stratification in England and the USA, leading to covert racial segregation and the continuing stigmatization of families who are deemed to be failing in preparing their children for school.

This article has deployed a raciolinguistic genealogy and the raceclass approach of a raciolinguistic perspective to trace how word gap ideologies have been diffused across the transatlantic education policy trade route. Racist ideas about the ‘limited’ language of non-European speakers were a common trope within early British colonial writings, with these same representations being redeployed in 1950–60s deficit discourses within British and north American sociology and developmental psychology. Since the early 2010s, these ideologies have been borrowed back to England and renormalized via a dense web of mechanisms including government-funded interventions, textbooks for teachers, academic research and Ofsted. These mechanisms were found to subscribe to word gap ideologies under claims of scientific objectivity, whilst overlooking its racist, classist and ableist roots and failing to engage with a transatlantic tradition of scholarly work which has long called it into question. In tracing through these mechanisms, I showed how the word gap in England is conceptualized as a sign of educational failure and low academic competency, a determinant of mental health issues, a predictor of school exclusions and entry into the criminal justice system, and a public health crisis.

Word gap ideologies continue to be attractive to transatlantic policy makers because they offer a seemingly simple solution to a host of determinants of social inequalities along the intersections of race, class and disability, whilst

exploiting marginalized groups by turning supposed linguistic deficit into material economic profit. Word gap ideologies open a space where a legitimate and sensible solution to fix social inequalities is to first claim that poor and racialized children have a lack of language, then design interventions which seek to fill the heads of such children with more words, and then make subsequent claims around social mobility, liberation and raised standards. Recent word gap discourses in England have subscribed to this logic under a guise of scientific objectivity, social justice and ‘research-led’ policy making, with Ofsted and Oxford University Press in particular occupying a position of institutionalized power which coerces schools and teachers into reproducing word gap ideologies in their own settings. However, this article, along with other critiques of gap ideologies, has shown that word gap interventions simply obfuscate structural conditions pertaining to racial hierarchies and economic inequality, and instead, serve to maintain the raciolinguistic status quo whilst alleviating the state of any larger responsibilities concerned with welfare and genuine social reform. Despite word gap interventions claiming to be about increasing the vocabulary of marginalized children, their practices are typically rooted in linguistic prohibition and constraint. For example, in my extensive fieldwork in schools in England, I have witnessed how the vocabulary of low-income, racialized children comes to be policed as ‘non-academic’ or ‘tier-one’ and placed in ‘word jails’ or ‘word graveyards’ as part of policies subscribing to word gap ideologies (see, also Cushing, 2020). These carceral metaphors of word jails and language policing are not always metaphorical, but reflect broader sociopolitical structures in which marginalized children are routinely criminalized in and outside of school.

What more can educational linguists do to further challenge such durable ideologies? A raciolinguistic perspective pushes us to seek a radical transformation of institutions to dismantle white supremacy and capitalism, in the rejection of ideologies which maintain the power of the white listening subject and the onus it places on minoritised speakers to modify the way they talk. Emerging frameworks such as Crip Linguistics (Henner & Robinson, 2021) and critical disability studies more broadly also push us to think about how the word gap is rooted in ableist conceptualizations of language which frame disabled people’s communication as ‘less than’ because they are deemed to not conform to normative modes of language practiced by able-bodied communities. In education systems such as England, which are characterized by an increasing level of state power and surveillance, it becomes urgently important to challenge word gap ideologies which exacerbate social inequality under seemingly benevolent guises of empowerment and social justice.

Notes

1. Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Ofsted have existed in some form since 1839, in both England and former British colonies. They grade schools as either 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' after an inspection of two days.
2. Records of Parliamentary debates, in transcript form.
3. Gross is a consultant who has significant power as a language policy maker in England, being the former 'Communication Champion' and chairing the influential 2018 *Bercow: Ten Years On* report, which reviewed services within speech and language therapy for children and subscribes heavily to word gap ideologies. She continues to offer training to schools in England on policies promising to 'close the word gap' (see also Gross, 2013).
4. The 'wealth of words' is an intertextual reference to E.D Hirsch's 2013 article *A Wealth of Words*. Hirsch is a influential figure in post-2010 education policy reform in England (see, for example, Nightingale, 2020)

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