

Appendix 1

'One word or two? Psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic interpretations of meaning in a civil court case', by Alison Wray and John J. Staczek [abridged version of the article in *The International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law* (2005), 12(1): 1–18, published by the University of Birmingham Press].

Abstract

What relative weighting should be given, in a court case, to psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic explanations of an alleged offence? We review the case of an African-American Plaintiff, who claimed that her receipt at work of a framed document with the title 'Temporary Coon Ass Certificate', from a white male supervisory-level employee in the same company, constituted racial discrimination in the workplace. Dialect research conducted by JJS, as expert witness for the prosecution, demonstrated that the dialectal use of 'coonass' (as it is more commonly spelled) to refer to Cajuns (white settlers of French descent) was restricted to the states of Louisiana and south-eastern Texas. It was argued by the prosecution to be unreasonable to expect someone from another part of the United States to know the meaning of the word. The jury found in favour of the Plaintiff. The prosecution case rested upon the premise that when a word is unknown, it will be interpreted by breaking it down into smaller units, in this case 'coon' and 'ass', both derogatory terms, the former strongly racist. We explore the psycholinguistic rationale for this assumption, and its converse, that when a word is well-known to an individual, (s)he may fail to see how it is constructed.

Introduction

This paper discusses a 1996–7 case of alleged racial harassment in the workplace, based upon a perceived use of language in an offensive manner. The

African-American Plaintiff filed the action, alleging that her employer, the US Department of Energy, created a hostile work environment. The case was heard in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia.

The Plaintiff claimed that, on returning from vacation, she found in her desk drawer a framed certificate with the title 'Temporary CoonAss Certificate' and her name printed on it. The document was signed by a white Department of Energy employee based at a workshop in east Texas, the site of a recent team visit that the Plaintiff had been unable to attend. The Plaintiff, upon receiving the certificate, 'immediately experienced emotions of shock, outrage and fury, and felt the certificate and the statements contained therein constituted a serious racial slur' (communication from the clerk of the Plaintiff's attorney to JJS, as expert witness for the Plaintiff, 7 August 1996). The Plaintiff sought internal remedies in the form of sanctions against the sender and alleged that: 'the Defendant condoned the hostile environment by failing to discipline the sender or take other remedial action' (*ibid.*). In September 1997, the jury found in favour of the Plaintiff and awarded some \$120,000 in compensatory damages against the US Department of Energy.

The Plaintiff was not the only Department of Energy employee to receive such a certificate, and was one of two African-Americans in this round of certificate distributions. In court testimony, the sender stated that he had picked up a bulk load of certificates in 1985 at the World's Fair in New Orleans.

Q You've given out 'Coonass Certificate' [sic] just like the one you gave to [the Plaintiff] for 10 or 11 year [sic], is that right?

A That's correct, sir.

Q And what you did, I gather, is you got a package of 'Coonass Certificates' from a restaurant, is that right?

A Yes, sir ... I picked them up, brought them to the site. I made changes to them, basically about where they came from, took 'Plantation House' off, and at that point in time I put 'Tex-Oma-Complex' on the bottom of them.

(Trial Transcript: cross-examination of Defense witness by Plaintiff's attorney, 21 August 1997, p. 37.)

Since acquiring the certificates, he had issued them regularly, with the implicit approval of his supervisors:

Q And the supervisors you've had over that 11-year period that you've been giving out the 'Coonass Certificate,' has any of your supervisors said to you, 'Don't give out these Coonass Certificates'?

A No, sir.

Q Have any of them said the 'Coonass Certificate' is racially offensive?

A No, sir.

(Trial Transcript: cross-examination of Defense witness by Plaintiff's attorney, 21 August 1997, pp. 39–40.)

Certificates were issued after site visits made by teams from other company offices. The meaning of the term ‘coonass’ as ‘white Cajun’ (see below) was allegedly explained during the visits. The Plaintiff was sent a certificate in error, since her name appeared on the list of attendees even though she did not participate in the visit.

Interpreting ‘Coonass’

We shall examine, below, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors that play a role in the interpretation of a word’s meaning. First, however, we examine the printed evidence, since dictionaries are in general, and certainly were in this case, viewed as a key source of authoritative information.

The term ‘coonass’ (non-hyphenated) appears in two dictionary sources: *The Historical Dictionary of American Slang (HDAS)* and *Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE)*. Its primary meaning is given as a term for Louisiana Cajuns. Although the term ‘Cajun’ is historically complex with regard to racial group and social status, Cajuns are classically defined as the white descendants of settlers in Acadia, a former French colony of eastern Canada, who were deported by the British, or relocated voluntarily, to the south-western territories, including Louisiana, in the mid-eighteenth century (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (AHDEL)*, 1992: 9). DARE attests that the usage of ‘coonass’ is confined to Louisiana and south-eastern Texas, though it is also known to regional speakers in Mississippi, Arkansas and Alabama. Research to determine this regional distribution was based on formal interviews with informants in the South.

In addition to the core definition, however, the following specific entries are notable:

- ‘Coonass is still a pejorative for any low-life individual, especially Negroes’ (DARE informant, File eKY).
- ‘The term “coonass” ... may have been a racial allusion suggesting a Cajun-black genetic mixture’ (HDAS informant, Dormon, 1983: 87).

The combined evidence above suggests that ‘coonass’ has two meanings, the second alluding to, if not actually referring to, African ancestry. However, the status of the latter entries is questionable, as we shall see presently. Unequivocal, though, is the offensive meaning of the separate terms ‘coon’ and ‘ass’. A wide range of standard and specialist dictionaries give as one meaning of ‘coon’, ‘a Negro’, and indicate that it is a slang and derogatory term. Its origin is consistently reported as a shortened form of ‘raccoon’, itself a word of Algonkian Indian origin. ‘Ass’ is identified in HDAS as a US version

of British ‘arse’, the buttocks or rump. As such, it is considered a ‘vulgarism’ (HDAS). AHDEL gives the definition as ‘a vain, self-important, silly, or aggressively stupid person’, based on a primary meaning of ‘donkey’.

What sort of quality of evidence is obtained from dictionaries, though? In the course of questioning, the expert witness for the defendant made a number of observations regarding the validity of dictionary definitions:

‘... these dictionaries are only as good as the people they’re talking to These are not definitions. These are recorded testimonies of what people think these things mean.’

(Trial Transcript: direct examination of expert witness for the Defense, 22 August 1997, p. 44.)

Referring to the DARE and HDAS:

‘Those two dictionaries are based on interviews with people, asking them what regional or slang terms mean to them. The reason for that is because these terms are not – have no standard accepted meaning.’

(Trial Transcript: cross-examination of expert witness for the Defense, 22 August 1997, p. 60.)

As the observations of this expert witness indicate, care needs to be taken with dictionary entries where there is no evidence of general consensus within a speech community, or where there are grounds for doubting the validity of the statement that the dictionary cites. Specifically with regard to the two attestations, above, that ‘coonass’ can imply African ancestry, it is possible that the claimed extension of the term to black people is a *post hoc* rationalization based on folk etymology. In actual fact, the consensus across dictionaries, including both HDAS and DARE, is that ‘coonass’ has an etymology in which ‘coon’ does not figure at all, being, rather, the corruption of the French ‘connasse’, a vulgarism used as an insult.

Dictionaries, then, can offer valuable insights into the historical origin and at least some current perceptions of a word’s meaning. However, there is more to meaning than this. The instructions to the expert witness for the prosecution were to ascertain ‘not the specific meaning of “Coonass” within Cajun circles, but ... what the words “Coon” and “Ass” generally mean, how they are generally intended and received, and the hurtful potential of these words’ (Memorandum from the clerk of the Plaintiff’s attorney to expert witness for the Plaintiff). Dictionaries can give only limited insight into these matters, since they are unable to comment on meanings of words *in use*, that is, in relation to (a) the text in which they occur, (b) their role in a particular communicative act, or (c) the social context that might determine

why a speaker/writer chooses one term over another, and how a hearer/reader interprets it.

Sociolinguistic considerations

Language, whether oral or written, exists within a context of use. Both speakers and hearers bring to their understanding of a word or phrase a knowledge founded on a socialization, education and experience that may be totally or partially shared, or not shared at all. The term 'coonass' is clearly dialectal and, as such, certain questions follow:

- How is the word likely to be interpreted by an individual who does not come from, and has not lived in, the region in which the word is customarily used?
- What contextual and other considerations might come into play when such a person is interpreting the term?

Regarding the first question, the Plaintiff, an African-American woman living and working in Washington D.C., was neither from the dialect area in which the term 'coonass' was in use (Louisiana and south-eastern Texas), nor from one of the 'dialect contact areas' (Mississippi, Arkansas and Alabama). Dialect contact areas are locations where, usually because of geographical proximity and/or cultural or commercial links, dialect forms might often be heard, even if not used by the local population. Should the Plaintiff, then, reasonably be expected to have known what 'coonass' meant? During cross-examination, the expert witness for the defendant stated:

'... it's not unreasonable to think that people – not only people in South Louisiana and East Texas would be familiar with the term ... People all over the place know this.'

(Trial Transcript: cross-examination of expert witness for the Defense by Plaintiff's attorney, 22 August 1997, pp. 49–50.)

That is, this expert witness considered unfamiliarity to be the exception rather than the rule. In contrast, the view of the expert witness for the Plaintiff was that the term as a reference to a Cajun could not be expected to have widespread recognition across the United States.

How can this difference of opinion be interpreted? The expert witness for the Plaintiff had carried out some informal and random sampling of African Americans and White Americans in the Washington D.C. area, to determine their understanding of the term 'coonass'. He found that almost all of those

questioned perceived a racial overtone in the term and viewed it as offensive and disrespectful.

In contrast, the expert witness for the Defense was himself a South Louisianan of French Acadian descent – that is, of Cajun ancestry. He then, originated from, and resided well within, the dialect area in which the term was in use and he was, as a result, highly familiar with it. This fact is opposite because the issue was whether a member of a speech community is able to assess the extent to which people who are not members of that speech community share its lexical inventory. In other words, how aware are dialect speakers about (a) which words in their vocabulary are dialectal, and (b) how widely known they are beyond the immediate area? If we do not perceive the need for remedial action, we are unlikely to undertake it. It is, consequently, significant that the expert witness for the Defense stated:

‘Frankly, I didn’t look for definitions of “coonass” because I know what it means.’

(Trial Transcript: cross-examination of expert witness for the Defense, 22 August 1997, p. 43.)

Turning now to the second question, words do not operate in isolation. They are interpreted in relation to other words with which they occur and also the situational and social context in which they are used. We may reasonably conjecture that had the Plaintiff not been African-American, she would probably have reacted to receiving the certificate with bafflement rather than distress. Even taking into account the generalized understanding of ‘ass’ as a derogatory term, the fact that the Plaintiff’s case was one of racial harassment indicates that she reacted predominantly to seeing the word ‘coon’. Indeed, in court she stated:

‘When I pulled [the certificate] out, the first thing I saw was “coon”. I didn’t see “temporary”. I didn’t see “ass”. All I could see was “coon” ... I was shocked. I was outraged.’

(Trial Transcript: direct examination of the Plaintiff by Plaintiff’s attorney, 20 August 1997, p. 36.)

Thus, her own ethnic identity formed part of the context within which her reading of the words ‘coonass’ caused offence. The contention of the prosecution was that the sender should have been aware of, and sensitive to, the possibility that these context parameters could lead to an interpretation of the phrase as offensive. In other words, even though he had no reason to anticipate that *anyone* would receive a certificate without having had the term explained to them during their visit, nor that if anyone did

do so, they would be African-American, the potential for the phrase to cause offence should have been taken into account when he decided to send the certificates.

An examination of the certificate itself, however, reveals some counterbalancing factors. Firstly, it is to be signed by ‘a certified coonass’, implying that if an insult is intended, even in jest, that insult falls first, and more heavily, on the sender than the recipient. More than that, it indicates that the certificate represents a gesture of inclusion, not exclusion, that is, it is welcoming the recipient into membership of a group, not labelling him or her as a member of an outsider group. Secondly, the smaller print on the certificate indicates that the sentiments in the definition of a ‘certified coonass’ are predominantly positive – that is, the description is complimentary. Thirdly, several words co-occurring with ‘coonass’ in the text (‘boudin’, ‘crackins’, ‘crawfish etouffee’ and ‘gumbo’) are clearly dialectal and their presence arguably heightens the impression that ‘coonass’ itself might be.

Psycholinguistic considerations

Wray (2002) begins her book *Formulaic Language and the Lexicon* with the following anecdote:

In a series of advertisements on British TV early in 1993 by the breakfast cereal manufacturer Kellogg, people were asked what they thought Rice Krispies were made of, and expressed surprise at discovering the answer was rice. Somehow they had internalized this household brand name without ever analyzing it into its component parts (p. 3).

Why should this happen? She proposes that: ‘... overlooking the internal composition of names is a far more common phenomenon than we might at first think ... [and] it is actually very useful that we can choose the level at which we stop breaking down a chunk of language into its constituent parts’ (pp. 3–4). In the course of her book, Wray draws on an extensive critical examination of the research literature to demonstrate that the internal composition of phrases and polymorphemic words is, indeed, often overlooked, and also develops a psychological model of how we learn and store lexical material, that accounts for why it comes about (see later).

In the trial, the expert witness for the Defense was asked whether he viewed ‘coonass’ as a single word or two words. In reply, he compared it to the word ‘firefly’: “‘firefly’ is not ‘fire’ or ‘fly’; it’s a ‘firefly’. It’s an expression used together” (Trial Transcript: direct examination of the expert witness for the Defense, 22 August 1997, p. 14). In the case of ‘firefly’ there is, of course, a clear hint as to why it gained its name, that relates to its component parts.

However, internally complex words and multiword phrases often have an apparent etymology that is misleading, with subcomponents that do not represent what they seem to. Thus, the ‘ladybird’ or ‘ladybug’ is so-called not because it is female or resembles a lady, but because it was traditionally a creature of ‘Our Lady’, the Virgin Mary (compare German ‘Marienkäfer’, ‘Mary’s beetle’). A ‘penknife’ is not a knife that is the size or shape of a writing implement, but a knife originally designed for sharpening quills (‘pen’ = ‘feather’).

What of ‘coonass’, then? If we set aside the single proposal, discussed earlier, that the term takes the form it does because it first referred to black Cajuns, and if we follow instead the more reliable etymology from French, then ‘coonass’ is no more made up, historically, of ‘coon’ and ‘ass’ than ‘carpet’ is made up of ‘car’ and ‘pet’ or ‘browsing’ is made up of ‘brow’ and ‘sing’. We must recognize a direct link, within the dialect area of its use, between a French word for a part of the body and a consistently applied derogatory term for an immigrant group of French settlers from Canada and their descendants. Any association with African-Americans is after the event and imposed by outsiders.

But does that make the externally imposed, albeit historically false, interpretation any less real to those who make it? More appositely here, does the ‘innocent’ etymology of a word or phrase excuse insensitivity on the part of its contemporary users? In order to assess this issue, we need to return to Wray’s proposal that words and phrases are not always broken down into their smallest components. She identifies several interrelating reasons why that might occur. One is well-exemplified above: in many cases an apparently polymorphemic word does not, in fact, break down in components that help one work out the meaning. The same applies to phrases, from the clearly irregular ‘by and large’ through to many multiword expressions whose internal oddity we could easily overlook (e.g., ‘perfect stranger’; ‘broad daylight’; ‘in order to’). In these instances, there will be no benefit in examining the word or phrase too closely. However, that cannot be the root of the issue, for how would the user *know* that the word or phrase was partly or entirely non-compositional, unless by attempting to do that analysis?

Wray’s explanation is that when we encounter new words and phrases, we only break them down to the point where we can attribute a reliable and useful meaning, and then we stop. She terms this strategy *needs only analysis* (Wray, 2002: 130–2). Needs only analysis suggests that people who have been raised in Louisiana or southeast Texas will, having encountered the term ‘coonass’ and having accepted without question that it refers to a Cajun, have had no reason to engage in further analysis of it. This could go some way to explaining how the sender of the ‘coonass’ certificate apparently failed to anticipate the possibility of a misunderstanding. Furthermore, it could

account for why the expert witness for the Defense felt that he did not need to look the phrase up: ‘because I know what it means’, and why he described the racial interpretations as ‘not standard meanings’ (Trial Transcript: cross-examination of the expert witness for the Defense, 22 August 1997, p. 44).

In contrast, someone who does not know the word, has an additional ‘need’, and will therefore engage with more analysis, by breaking down the incomprehensible whole into comprehensible parts, naturally using the ‘word’ break as the morphological boundary. The result is two words with independent meanings: ‘coon’ and ‘ass’. The decoding that is required by a person encountering ‘coonass’ for the first time is minimal: no more than the recognition that there are two components, both derogatory, implying that their combination must also be so.

What of the sender? Although he may never have needed to break down ‘coonass’ into its components to derive meaning, nevertheless, he would presumably only need to have once caught sight of the word ‘coon’ on its own on the certificate to have noticed, and quite differently computed, its meaning as a separate item. Yet he appeared never to have made the connection between ‘coon’ and ‘coonass’:

- Q You’re familiar with the term ‘coon’, aren’t you?
- A Yes, sir, I am.
- Q You understand that that has a racially-derogatory meaning?
- A Yes, sir, I do.
- Q And you knew that the term ‘coon’ has a racially-derogative meaning to African Americans at the time that you prepared the certificate that’s been marked as Plaintiff’s Exhibit Number 1, isn’t that true?
- A That’s correct.

(Trial Transcript: cross-examination of Defense witness by Plaintiff’s attorney, 21 August 1997, p. 40.)

His claim is particularly striking in view of the fact that he had actually handed a certificate to another African-American employee, yet still did not see a connection between ‘coonass’ and ‘coon’ (Trial Transcript: cross-examination of Defense witness by Plaintiff’s attorney, 21 August 1997, p. 42). This makes most sense from the perspective of *needs only analysis*, and would be a case of ‘constituent blindness’ brought about by the strong and consistent association of a specific meaning with the composite word ‘coonass’. More accurately, it would be ‘pseudo-constituent blindness’ since ‘coon’ and ‘ass’ are not, historically or actually for the dialect speakers, constituents of the whole. For such individuals to see ‘coon’ and ‘ass’ in ‘coonass’ is – a word break notwithstanding – comparable to a standard English speaker noticing ‘sea’ and ‘son’ in ‘season’.

Conclusion

So, what does a word mean? We operate within, and across, speech communities. Whatever we may intend by a word, we must be constantly aware of how it is, or could be, received by others. Nevertheless, we may, for good psycholinguistic reasons, be blind to the internal construction of a word or phrase in our own language variety. Meanwhile, that same internal construction may be all too plain to those unfamiliar with the item. The user of the construction may discover the other possible interpretations only by chance. Is it then reasonable for a court to expect that a word with strong local cultural associations will always be recognized as potentially ambiguous, even though, within its own realm of application, it is not?

The judge and jury are put into a difficult situation in such cases, assuming that they take both parties to have made an innocent interpretation of the disputed term. The Judge, in his summing up, stated:

[T]o determine ... whether the Temporary Coon Ass Certificate was racially offensive, you should consider [the sender's] intent to discriminate or not to discriminate against blacks, the subjective effect of the forwarding of the certificate on [the Plaintiff], and the impact it would have had on any reasonable person in [the Plaintiff's] position.

(Trial Transcript: summary of the Judge, 25 August 1997, p. 19.)

The Judge allows for the possibility that while the sender's intent was non-discriminatory, the impact on the Plaintiff was nevertheless one of deliberate discrimination. Achieving a ruling therefore entailed deciding which of the two was more justified in their blindness to the other's perception. For linguistic awareness cuts both ways: the sender might have been expected to have an awareness of non-dialect users' interpretations of 'coonass', but, similarly, the recipient might have been expected to spot, from the various indicators, that she was reading an unfamiliar dialect term.

This linguistic awareness, we have argued, may rest on more than the words themselves. The Plaintiff's initial sight of the certificate, when the word 'coon' was all she saw, may have blinded her to the possibility that 'coonass' meant something other than 'coon' + 'ass'. Meanwhile, the sender did not deny familiarity with the word 'coon' and its racist meaning, only any awareness that 'coonass' might be construed by a person who did not know the term, as containing the word 'coon'. We propose that her constituent awareness, and his constituent blindness, are entirely natural consequences of linguistic processing.

Just how a court should handle such psycholinguistic considerations is another matter. They could clearly have some bearing on the issue of intent

but it could still be argued that, however explicable the oversight might be in psycholinguistic terms, it is part of the educational level required of a manager or supervisor that he or she will be language-aware in relation to differences between linguistic varieties used, and encountered, in the work place. At the very least, the outcome of this case suggests that individuals in a socially responsible position are expected to appreciate the singularity of their own dialect or slang forms to a sufficient extent that they will refrain from using them with people likely to be unfamiliar with – or to misconstrue – their meaning.

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Appendix 2

'Sharing leadership of schools through teamwork: a justifiable risk?' by Mike Wallace [abridged version of the article in *Educational Management and Administration* (2001), 29(2): 153–67, published by SAGE].

Abstract

This paper develops the empirically-backed normative argument that ideally school leadership should be shared among staff, but the extent of sharing that is justifiable in practice depends on diverse contexts of schools, and consequent risks – especially for headteachers – that may inhere in the endeavour to share leadership. Findings are discussed of research into senior management teams (SMTs) in British primary schools showing how the headteachers variably shared leadership by setting parameters for teamwork according to a differing mix of belief in a management hierarchy and in equal contribution of team members. A model is put forward which links interaction between headteachers and other SMT members according to their belief in a management hierarchy and in equal contribution with different levels of team synergy. A contingent approach to sharing school leadership is justified on the basis of this model and implications for training are identified.

Sharing leadership – in principle

The purpose of this paper is to develop the normative argument that school leadership should ideally be extensively shared but, because school leaders do not live in an ideal world, the extent of sharing which is justifiable in practice depends on empirical factors. In other words, championing of shared leadership draws on principles which are contingent on the situation, not absolute. Specifically, I wish to explore empirical factors connected with the contexts of schools and consequent risks – especially for headteachers – that

may inhere in their endeavour to share leadership. Findings will be discussed from research into senior management teams (SMTs) in British primary schools, whose role is to support the headteacher in leading and managing the institution. Typically, they consist of the headteacher, deputy head and other teachers with the most substantial management responsibility. Team members are variably involved in making policy and routine management decisions on behalf of other staff, whose views are represented in some measure. The term ‘management’ in the label ‘management team’ therefore refers both to leadership (setting the direction for the organization) and to management activity (orchestrating its day-to-day running). A combined cultural and political perspective was employed to investigate how the ‘culture of teamwork’ expressed in SMTs embodied contradictory beliefs and values. These beliefs and values reflected the wider social and political context, which impacted reciprocally on team members’ use of power, and affected the extent to which leadership was shared between team members.

Several principles have been advanced to support the claim that school leadership should be shared relatively equally amongst staff. Most centre on staff entitlement. First, staff are entitled to contribute to decisions which affect their work and to be empowered to collaborate in creating an excellent institution. Shared leadership is morally just (Starratt, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1996) in a democratic country where individual rights are accorded high priority. Second, since staff give their professional lives to their school, they are entitled to enjoy the comradeship that working with colleagues can engender. Participating in shared leadership has intrinsic value, potentially, as a fulfilling experience for all involved (Nias et al., 1989; Wallace and Hall, 1994). Third, staff are entitled to gain this experience to further their professional development and career aspirations. It offers individual team members a potent opportunity for workplace learning, whereby they may improve their performance in their present role and prepare for promotion. A fourth principle looks to staff obligations as student educators. Adult working relationships in schools play a symbolic part in fostering children’s social development. As role models, staff have a responsibility to express in their working relationships the kind of cooperative behaviour they wish their students to emulate.

A fifth principle focuses on valued leadership outcomes rather than the process. Shared leadership is potentially more effective than headteachers acting alone. Staff are interdependent: every member has a contribution to make as leadership tasks can be fulfilled only with and through other people. Achieving extensive ownership of policy decisions is therefore necessary if staff are to work together to implement them. Empowerment through mutual commitment and support enables staff to achieve more together than they could as individuals (Starratt, 1995; Wallace and Hall, 1994). In these circumstances, they can achieve an optimum degree of *synergy*, which may be

defined as group members combining their individual energies to the best of their ability in order to achieve shared goals. Advocates assume that staff will adhere to these principles if given the chance: those offered their entitlement will take it up; they will act as good role models for students; and they will collaborate and generate synergy.

Prescription versus practice

Such ideas are embedded in normative theories of educational leadership from which prescriptions for practice are derived (Starratt, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1996), informing the school restructuring movement in North America (Pounder, 1998) and advocated for the UK by a few commentators (Southworth, 1998). They commonly refer to notions of transformational leadership and organization-wide learning originating with the world of business (e.g., Senge, 1990; Conger and Kanungo, 1998). Principals (headteachers) are urged to promote transformation of the staff culture through articulating a vision of a desirable future state for the institution; garnering colleagues' support for it; and empowering them to realize this shared vision through developing management structures and procedures emphasizing professional dialogue, team-working and mutual support. How principals should behave, according to these theories, reflects assumptions about the real world of schools which include:

- 1 Principals possess freedom to determine their vision, their strategy for inspiring colleagues to share it, and the means for implementing it through their practice.
- 2 It is possible to engineer change in a teacher culture with predictable results.
- 3 Elements of the teacher culture are mutually compatible and individual interests are reconcilable, facilitating transformation that results in unity of purpose.
- 4 Empowerment of teachers leads to their actions to realize the vision proffered by principals.

Should these assumptions prove unrealistic, it follows that the principles on which the normative theory rests must be compromised if it is to have prescriptive value. That transformational leadership is deemed exceptional enough in North American schools and industries to merit books and training programmes promoting it suggests that the assumptions behind transformational leadership do not obtain in North America. Their applicability to the UK is even more questionable.

First, British headteachers have lost their freedom to be visionaries because of central government reforms. 'National standards for headship' (Teacher Training Agency, 1998: 4) require that 'the headteacher provides vision, leadership and direction for the school and ensures that it is managed

and organized to meet its aims and targets'. The content of these aims and targets is largely determined by a central government engaged in a nationwide school target-setting exercise and imposing what, when and how literacy and numeracy must be taught in primary schools. Headteachers are expected both to articulate and gain colleagues' support for government ministers' educational vision and to ensure its implementation.

Second, research on schools implies that the teacher culture is not directly manipulable through leadership, though it is open to change (e.g., Nias et al., 1989). Attempts to stimulate cultural development may precipitate cultural change in unforeseen and undesired directions (Wallace, 1999). Hargreaves (1994) found that attempts in North America to foster a collaborative teacher culture merely engendered 'contrived collegiality' – a poor substitute for the genuinely collaborative culture which he argues may arise spontaneously.

Third, teacher cultures frequently contain incompatible elements: contradictory beliefs and values coexisting in tension. An earlier study of secondary school SMTs (Wallace and Hall, 1994) showed how their culture of teamwork encompassed two contradictory sets of beliefs and values. SMT members believed in a *management hierarchy* topped by headteachers, since they are in charge of running the school under supervision from the governing body, and have a unique ability to affect colleagues' careers through their contribution to staff selection and development. The sense of hierarchy was reinforced by the system of graded posts for staff, representing differential status, salary and responsibility levels. Senior staff are entitled to oversee the work of junior colleagues for whose work they are responsible. At the same time, team members believed in the ability of all their number to make an *equal contribution* to teamwork, being entitled to have an equal say in working towards consensual decisions whatever their status in the management hierarchy. Headteachers were hierarchically superior as creators, developers and leaders of their SMTs, but also were team members whose opinion carried equal weight with that of colleagues.

Fourth, empowerment of other staff does not guarantee that they will take up this entitlement in a manner acceptable to headteachers. Research shows that a significant minority of SMT members remain uncommitted to teamwork (e.g., Weindling and Earley, 1987; Wallace and Hall, 1994). Even where commitment is uniform, SMT members other than the headteacher may use power accompanying their team membership to act in ways that lie outside the limits of practices that accord with the headteacher's 'comfort zone' (the range of others' acceptable behaviours).

Under the structure of authority in British schools, the decision over how far to share leadership has long lain with headteachers. Research over recent decades suggests that perhaps the majority actually behaved more in accordance with the 'headmaster tradition' born of nineteenth-century public schools

(Grace, 1995). Many primary heads identified closely with ‘their’ school, confining shared leadership to empowering colleagues to deliver their agenda (Hall and Southworth, 1997). In a hands-off political climate, headteachers enjoyed considerable agency, empowered to adopt their idiosyncratic construction of headship, often entailing restricted sharing of leadership which cast their colleagues exclusively in the role of followers. However, research also suggests there was limited followership, teachers publicly toeing headteachers’ official line in the ‘zone of policy’ (Lortie, 1969) while, behind the classroom door in the ‘zone of practice’, they also possessed sufficient agency discreetly to do their own thing.

Central government education reforms have changed all that. Local administration has been largely replaced by additional central government authority to direct educational essentials like curriculum and to determine standards through legislation and financial incentives, complemented by devolution of authority to headteachers (within centrally determined limits) over inessentials like the operating budget. The most compelling reason for sharing leadership is now less a matter of principle than of pragmatism in a hostile environment. Headteachers must share leadership and their colleagues must deliver. The former are ever more dependent on the latter to contribute their specialist expertise in implementing mandated reforms, to feed this expertise into the leadership process as they gain experience with new practices, and to assist with monitoring implementation.

Headteachers now have less room to manoeuvre. Their notion of headship is increasingly constructed for them by external forces, and they can no longer afford *not* to accept the risk of sharing leadership in some degree. Yet an ironic consequence of central government strategy is to render sharing leadership as risky for headteachers as it is necessary. While they still enjoy exclusive authority to decide how far to share leadership, they are also held uniquely accountable for the outcomes of their decision. Reforms designed to strengthen external accountability, like national assessment of pupil learning and regular inspection of schools (both involving publication of results), have increased the vulnerability of the very headteachers on whom central government ministers depend to implement reforms. Headteachers alone are charged with legal responsibility for running the school within the oversight of the governing body. The accountability measures have increased the likelihood that headteachers will be publicly vilified if evidence is revealed of failure to implement central government reforms or to reach stipulated targets for educational standards.

Headteachers are confronted by a heightened dilemma: their greater dependence on colleagues disposes them towards sharing leadership. In a context of unprecedented accountability, however, they may be inhibited from sharing because it could backfire should empowered colleagues act in

ways that generate poor standards of pupil achievement, alienate parents and governors, or incur inspectors' criticism. If this is the reality of schooling, how far should headteachers be expected to risk sharing leadership, since it could negatively affect their reputation, colleagues' work and ultimately children's education? If the risk of ineffective leadership can be reduced by limiting the amount of sharing, is it justifiable for headteachers to adopt a contingency approach, varying the degree of sharing as the situation evolves?

The case of primary school SMTs

The remainder of the paper seeks a tentative answer to these questions by considering evidence on the operation of primary school SMTs. First, relevant aspects of the research design and the combined cultural and political perspective framing the investigation are outlined. Second, findings are reported showing how the headteachers variably shared leadership by setting parameters for teamwork according to a differing mix of belief in a management hierarchy and in equal contribution of team members. Third, a model is put forward which links different levels of team synergy with interaction between headteachers and other SMT members, according to their belief in a management hierarchy and in equal contribution. Finally, a contingent approach to sharing school leadership is justified on the basis of this model and implications for training are identified.

The research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, investigated SMTs in large primary schools. (For a full account, see Wallace and Huckman, 1999.) Institutions with over 300 students were selected because SMTs in them would probably constitute a subset of the teaching staff. A key criterion for selecting SMTs was members' unified professed commitment to a team approach. Headteachers at potential sites were contacted and individual SMT members' stated commitment confirmed during a preliminary visit. Focused, interpretive case studies of four SMTs (labelled as Winton, Pinehill, Kingsrise and Waverley) were undertaken over the 1995/96 academic year. Data sources comprised 58 semi-structured interviews (eight with headteachers, 20 with other members of the SMTs, 26 with a sample of other staff, and four with chairs of school governing bodies); non-participant observation of twelve SMT meetings and ten other meetings where SMT members were present; and a small document archive. Research questions for the case studies were derived from a literature review, the previous study of secondary school SMTs and an initial postal questionnaire survey of headteachers, to which interview questions related. Fieldnotes were taken during case-study observations and tape-recorded interviews. Summary tapes were prepared and transcribed with reference to fieldnotes, schedules

and documents. Data analysis entailed compiling interview summaries that fed into site summaries, forming the basis for cross-site analysis. Tables were constructed to display findings, the data set was scanned to explore the contextual complexity of specific interactions and explanatory models were developed.

The cultural and political perspective guiding the research integrates concepts about teacher professional cultures and micropolitics. It focuses on the reciprocal relationship between culture and power: cultural determinants of differential uses of power and uses of power to shape culture (Wallace, 1999). Culture informs deployment of power which, recursively, contributes to the maintenance or evolution of this culture. A simple definition of *culture* is 'the way we do things around here' (Bower, 1966): beliefs and values about education, leadership and relationships common to some or all staff in a school. A *culture of teamwork* may develop among SMT members which comprises shared beliefs, values and norms of behaviour about how they work together. As indicated above, a pivotal feature of the culture in the case studies was the interplay between uses of power according to belief in the management hierarchy and in the entitlement of all team members to make an equal contribution to the SMT. The uneasy coexistence of these beliefs is a consequence of the flow of wider social and political forces for cultural change and continuity going back to the headmaster tradition (based on belief in a strict hierarchy); the subsequent upsurge of demands from teachers to share in leadership (reflecting belief in equal rights as colleagues to participate in schools located within a democracy); and the new 'managerialist' belief in public sector managers' right to manage (Whitty et al., 1998), to achieve goals set by their political bosses (reasserting belief in hierarchy but with headteachers now in the middle of the chain of command).

Following Giddens (1984), a definition of *power* as 'transformative capacity' – use of resources to achieve interests – is employed. This conception was selected to encompass interactions which vary between synergistic, where staff pull together to achieve the same goal, and conflictual, where they pursue incompatible goals. Power may be divided (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980) into *authority* – use of resources legitimated by beliefs and values about status, including the right to apply sanctions; and *influence* – informal use of resources without recourse to sanctions linked to authority (although other sanctions may be available). Headteachers' conditions of service give them exclusive authority over other staff, but teachers may wield influence in seeking to support or undermine headteachers. The latter have recourse to authority and influence to promote a particular culture of teamwork within the SMT but cannot guarantee it will happen. Controlling other staff is, for headteachers, more a matter of *delimitation* – allowing for different behaviour within the boundaries of their comfort zone – than of establishing directive

control. Changing beliefs about the redistribution of authority and influence between headteachers, their colleagues and other stakeholders reflect the impact of externally imposed reforms which delimit the agency of headteachers and other staff along quite narrowly defined boundaries. Headteachers may have created their SMTs, but not under conditions entirely of their own choosing.

A balancing act

The four headteachers had authority to decide, according to their professional beliefs and values, whether to adopt a team approach to leadership and how far to share leadership within it. SMT operation at Winton was relatively egalitarian, with a strong emphasis on equal contribution by all members to a wide variety of team tasks. In the other three schools it was more hierarchical, with deputies being more involved than other members in a narrower range of tasks. The headteachers enjoyed very different degrees of freedom to choose their team mates. The headteacher at Pinehill was newly appointed from elsewhere and inherited other members of the SMT. The headteachers of Kingsrise, Waverley and Winton had been in post for some years. They had both created their SMT and played a major part in selecting all team colleagues when vacancies had arisen, so had been able to appoint colleagues who subscribed to their conception of teamwork.

Elements of a management hierarchy were intrinsic to headteachers' design of the team structures. The spread of individual management responsibilities among team members gave them joint oversight of other staff (Table 1). Senior teachers were either responsible for a group of classes (e.g., the junior department) or for a specialism (e.g., students with special needs). The extent to which headteachers shared leadership depended on the balance they sought between expressing belief in the management hierarchy and in equal contribution of team members in the SMT's operation. The headteacher at Winton had created a small team to facilitate extensive sharing consistent with her belief in promoting an equal contribution by all members, who could

Table 1 Case-study SMT membership

Status level of SMT members	Winton (4 members)	Pinehill (6 members)	Kingsrise (7 members)	Waverley (5 members)
Headteacher	1	1	1	1
Deputy Head	2	1	1	1
Senior Teacher	1	4	5	3

take initiatives and engage fully in debate. The hierarchical approach that she had rejected as tokenism, where a headteacher would merely seek support for his or her agenda, was close to that embraced by the other headteachers – who opted for larger teams.

How limited headteachers' power can be to set parameters for SMT operation when inheriting a team was demonstrated at Pinehill. The new headteacher attempted to impose his authority to introduce a more hierarchical mode of operation on other members of the existing team. The previous headteacher and deputy had been absent for long periods and other members of the SMT had enjoyed the opportunity to make a relatively equal contribution to teamwork. Several would not, initially, accept the more restricted contribution the new headteacher allowed them. Department leaders used influence by offering minimal compliance to the headteacher while complaining to other teachers behind his back, generating a widespread perception of a disunited team.

Varying the balance between equal and hierarchical sharing

Different degrees of sharing were expressed through several aspects of the teams' practice. First, the extent and boundaries of team tasks diverged. At Winton, the headteacher encouraged all other SMT members to participate fully in most leadership tasks, extending to developing policy proposals. At Pinehill, team tasks excluded curriculum matters (which were addressed by a parallel group consisting of the headteacher, deputy head and a teacher designated as curriculum leader). Monitoring implementation of decisions extending to classroom observation was being developed through training for the headteacher and deputies at Winton. The headteachers of the other schools had accepted that this potentially threatening level of internal monitoring was a task for them alone. They were not sole determinants of the limits of SMT practice. Reticence among SMT colleagues to monitor the performance of other staff reflected their allegiance to the wider staff professional culture, which accorded individuals considerable classroom autonomy. These SMT members had used influence to voice their unease and realize their interest in avoiding an unwelcome task. The notion of a management hierarchy suited them here: they could argue it was not their job, as junior members, to monitor colleagues.

Second, the headteachers variably empowered team colleagues to contribute to tasks they did share. While the headteacher at Winton encouraged SMT colleagues to take initiatives within broad boundaries (such as piloting a system for improving student discipline), the other headteachers confined

sharing to consulting team colleagues on their prespecified agenda. Where all members participated in making team decisions, the norm was universal that a working consensus must be achieved. Debate leading to a decision at Winton, however, commonly comprised ‘open consultation’ where all members were encouraged equally to offer ideas. The other headteachers tended to opt for a more hierarchical approach of ‘bounded consultation’, where they put forward their proposed decision and sought colleagues’ comments before taking it to a meeting with other staff. Pooling information to build an overview was a feature of the four teams, but the flow of information and opinion was multidirectional at Winton and channelled more unidirectionally in the other SMTs towards what the headteacher wished to know.

Third, there was varied appreciation of individual members’ complementary knowledge and skills. SMT members at Winton were aware of the complementarity of their expertise connected with their individual management responsibility, and of contrasting skills linked to personalities which were required to balance creative thinking with getting tasks completed. Awareness of complementarity in the other teams was restricted largely to knowledge connected with the hierarchical distribution of individual management responsibilities, suggesting that their contribution to the team did not run as deep.

While the team approach at Winton expressed belief in equal contribution of SMT members most fully, expression of belief in a management hierarchy was not only enshrined in the structure but was also reflected at times in the team’s practice. Observation of Winton SMT meetings indicated that members other than the headteacher expressed their belief in the management hierarchy by ensuring that their contribution stayed inside the implicit boundaries set by her. They would check voluntarily that she was comfortable with the course of action they were advocating. The culture of teamwork shared throughout this team included the norm that the headteacher had authority as formal leader within the management hierarchy to pull rank, but only for contingent situations where equal contribution did not result in consensus. The flexibility with which all team members were able to switch between the two contradictory beliefs as circumstances changed was one foundation of synergy for this SMT. Unified commitment to combining individual energies in pursuit of a shared goal was not jeopardized when the prevalent norm of equal contribution was temporarily replaced by reversion to hierarchical operation. Team colleagues’ willingness to switch in this way reduced the risk for the headteacher of losing control that relatively equal sharing can bring. The culture of teamwork here was sophisticated enough for contradictory beliefs and values to coexist without conflict, mutually empowering all members.

Sharing leadership through teamwork

The headteacher at Winton shared most leadership tasks, shared them with all her SMT colleagues, and did so relatively equally. While the other headteachers empowered their team colleagues to make a more restricted contribution as equals (especially to debate and some decisions), they shared fewer leadership tasks, shared less with more junior colleagues, and shared tasks unequally with all other members. The agency of all four headteachers was similarly delimited by national contextual factors connected with central government reforms, but differently by school level factors – notably the opportunity to create their team and choose its membership. The headteachers retained sufficient agency to employ their authority in orchestrating alternative approaches to sharing leadership within the SMT, dependent on their contrasting balance of belief in a management hierarchy and in equal contribution. Their team colleagues likewise had agency to use influence in making a supportive or resistant response to headteachers according to the balance of their own adherence to these contradictory beliefs and values. The agency of headteachers and their colleagues may have been more tightly delimited by reforms but it was still significant. The new central government promotion of a management hierarchy had yet to eliminate adherence to more egalitarian norms whose origin predates the reform era.

Figure 1 is a model explaining what occurred within the agency of the headteachers and other SMT members. It compares norms relating to belief in a management hierarchy and in equal contribution to which the headteacher subscribes (the left and right hand columns) with the equivalent norms to which other SMT members subscribe (the upper and lower rows). Each cell depicts the combination of norms held by the headteacher and other SMT members. (For simplicity, it is assumed that all other SMT members share allegiance to the same norm at any time.) The *upper left cell* represents the situation at Kingsrise and Waverley, whose headteachers adopted a strongly hierarchical team approach which their SMT colleagues accepted. Interaction was harmonious since there was congruence between norms followed by all members. The headteachers took a low risk of loss of control by restricting other members' contribution. The potential for SMT-wide synergy was also only moderate because the range of shared tasks over which their energies could be combined was limited. Other members were not encouraged to take initiatives or to contribute their ideas, beyond responding to the headteachers' proposals.

The *lower right cell* represents the situation at Winton, where the headteacher encouraged other members to make an equal contribution and they were willing to do so. Here the potential for SMT synergy was high because all members were involved in a wide range of tasks and were encouraged to contribute all of which they were capable, including taking their own initiatives.

Norms		Headteacher	
		Management hierarchy	Equal contribution
Other SMT members	Management hierarchy	Moderate SMT synergy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headteacher operates hierarchically, • other members accept headteacher's seniority, • other members contribute few ideas, • working consensus achieved, • outcomes acceptable to headteacher. 	Low SMT synergy (disengagement) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headteacher encourages other members to make an equal contribution, • other members prefer headteacher to operate hierarchically, • other members contribute few ideas, • willingness to compromise in favour of headteacher, • outcomes acceptable to headteacher.
	Equal contribution	No SMT synergy (open conflict) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headteacher operates hierarchically, • other members do not accept headteacher's seniority, • other members contribute few ideas, • no consensus achievable, • outcomes not acceptable to headteacher. 	High SMT synergy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headteacher encourages other members to make an equal contribution, • other members wish to make an equal contribution, • all members contribute many ideas, • outcomes acceptable to headteacher.

Figure 1 Modelling interaction between the headteacher and other SMT members

The risk of the headteacher losing control remained low only as long as other members sought outcomes within the headteacher's comfort zone and were willing to compromise if necessary to achieve this situation.

Interaction is harmonious in both cells where there is congruence between the norms followed by all members, but the level of synergy is potentially greater where all involved can make an equal contribution. The solid arrow linking the *upper left and lower right cells* indicates how a team may sustain harmonious interaction and reap as much synergy as is possible at any time through all members working towards making an equal contribution. If the contingency arises where one or more other members advocate action lying outside the headteacher's comfort zone, harmony may be sustained if they can accept the headteacher withdrawing a decision from the team and making it unilaterally, as the team leader who is externally accountable for the work of the SMT. The key to smooth operation and maximizing synergy is for both headteacher and other SMT members to be flexible enough to switch together temporarily, for such contingencies, from adherence to the norm of equal contribution to the norm of a management hierarchy.

The remaining two cells depict how synergy may be compromised through disjunction between norms followed by the headteacher and other

SMT members. The *lower left cell* covers situations where the headteacher operates hierarchically by pulling rank according to his or her position in the management hierarchy. But other members do not accept this move, because it transgresses their belief in their entitlement to make an equal contribution. Conflict may ensue, as at Pinehill after the arrival of the new headteacher when other members found his strongly hierarchical approach to leadership unacceptable. The *upper right cell* covers situations where the headteacher encourages colleague members to make an equal contribution, but they act according to their subordinate position in the management hierarchy. The result is disengagement of other members, as they withhold from making the contribution fostered by the headteacher. Such a situation arose in the more hierarchical SMTs where headteachers encouraged other team members to participate in monitoring other staff but they declined the invitation, implying it was the headteachers' task as top manager.

From practice to prescription: a contingent approach to sharing leadership

This model indicates how different approaches to sharing leadership in the case-study SMTs proved significant for the degree of synergy attainable. While the arguments put forward earlier for the principle of sharing school leadership widely and equally are persuasive as far as they go, they fail to take into account two features of the real world, at least in Britain: the risk that sharing will result in ineffective leadership which is unacceptable because of its negative impact on students' education; and the strict hierarchy of accountability where the headteacher may have to answer for empowering colleagues to make an equal contribution if things are deemed to have gone wrong. The research implies that prescriptions for school leadership should be informed by evidence, and so rest on principles that are context-sensitive: the approach advocated will therefore be contingent on circumstances. For the UK, evidence-based principles might be:

- 1 School leadership should be shared widely and equally to maximize the potential benefit for children's education and for teachers' job satisfaction and professional growth.
- 2 Headteachers have responsibility for promoting shared leadership but the right, because of their unique accountability for doing so, to delimit the boundaries of sharing and to have the final say where there is disagreement over leadership decisions.

- 3 Other teachers have the right to participate in school leadership but the responsibility, because of the headteacher's unique accountability for their work, to ensure that they operate within the boundaries set, including letting the headteacher have the final say where there is disagreement over leadership decisions.

These principles would justify British headteachers working towards the most extensive, equal sharing of leadership possible to maximize potential for synergy, while allowing for contingent reversal to hierarchical operation to minimize the risk of disaster. Such a context-dependent prescription runs counter to the more generic prescriptions portrayed in North American normative theories like transformational leadership and organizational learning, whose applicability to the UK environment was questioned earlier. Arguably, such theories beg for elaboration and refinement to reduce their cultural relativity, so that they embrace more of the complexities of leadership in different real world situations and have wider applicability between contexts.

Finally, school leadership training and informal learning support should include raising participants' awareness of their contradictory beliefs and values. Assistance could be offered with learning to live with this contradiction and to switch between alternative beliefs and values as contingencies arise. Rather than offering simplistic advice (until recently, in Britain, pushing towards context-free equal sharing of leadership), headteachers could be advised to adopt a contingent approach, depending on an ongoing situational analysis.

The approach to training and shared leadership practice suggested here flies in the face of most training in the UK and elsewhere, which tends to reduce the complexity of leadership to a single formula for action. This research shows that real life is not so straightforward and the sooner training catches up with this complexity, the better. It is ironic that another UK reform – preparatory training for aspiring headteachers, introduced in 1997 – is cast so much in terms of hierarchy, reversing trainers' equally simplistic earlier orientation. The central government project of 'modernizing' the teaching profession, reflecting a hierarchical approach to leadership in the service of New Labour educational goals, may be challenged: it inhibits headteachers and their colleagues from sharing leadership in ways that maximize everyone's potential contribution. An approach to sharing leadership which works towards equal contribution, with an occasional regression to hierarchy, may be where the synergy lies that could really make a difference to the quality of school leadership, and so help raise educational standards. Yet the training syllabus focuses closely on the headteacher as directive top manager (Teacher Training Agency, 1998). Sharing leadership through an SMT scarcely makes it onto the new training agenda. Where is the justice in that?

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