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During the academic year 2021-22, I was fortunate enough to spend a year in the UK and conducted research into particular areas of interest: *(Im)politeness* and *Learner Autonomy*. The former has practical application for the teaching of English both in the English department and across the wider English curriculum, while a systematic inclusion of the latter will reap benefits to all students regardless of the subject(s) they are studying.

Covid restrictions across the UK hampered me to some extent, but nonetheless I was able to achieve the majority of my goals for the year. What follows is a summary of the work I conducted and the conclusions that I reached.

(Im)politeness

Generally speaking, language change occurs at a relatively slow rate, yet with the advent of online communication, particularly social media, there has been a more rapid evolution of language use and usage. I am particularly interested in the use of impoliteness and how it has changed across generations as this may provide insight into how social groups and intra-group relationships are both evolving and at the same time remaining constant. Impoliteness has long been a clear indication of membership of a particular sort of in-group (this is why, for instance, parents may swear with friends yet rarely use taboo language in front of their (young) children and vice-versa). One of the main goals of my sabbatical was to investigate how the younger generation's attitudes to taboo language and its use differs from that of earlier generations.

I spent a great deal of time reviewing the most recent literature in the area of politeness, in particular the work of scholars such as Jonathan Culpepper, Jesse Sheidlower and Benjamin Bergen. In addition, I collated real-world data and plan to analyze use of taboo language on British television programmes (both scripted and authentic speech) across generations. A major difference I have already been able to confirm is that the younger generation (those under the age of 30) tend to find language that alienates individuals more offensive than taboo language related to bodily functions. Thus words such as: *poof*; *lezzar*; *nigger*, words that insult people based on (involuntary) group membership are deemed highly offensive whereas more 'traditional' taboo words: *fuck*; *shit*; *bitch* and so on are nowhere so. The inverse is true of older generations. This, in many respects, is a healthy shift and suggests that British society is becoming a more inclusive and tolerant one.

An important development in the past couple of years has been the rise of "woke" culture, which has led to a great deal of censorship of language, especially on social media. I collected articles from newspapers (both online and print) which highlight the heated debate regarding "woke" culture focusing on what kinds of language is 'acceptable'. This is important as, clearly, it raises the questions: who is to police language use, who gets to decide what is and is not acceptable? This is more than a mere academic question; the very heart of free speech is that it exists to protect speech that we find offensive, not merely speech of which we approve. To quote Noam Chomsky, "*If we don't believe in freedom of expression for people we despise, we don't believe in it at all.*" This research will result in the publication of a minimum of two papers.

Developing Student Autonomy

Covid is here and it is here to stay. As we all know, this has changed the way we teach our students as well as the way they learn. And it is more than likely that, as the virus continues to mutate and new strains emerge, the changes we have made since 2019 will be with us for the foreseeable future. I have been interested in learner autonomy for many years and am keen to incorporate aspects of self-study into our curricula. In addition to my work on (im)politeness, I conducted research into this area particularly as it relates to Blended Learning (see, for example, the work of Charles Graham, Anthony Picciano and Kenneth Robinson). My goal is to promote ways in which we can modernize our current pedagogy, making use of modern communication tools so that we can better serve our students. The benefits of facilitating learner autonomy are many and include, though are not limited to, the following:

- students develop the confidence to learn for themselves and come to see the teacher as a resource rather than the fount of all knowledge.
- students explore different learning styles and strategies and can then adopt those which best fit their immediate and ever-changing needs.
- students become able to exploit peer-to-peer learning and teaching, taking advantage of the knowledge and skills that their classmates possess.
- the successful development of autonomous learning skills has implications beyond the classroom; students will be able to use these tools throughout their lives and, in all probability, judicious application of these skills will have a positive impact on their professional careers.

Naturally, any changes cannot be made overnight. There are many institutional factors that can slow the inclusion of a more learner-centred approach to teaching and curriculum/syllabus design (see, for examples, the work of David Boud and Benson & Voller). Nevertheless, changes must and will come and the sooner we embrace the inevitable, the sooner we can begin to thrive in the 21st century.