COMMUNICATING LINGUISTICS

LANGUAGE, COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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ENGAGING WITH PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

A personal retrospective

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Introduction

Public engagement for me always used to start with a phone call – or, these days, an email. I clearly remember the first one. It was in 1962, while I was a research assistant on the Survey of English Usage at University College London. Normally the director, Randolph Quirk, or his secretary answered the phone; but that day I was the only one in the office. It was a journalist wanting to write a piece about the Survey. I spent half an hour doing my best to explain what the Survey was all about, how it was the first one of its kind to examine spoken as well as written English grammar, how it was descriptive rather than prescriptive and so on. The journalist had heard of grammar. 'Split infinitives?' he queried. I said this was indeed one of the many types of construction that we were monitoring in spoken English. He then asked what were the sources of data. I gave him some examples, including BBC recordings, such as *Any Questions*. 'What sort of people?' he asked. I gave him some names. One was Sir Gerald Nabarro, a prominent Conservative politician at the time, who was a regular participant.

The next day there was a story about the Survey, with a howling headline about Gerald Nabarro and split infinitives. The red-hot phone call from Nabarro later that day took Quirk by surprise. I had told him about the journalist, but not mentioned any details, not thinking they were important. Nabarro was furious that his name had been linked in the same sentence to split infinitives. A sheepish research assistant was duly summoned into Quirk's office, and I got my first lessons in public engagement. Never reveal your sources. Also, no matter how carefully you nuance your linguistic explanations, the media will get them wrong. And they will ignore your academic caution in the search for an eye-catching headline. As BBC journalist John Humphrys put it some decades later in an article for the *Spectator* (11 November 2006): 'The basic law of journalism states, "First simplify, then exaggerate."' Everyone needs to remember that. Lesson 1.

In the event, Quirk managed 'the Nabarro Affair,' as we came to call it, brilliantly. He told Sir Gerald that he was one of a select few to have their fluent command of the English language incorporated into what would one day be seen as a unique archive of 1960s usage – along with the Queen... instant mollification.

Engaging with the media

If I were to quantify the amount of my public engagement over the years, the primary place would go to the media, and especially broadcasting. Language is one of those topics that is always attractive to broadcasters, because they know it is an area in which everyone has a stake. We all – with just a few exceptions – speak and write, and have opinions about the way other people speak and write, and are ready, at the drop of an 'at, to send a letter or email of complaint to a broadcasting company. In the 1980s, I wrote and presented several series about English usage on BBC Radio, such as *Speak Out* and *English Now*, fuelled by the thousands of letters and postcards sent in at the time. The same topics turned up over and over: accents, disputed pronunciation, grammatical shibboleths, vocabulary change, spelling difficulties, apostrophes... They were almost entirely dislikes – what has been called the 'complaint tradition' (Milroy and Milroy, 2012). And they seem unaffected by time. I have just looked through some of them again, and find that the issues being raised in the 1980s are still being raised today. It is as if those programmes had never been. No matter how often one tries to engage by giving a public explanation of a contentious linguistic issue, there will be a solid section of society that takes no notice of it. Lesson 2: don't expect to change the world through an interview or a newspaper article, even if they report you accurately. So, be prepared to say the same thing repeatedly, in as many settings as possible.

The biggest danger these days is to manage the consequences of fallible reporting, for there is a second level of simplification that has to be contended with – reportage in social media, especially in short-messaging services such as Twitter. Fake linguistic news. The space constraint disallows nuanced expression, motivates the use of quotations out of context and – through the inherently anonymous character of the medium – elicits a level of contentiousness and abuse that is unprecedented in traditional debate. People seem very ready to take offence these days. And even if a correction is posted at one point in a timeline, there is no guarantee that it will be seen or recalled even a few hours later, given the number of posts that will have arrived on the platform in the interim.

There are other things to watch out for when engaging with the media. Beware the programme researcher, who can keep you on the line for ages, asking far more questions than could ever possibly be covered by an interviewer or in a programme. Their job is to offer the programme-maker as much choice as possible, and they are quite happy to spend an hour or more milking your brain. Only a tiny fraction of what you say will be used. So it is wise to limit the amount of time you are prepared to give, either by phone or online. And be prepared for what has been called 'dropping the dead donkey,' where your item is cancelled

because some other item of greater importance has come up, or a previous item has overrun. I have probably had more dead donkeys than actual radio or television appearances, over the years, though I never kept a count. There's no way of anticipating this, of course, but you have to be prepared for it. You may think your topic for public engagement is important, but it may not receive the level of respect you think it deserves.

Also be prepared to have your natural speaking or writing style altered, to suit the needs of the medium. There is no room in public engagement for being stylistically precious, and I have always deferred to the instincts of producers, when they send back my draft script with comments. I learnt many useful lessons, such as to avoid long or complex sentences, to be aware of topics which create sensitivities, and to note which words cannot be used (before the evening watershed) even as linguistic illustrations. However, acknowledging the expertise of programme-makers does not mean a complete abdication of personal responsibility. There are times, even, when the invitation to contribute to a programme may have to be refused. You may want to avoid channels that play down serious discussion, and where any attempt to make an academic point will be given short shrift. Especially beware the invitation to make a contribution 'at the top of the hour': these are usually from producers who are going to treat language as a lightweight filler, seeing it only as a source of humour – an amuse-bouche before the news, after all the serious interviews have gone. Such items will be very short, rushed (as the hour approaches) and often dropped at the last moment. The dead donkey again. If you have travelled to a studio, there is nothing more dispiriting than when this happens.

One thing you can do in advance is get a sense of the style of the radio channel or programme to which you've been invited, especially if it's live. And when actually taking part, be sensitive to regional, cultural and time differences. A regional example: if you are quite good at accents and are asked to illustrate them, it is unwise to choose the accents of the region you are broadcasting to. Even if you are a very good phonetician, you will get them wrong in the ears of some listeners, you will be criticised for stereotyping or mocking and the engagement will not be positive. A cultural example: when broadcasting to an area where the country is at war or there is a history of conflict with some other country, it is wise to check if there are topics or names that would cause upset. In an extreme case, the bare mention of a name might cause the contribution to be abruptly terminated. And time? I remember my first radio call to ABC (Australia) which was a bouncy mid-morning for me, but the late show in Melbourne. My first energetic sentences were met with a whispered 'quiet' from the producer: 'It's nearly midnight here!'

Special fields: proactive issues

Far more rewarding is engagement with special fields. I do not mean proactively. I have rarely gone out into the world waving a linguistic flag that says 'Can I help

you?' And on the few occasions where I have done so, the initiatives have usually ended in failure. Four examples:

- Noting the serious growth in online grooming of children by predators, I devised a linguistically based scheme that would analyse online conversational interactions and identify any that were beginning to sound suspicious: see Crystal (2011) for details. I called it Chatsafe and offered it to various online bodies. None responded. I needed data to test the procedure, and this required a raft of necessary police checks and permissions, so I approached the UK Home Office. Again, no response. I suspect you have to know someone within an organisation if you're going to get anywhere – or a really powerful backer who knows the system.

- Having repeatedly had the experience of being mistaken for other David Crystals on Amazon (and presumably they for me), I wrote offering to adapt a taxonomy I devised for the Cambridge/Penguin encyclopedias and for online advertising to stop this sort of thing happening, or at least to reduce it, by tagging names with relevant categories. Thus, David Crystal$_{linguistics}$, David Crystal$_{dentistry}$, David Crystal$_{fashion design}$ and so on. No response. The problem still exists.

- I was, for a while, President of the Indexer Society, at a time when the Harry Potter books were developing into a series. At a teachers' conference, it was suggested that an annotated index to the books would add interest for the pupils and would especially help those with special needs who were finding it difficult to keep on top of the plots and the many characters. Would I help? I wrote to J. K. Rowling's agent, who promptly rejected the proposal and threatened me with immediate legal action if I dared to take forward such a thing!

- In the mid-1990s, the plight of many of the world's endangered languages was beginning to attract attention, and linguists were prime movers in the drive to gain political and economic support for documentation and, where possible, revitalisation: see Rehg and Campbell (2018) for a retrospective. One of the proposals was to develop a 'house of languages,' analogous to natural history museums, art galleries and other such institutions where a special field is given a creative public presence. In the UK, the initiative was given a warm response by the British Council, and two years were spent developing a project to establish what was to be called a 'World of Language' in a building on London's South Bank, opposite Shakespeare's Globe. It had all been costed when the government suddenly withdrew its support, having decided that a better use of money was to develop something to be called the Millennium Dome. The World of Language never went ahead: see Crystal (2008) for details.

Not all proactive projects are going to be failures, but to make them successes requires a level of commitment that may put them beyond the reach of many. The problem usually comes down to money. The *Shakespeare's Words* project

is an example. This began when my actor/director son Ben was working with a cast on a play and found that some of its unfamiliar words were not to be found in the traditionally used glossary, by C. T. Onions, dating from 1911. We therefore began a three-year project that led to the publication of *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion* by Penguin in 2002. This was a huge book, by Penguin standards (676 pages), but even so it contained only a fraction of the usages found in the canon. There are six references to *bootless* (meaning 'unsuccessful'), for instance, but this word turns up 22 times in all the plays and poems. An online incarnation was the solution, and this was eventually launched in 2008, with revisions at intervals, as technology evolved – the latest being in April 2022. All instances of unfamiliar words are now included and searchable, and a raft of additional features, such as a thesaurus, word families and pronunciations, have been added over the years. The website is used, according to Google Analytics, by 3–4000 users a day, which is one way of quantifying public engagement.

But none of this came cheaply. A brilliant team of website designers and programmers, based in Prague, set up the site and have since developed (in response to user requests for new features) and maintained it, which includes all the registration costs that any website has to incur. This required a considerable personal investment, which we hoped to recover through a donations model; and when, after several years, this failed to generate even enough to cover annual maintenance, we switched to a subscription model. Take-up has been good, but we estimate it will take some ten years to recoup the investment. So here is Lesson 3: proactive public engagement can be expensive, especially if technological assistance is required. For any such project, work out if you (or your institution) can afford it – and when you arrive at an estimate, double it, for hidden costs are always going to emerge. At the outset, explore as many cost-covering strategies as you can, bearing in mind that if the project has a commercial outcome, it may place it outside the pale for the usual kind of academic grant applications.

Special fields: reactive issues

Reactive encounters have, on the whole, been very successful. I view applied linguistics as the application of linguistic theories, methods and findings to the elucidation – and hopefully solution – of problems which have arisen in other areas of experience (Crystal 1981; Tomić and Shuy 1987; Crystal and Brumfit, 2004). The important point to note is that linguists are usually not aware of what those problems are until someone explains them. Indeed, they may never have thought of the enquiry as a domain that would benefit from a linguist's services at all. So, it is important to have an open mind, be ready to respond and to be pulled in an unexpected direction. Lesson 4, as Hamlet says: 'the readiness is all.'

Getting to understand the nature of the problem, in order to decide whether you can help, is a crucial but time-consuming part of the process of public engagement. I find a checklist of seven questions helpful:

1. Does linguistics have the answers that will enable the encounter to be successful?
2. Do I have the necessary knowledge of the relevant area of linguistics, or will it involve me in preliminary research?
3. Do I have an interest in and empathy with the subject-matter of the enquiring domain?
4. Do I have the time to get involved?
5. Does my academic environment allow me to get involved?
6. Are there ethical, financial, political, religious, cultural, personal or other factors I need to take into account?
7. Is the involvement likely to feed back into linguistics to develop the subject as a whole?

Three projects are illustrative.

Clinical outreach

I was largely unaware of what the problems were in the field of speech therapy until I was asked (in a phone call to the newly established Department of Linguistic Science at the University of Reading) if linguistics could help in the assessment of a three-year-old language-delayed child being treated in the Audiology Unit of the Royal Berkshire Hospital. The checklist yielded the following results:

1. *All the answers?* Yes. I had asked what sort of information they needed, and 'a norm of child language acquisition' (CLA) was mentioned – an area of linguistics that was establishing itself at the time.
2. *Personal knowledge?* Another yes. I was teaching the course on CLA, and would go on to found the *Journal of Child Language* a few years later.
3. *Interest?* A definite yes, as I had studied the CLA of two of my children, and was the parent of a child with a cleft palate.
4. *Time?* Not really, working in a new department with a small staff, many courses to teach, and quite a heavy load of departmental administration. But it seemed the request would not take up too much time – an afternoon or two perhaps.
5. *Permission?* Yes. The head of department, Frank Palmer, was keen to build relationships with other departments, over and above the undergraduate joint-degree courses, and links had already been established with typography, music and education. The local hospital seemed an obvious next step.
6. *Factors?* None that I could foresee. No fees were involved, and this was before the days when any encounter with children required a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check.
7. *Advancing linguistics?* No idea.

In the event, check 4 turned out to be ridiculously wrong. The encounter with the world of speech pathology would take up most of my research time over the

next 15 years and lead to the establishment of the first linguistics-based degree in speech therapy, a diploma in remedial language studies, and the founding of a journal, *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*. The research that was needed to relate CLA to issues of diagnosis, assessment, and treatment, for adults as well as children, motivated the devising of a series of linguistic profiles in grammar and other areas, collaborating with new members of the department (Crystal, Fletcher and Garman, 1976; Crystal, 1982). All this then contributed to the emergence of a new branch of applied linguistics, clinical linguistics, easily satisfying check 7. So, Lesson 5: however much time you estimate your public engagement role is going to take up, you are probably going to be wildly wrong. The desire and opportunity to 'make a difference' is likely to be too tempting to deny; you will be sucked in to making commitments that you want to keep; and the friendships that can follow with people from the other domain foster a bond that you will be reluctant to break. Leaving a public engagement project is always much more difficult than starting one.

Business outreach

In case this might be thought to be an isolated experience, here is a second example – this time after I had left the full-time university world to become an 'independent scholar.' I was totally unaware of what the problems were in the field of online advertising until I was asked (in a phone call) whether linguistics could help solve a problem. It seems that inappropriate ads were appearing on websites. The example I was given was of a CNN web page about a street stabbing in Chicago; the ad at the side of the report said 'Buy Your Knives Here'! Embarrassment all round. How could this be stopped?

Applying the checklist once again:

1. *All the answers?* Yes. The problem was clear: the word *knife* had appeared several times in the report; the naive software had assumed that all it had to do was look in an inventory of digital advertisements and find any references to knives – which it did, ignoring the fact that *knife=weapon* is from a totally different semantic field to *knife=cutlery*. Context was being ignored. A contextually based semantic analysis, analysing polysemy and taking whole pages into account, would probably solve the problem. The kinds of ambiguity involved had long been recognised in lexicology and lexicography.
2. *Personal knowledge?* Yes. I had taught courses on semantics at Reading and edited books on the subject, such as Palmer (1976).
3. *Interest?* Yes. I had been a collector of old dictionaries for some years and was a member of the Longman board (Linglex) that was advising the company during its huge expansion period of dictionary publishing.
4. *Time?* Yes. I was general editor of the *Cambridge Encyclopedia* family at the time, but CUP was developing a publishing policy which had led them to sell this family to an internet development firm. The enquiry had come

through that firm, and the classification I had used for the encyclopedias was beginning to be expanded into a broader taxonomy that, I thought, could also be used to solve the 'knife' problem and similar issues. I wasn't expecting it to take too long, as – once pointed in the right direction – I imagined someone in the ad world would implement the more sophisticated semantic approach.

5. *Permission?* The academic context was no longer relevant, but was now replaced by a company context. My line manager considered the task to be a good fit, so I fed back my conclusions to the enquirer.

6. *Factors?* Financial, certainly, but this was being looked after by the new company. However, it raises a general issue for academics when public engagement involves a consultancy: if fees are involved, they need to ensure that there is no conflict between institutional time and personal time; and, if the latter, that the fee-level is appropriate. Lesson 6: get advice and compare the scales used by other professionals with similar qualifications.

7. *Advancing linguistics?* No idea.

It was the clinical story all over again. Check 4 was ridiculously out. It transpired there was nobody in the ad world who knew anything about semantics or lexicography. It would be up to me to come up with a procedure. The task involved working through the whole English dictionary, identifying the cases of polysemy (which meant most of the words) and tagging them for context. So, for example, *depression* was tagged for its economic, physical geographic, climatological and psychiatric senses. It took a team of 30 part-time lexicographers over a year to complete the task. And then a new company was formed to develop the system (eventually called iSense) and to market it. I was chair of that company for a decade. The main difference with the earlier project was that it proved easier to leave it, as in the business world there are well established 'exit strategies.'

Check 7 was not entirely disregarded, notwithstanding the business world in which I was working. I wrote several papers for journals on the approach, which came to be called 'semantic targeting' (Crystal, 2010), and it proved possible to incorporate aspects of the work into my academic writing on language and the internet (Crystal, 2011). But here a different issue arose: the approach had been patented, and there were NDAs to respect – non-disclosure agreements. In a fiercely competitive business world, academics must not be naive, and blithely write up all the details of a product, as if it were a PhD thesis or an article for a peer-reviewed journal. Lesson 7: become aware, before you get involved, of what you will be allowed to publish or even talk about in public.

Also, legal issues can arise. Think again about the need to handle lexical polysemy – in the whole dictionary. That includes the vocabulary of sex, violence, racial hate, drugs, and all the language that appears on the 'dark' side of the Internet. If the aim is to protect websites from ads in these domains, then they have to be analysed – which means downloading them in sufficient quantities to make lexical profiles possible. One has not only to have a thick

skin to cope with the unpleasantness but also to be very cautious and inform the authorities of the nature of the project, to avoid an unwanted knock on the door. Lesson 8: explore any possible legal issues when dealing with sensitive areas.

Theatrical outreach

Another phone call: this time from Shakespeare's Globe in London, with a request for help to mount a production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 'original pronunciation' (OP). The Globe had been established to explore Elizabethan original practices, and had been acclaimed for its work in music, costume and movement, within the reconstructed theatrical space, but the possibility of reconstructing period pronunciation had not been addressed – nor had it occurred to me that the Globe might want to do this, notwithstanding the existence of a tradition of exploring Shakespearean OP going back to the mid-19th century, and involving phoneticians, such as Alexander Ellis and Daniel Jones, and theatre directors, such as John Barton and Bernard Miles.

This is how the checklist came out here:

1. *All the answers?* Not entirely. A great deal is now known about the phonology of the Early Modern English period, but there are many gaps and quite a few controversies over the stage that certain sound changes had reached.
2. *Personal knowledge?* I had a general understanding of English historical phonology, and had incorporated summaries of the sound system in its various stages of evolution in my *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, but I had never heard a reconstructed sound system in the mouths of anyone other than phoneticians; and actors were not phoneticians.
3. *Interest?* Yes. I had been involved with the Globe from its earliest days, writing articles for each issue of its magazine, *Around the Globe*, and being a Sam Wanamaker Fellow there in 2003, so I had a reputation as their 'tame linguist,' which is presumably why they called me.
4. *Time?* It seemed like a relatively limited commitment. It was January 2004. I envisaged three stages: to reread the phonological literature and make choices where there were cases of competing views; to provide a transcription of the director's cut of the play; to teach the actors (and their dialect coach) the OP; and to follow their progress through rehearsal into production, which was scheduled for June. It would then be over. The whole story is told in Crystal (2005/2019).
5. *Permission?* Yes. As before, I had to ensure that this did not interfere with my business responsibilities, but these had reduced a little after the first wave of publications.
6. *Factors?* Nothing to be concerned about. They had offered a nominal fee. The only consideration was the practical one of getting to the Globe at regular intervals from my home in North Wales, but as I was often in London

anyway on other business, that was unlikely to be an issue. (Public engagement projects often require visits to the locations where the projects are taking place. It is wise to check if travelling expenses are being catered for.)

7. *Advancing linguistics?* I felt it was unlikely.

Once again, check 4 was ridiculously out. The OP production was a great success, so the Globe followed it up with another, *Troilus and Cressida*, in 2005. In the audiences were theatre people from around the world, interested in hearing what OP had to offer, and they took back the initiative to try it out in their countries. American directors were especially enamoured of the approach, as OP has features (such as a postvocalic /r/) that make it resemble US English, and allows actors to feel more at home in that phonology than they were ever able to be in RP. Since 2006, over 20 of Shakespeare's plays, as well as works by other playwrights of the period, have been given an OP performance in several cities; and one company (the Baltimore Shakespeare Factory) has been mounting an OP production each year. I have been involved as a teacher or consultant on many of them.

This project also illustrates another point: the success of a public engagement initiative varies greatly, depending on factors totally outside the control of those involved. In the case of OP, not all theatre directors responded with enthusiasm; indeed, some were indifferent or dismissive. Although the first artistic director at the Globe, Mark Rylance, was a great supporter of OP, his successor Dominic Dromgoole was not, so that there were no subsequent OP productions at the Globe until its educational wing took an interest in 2014. Similarly, the artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford, Greg Doran, felt that OP was no more than an academic experiment. Lesson 9: be prepared to have your efforts at public engagement rejected – but don't take it personally. When you take into account all the political, economic, historical and (not least) personality factors that lead theatre companies to go their individual ways, it would be most unlikely for any initiative to receive a universal welcome. And I suspect this is going to be true of any attempt at engagement with an artistic domain. Maybe with any domain.

Small-scale projects

I don't want to give the impression that all public engagements are large-scale, long-term endeavours. There are valuable small-scale projects too, just as much appreciated, and sometimes with effects that go well beyond what you might expect. Contributions to individual radio or television programmes are usually clearly time-delimited – unless they inadvertently turn into a series! – and the extent of involvement is known in advance. Most forensic linguistic collaborations are specific, case-related, with a clear beginning and end and usually not lasting more than a few days or weeks – though there are cases that do drag on; and if a case ends up in court, it can involve the linguist sitting around in

corridors for some time waiting to be called in as a witness (the issues are discussed in Shuy, 2006, and see also French and Watt, 2018). If the court is an international one (such as at The Hague), the time commitment can be considerable, unless the issues are handled online. (Financial considerations are usually not an issue, in legal settings, as fees, travel expenses, and so on are always part of the planning.)

Exhibitions are another instance of a well-defined time-frame, which will include a period set aside for planning. This was the case with the British Library (BL) exhibition, *Evolving English*, which ran from November 2010 to April 2011. Preparations began two years earlier, with meeting-dates clearly scheduled. An associated book was built into the planning (Crystal, 2011). But once it was over, it was over. And once again, the effect of the public engagement could be monitored in terms of the number of visitors the exhibition received. It turned out that this was the best attended winter exhibition ever at the BL.

Simplification

Finally, I should mention the biggest challenge linguists have to face when engaging with the public, whether general or specialised: the need to simplify – but not, *pace* John Humphrys, to exaggerate. I sometimes feel that applied linguistics is the science of telling half-truths about language. Certainly, when trying to get a message across to an uninformed and often sceptical public, it is essential to be cautious about presenting the terminology, qualifications, diverse viewpoints and subtleties of expression that characterise the subject when linguists address their peers. I do not think it would have been possible to make much progress in the clinical world if I had presented colleagues there with a descriptive framework of the kind I would have used in an article for the *Journal of Linguistics*.

Complexities can of course be introduced gently, as time goes by, but not at the outset. Many teachers have told me how their first encounter with linguistics was off-putting because of the terminology or the complexity of an analysis, or where they were presented with alternative analyses of an issue without having the necessary background to evaluate them. It is quite an art to tell only as much of the linguistic story as is needed to help. However, you may well encounter criticism from theoretically minded linguistic colleagues who do not share your enthusiasm for public engagement, and for whom any hint of simplification is seen as doing the subject a disservice. Lesson 10: be ready for sometimes heated debate in staff meetings. It is wise to attend armed with an explanation of the wider benefits of the exercise to the community – as well as to the university. In these days of targets and impacts, the issue may not be as great as it once was. When it comes to a choice between accepting simplifications or salary cuts, purists are likely to become pragmatic!

Conclusion

For each negative, in my ten lessons, there are positive actions that can lead to a resolution. To recapitulate:

1. Media distortion of views? Send in corrections and clarifications.
2. Being ignored? Repeat views in as many settings as possible.
3. Expensive outlay? Engage in careful financial planning.
4. A steep learning curve? Keep an open mind and be ready to engage.
5. Underestimating time? Overestimate it.
6. Uncertainty about fees? Get advice.
7. Non-disclosure issues? Check in advance.
8. Legal issues? Check in advance.
9. Proposals rejected? Don't take it personally.
10. Simplification unappreciated? Explain the wider benefits.

None of the issues described in this paper should detract from the unquantifiable positives that accompany any effort towards public engagement. Even in the cases of failure, there is the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your best and not turned away, recognising that in some cases of potential public engagement, there are circumstances beyond the control of any linguist, no matter how well-meaning, that will prevent it taking place. But in cases of success – and they are by far the majority – there is an emotional sense of personal fulfilment that is just as strong as the intellectual gratification that accompanies the completion of any 'pure' linguistic analysis or description. Stronger even. I have before me a positive review of one of my linguistics books and a letter from a parent thanking me for helping their language-delayed child to improve. Which pleases me more? No contest.