

Saliency and accent revival in Liverpool

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Introduction

stigma

- Liverpool experienced severe economic decline in the 70's and 80's
- Liverpool English (Scouse) is well known and heavily stigmatised in the UK (cf. Montgomery 2007)
- "[R]egional dialect levelling is widespread in Britain" (Kerswill 2003)

Scouse should be levelling out, but:

- The last 20 years have seen urban regeneration and economic improvements (cf. Belchem 2006)
- Many Liverpoolians believe younger speakers "exaggerate it, (...) trying to be Uber-Scouse" (male, middle class, 59 years old)
- Watson (2007) has found some evidence supporting this claim

If younger speakers do indeed show a stronger preference for local speech forms, is this because the variables are less salient to them?

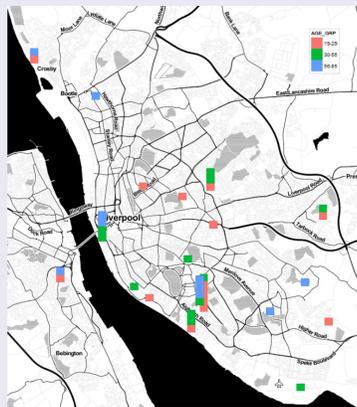
Method

participants

- 36 participants were interviewed one-on-one (18 included in this analysis, 12351 tokens)
- 3 age groups represented (19-29, 30-55, 56-85), balanced for gender and social class

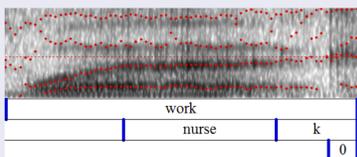
saliency

- 4 registers included: word list, reading, free speech, accent imitation/performance
- saliency measured through presence/absence of style-shifting and explicit comment (indicator, marker, stereotype; cf. Labov 1972)
- younger speakers are hypothesised to
 - (a) exhibit less style shifting and
 - (b) be less consciously aware of typical local features



measurement

- F1, F2, and F3 semi-automatically measured for vowels (happyY and NURSE) and normalised using the Bark-difference method
- Proportional duration of friction (PDF; cf. Sangster 2001) measured for the consonants (velar nasal plus and lenition of /k/); higher values indicate 'more Scouse' variants



Variables

vowels

happyY-tensing

final vowel in words of the happyY set is realised by a tense [i] instead of a lax [ɪ] (considered non-salient)

NURSE-SQUARE merger

fair and *fur* are (near-)homophones for many Liverpool speakers, realisation tends towards [ɛ] (considered highly salient)

consonants

velar nasal plus

<ng> is realised as [ŋg], so that *singer* rhymes with *finger* (considered non-salient)

lenition of /k/

/k/ is phonetically either an affricate [kx], or a fricative [ç, x] (considered highly salient)

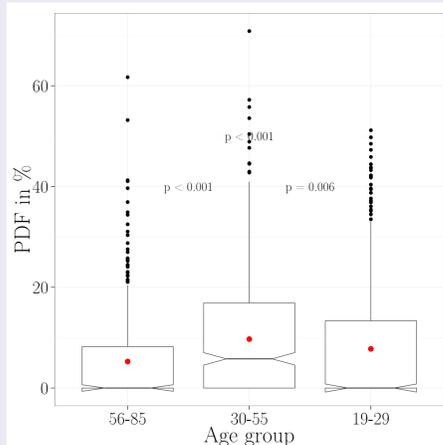
(cf. Trudgill 1999; Watson 2007)

Notes on results

- mixed linear effects models show that both gender and social class influence the usage of all variables investigated, but for reasons of space the focus here is on age
- all figures are designed in such a way that higher values

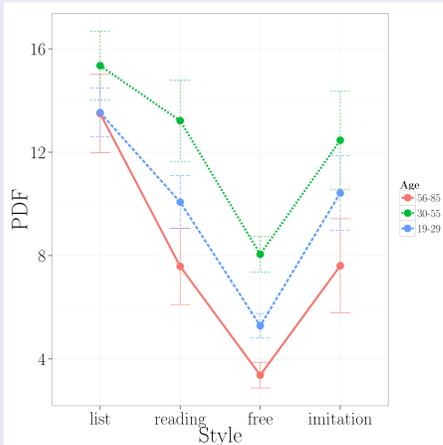
- on the y-axis represent 'more Scouse' realisations
- red dots in boxplots mark mean values
- p-values (left to right) indicate significance for old to middle, old to young, and middle to old group comparisons

velar nasal plus



(a) PDF of /ŋg/ by age

- increase in middle group, drop towards youngest
- mix of spelling pronunciation pattern and possibly some sub-conscious awareness association with Liverpool



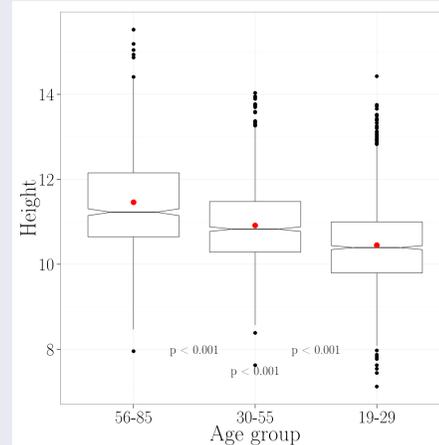
(b) PDF of /ŋg/ by style

- women have higher PDF values than men
- never mentioned as a typical feature
- probably an indicator in all age groups

References

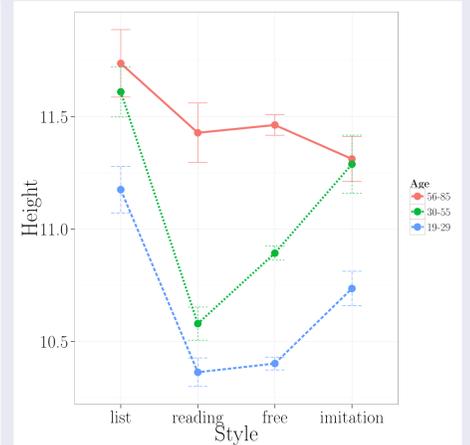
Belchem, John (2006) "Introduction: the new 'Liverpool'". *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism*. Second edition. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. xi-xxix.
 Flynn, Nicholas (2010) "Gender-based variation of word-final unstressed vowels by Nottingham adolescents". *Proceedings of the Second Summer School of Sociolinguistics*. The University of Edinburgh 14-20 June, 2010.
 Kerswill, Paul (2003) "Dialect levelling and geographical diffusion in British English". D. Britain and J. Cheshire (eds.) *Social Dialectology. In honour of Peter Trudgill*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 223-243.

happyY-tensing



(a) Vowel height by age

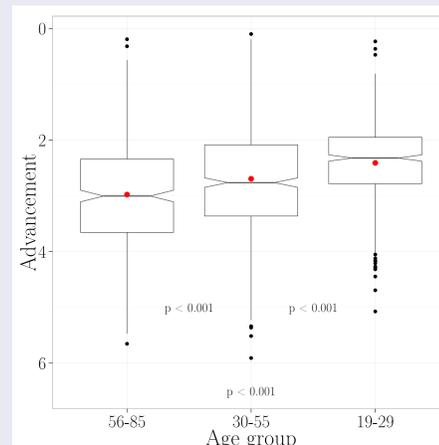
- significantly more centralised in youngest group
- development *away* both from Scouse and from RP
- women use slightly more tense variants
- signalling of 'Northern' identity? (cf. Flynn 2010)



(b) Vowel height by style

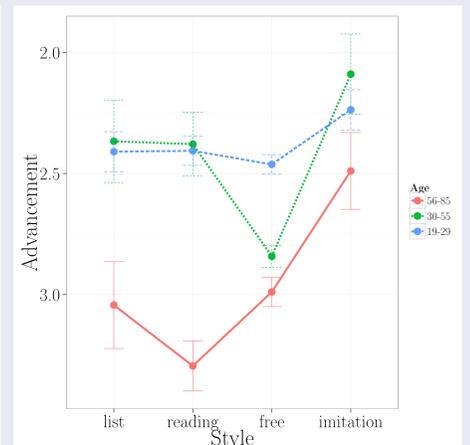
- not mentioned by a single subject, completely (?) below the radar
- somewhere between an indicator and a marker (especially in middle and young group)?

NURSE



(a) Vowel advancement by age

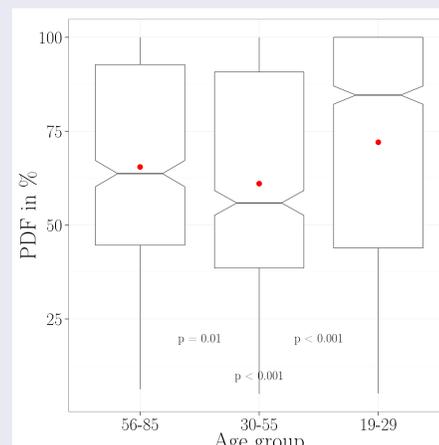
- significantly fronted in youngest group
- no style shifting in youngest group
- hypercorrection in middle group
- women have *more* advanced vowels, i.e. they are 'more Scouse' than men



(b) Vowel advancement by style

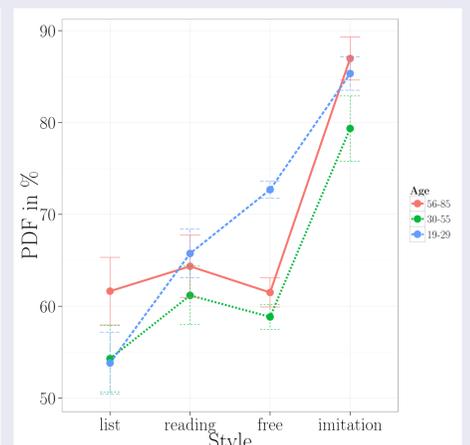
- known to about 40% of middle group, virtually unknown in the other groups
- marker in old and middle group, just indicator in youngest group

lenition of /k/



(a) PDF of /k/ by age

- youngest group significantly more Scouse than the other two
- most consistent style shifting in the young group
- women use lenition less than men



(b) PDF of /k/ by style

- lenition is more pronounced in intervocalic position (→ phonetically 'justified')
- linearly increasing conscious awareness through the age groups (to 100% for the youngest speakers)

Conclusions

- younger speakers are indeed 'Uber-Scouse', provided one looks at the features that are considered most typical
- increased usage of the local variant of NURSE could be explained by decreasing saliency
- awareness of /k/-lenition, on the other hand, is *increasing*; young Liverpoolians use this feature deliberately (?) and despite its stigmatisation to signal their local identity
- happyY is getting increasingly centralised, moving away from Scouse and RP

Changes in saliency could be one factor in explaining which Scouse features are being strengthened, but their usefulness in expressing a local and supra-local (Northern) identity seems to be just as or even more important.

