Liverpool English, spoken in the city of Liverpool and surrounding areas of Merseyside in North West England (Marotta & Barth, 2006), is claimed to have ‘ousted’ the traditional dialect of the Wirral (Knowles, 1973), an area bordering the city to the west. However, there appear to exist ‘different kinds of Merseyside Englishes’ (Grant, 2007, p.141) with subtle phonetic differences between them. This has previously been found in Liverpool’s border regions to the north and east (West, 2015; Clark and Watson, 2016), as well as the Wirral itself (Newbrook, 1999). The present paper examines potential differences between Liverpool and Wirral speech in terms of voice quality, specifically phonation (i.e. differences in glottal constriction). Liverpool and the Wirral contrast socially and economically, the Wirral being more rural and affluent than Liverpool. Liverpool too, being an urban centre has strong working-class associations, making its character quite distinct from the Wirral. Therefore, voice quality is examined here in relation to geographical and social identities.

Voice quality has been linked to social factors such as gender and class (e.g. Esling, 1978; Stuart-Smith, 1999). In British English varieties, pre-aspiration and breathy voice appear to be more common in the speech of females (e.g. Foulkes & Docherty, 1999; Stuart-Smith, 1999; Foulkes, Docherty & Watt, 2001) than males, whereas pre-glottalisation and creaky voice appear to be more common in the speech of males (Henton & Bladon, 1988; Foulkes & Docherty, 1999; Stuart-Smith, 1999). Rather than being purely physiologically determined, however, voice quality has been found to be used in identity work and stance taking (see Podesva & Callier, 2015 and Levon, 2016).

The principal objective of this research was to explore whether speakers from Liverpool and the Wirral differed in their relative use of pre-glottalisation (or ‘glottalization’, typically manifest as creaky voice on the preceding vowel, e.g. Roach, 1973; Chong & Garellek, 2018), and pre-aspiration (associated with breathy voice, e.g. Ni Chasaide, 1985). Pre-aspiration involves vocal fold abduction, pre-glottalisation requires adduction. The research examined the use of pre-glottalisation and pre-aspiration by 16 speakers from across the Wirral (n = 7, 4 females and 3 males) and Liverpool (n = 9, 6 females, 3 males). Both voice quality phenomena were explored in terms of their presence or absence at the end of vowels preceding word-final voiceless plosives (/t/ and /k/). All participants were in the final year of sixth form (aged 17-18) and were tested in their respective high-schools. Words were elicited in a word-list reading task, with target words being monosyllabic and CVC in form. On this basis, all inter-speaker variation was assumed to be geographically and socially determined.

Preliminary investigation of the results suggests that Liverpool speakers demonstrated greater use of pre-aspiration, Wirral speakers pre-glottalisation. The findings indicate that, for Merseyside speakers, geographical identity distinctions could potentially be manifest through differences in voice quality. The results will be explored further in the presentation, not just as a function of geography, but place identity, sex and social class.
References


