

# “There’s a line and Sheffield is in the North”: Chesterfield teenagers’ perceptions of the North-Midland divide in England.

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on data gathered from perceptual activities, this poster explores how teenage residents of Chesterfield (North East Derbyshire) present their regional identity. Due to Chesterfield’s administrative position as part of the East Midlands, Chesterfield teenagers are hypothesised to identify as Midlanders, perhaps having a stronger Midlander identity due to Chesterfield’s close proximity to the border with Yorkshire (Braber 2014). However, because of Chesterfield’s proximity to Sheffield, South Yorkshire, and being closer in distance to Sheffield than to its county capital, Derby, it is also possible that teenage residents align themselves more with Sheffield and the North (Llamas 2010: 228), especially given the Midlands’ relatively lacklustre reputation (Braber 2016) and Yorkshire’s stronger cultural prominence (Montgomery 2016).

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## INTRODUCTION

Chesterfield is a market town of 104,300 residents (2014). It is 28.7 miles away from its county capital, Derby, while only 12.5 miles from Sheffield, South Yorkshire. Despite the county boundary between Sheffield and Chesterfield, many Chesterfield locals are more familiar with Sheffield than Derby (pilot study, 2015). However, while some Chesterfield locals believe that Sheffield and Chesterfield accents are “virtually the same”, others state strongly that the Sheffield accent is markedly different (pilot study, 2015). My research aims to answer the following:

- 1) Do Chesterfield locals believe there is a North/Midland divide between Chesterfield and Sheffield;
- 2) Can Chesterfield locals identify local accents;
- 3) Is there a difference between Chesterfield and Sheffield accents?

## METHOD and RESULTS

Perceptual activities:

- 1) Draw a map task

Chesterfield teenagers were asked to draw one line if they think there is a north/south divide (see figure 1, made using ArcGIS 10.5.1).

They drew two lines if they believe in a north/south/midland divide.

= Line density/Heat maps show where Chesterfield teens place the Midlands region, with **73% of all respondents placing Chesterfield in the Midlands** while **61% place Sheffield in the North**.

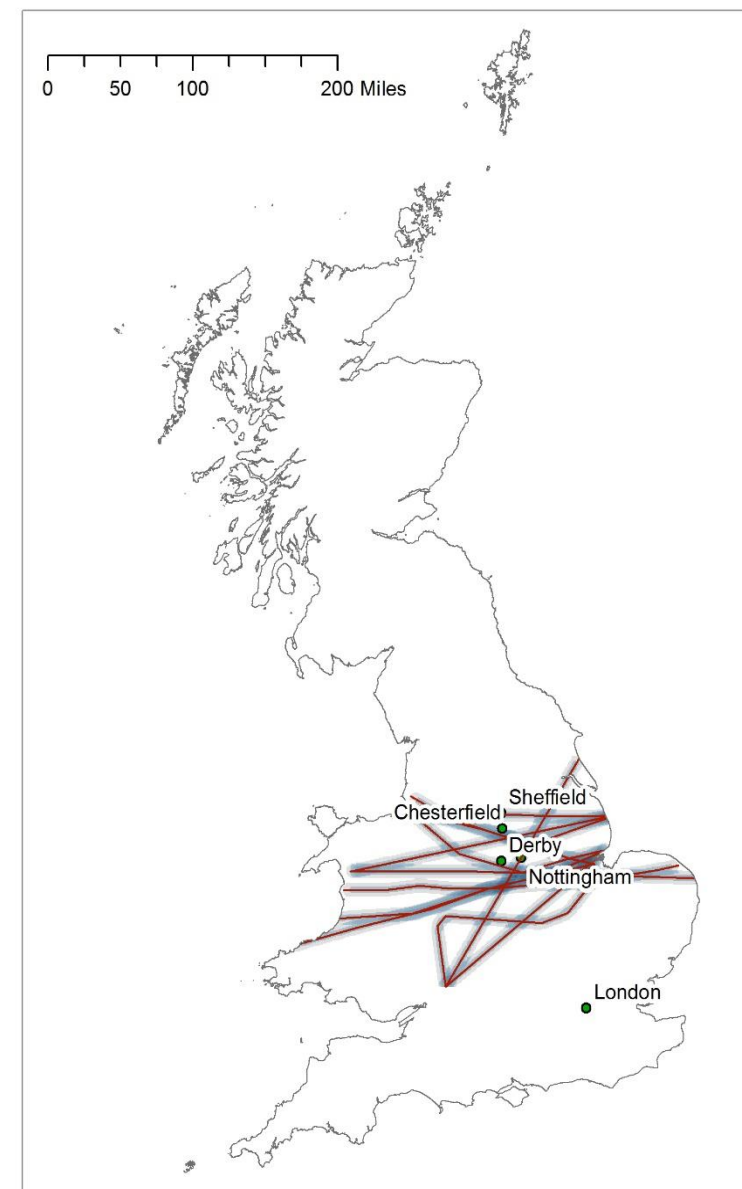


Figure 1: North/South Lines by Chesterfield teenagers  
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## 2) Dialect recognition tasks

Recordings of older males and younger females from Chesterfield, Sheffield, South Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire were played.

= **Sheffield** is the **most identifiable accent** to Chesterfield teenagers through variants of FACE and GOAT vowels (figure 2).

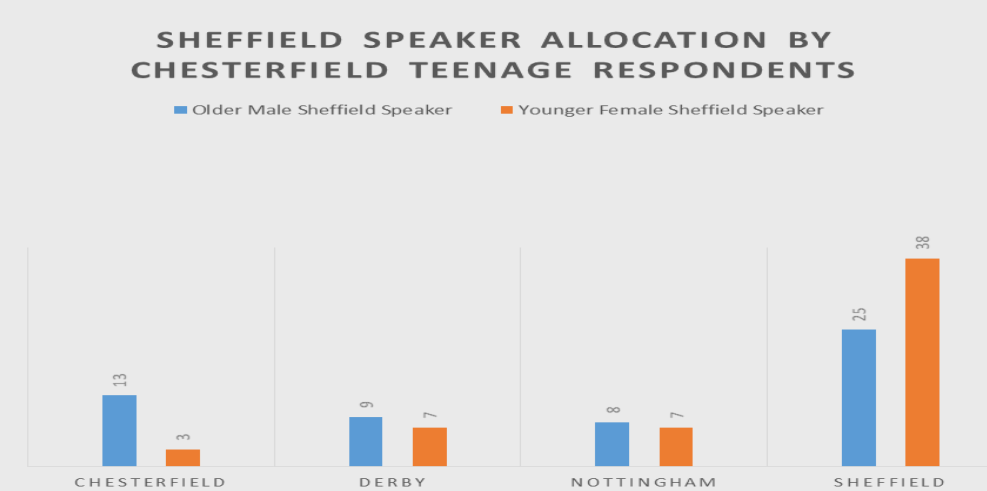


Figure 2: Sheffield speaker allocation by Chesterfield teenage respondents

The younger Sheffield female was the most accurately identified, with **69% of teenage participants recognising her accent**.

The Chesterfield teen audience recognise the incoming GOAT variant [e:], described by Finnegan (2011), as a Sheffield variant.

Comments about her voice include:

***She said “clurthes” instead of “clothes” and “windur” for “window.”***

## 3) Word list analysis

Initial analysis suggests that Chesterfield locals reject the Sheffield monophthongal variants of FACE and GOAT ([e:] and [ɔ:] respectively) in their own linguistic repertoire.

## DISCUSSION

South Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire accents may not be easily recognised because of their similarity to the Chesterfield voices. Flynn (2012: 421) questions whether there is a distinct East Midlands dialect area, calling for more perceptual research to be undertaken. The Sheffield voices in my sample maintain regionalisms. This, together with proximity and familiarity, make the Sheffield speakers most identifiable to the Chesterfield teenage audience.

## CONCLUSION

Despite perceptions of the North being “better” to many of my interviewees, who largely also consider Sheffield to be part of the North, Chesterfield teenagers seem to remain linguistically and ideologically rooted in the East Midlands.

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