100 years of Dialect Continuity and Change in Sheffield English

Project Outline

In the early stages of my PhD project, I have completed preparatory work to compile the Corpus of Sheffield Usage (CSU), based on archival dialect recordings. I have three research questions:

1. How have changes in the demographic structure of Sheffield affected the local dialect?
2. To what extent is the local dialect of Sheffield conditioned by social, geographical and/or economic factors?
3. How does individual place orientation and constructions of (local) identity influence Sheffield speakers’ use of local forms?

Sheffield has high levels of social disparity, manifested in an East/West split across the city. MC speakers reside in the West, and WC speakers live in the East. Finnegan (2011) demonstrated that this influenced linguistic variation.

Sheffield’s rapidly changing social landscape over the last century, with a shift from industrialization to the service sector and ‘eds and meds’ culture (Beal 2009), is also likely to have shaped the local dialect.

The Corpus of Sheffield Usage (CSU)

The CSU will be comprised of three sub-corpora:

1. Survey of Sheffield Usage (SSU) recordings from 1981
2. 1996-99 recordings (reported in Stoddart et al 1999)
3. 2020 data, to be collected next year

20 year time intervals will facilitate analysis of change over time.

Participants with varying social characteristics in each sub-corpora will enable investigation of how social factors (e.g. age/location/gender/social class) may influence linguistic variation in Sheffield.

Social class determined using the NS-SEC occupational categorization.

Close listening to each recording has allowed me to reassemble biographical information for each participant, as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Tape Number</th>
<th>Digitised</th>
<th>Year/No</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Social Class</th>
<th>Precise Age</th>
<th>Left Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Recording Quality</th>
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Methodology

Sociophonetic Analysis

Real and apparent time trend study, using forced alignment to perform quantitative sociophonetic analysis

Once the corpus is built in LaBB-CAT, I will use its integration with HTK to force-align each interview, and then export text-grids in Praat which I can use to check and hand-correct alignments.

I will then be able to perform searches for particular variants, such as those in the GOAT and FACE lexical sets, and extract formant measurements in Praat. This will allow me to quantify the sounds and measure changes over time.

Style and Stance

Once I have established patterns of change, I will code comments in conversations about locality for positive/negative alignments, (following Nycz 2018). This will permit me to examine style and stance and understand the social meanings of variation in Sheffield English, as well as how features might be used in acts of local identity construction.

Johanna Blakey

johanna.blakey@sheffield.ac.uk  https://steelsey.com/blog