100 years of Dialect Continuity and Change in Sheffield English

The University Of Sheffield.

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.
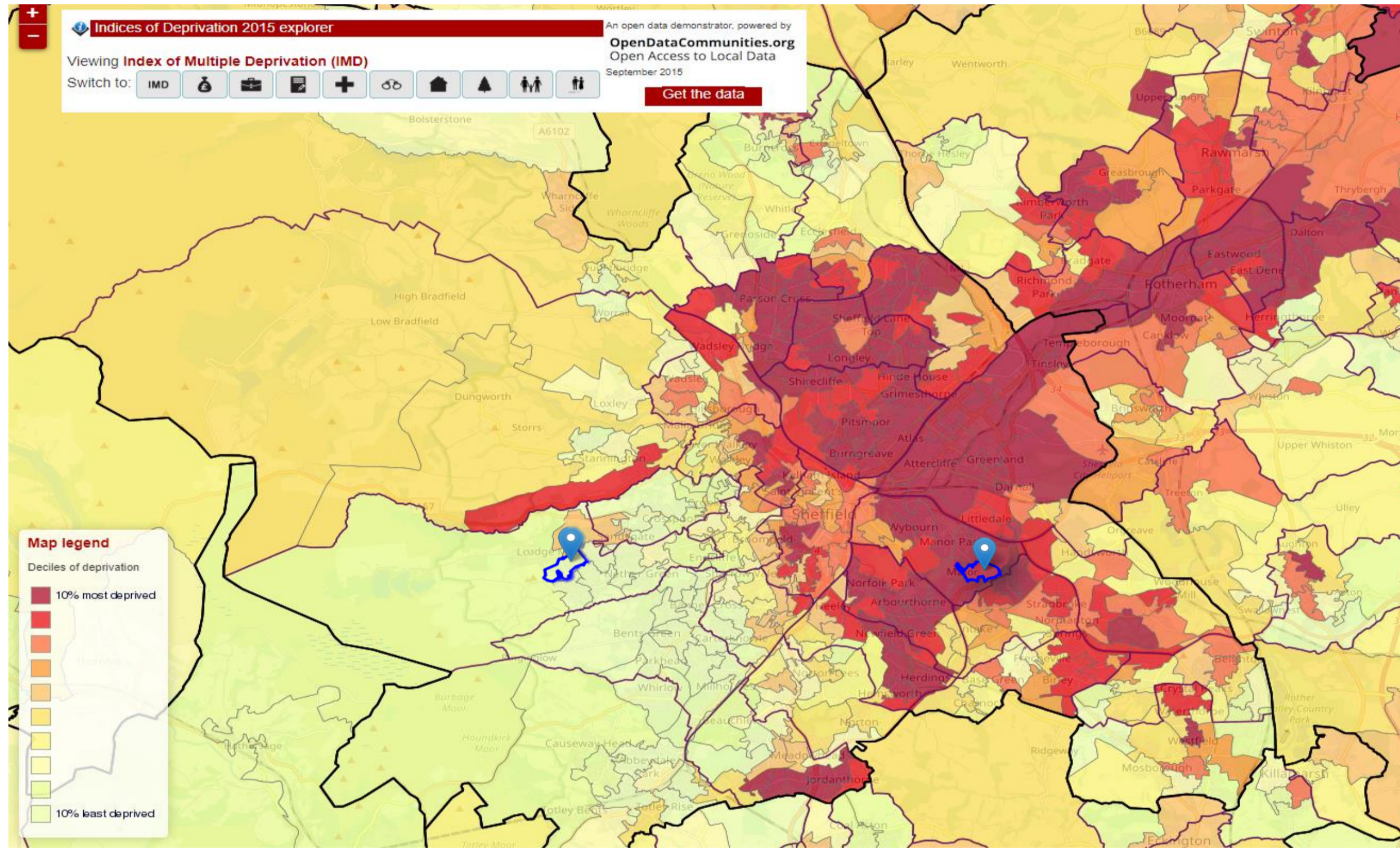
Map from the Government Indices of Deprivation, with the two pinned areas highlighting Sheffield wards that are in the top and bottom 1% of UK wards in terms of levels of deprivation.

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.

Johanna Blakey

johanna.blakey@sheffield.ac.uk   https://steelcityspiel.home.blog

Methodology

Map demonstrating the concentration of Sheffield speakers with Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations

Map demonstrating the concentration of Sheffield speakers with routine occupations

Map demonstrating the concentration of Sheffield speakers with level 4 qualifications and above

*Map demonstrating the distribution of speaker locations from the archived recordings in the CSU*

Sociophonetic Analysis

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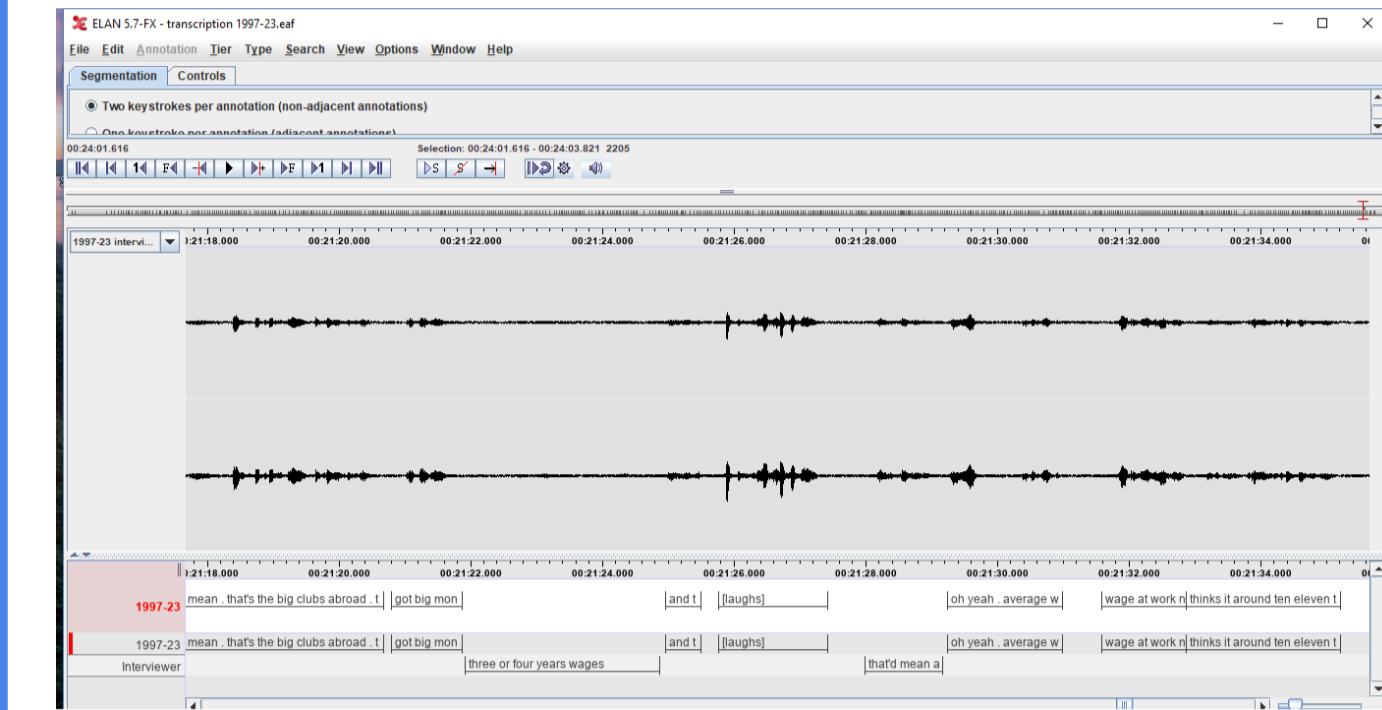

Time aligned transcription in ELAN with utterances segmented into breath-groups

Each interview will be transcribed in ELAN to create time-aligned transcriptions, then input into LaBB-CAT alongside WAV files.
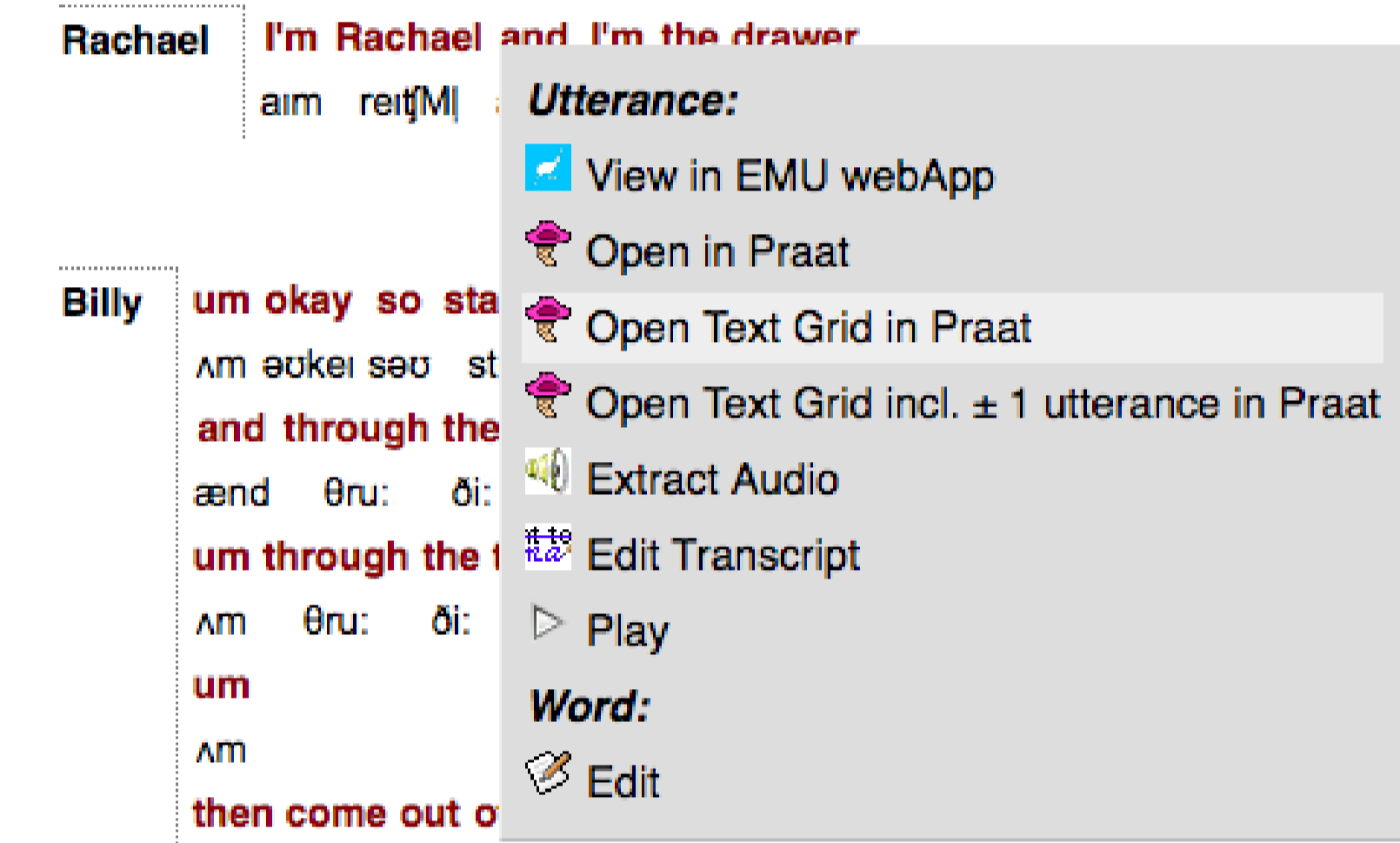
Force-aligned transcript with phonetic segment layer in LaBB-CAT

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.
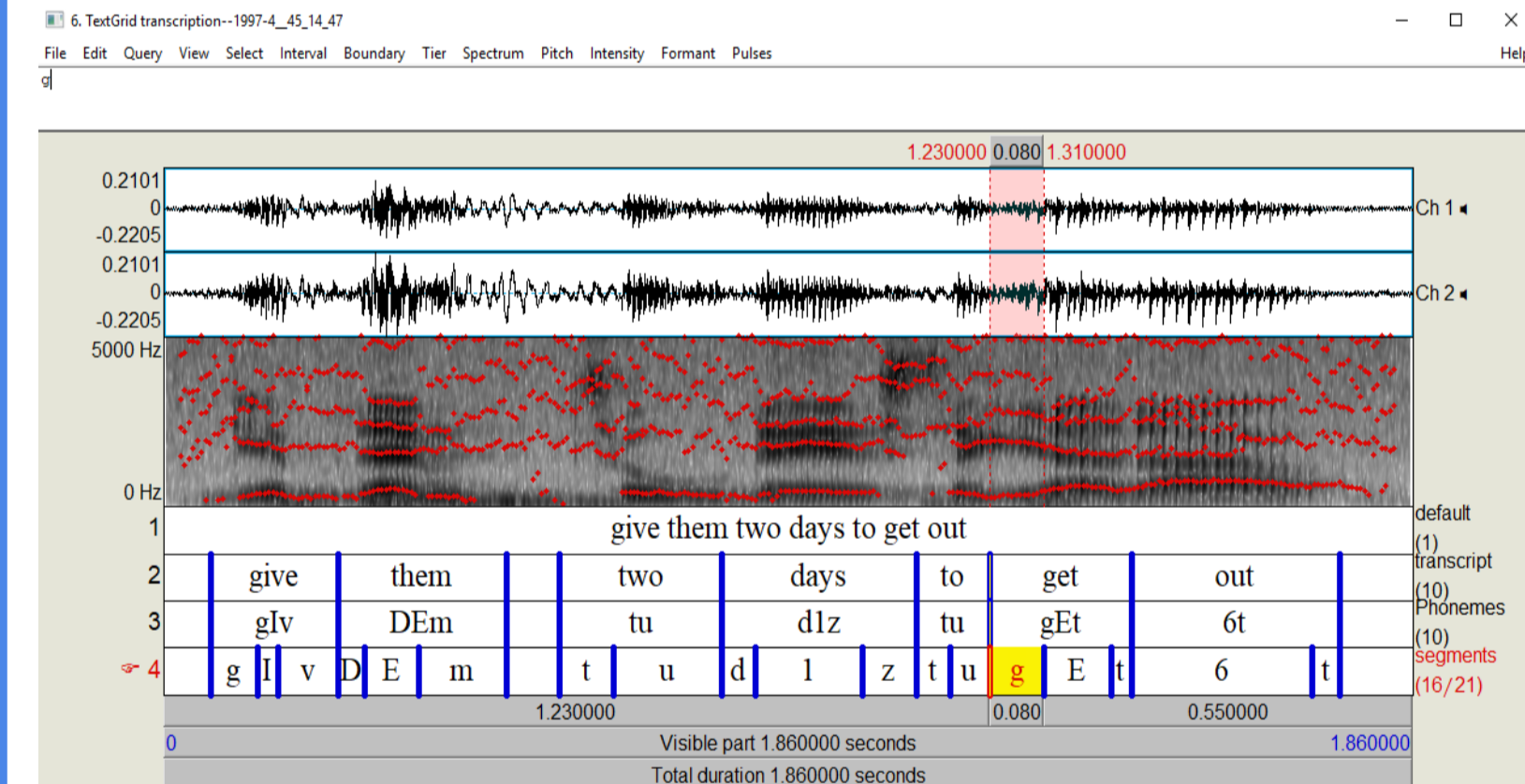
Text-grid in Praat window showing a force-aligned segmented and labelled speech utterance from a CSU recording

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.

Variation in the GOAT and FACE vowels has long been attested in Sheffield speech, as demonstrated in this summary table of variables cited over the past two centuries by Finnegan (2015:230)

Table 1. FACE and GOAT variants in the recorded history of Sheffield English

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.

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

c.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 reap biographical information for each participant, as follows:

Socio-demographics	SSU 1980		1999		2020
	n	Mean NS-SEC	n	Mean NS-SEC	n
Female Young	6	3.7	4	2	4
Male Young	4	4	4	5	4
Female Middle	9	4.1	7	4.3	4
Male Middle	14	3.4	4	4	4
Female Old	11	5.7	5	5.8	4
Male Old	7	4.6	6	4.2	4

Table demonstrating the number of interviewed participants in each broad social category from each time frame. 2020 interviews are yet to be collected.

Participant Number	Tape Number	Digitised Yes/No	Transcript Yes/No	Gender	Age group	Social class	Precise age	Left education	Occupation	Location	Born	Recording Quality	Notes

References

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