

PERCEPTIONS OF NORTH EAST SCOTTISH SPEECH

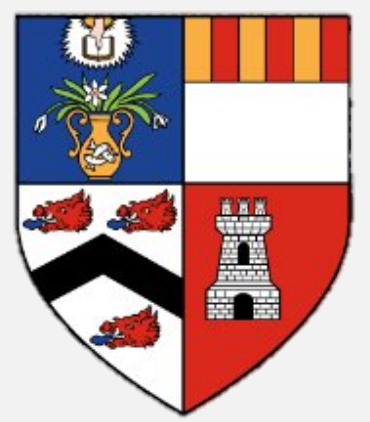
A perceptual dialectological study of intra-regional language attitudes.

Dawn Leslie

✉ r01dml16@abdn.ac.uk

🐦 @_DawnLeslie

🌐 www.dawnleslie.net



UNIVERSITY OF
ABERDEEN

INTRODUCTION

The North East of Scotland presents an interesting linguistic scenario: while the local dialect (often referred to as 'the Doric') is noticeably distinct from other dialects of Scots, intra-regional variation has also been perceived historically, with divisions noted between the rural 'fermfolk', the coastal 'fisherfolk', and those from the urban centre of Aberdeen.

However, the demographic and socio-economic status of the North East has experienced rapid change, and recent studies suggest that youngsters are less likely to speak the dialect as conservatively as previous generations. This study examines the impact this may have on perceived intra-regional linguistic divisions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do traditional intra-regional divisions still exist in the minds of younger speakers?
2. Is the 'Doric' dialect label still culturally salient for today's North East youngsters?
3. How do youngsters' perceptions of local speech relate to matters of local identity?

METHODOLOGY

Adapted from Preston (1999)'s five-point approach:

1. Draw-a-map of a) Scottish dialect areas b) NE intra-regional divisions*
2. Rank different parts of the NE according to their degree-of-difference
3. Rank different parts of the NE based on a series of evaluations
4. a) Listen to voices and identify their source location b) Rate voices based on a series of evaluations
5. Group conversations and open-ended survey questions



314 informants completed these tasks during fourteen interactive survey sessions at different locations across the region.

Informants were sorted into two age groups:

- 14-17 year olds
- 60 years old and over

*map data has not been included in the results of this presentation

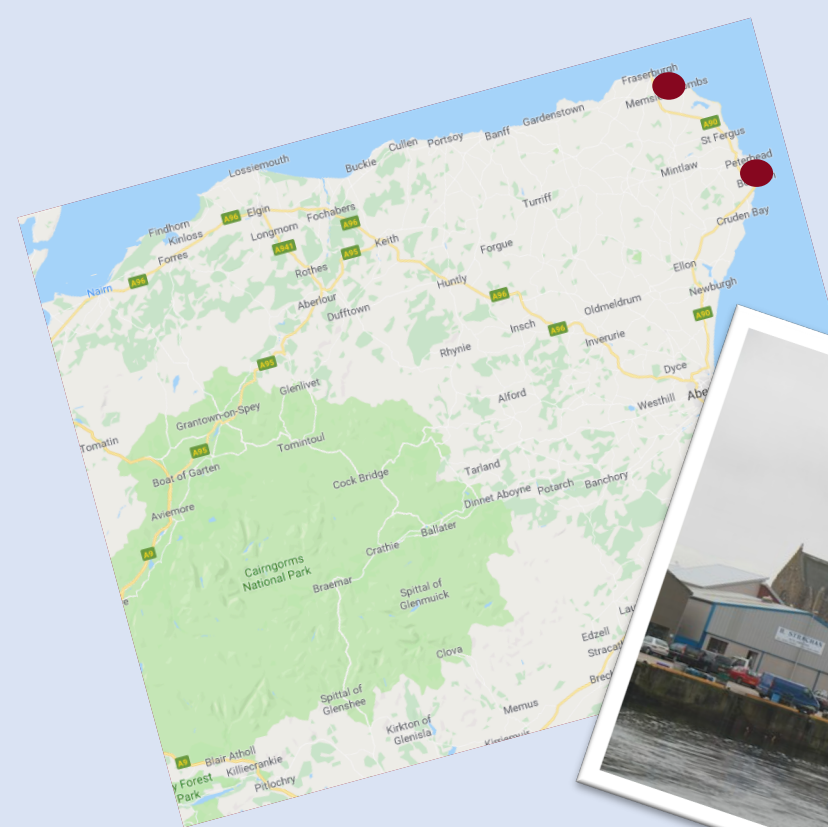
SOME RESULTS

THE 'DORIC' LABEL

- Offered by 42% of informants as an umbrella label for North East dialect.
- Slightly higher frequency in responses from younger informants than older informants, suggesting that it is firmly establishing itself as an umbrella term.
- Some older informants offered more localised terms, such as 'Buchan' – however, this label did not appear in younger informants' responses.

PERCEPTUAL 'OTHERING' OF PLACES

- Across all responses from all locations, there seems to be an 'othering' of the town of Fraserburgh (and, to a slightly lesser extent, its neighbour Peterhead).



- Speakers from these two towns are consistently perceptually rated as being the most unpleasant, least understandable and most 'Doric'.
- Interestingly, there is general unanimity about this amongst older and younger informants.
- Also, repeated qualitative comments such as *rough* suggest that the 'othering' of these places may not be due to purely linguistic factors.

DISTANCE VS. DIFFERENCE

- For Task 2 of the survey, informants were asked to consider their hometown as the 'centre of the universe' and to rate other North East locations according to the perceived 'degree-of-difference' of their speakers. Results showed that:

- Actual distance and perceived difference do not always correlate.

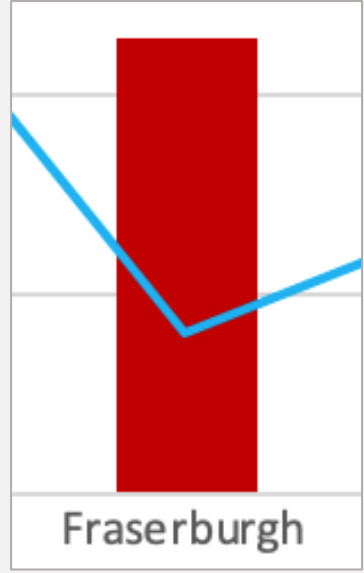
For example: older informants from the rural heartlands of Aberdeenshire rated the coastal communities of Peterhead and Fraserburgh, and also the city of Aberdeen, as being markedly 'different' despite their relative proximity.

- In locations where both younger and older informants were surveyed, younger informants perceived less 'difference' across the board.

For example: this was most noticeable in the degree-of-difference ratings for Aberdeen city offered by older vs. younger informants in Aberdeenshire. The perceptual rural/urban divide seems to have weakened somewhat in the minds of younger speakers.

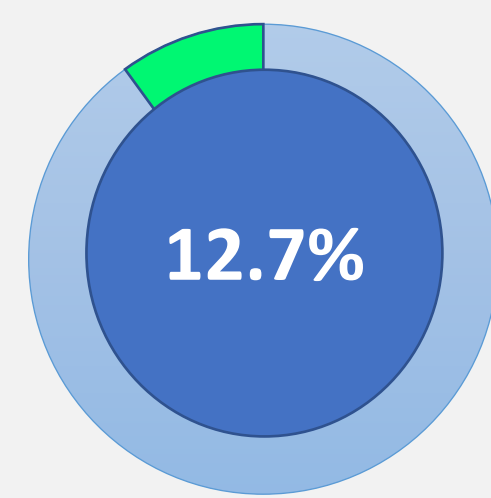
- Places 'closest to home' were often unexpectedly marked in terms of 'difference'.

For example: despite being only eight miles apart, the **degree-of-difference rating** afforded to Fraserburgh by Peterhead youngsters did not proportionately correspond with its **relative distance**.



NOT ALWAYS MATCHED WITH LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE

- Despite rating it so negatively in the place evaluation task, when informants were played a speech recording of a dialect speaker from Fraserburgh...



... only 12.7% of informants managed to place the voice within a 10mile radius of the correct location, making it the second most inaccurately identified speaker sample.

Younger informants recorded higher inaccuracy rates than their older counterparts when trying to place this voice, despite having such strong opinions about Fraserburgh in the previous task.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The lessening of the degree-of-difference intensity according to younger speakers may suggest a weakening of traditional intra-regional linguistic divisions as perceived by previous generations.
2. The Doric label is still salient for youngsters and seems to be accompanied by the rejection of other more localised terms. Again, this could suggest some degree of advancing homogeneity.
3. In terms of local identity, some prejudices still seem to garner consensus (such as the negative rating of Fraserburgh), even if they are no longer necessarily grounded in actual linguistic knowledge.

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