

Salience and the sociolinguistics of Scouse spelling

Exploring the phonology of the Contemporary Humorous Localised Dialect Literature of Liverpool*

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In this article we investigate a phenomenon in which non-standard spelling is normal in professionally produced, published English. Specifically, we discuss the literary genre of *Contemporary Humorous Localised Dialect Literature* (CHLDL), in which semi-phonological spellings are used to represent aspects of non-standard varieties. Our aims are twofold: 1) we provide, by example, a framework for the quantitative analysis of such types of dialect orthography, which treats respellings as linguistic variables, and 2) we argue that this type of quantitative analysis of CHLDL can shed light on which phonological features are sociolinguistically salient in a given variety, as long as we bear in mind both what is possible orthographically and the phonological status of the dialect features involved. We explore these issues by investigating a corpus of ‘folk phrase-books’ which represent the variety of English spoken in Liverpool (Scouse), in the north-west of England.

Keywords: dialect spelling, orthography, Liverpool English, Scouse, sociolinguistic salience, phonological salience

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1. Introduction

In this paper, we investigate a phenomenon in which non-standard spelling is normal in professionally produced, published English. Specifically, we discuss a literary genre — which we label *Contemporary Humorous Localised Dialect Literature* (CHLDL) — in which attempts are made to use non-standard spellings to represent the phonology of non-standard varieties. Unlike ‘traditional’ dialect literature, there has been little linguistic investigation of this genre of dialect writing, despite the fact that it is popular throughout Britain and the United States (and doubtless elsewhere, too). When material of this type has been considered by linguists, it has often been criticised or dismissed, in part because of its light-hearted nature and subjective approach to the representation of linguistic detail. Preston (2000: 614), for example, criticises similar spellings because “the speaker so represented [is] demoted in social status, intelligence, [and] sophistication”. In this paper, we argue that such writing is of inherent interest as a genre of dialect literature in itself, and also that it can have real (socio)linguistic value, which has previously been overlooked. Our basic position on this point is that if orthography is conceived as a social practice in which spelling choices are the result of an author’s meaningful decisions (Sebba 2007), then any respellings of the kind found in CHLDL have the potential to shed light on which particular linguistic features are salient to the speakers of a given community, perhaps even to the extent that this leads to, or at least reflects, those features being “enregistered” in the dialect (Agha 2003; Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson 2006). The features in question need to be understood in their proper linguistic light — as we deal here purely with spelling and pronunciation, this involves a consideration of the features’ phonological characteristics. Our approach opens up a range of issues for consideration in connection with CHLDL, such as the notion of sociolinguistic salience, and the ways in which linguists can tap into the relative salience of specific linguistic variables.

We explore these issues by investigating a newly compiled corpus of ‘folk phrasebooks’, which attempt to represent the variety of English spoken in Liverpool, in the north-west of England. This particular variety, popularly called ‘Scouse’, is well-known in England — in part, perhaps, because it has a number of phonological features which distinguish it from nearby accents (Knowles 1973; Honeybone 2001; Watson 2007a), due to its origins as a new-dialect (in the sense of Trudgill 1986, 2004; Honeybone 2007), and also because it is a stigmatised variety which usually does badly in studies of sociolinguistic prestige (Coupland and Bishop 2007; Montgomery 2007). However, while we know that a Scouse accent is stigmatised as a whole, we know little about which of its phonological features in particular contribute to that stigma. We show how CHLDL can contribute to a discussion of this issue.

The paper is structured as follows. In Section 2 we examine how linguists have engaged with the notion of linguistic salience. In Section 3 we show how an analysis of non-standard spellings can contribute to this discussion, considering some general issues that arise in the interpretation of dialect orthography, and invoking a recent sociolinguistic approach to orthography which treats spelling as a social practice and which predicts that an examination of orthographic practices in popular dialect writing can help us identify which linguistic features are sociolinguistically salient. After describing our methodology in Section 4, we test the validity of this prediction in Sections 5 and 6, using our corpus of Liverpool CHLDL. We first describe the main characteristic phonological features of Liverpool's English and then examine which of these features are represented in the corpus. Our analysis differs from most similar existing work on CHLDL or similar texts (Schneider 1986; Beal 2000, 2009; Johnstone 2009; Bennett 2012) in that our methodology treats the spelling variants as variables in the sense of Labov (e.g. 1972), and thus allows for a quantitative analysis of the variation. In connection with this, we argue, at various points in the paper, for a number of methodological practices and conceptual distinctions which are necessary for the analysis of dialect spelling, many of which build on previous work on dialect literature.

As a result of our analysis, we argue that we are able to shed light on relative differences between the representations of different phonological variables, once the general limits of orthography and an understanding of phonology are taken into account. It is by doing this, we argue in Sections 6 and 7, that this particular kind of dialect literature becomes a valuable linguistic resource.

2. Salience, sociolinguistics and phonology

We know from work within the paradigms of folk linguistics and perceptual dialectology that non-linguists' opinions about regional varieties of language are often surprisingly uniform (see e.g. Preston 1999; Niedzielski and Preston 2003; Montgomery 2007). Montgomery (2007) shows that in the UK the accent of Liverpool is not only the one that is identified most often, but is also amongst the most negatively stereotyped. Liverpool's linguistic stigma has been noted in other work over more than three decades (e.g. Giles and Powesland 1975; Coupland and Bishop 2007) and it is partly its stigma, Montgomery (2007:254) argues, which helps to explain the consistencies in informants' identification of the variety. However, while we can be fairly certain that Liverpool English is recognised more consistently than most other varieties, at least by British listeners, much less is known about how its linguistic features contribute to its salience. Indeed, this is true for English varieties in general — we know relatively little from language

attitude research about which specific linguistic features listeners tune into when asked to identify or otherwise react to linguistic varieties.

This is not a trivial matter, because the salience of linguistic features, and the social values that can be attached to salient features, are often invoked in linguistic studies. Salience has been used, for example, in the explanation of language change (see e.g. Trudgill 1986 for an overview, and also Kerswill and Williams 2002). To explain certain vowel changes in Newcastle, for instance, Watt (1998) posits that it is young speakers' desire to sound modern which underlies their recessive use of a regionally restricted variant, and encourages its replacement with another, geographically more widespread form. This reasoning implies that those linguistic features that are undergoing change must be salient to the people involved.

In sociolinguistics, salience is often operationalised in terms of Labov's (1972) well-known continuum of *indicators* (least salient) > *markers* > *stereotypes* (most salient), or Silverstein's (e.g. 2003) "orders of indexicality", where higher orders of indexicality are increasingly salient. The difference between the steps in such continua is typically described in terms of listeners' social evaluation of and commentary on the features in question. For example, in Labov's terminology, while features classified as markers and those classified as stereotypes would each be noticed by listeners, stereotypes are the more salient because they attract overt social commentary.

Precisely which factors contribute to the salience of linguistic features is a matter of debate, but it is common to see lists of criteria which, if met, predict that a given linguistic feature is likely to be salient. Trudgill (1986: 11) offers four, arguing that greater awareness is likely to be attached to linguistic forms which 1) are involved in linguistic change, 2) have variants which are phonetically radically different, 3) are involved in the maintenance of phonological contrast, and 4) are overtly stigmatised, often because there is a high status variant and this variant tallies with the orthography.

Criteria like these offer important insights, some of which we build on below, but they are also not without problems. The first criterion, for example, is open to the criticism of circularity: if salience is to be used as an explanation for language change, then change cannot be used as a condition for salience (Kerswill and Williams 2002). The second, which requires a decision to be made about exactly what counts as 'phonetically radically different', relies on rather subjective decision making (Watson and Clark 2013); there is no independently agreed measure of phonetic distance, although it seems intuitively reasonable that speakers can be aware of different degrees of difference.

The third criterion, which posits that a feature is likely to be salient if it is involved in the expression of a phonological contrast, directs our attention to the phonological status of the linguistic features in question, and to what we might call

‘phonological salience’. Trudgill’s focus on contrast is understandable, and tends towards the objective — speakers are able to intuit about segmental contrasts, so we can check which features are predicted to be salient on this criterion — but phonological salience is more complex than this. Phonological phenomena can have a range of types of status, and we might expect this to lead to differing degrees of salience.

Since contrast is the primary way in which speakers have conscious access to phonology, we might indeed expect speakers to be aware of this sort of phonological phenomena, both in terms of the set of underlying contrasts that make up their own dialect and in terms of the differences between two varieties’ sets of contrasts — what Wells (1982) calls a “systemic difference” between dialects (following others, such as Trubetzkoy 1931). A well-known example of a systemic difference is that most varieties of English have a contrast between /ʊ/ and /ʌ/ as in *put* / FOOT and *putt* / STRUT, but varieties from the north of England lack /ʌ/ and thus have one less contrast, with /ʊ/ in both lexical sets.¹ We might expect, then, that speakers are aware of this sort of difference. As well as systemic differences, it is possible for dialects to have the same number of contrasts, but to have different context-free realisations of the segments involved. An example can be found with the FACE and GOAT lexical sets, which can have monophthongs, closing diphthongs, or centring diphthongs in British varieties of English, but rarely merge with other categories. It is not immediately obvious whether these types of difference should be phonologically salient — as they involve the same number of contrasts, we might expect not; on the other hand, if we take Trudgill’s second criterion into consideration, then we might predict that such differences should be salient if the segmental realisations in two dialects are sufficiently phonetically different.

The degree of salience expected of systemic differences is also not necessarily to be assumed for dialects’ inventories of phonological processes, or for differences between dialects at this level. Phonological processes have often been called ‘phonological rules’, and are typically understood as conventions of realising underlying segments in specific phonological environments. Dialects can either share the same processes, have similar processes with slightly different patterning (as in stop glottalisation, where underlying /p, t, k/ are realised as [pʔ, tʔ, kʔ], which is found in many varieties of British English with the coda as its environment, but can also occur in foot-internal environments in accents from north-eastern England), or can differ in terms of the presence *vs.* absence of a process (as in rhymal *l*-darkening, which is present in many dialects of British English, but is absent in north-eastern English and accents from Wales, for example). Some phonological processes may

1. We refer to vocalic phonological variables / features wherever relevant using Wells’ (1982) lexical sets, identified by SMALL CAPITALS.

neutralise underlying contrasts (as in final obstruent devoicing in German and other languages, for example), but this affects surface contrasts, so speakers may be less aware of such processes than they are of sets of underlying contrasts.

Since phonological processes are different from contrasts, the prediction is that speakers are less likely to be aware of them. However, it may be too simplistic to assume that all processes have the same potential for salience. Phonological theory has long recognised that there may be different types of phonological process. Coetzee and Pater (2011), for example, differentiate between ‘early phonology’ and ‘late phonology’, each with different properties. In the model of Lexical Phonology (which can also be called Stratal Phonology — see Kiparsky 1982; Bermúdez-Otero *fc.*) this is seen as a difference between lexical and postlexical rules. Kiparsky (1988), McMahon (1994, 2000) and Coetzee and Pater (2011), among others, discuss the differences in properties expected of such different types of processes. For example, ‘early’ processes may have exceptions and morphological conditioning, and typically derive segments which also exist underlyingly (a property often known as ‘structure preservation’); a classic example is trisyllabic laxing, which has exceptions (e.g. *obesity*), is word-bounded, and derives segments which also occur in underlying representations. ‘Late’ processes, on the other hand, are exceptionless, can occur across word boundaries and need not be structure-preserving; a classic example is flapping, which has all these properties, deriving [ɾ], which does not exist in underlying forms. McMahon (1994, 2000) writes that lexical rules (‘early’ processes) are more likely to be observable by speakers, while speakers are more likely to be unaware of the existence of postlexical rules (‘late’ processes).

All this means that while we might expect systemic differences to have more potential for salience than realisational differences, in line with Trudgill’s claim, we might also expect ‘early’ phonological processes to be more likely to be salient than ‘late’ realisational processes. This is rarely acknowledged in discussions of sociolinguistic salience, and is a point to which we return below.

Trudgill’s fourth criterion for salience — that a variable is likely to be salient if it has a variant which is overtly stigmatised and if the prestige form is represented in orthography — is an intriguing combination of two somewhat different factors which need to be unpacked. Trudgill (1986: 11) offers *h*-dropping and the realisation of (ING) as [ɪŋ] or [ɪn] as examples of features which become salient at least in part because of these factors. It should be kept in mind that it is not always straightforward to decide whether the high-status variant is, or even can be, reflected in orthography. It may be possible for a feature like *h*-dropping, because /h/ is simply spelled as <h> in Standard English writing and <h> can easily be omitted, but the situation is less clear for (ING), where it might be argued that the Standard English spelling <ing> does not unambiguously represent the pro-

nunciation [ɪŋ]. Moreover, certain differences between dialects, as we discuss in Section 3, are simply not representable in writing at all.

A further problem with this criterion is that it is difficult to know for sure whether a particular variant is stigmatised, even if it is relatively straightforward to discover how listeners socially evaluate whole accents. Because non-linguists often lack the necessary metalanguage to be able to talk about such things, they are often unable to comment directly on particular linguistic features. Montgomery (2007) shows that when speakers are asked to provide such commentary, they offer non-linguistic characteristics over linguistic ones, and even when linguistic characteristics are noted, they are restricted to a small set of lexical features, including some dialect words, or are prosodic in nature (e.g. a variety is 'slow' or 'sing-song').

Despite this, recent experimental work has successfully shown that speakers do react to single features. Using acoustically manipulated stimuli, Campbell-Kibler (2008, 2009) and Labov *et al.* (2011) demonstrate that listeners react to non-standard pronunciations of (ɪŋɡ), claimed by Trudgill to be salient above, and Watson and Clark (2013) show that listeners in the north-west of England react to the merger between NURSE and SQUARE (see Section 4.1 for further discussion of this feature). More of this sort of work would undoubtedly shed further light on the salience of particular linguistic features, but the picture so far has been masked because, often, just one variable is examined at a time. This is understandable, even necessary, since we need a way of controlling the data so that we can be sure about what listeners are reacting to. This is difficult when examining a stream of spoken language, given the ubiquity of potential cues. A consequence of considering only one variable at a time is that we are unable to uncover the relative salience of a number of linguistic features in a given dialect; it is important that we try to understand the relative salience of features, however, because salience is not an 'all or nothing' matter.

We have seen in this section that it is not easy to identify the salience of particular phonological dialect features. A range of factors have been invoked in previous literature, under the headings of 'sociolinguistic salience' and 'phonological salience'. We consider a further factor in Section 5 — that of the localisedness of a dialect feature, and we should note here that other properties have also been hypothesised to increase the salience potential of a linguistic form, including 1) frequency of occurrence (Bardovi-Harlig 1987 suggests that forms which occur frequently are more likely to be salient, for example), and 2) prosodic prominence (Yaeger-Dror 1993 argues that forms which are in prosodically strong positions, such as word initial position, are salient). We lack the space here to consider other such criteria in detail, although it is clearly possible for them to influence the salience of dialect features.

If we hope to understand the features of varieties, and the role they play in identifying these varieties, we will need to try to tease apart how these factors interact in characterising particular dialect features. We argue below that we need to grapple with these issues (contrasts *vs.* processes and ‘structure-preserving’ *vs.* ‘non-structure-preserving’ processes, for example) in order to understand the spelling practices found in CHLDL.

3. The sociolinguistics of orthography

Although spelling ‘mistakes’ are often taken to be indicative of a writer’s lack of education and intelligence (Carney 1994:79), not all spellings which deviate from the conventions of the standard / reference system are unintentional. In 2007, for instance, the UK *Guardian* newspaper ran the following headline: “Undergraduates are let down by week spelling”. Here, the word *weak* is deliberately written as <week> to allow the writer to make a point. This possibility for variation is permitted by the English spelling system: <ea> and <ee> are both possible spellings of the same phonological form, /i:/, even though only one spelling is ‘correct’ in any given context. This sort of intentional orthographic variation offers the potential for certain spellings to ‘mean something’. To account for this, it has been argued that understanding how spelling works requires a social practice account (Sebba 2007, 2009; see also e.g. Scribner and Cole 1981 and Street 1984 for connected discussion). Such an account treats spelling not as something that is correct or incorrect, but essentially as a social act, a “widespread and recurrent activity which involves members of a community in making meaningful choices” (Sebba 2007:31). That is, although English orthography is standardised, and has been for centuries, variation is still possible, and this variation allows for orthography to be imbued with social meaning. There are long traditions of exploiting this potential, for example in ‘traditional dialect literature’, by which we mean texts “composed wholly (sometimes partly) in a non-standard dialect, and aimed essentially, though not exclusively at a non-standard-dialect readership” (Shorrocks 1996:386), which are typically seen as a ‘serious’ or ‘high’ literary form, stretching back to the mid-18th and especially 19th centuries, and also in ‘literary dialect’, by which we mean “the representation of non-standard speech in literature that is otherwise written in Standard English (for instance, some of the dialogue in the works of such writers as Eliot, Dickens and Hardy) and aimed at a general readership” (Shorrocks 1996:386). In the rest of this section, we consider some general principles for the analysis of dialect spelling, as CHLDL has much in common with the genres just mentioned, and these principles are the fundament from which our analysis of CHLDL has grown.

3.1 Orthographic variation, social meaning and conventions in dialect literature

Sebba (2007) illustrates a number of different sources of spelling variation, describing how orthographic conventions can be broken in order to achieve particular effects. One such source is “using sound-symbol correspondences which are conventional for the language, but are the ‘wrong’ ones for the particular word” (Sebba 2007: 34). The substitution of <weak> with <week>, in the newspaper headline above is an example of this, and Sebba (2007: 34) provides many others, such as the spelling of *thought* as <thort> and *was* as <woz>. These types of respellings, which are normally known as “eye-dialect” (Krapp 1926; Preston 1982), and have been called “grapheme substitutions” (Androutsopoulos 2000: 522), are phonologically unmotivated, giving the impression of non-standardness but not providing any linguistic detail (see also Preston 2000). Such spellings are not an attempt to represent non-standard pronunciations in written form — they simply make use of a language’s accepted sound-spelling correspondences in an unconventional way, to represent a pronunciation which is widespread in the area where the text is produced, and also found in the relevant standard / reference accent. Such eye-dialect forms are common in much dialect literature, as is the representation of connected speech phenomena, using what have been called “allegro” (Preston 1982) spellings such as writing *because* as <coz> or *salt and pepper* as <salt n pepper>. The pronunciations represented by allegro spellings are present in both standard and non-standard varieties in spoken language, so they are much like eye-dialect in conception. Both eye dialect and allegro spellings have been claimed to cause readers to stigmatise both the language itself and the person they imagine is responsible for producing it (Preston 1985, 2000: 616; see also Jaffe and Walton 2000). These effects can be used by writers deliberately, however, to portray particular personae, and do not always have this negative effect or intent (see e.g. Sebba 1998; Hinrichs and White-Sustaita 2011). Such respellings are, on this view, socially meaningful.

Another way in which orthography is often changed in the type of texts considered here is what we call ‘forced lexical reanalysis’. This is not as common as eye-dialect because it involves a conscious creative act in playing around with words and their spelling for humorous effect, rather than just relying on conventional correspondences between graphemes and phonological entities. Forced lexical reanalysis involves a punning misparsing of the words of a phrase so that they are respelled as other existing words (or pseudo-words), often after connected speech phenomena have applied, and taking advantage of homophony (or near homophony). They are intended as jokes and the phonology of the original may not be fully

respected — getting the humorous effect is more important. Examples include <Chuck Doubt> for *chucked out* and <Jamaica> for *did you make her*.

Recognising respellings of the eye-dialect, allegro and forced lexical reanalysis types is important for our purposes, as they need to be identified and set aside, because they do not represent anything specific to the variety in question.² Our final type of orthographic strategy, which has been called “regiolectal spelling” (Androutsopoulos 2000), truly attempts to represent regional, dialect-specific features. Early examples from dialect literature representing the traditional dialect of the north-east of England (often called ‘Geordie’), for example, are found in Wilson (1867), who uses the spelling <ye> in <cabinet-myeker> for *cabinet-maker* to accurately illustrate that the FACE vowel is [ɪə], and the spelling <oo> in <toon> for *town* to illustrate that the MOUTH vowel in that traditional dialect is [u:] — spellings like these are common in material aiming to represent dialects from the north-east of England, where /u:/ did not diphthongise in the traditional dialects (see Beal 2000).³ These examples raise two points which are not always made explicit in the consideration of such material: 1) regiolect / dialect spellings of this sort typically rely on or work with *differences* between the dialect to be represented and a standard / reference variety, and 2) English dialect literature is largely both constrained and enabled by the graphological-to-phonological correspondences of Standard English. In terms of 2), authors and readers of such texts from England all know the standard spelling and (at least in the contemporary period) all have some awareness of the graphological-to-phonological correspondences of RP (or something similar). Devising spelling for such work is not like devising an orthography for an unwritten language (when latinate values of letters might be expected). Thus, in principle <oo> is no better a spelling for [u:] than is <ow> (<ow> is itself a variant of <ou>, which was widely used to spell [u:] in Middle English, under French influence), and <ow> could perfectly well stand for [u:] when spelling Geordie — indeed, while <ow> does not currently represent [u:] in Standard English, <ou> does so in *acoustic, group, soup, etc.* However, of course, <oo> works well as a spelling for [u:] given the correspondence in the relevant

2. This is not always straightforward, and often requires a prior understanding of the variety in question. As Trudgill (1999b), for example, clearly shows, spellings which are intended for ‘insiders’ who know the dialect well are not always readily interpretable by ‘outsiders’ who do not know the dialect. This could have an impact on the spelling practices adopted by a CHLDL author if the texts are intended to be sold to non-native speakers, and certainly requires care from the analyst when working out how such spellings should be interpreted.

3. For connected discussion see Trudgill (1999b) who argues that the <oo> = [u:] convention is inappropriate for Norfolk traditional dialect orthography (even though some spellings recently suggested for the variety have used it).

standard / reference variety of English (as in words like *food*, *shoot*). In terms of 1), although <ow> *could* stand for [u:], Wilson (1867) uses the spelling <oo> in *toon* to draw attention to the fact that Geordie *differs* from the standard / reference variety of English in this respect.

Spellings of this sort are common in traditional dialect literature from the 18th and 19th century. Such work is often taken seriously (perhaps because of its age), being seen as valuable, legitimate, and a form of 'high' literature (see, among much else, Malham-Dembleby 1912). Moreover, because this particular genre of writing actively attempts to represent regional features, its linguistic potential has long been recognised, such that traditional dialect literature is often seen as an acceptable source of data with which to examine the characteristics of (past stages of) regional varieties (see e.g. Blake 1981; Taavitsainen, Melchers and Pahta 1999; Trudgill 1999a). Regiolectal spellings are also used in literary dialect, for example in the work of Dickens, representing Lancashire in *Hard Times* (see Poussa 1999), Lawrence, representing the English East Midlands in *Sons and Lovers* (Reitz 1992), and Hardy, representing Dorset in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (Taylor 1993). While it is clear that attempts are made in these works to represent particular regional features, the respelling is often inconsistent because the writer is typically striving for an overall artistic effect rather than for linguistic accuracy. Agha (2003), for example, shows that in the direct speech of one of the characters in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, *h*-dropping is represented in spelling in only a few carefully selected words, and not in all places in which /h/ would be dropped. Although the literary effects of such respellings in literary dialect are widely discussed (in the literature cited above and elsewhere), the fact that it is thought to represent regional features unsystematically has meant that it is not always afforded the same respect by linguists as traditional dialect literature. Balhorn (1998), for example, argues that dialect spellings in literary fiction perform only an indexical function and say little about the linguistic system they are trying to represent. However, when regiolectal spellings in such literature have been subject to systematic, quantitative analysis, patterns have emerged which suggest that they represent actual linguistic variation more accurately than is often assumed (see e.g. Schneider and Wagner 2006; Burkette 2001). This sort of dialect writing, then, like traditional dialect literature, may also provide a fruitful source of data for the exploration of the linguistic system that is being represented, and of the salience of particular linguistic features.

The analysis involved in such exploration requires us to bear a number of things in mind. We should not assume that all phonological features can be equally easily represented in spelling. British varieties of English vary considerably in their patterns of intonation and voice quality, for example, but these features cannot be spelled. Liverpool English is set apart from neighbouring varieties in both

these respects (Knowles 1973; Watson 2007a) and there is evidence that there is conscious awareness of these features, as in the folk myth that a prevalence of enlarged adenoids in speakers gave rise to aspects of Scouse voice quality (see, for example, BBC 2005). Dialect literature cannot represent this, and therefore cannot provide a tool for investigating the salience of these types of feature.

We have noted that English dialect literature is constrained and enabled by the graphological-phonological correspondences of Standard / reference English, but these correspondences do not offer spellings for all the phonological features that a dialect author might need. Thus, for example, the NURSE vowel can be [ø:] in north-eastern British varieties (Watt and Allen 2003) but English orthography has no way of representing front rounded vowels as they do not occur in standard / reference varieties. (That said, authors are not completely limited to Standard English spelling conventions: the non-standard glottal stop realisation of /t/ is often represented as <'>, as in <bu'er> for *butter*; see, among much else, Darnton 1993). However, the fact that certain features would require specific acts of orthographic invention can be expected to constrain what types of phonological feature it is possible to represent in dialect spellings.

3.2 Introducing *Contemporary Humorous Localised Dialect Literature*

Once we accept that spelling variation can be socially meaningful, and that such dialect literature can be used to investigate the variety of language it is meant to represent, it becomes clear how an exploration of the phonological features that have been respelled offers the potential to identify which features are salient in a given variety. This line of enquiry is being pursued in a growing body of work that has begun to investigate a hitherto underexplored genre of published writing in which the orthographic strategies outlined in this paper can be found. We label this genre *Contemporary Humorous Localised Dialect Literature* (CHLDL).⁴ CHLDL can be found in a variety of forms, but all share a few defining characteristics. These are that all CHLDL is current (i.e. it is *contemporary*), and is being written consistently by small, local producers. It also uses *humour*, of varying degrees of vulgarity. Some passages may even simply involve jokes written in Standard English — typically 'local jokes' which require an understanding of the social and geographical characteristics of the area where they are published. CHLDL is written by non-linguists for the general public, and much of it is only available for purchase in the areas where the variety is spoken (i.e. it is *localised*). Speakers from outside the region being represented may, indeed, find it difficult to interpret some

4. This acronym is readily pronounceable, as [tʃɪdl], even if this violates the English phonotactic constraint that syllabic consonants may only occur in unstressed syllables.

of the orthographic conventions employed, although it will be clear to all that the intention is to represent a non-standard variety.

CHLDL exists for a wide range of British (and other) dialects, including Bristol (*Krek Waiter's Peak Bristle*: Robinson and Wiltshire 2002), Estuary English (*Dija Wanna Say Sumfing*: Crancher 2002), Lancashire (*Completely Lanky*: Dutton 1992), Newcastle upon Tyne and Northumberland (*Larn Yersel' Geordie*: Dobson 1986), and Liverpool (*Lern Yerself Scouse*: Kelly, Shaw and Spiegl 1965/2000). Some volumes make much more attempt than others to represent non-standard phonology. Some texts rely mainly on eye-dialect and/or forced lexical reanalysis, such as Robinson and Wiltshire's (2002) volume for Bristol⁵ but others, such as Dobson's *Larn Yersel' Geordie*, make a much more serious attempt to represent local linguistic features. These texts typically seek to portray rather 'extreme' or 'broad' varieties, representing the most localised variants of linguistic variables, which are typically only used by a proportion of the speakers, only some of the time. Because of this, it has been claimed that such texts can provide a window through which the salient, indexical features of a dialect can be explored (Beal 2000, 2009). In an investigation of Newcastle CHLDL and other genres, Beal (2000: 350) shows that a small set of phonological features are often included as non-standard spellings (such as the spelling of words like *town* as <toon>, discussed above, and the spelling of words like *night* and *right* as <neet> and <reet>, representing an [i:]). These features are respelled, Beal (2000) claims, because they are recognised as being local to Newcastle. In later work, Beal (2009) compares Newcastle CHLDL with that of Sheffield, and argues that here too the indexical features of the dialect are represented in writing. Similar observations have been made about CHLDL in the USA. Johnstone (2009) describes how words and phrases from the dialect of Pittsburgh can be found in books, on signs and on mugs and t-shirts. Often, Pittsburghese phrases and their Standard English 'translations' are juxtaposed, which contextualises the regional forms as non-standard and local. These respellings, it is claimed, occur with such regularity as to indicate that there is overt recognition of them as being indexical of the varieties represented (Beal 2000: 350).

There has been little linguistic work on CHLDL to date, but there has been some; trail-blazing work includes Schneider (1986; see also Schneider 2002 and Schneider 2011: 88–93). Most such work has taken a qualitative approach to identifying the key features being represented. For example, while Beal (2000, 2009) uses pseudo-quantitative terminology (e.g. in arguing that certain features are "most common" [2000: 348], or that the representation of certain features is "less

5. There is some attempt to spell Bristol phonology in this volume, specifically 'intrusive /l/' (e.g. *insomnia* spelled as <insomnial> and *diarrhoea* spelled as <dire eel>, see Wells 1982: 344), but this is not very common. The volume's title illustrates the use of forced lexical reanalysis.

stable” than others [2000: 350]), she outlines from the outset that she makes no attempt to “give a statistical account of the relative frequencies or densities of particular dialect features” in the CHLDL texts (Beal 2000: 348). But since the indexicality of linguistic features is not an all or nothing matter, it is likely that a systematic quantitative analysis of spelling variation will shed new light on the way in which CHLDL represents linguistic features. Taking a quantitative approach requires that we are able to say not only whether a word is respelled from the standard, and what particular spelling variant is used, and whether that variant represents a linguistic feature, but also that we are able to express how often the same feature is not respelled. Once we take this approach, the opportunity arises for spelling variants to be considered as comparable to variants of sociolinguistic variables, in the Labovian sense of the term (cf. Labov’s 1972 *Principle of Accountability*). The spelling variants are semantically equivalent, in line with Labov’s seminal definition of a variable, and, as we have shown above, can be socially meaningful. It is by examining relative differences in the respelling of linguistic variants, we will argue below, that differences in the sociolinguistic status of these features can be uncovered.

In the rest of this paper we ask two main questions: 1) Are certain phonological features that are characteristic of Liverpool’s English represented systematically in the CHLDL data? And 2) what can this tell us about the salience of these features?

4. Liverpool English and its CHLDL

4.1 The phonological features of Liverpool English

Of all varieties of English spoken in the north-west of England, the accent of Liverpool, in the county of Merseyside, is arguably the most distinctive. So distinctive, in fact, that dialect maps of England (such as Trudgill 1999a: 65) portray Merseyside as a dialectal island, separate from other north-western localities. In this section we illustrate some of the key phonological characteristics of Liverpool English, including some of those which differentiate it from other north-western English varieties. Our discussion here is necessarily brief. We rely heavily on previous work for much of this information (e.g. Knowles 1973; De Lyon 1981; Honeybone 2001; Sangster 2001; Watson 2007a, 2007c; Clark and Watson 2011), and direct readers to that work for further details.

Like all other northern English varieties, the Liverpool STRUT vowel is typically [ʊ], leading to the absence of contrast, as mentioned above, between, for example, *put* and *putt*, unlike what would be found in the south of England (*put*

[p^hʊt], *putt* [p^hʌt]). Likewise, the Liverpool BATH vowel is the northern English [a] of TRAP (e.g. *bath* [baθ], *dance* [dʌns]), rather than the [ɑ:] of PALM, as would be found in the south (-east) of England. More geographically restricted but still found in some other northern English varieties (e.g. nearby Manchester), is the front [a:] vowel of the START and PALM lexical sets (which form one phonological category, as in most varieties from England).

A number of accents in England's north-west have a merger between the vowels of NURSE and SQUARE, such that pairs like *her* and *hair* and *stir* and *stare* are homophones. However, whereas many other north-western accents (e.g. St Helens and Bolton; see Tipton 2005 and Barras 2006, respectively) have a central vowel in these sets, so that both *her* and *hair* have [ɜ:], in Liverpool a front vowel is typically used, so that *her* and *hair* have [ɛ:] (Watson 2007a; Watson and Clark 2013). This front variant is geographically restricted to parts of Merseyside and does not extend across the north-west (although there are reports of it in some other varieties, such as Middlesbrough English, see Beal, Burbano-Elizondo and Llamas 2012:32).

Consonantal phonology presents further differences between Liverpool's phonological system and those of other northern accents, although here too there are similarities. /h/, for example, is frequently dropped in Liverpool, as it is in non-standard dialects throughout almost all of England, in both function words and lexical words (e.g. *her* [ɛ:], *house* [aus]). A regionally restricted consonantal feature which is thought to have been innovated thanks to the input of Irish varieties into new-dialect formation in the 19th century (see Honeybone 2007) is the 'stopping' of what are elsewhere dental fricatives ('TH-stopping'). Knowles (1973:331) observes that working class speakers often use dental or laminal alveolar stops in initial, final and intervocalic positions in place of both the lenis and fortis dental fricatives (retaining the laryngeal status found in the fricatives in other varieties), leading to pronunciations such as *the* [də], *brother* [brʊdə], *three* [t̪ri:], *bath* [bat̪]. TH-fronting, the realisation of the dental fricatives as [f, v] (e.g. *bath* [baf], *brother* [brʊvə]), which is known to be geographically diffusing throughout Britain (see e.g. Kerswill 2003), is claimed to be rare in Liverpool (Watson 2007c).

Arguably the largest difference between the consonantal system of Liverpool and those of elsewhere lies in the realisational potential of its plosives. It is very common for Liverpool English stops to be lenited to affricates and fricatives, essentially retaining place of articulation and voicing (see e.g. Honeybone 2001; Sangster 2001; Watson 2007b). Lenition is possible in stops at all places of articulation, but Watson (2007b) shows that it is most common for /t/, /d/ and /k/ (e.g. *light* [laɪt̪], *lad* [laɪd̪], *dock* [dʊk̪]); the fricative results of the lenition of /t/ and /d/ involve a wide range of realisational possibilities (Watson 2007a, 2007b) — what we transcribe here are common realisations: alveolar fricatives with a flat

cross-sectional tongue shape (Pandeli *et al.* 1997). While similar fricative realisations can be found for /t/ in other accents of English, such as Middlesbrough, Dublin (Jones and Llamas 2008), and Australia (Jones and McDougall 2009), nowhere else are they as phonologically widespread as in Liverpool (Honeybone 2007). Liverpool English /t/, for example, is very commonly realised as [t], [tʰ], [t̚], and [h] (Watson 2006). /t/ can also be realised as [ɹ] (or [r], which is also a rhotic realisation in Scouse, although we henceforth always transcribe the resultant rhotic always as [ɹ]), but this particular phenomenon is widespread across the north of England (see Wells 1982 who calls it ‘T-to-R’; Broadbent 2008; Clark and Watson 2011; and Buchstaller *et al.* 2013). T-to-R is essentially possible only in word-final position, when a word-initial vowel follows, and is restricted to a small set of highly frequent words — Clark and Watson (2011) searched a spoken corpus of Scouse and found it only in *it, at, let, that, lot, put, but, got, what, not, get, and bit*.

4.2 What is Liverpool English CHLDL?

The texts under investigation here represent a body of Liverpool English CHLDL produced by Liverpool publishing house the *Scouse Press*, dating from the 1960s to the current period. The books are from a series entitled *Lern Yerself Scouse* (henceforth LYS), which has five volumes. The first of these books appeared in 1965 (Kelly, Shaw and Spiegl 1965), and most of them had their most recent edition in 2000.

The texts follow a similar format based on the foreign language phrase book genre, and are advertised as a pseudo-‘teach yourself’ guides to learning the local dialect (while they are really intended for a local audience, of course). The texts have been so popular that Grant (2007: 143) claims they have ‘put written Scouse on the map’. Grant (2007: 145) further observes that the texts make ‘the most of ... eye-dialect’ and so ‘should not be taken at face value either in form or content’, but since they have never before been analysed systematically and quantitatively, it may be too hasty to claim that the linguistic features involved are not accurately represented. The covers of two of these books are illustrated in Figure 1.

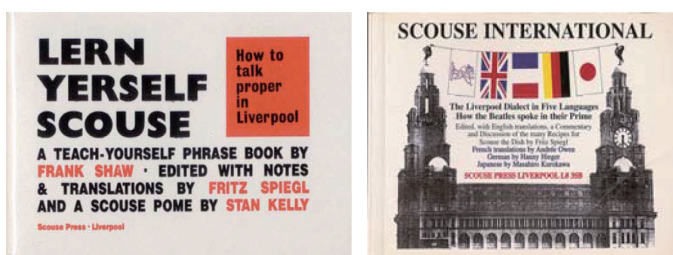


Figure 1. The covers of Kelly, Shaw and Spiegl (1965) and Spiegl (2000)

4.3 Methodological considerations

Our Liverpool CHLDL corpus was created from the five volumes in the LYS series. Each volume was digitised and converted to text files using optical character recognition software.⁶ Because the texts are phrase book parodies, they contained both Liverpool English spellings and their Standard English ‘translations’. In the analysis, we focus only on the spellings which are supposed to represent Liverpool English. In order for spelling variants to be treated as sociolinguistic variables, both standard and non-standard spellings in the Liverpool dataset were manually annotated with two sets of tags. The first provided an identifying label for the variable and the second categorised the variable as being spelled standardly or non-standardly — every potential occurrence of a non-standard form was thus counted. Eleven phonological features / variables were tagged, namely FOOT, STRUT, START, NURSE, SQUARE, (h), (t), (d), (k), (th), (dh) — the latter two represent the segments which are fortis and lenis dental fricatives in most varieties of English. These were selected because they represent a range of both vocalic and consonantal features which we know to be characteristic of Liverpool English (as discussed in Section 4.1) and because our experience of the volumes showed that they were, at least sometimes, represented in spelling. They involve both potential systemic differences (e.g. FOOT / STRUT, NURSE / SQUARE) and realisational differences (e.g. /t/ as [t], [tʰ], [ʈ], [h] and [ɹ]) between Scouse and Standard / reference English. The question is: which features are respelled in Scouse CHLDL? And are those features respelled to the same degree? Once the variables in the texts had been tagged, each one was extracted from the corpus, and some were annotated further. For example, the variable (h), which was examined only in word-initial position, was coded according to whether it occurred in a function or lexical word, and (th), (dh), (t), (d), and (k) were coded according to their word position (initial, medial, final).

5. Which phonological features are represented in Liverpool CHLDL?

5.1 The representation of vowels

The vowels investigated fit into three ‘dialect features’: FOOT / STRUT, START, and NURSE / SQUARE. As we saw above, there are differences between these vowel features in terms of their geographical spread: all Northern English traditional dialects have the same vowel in STRUT as in FOOT, but the front vowel of START is

6. Thanks are due to Claire Dembry for scanning and digitising the hard copies of the *Lern Yerself Scouse* texts.

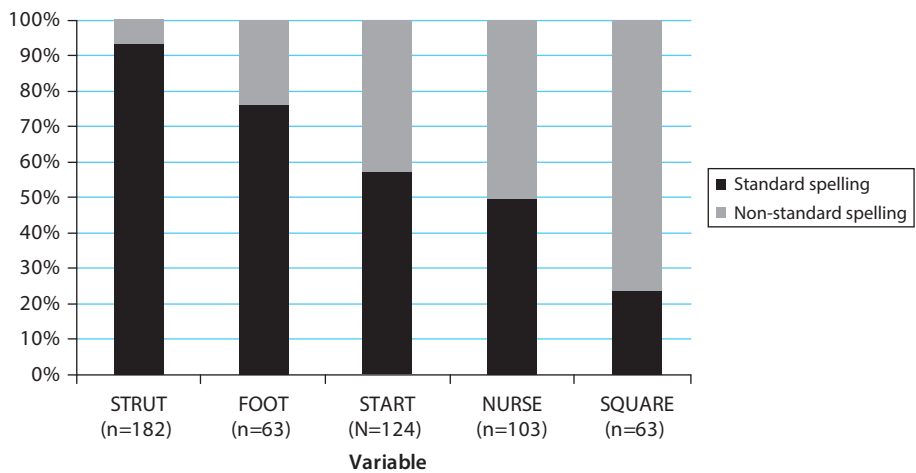


Figure 2. The use of standard and non-standard spelling variants in five lexical sets: FOOT, STRUT, START, NURSE, and SQUARE.

more regionally restricted. It is not found exclusively in Liverpool, however, as it can also be heard in nearby Manchester. In the north-west, the pronunciation of NURSE and SQUARE with a front vowel occurs only in parts of Merseyside, although the absence of contrast is shared with nearby Lancashire dialects. Figure 2 shows that there are clear differences in terms of how frequently words in these lexical sets are respelled in the CHLDL data.

The STRUT and FOOT vowels are spelled non-standardly less frequently than are START, NURSE and SQUARE. NURSE and, in particular, SQUARE words are respelled most often of all. In order to explore whether the non-standard spellings actively attempt to represent some aspect of the Liverpool English phonological system, we must examine the spelling practices themselves. Table 1 provides some examples of how these lexical sets are spelled when they are written non-standardly.

Table 1. Examples of non-standard spellings in the five lexical sets STRUT, FOOT, START, NURSE, SQUARE.

Lexical set	Examples of non-standard spellings
STRUT	<i>Bugger off</i> <boogaroff>, <i>love</i> <luv>, <i>blood</i> <blud>
FOOT	<i>could</i> <cud, cudd> <i>couldn't</i> <cudden>, <i>should</i> <shud>
START	<i>can't</i> <caahn't>, <i>can't half</i> <caahnaahf>, <i>cards</i> <caards>, <i>mark</i> <maahrk>, <i>banana</i> <banaahna>
NURSE	<i>girl</i> <gerl>, <i>birds</i> <berds>, <i>shirt</i> <shairt>, <i>work</i> <werk>, <i>burst</i> <berst>, <i>turn</i> <tirn>, <i>personality</i> <pursonality>
SQUARE	<i>pair</i> <pur>, <i>wear</i> <wur>, <i>bare</i> <bur>, <i>fares</i> <furs>, <i>fairy</i> <furry>

The few non-standard spellings of STRUT are restricted to a small number of lexical items, usually in exclamations (e.g. *bugger off!* <boogaroff!>), or vocatives (*kecks off, love* <keks off, luv>).⁷ Although the respelling of FOOT is more common than that of STRUT, it too is restricted to a small set of words (e.g. *could, couldn't, should, would, good*). Moreover, when FOOT is respelled, a frequent practice is to use unequivocal eye-dialect and allegro spellings elsewhere in the same utterance (e.g. *I wouldn't mind* <I wudden mind>, *what would you like, love?* <wot wudja like, luv>). This suggests that the respelling of FOOT may not be an attempt to represent an accent-specific feature — it simply involves cases of eye-dialect, given that <cu> represents the standard / reference pronunciation just as well as the Liverpool pronunciation (both [kud], if we ignore aspiration and consonant lenition). Respelling STRUT would make more dialectal sense, as the Scouse /ʊ/ in these words differs from the standard / reference equivalent /ʌ/. It is therefore perhaps surprising that respelling of STRUT words is so infrequent. It may be limited by the possibilities of English spelling — STRUT words are spelled with <u> in the vast majority of cases, and <u> is the obvious spelling for /ʊ/. Respelling the minority of STRUT words which usually have <o> or <oo> (e.g. *love, blood*) with <u> is straightforward, but STRUT words which usually have <u> (like *bugger*) require a different convention, and no other obvious convention exists in English other than <u> to spell /ʊ/. Using <oo>, as in <boogaroff> is not ideal, as it conflicts with the convention that <oo> represents [u:], discussed above. The FOOT/STRUT feature shows little sign of being a very salient feature of Scouse to those who write (and read?) CHLDL — taken together, the percentage of non-standard forms is just 11%.

The spelling of START shows a different picture to STRUT and FOOT. Firstly, the START vowel is respelled in a wide range of both frequent and infrequent words, and is often the only item that is respelled in a given utterance (e.g. *she can't half jangle* <she caahn aahf jangle>⁸, *I'm parched* <I'm paarched>⁹). This, coupled with the fact that it is spelled non-standardly around half of the time (43%), suggests it is a feature which has salient local meaning. The dialect feature connected to START is a case of difference in context-free realisation between the standard / reference variety, with [a:], and the Scouse realisation [a:]. The distinction between [a:] and [a:] is not phonetically vast, but it is considerable — a fully back vowel vs. a fully front vowel — and is clearly enough to make the dialect feature noticeable, and hence a candidate for sociolinguistic salience.

7. *Kecks* is a Northern English word meaning 'trousers' or 'underpants'.

8. *Jangle* is a Northern English word meaning 'talk'.

9. *Parched* is a non-standard word meaning 'thirsty'.

Why is the situation for *START* different to that of *FOOT/STRUT*? Considerations of the relative salience of phonological phenomena would lead us to expect a difference in contrasts between Scouse and the standard / reference variety (as in *FOOT/STRUT*) to be more salient than a difference of context-free realisations with the same number of contrasts (as in *START*). We suggest that this is because the *FOOT/STRUT* difference to Standard English is one which is shared with all northern varieties — it is not a characteristic feature of Scouse, so is not that salient and is hence spelled only infrequently — whereas the front vowel in *START* is more localised, as it is not shared with many other northern varieties. This introduces a further potential criterion for salience: the extent to which a dialect feature is localised. We will see below that there is good evidence that this criterion should play a role in our considerations.

Of all the vowels in focus here, *NURSE* and *SQUARE* have the widest range of non-standard spelling variants, with the vowels being variously represented with <er>, <ur>, <ir>, <air> — taken together, the percentage of non-standard forms is 60%. The same wide range of spelling variants exists for these vowels in Standard English orthography as well, of course (e.g. *herd*, *fur*, *fir*, *hair*) but the key point in the CHLDL data is that the choice of spelling variant is possible in English spelling but unconventional for a particular word (e.g. *turn* spelled as <tirn>, *bird* as <berd>). This kind of respelling should not be classified as eye-dialect for Scouse, given the situation regarding *NURSE* and *SQUARE*, and this is further shown by the fact that in what would be minimal pairs in many varieties of English (e.g. *her/hair*, *fur/fare*, *furry/fairy*), the ‘wrong’ member of the pair is used in the CHLDL data (e.g. *Fares please* <furs please>, *the good fairy* <the good furry>). This is a Liverpool-specific strategy, which suggests an awareness of the fact that these words in these lexical sets can be pronounced in the same way. The high frequency with which these vowels are spelled non-standardly suggests these vowels, like *START*, are imbued with local meaning. Indeed, the *NURSE/SQUARE* situation is the most salient of the three vocalic features that we consider here on the basis of our figures. Like *START*, *NURSE/SQUARE* is more localised to Liverpool than *FOOT/STRUT*, but, unlike *START*, *NURSE/SQUARE* involves a systemic difference involving contrasts. It is therefore not surprising that the cline of salience should be *NURSE/SQUARE* > *START* > *FOOT/STRUT*.

5.2 The representation of H-dropping

We next consider a consonantal variable, the presence or absence of /h/. As discussed above, H-dropping in lexical words in stressed position (as well as in unstressed function words) is widespread in Britain, occurring in almost all regional varieties (see Trudgill 1999a: 29), so is not localised to Liverpool speech. Unlike

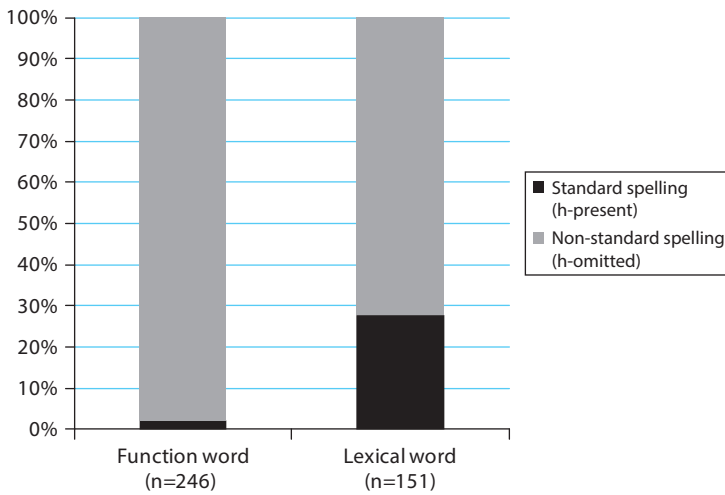


Figure 3. The use of standard and non-standard spelling variants in words with initial /h/

the vocalic variables highlighted above, *h*-dropping is a phonological feature which is very easily spellable, however, as the presence or absence of the grapheme <h>. Figure 3 shows how often *h*-dropping is represented in the CHLDL data.

h-dropping is very frequently present in the CHLDL data, almost categorically for function words and 72% of the time for lexical words. We focus on the figure for lexical words, because absence of [h] in function words is often possible in allegro speech in most, if not all, English varieties. Sometimes <h> is simply absent, and sometimes it is replaced with <'>. Examples include *hurry up* <urry up>, *empty house* <empty ouse> and *at home* <at 'ome>. Even though it is not localised to Liverpool speech, *h*-dropping *can* involve a difference of contrasts with the standard variety (cf. *hair* vs. *air*), and it has a high status variant which is reflected in standard orthography, one of Trudgill's criteria for salience discussed in Section 2. It is also a very well-known feature of English accents, and is associated with low-status speech. Wells (1982: 254), for example, describes *h*-dropping as "the single most powerful pronunciation shibboleth in England". Given that CHLDL texts typically aim to represent the features most often associated with low status speech, it is perhaps unsurprising that such a feature would be very regularly represented in writing, although this is not expected in specifically Scouse CHLDL, if we only expect more localised features to be represented frequently. It may be that the fact that it is so well established in popular consciousness as a feature of non-standard English ('*h*-dropping' is a term in common usage, whereas 'the FOOT/STRUT split' is not) means that it is salient in Scouse and is spelled in CHLDL order to mark Scouse out as a non-standard form of English.

5.3 The representation of TH-stopping

Like the representation of H-dropping, the pronunciation of what are dental fricatives in most varieties of English as [t̪] and [d̪], respectively, is quite straightforwardly representable in writing. The segments [t̪] and [d̪] are close enough to [t] and [d] to be represented using the same spelling conventions (<t> and <d>).¹⁰ If this feature is recognised as being part of Liverpool English, we would expect it to be present in the CHLDL texts. Figure 4 shows the occurrence of standard and non-standard spellings of words which can have /θ/ or /ð/ in English dialects.

Figure 4 shows that the respelling of <th> is a frequent feature of the CHLDL texts. Both lenis and fortis forms are respelled, and a number of orthographic conventions are used to indicate non-standardness, the most common being the simple use of <d> and <t>, implying that TH-stopping is clearly being spelled here. Examples include *the* <de>, *then* <dthen>, *another* <anudder> for the spelling of /ð/ and *think* <tink>, *nothing* <nutt'n> for the spelling of /θ/.¹¹ In order to examine

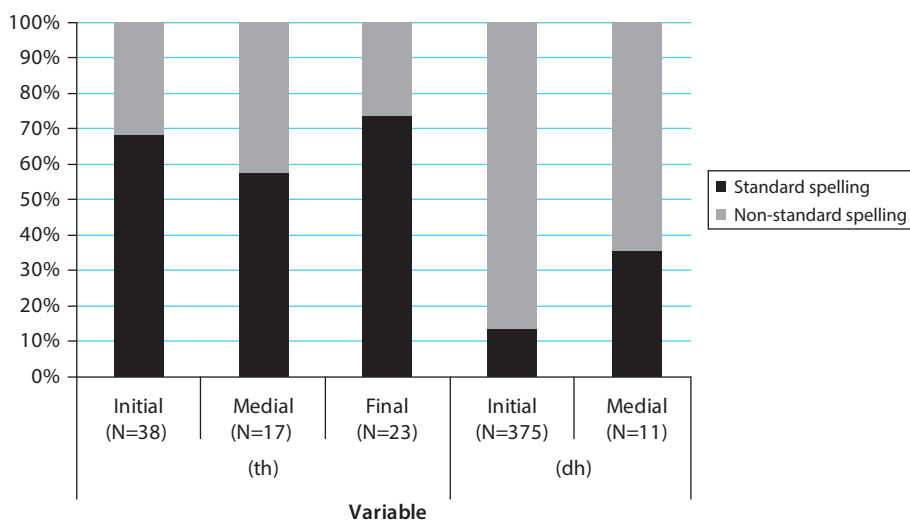


Figure 4. The use of standard and non-standard spelling variants in words with potential /θ/ (labelled *th*) and /ð/ (labelled *dh*) in word initial, media and final position. There were no tokens of (dh) in word-final position.

10. This means that one grapheme is used to represent more than one contrasting phonological segment (e.g. <t> represents both [t̪] and [t]), but this is not unusual — in Standard English spelling <th> represents both [ð] and [θ], for example.

11. These examples show that both single and double <t, d> are used to spell (th) and (dh), in line with the general English orthographic convention that a singleton represents length in a preceding vowel, and an orthographic geminate indicates preceding vocalic shortness.

whether the non-standard spellings pattern systematically, Table 2 quantifies the specific variants.

Table 2. The frequency of non-standard spelling variants for words that have phonological /ð/ and /θ/.

	<d>	<dd>	<dt>	<dz>	<tth>	<tt>	<t>	<vv>	<f>
dh (n=327)	71.2%	0.3%	26.9%	0.3%	0.3%			0.9%	
th (n=25)			28%			8%	60%		4%

Two points are noteworthy here. The first is that there is a clear tendency for <d> to be used to represent the lenis fricative /ð/ (as in *the* <de>, *that* <dat>, or *other* <udder>), and for <t> to be used to represent the fortis fricative /θ/ (such as *birth-day* <birthday>, *beneath* <beneat>, *worth* <wert>). This indicates an awareness of the fact that the laryngeal status of the segment is maintained when it is realised as a stop. These spellings thus accurately represent this particular aspect of the Liverpool phonological system in a subtle way. Some spellings are more complex: <dt> and <tth> seem to focus on representing the fact that the contrast between the dentals and alveolars is retained in TH-stopping, by attempting to create a new spelling of the dental stops; if this is focused on in the CHLDL spelling, it seems that the representation of laryngeal state is not so important (so <dt> can be used for both segments). The second point is the very low frequency of tokens with <v> or <f>, which would represent TH-fronting. We made the observation above that Liverpool has lagged behind other localities in the adoption of TH-fronting and, given some of the CHLDL texts date from more than four decades ago, it is likely that TH-fronting was all but absent when they were being written. Again, this shows that the written representation of this particular phonological variable quite closely represents the accent itself.

It also suggests that TH-stopping is a phonological feature which has local meaning: overall, TH-stopping is spelled in 76% of possible cases. This is a high figure in comparison with the other features just discussed. As with START, TH-stopping does not involve a difference in the number of contrasts between Scouse and the standard / reference variety — the contrast between, say, *three* [tri:] and *tree* [tri:] and between *then* [ðen] and *den* [ðen] is present in Scouse, just as it is in Standard English — it is simply realised in a different way — so we might expect TH-stopping to be represented orthographically to the same degree as is START. The context-free realisation of the ‘TH’ segments is, as for START, quite different from the realisations of reference forms (stops in Scouse *vs.* fricatives in non-Scouse English varieties), and is clearly a big enough difference to make the dialect feature noticeable, and hence a candidate for sociolinguistic salience. The fact that TH-stopping is a highly localised feature — more so than START as it is not

shared with other dialects in mainland Britain — means that we might expect it to be somewhat more salient than *START*; possible reasons why *TH*-stopping seems to be *considerably* more salient than *START* are considered in Section 6, which summarises the figures for all the features discussed.

5.4 The representation of /t/, /d/, /k/

The final dialect feature that we consider, the realisation of Liverpool English underlying plosives, is the most regionally restricted feature in most respects. Given that *TH*-stopping is widely represented in writing in quite subtle ways, we might predict that plosive lenition will also be represented in CHLDL, because *TH*-stopping is restricted to the Liverpool area in the north-west of England, and lenition is also extremely characteristic of the variety. *TH*-stopping is found in several other varieties of English, in Ireland, America and Shetland, unlike plosive lenition, which is only found in a very few other varieties, and then typically only affects /t/ and only derives a fricative (which is unlike the Liverpool situation, where lenition is phonologically much more extensive), and this implies that lenition should be more commonly represented in CHLDL than *TH*-stopping. However, this is not the case. Figure 5 shows the frequency of standard and non-standard spellings for (t), (d) and (k). Because lenition is known to be sometimes conditioned by prosodic environment, being more extreme in intervocalic and final positions than in initial position (see Harris 1994; Balogné Bérces and Honeybone 2012), the tokens are displayed according to whether they are word-initial, intervocalic or word-final.

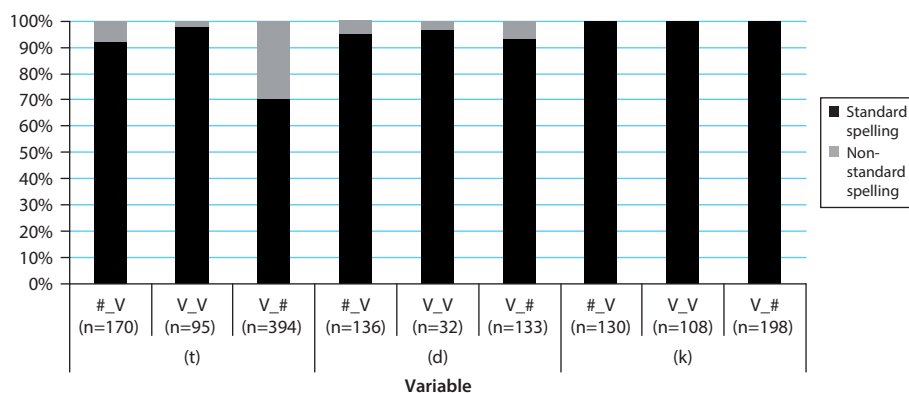


Figure 5. The use of standard and non-standard spelling variants in words with phonological /t/, /d/ and /k/, in word initial (#_V), intervocalic (V_V), and word-final (V_#) position.

On the whole, underlying stops are spelled using standard spelling in the CHLDL data, and phonological position in the word makes little difference. /k/ is always spelled standardly, /d/ is spelled standardly the vast majority of the time, and /t/ is largely spelled standardly, although word-final /t/ needs separate discussion, to follow below. The absence of spelling for lenition cannot be due to it being infrequently found in Scouse, since it is very commonly found in speech. It also cannot be because there are no ways to spell the products of lenition at all. This may be the case for the lenition of /k/, in fact, as there is no easy way to spell [x] in English. It would be possible, in principle, to adapt the Scots orthographic practice of using <ch> to spell the /x/ phoneme (so that <loch> with /x/ contrasts with <lock> with /k/) but the <ch> grapheme in English English is likely to be read as the affricate /tʃ/, and so its suitability for a spelling of [x] is questionable, and this may contribute to the absence of respellings of /k/, but it cannot be the full story. The difficulty in spelling the products of lenition does not hold for /t/ and /d/.

When /d/ is spelled non-standardly, the spellings do represent lenition, thus an affricate is spelled occasionally using the conventions <dz>, as in *don't* <dzon't>, *leader* <leadzer>, and a fricative is spelled occasionally using <z>, as it is in *lad* <laz>.¹² Similarly, <ts> is used to spell the affricate result of lenition of /t/, as in *tart* <tsart>, and the conventions used to spell /s/ are also used to spell the fricative product of /t/, as in *right* <rice>. While the result of lenition of /d/ and /t/ do not neutralise with /z/ and /s/ (Sangster 2001 is explicit about this, based on an acoustic investigation), they are clearly close enough in principle to use the conventions that English has for spelling /z/ and /s/ (just as [ɹ] is close enough to [d] to use <d> to spell them both, to represent TH-stopping), and the spellings used here for the affricates are not radically complicated (and have some marginal use in English, as in *tsar* 'emperor / policy-coordinator' and *dzeren* 'the Mongolian antelope', both in the OED). However, these conventions are used very rarely.

Of all the stops, /t/ is represented with non-standard spelling most often. Like /d/, non-standard spellings are infrequent in initial and intervocalic positions, and, also like /d/, when non-standard spelling is used in these positions it is to represent lenition. Word-final /t/ behaves differently, with 30% of tokens being spelled non-standardly. As discussed in Section 4.1, /t/ in final position has a much wider range of possible realisations than any other stop, so it is possible that some of this phonetic variation is reflected in the non-standard respellings.

12. The spelling of *lad* as <laz> accounts for all but one of the non-standard spellings of word-final /d/. The word *lad* is a popular vocative used to refer to Liverpool males (used in the same way as *mate* or *dude* in other varieties of English, see e.g. Kiesling 2004), so it is likely that the word itself, and the pronunciation [laɪ̯], has particular local significance.

Figure 6 provides a breakdown of the non-standard spellings that were found in the data for word-final /t/.

The respellings of word-final <t> are not evenly distributed. While there are a few examples of /t/ being spelled as the fricative result of lenition (e.g. *bite* <bice>, *right* <rice>, *let* <less>), over 80% of the time non-standard /t/ is spelled with <r>. This is a clear attempt to represent the pronunciation of /t/ as [ɹ], to represent the phenomenon of T-to-R. While arguably historically derived from a different form of lenition (see Broadbent 2008), T-to-R is not part of the general Liverpool lenition phenomenon, which involves affrication and spirantisation (and on occasion debuccalisation). T-to-R is an alternative realisation strategy for /t/ lenition.

Why is lenition so rarely represented in Scouse CHLDL, if it is so common and characteristic of the variety? For /k/, the unavailability of a good orthographic representation of [kx] and [x] may contribute to the explanation of why no cases of the lenition of /k/ are spelled (although orthographic conventions like <kch> or <kh> could suffice if a writer simply wanted to draw attention to the use of a non-standard form), but, as we have seen, there are orthographic possibilities to represent the lenition of /d/ and /t/, especially as fricatives — they are just not used very often. If we set /k/ and T-to-R aside, only 5% of the spellings of these stops indicate lenition. We propose that the reason for this lies with the phonological status of the phenomenon involved, as discussed in Section 2. All of the features discussed thus far either involve differences in underlying contrasts or in the context-free realisation of segments. Lenition has clear characteristics of a low-level, or ‘late’ phonological process. It has no lexical exceptions, is non-neutralising, and not structure-preserving — the results of lenition are segments like [θ] and [ð] which

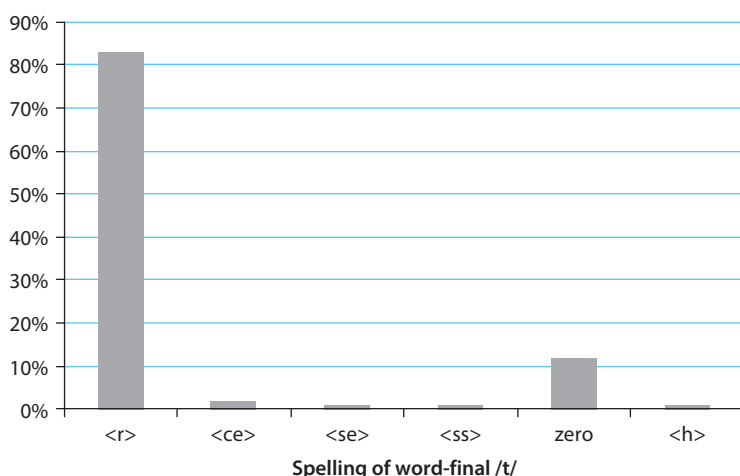


Figure 6. The non-standard spelling variants which represent /t/ in word-final position.

do not exist underlyingly. As we saw in Section 2, late processes are predicted to be those which speakers are less likely to be aware of, and this offers an explanation for the fact that lenition is not spelled in Scouse: speakers are not very clearly aware of the existence of the phenomenon, because of its phonological status.

The same cannot be said for T-to-R. As Figure 6 shows, final /t/ is spelled as <r> quite frequently, and so it seems that T-to-R is salient in Scouse. T-to-R is widely assumed to be a phonological process which affects /t/ to derive [ɹ], like Liverpool lenition, but — importantly for our purposes — it has a very different status. T-to-R is structure-preserving and neutralising, as the rhotic exists underlyingly, and it is lexically constrained — these are the characteristics of ‘early’, lexical phonological phenomena, which are predicted to be observable by speakers, as discussed in Section 2. It is therefore no surprise that T-to-R is more commonly spelled than Liverpool lenition if we assume that ‘early’ phonology should be more salient than late phonology.

The lexical restriction on T-to-R is quite notable. As discussed in Section 4.1, the realisation as [ɹ] is tightly constrained, being possible only in the words *it*, *at*, *let*, *that*, *lot*, *put*, *but*, *got*, *what*, *not*, *get*, and *bit*, according to Clark and Watson (2011). We might ask whether the same constraints are obeyed in the CHLDL data. Table 3 presents examples of the spelling of /t/ as <r>.

Table 3. Example phrases in which /t/ is spelled non-standardly using <r>

Word	Non-standard spelling
<i>put</i>	<i>put a</i> <purra>
<i>got</i>	<i>got an</i> <gorran>, <i>got a</i> <gorra>, <i>got up</i> <gorrup>
<i>get</i>	<i>get our</i> <gerrare>
<i>not</i>	<i>not a</i> <norra>
<i>bit</i>	<i>Bit of a</i> <birrova>
<i>what</i>	<i>what a</i> <worra>

As the words in Table 3 demonstrate, in the CHLDL data /t/ is respelled as <r> in precisely the words and phonological environments in which it is likely to occur in speech. Indeed, throughout the CHLDL data, /t/ is only spelled as <r> in words in which it occurs in speech, and never in contexts in which T-to-R is impossible (e.g. words with a long vowel, or when the /t/ is followed by a consonant-initial word). It seems that for this feature, like TH-stopping, CHLDL respellings represent subtle phonological detail which is recognised as being a feature of Liverpool’s English.

6. Scouse CHLDL, salience and enregisterment

At the end of Section 3, we posed two questions: 1) Are certain phonological features that are characteristic of Liverpool's English represented systematically in CHLDL? And 2) what can this tell us about the salience of these features?

Our quantitative analysis showed that some features are represented with a real degree of consistency, and, if we bear in mind their expected degree of phonological salience and the extent to which the features are geographically restricted and localised to Liverpool, we can start to explain the different degrees to which the features under consideration here are represented. Figure 7 compares the extent to which the phonological dialect features considered in Section 5 are spelled, with the principled exclusion of T-to-R spellings. A full consideration of T-to-R should only count those occurrences of final /t/ in words which allow the process to occur so the result for (t) in Figure 7 shows only spellings for plosive lenition.

What does Figure 7 tell us? Firstly, none of these features is represented in spelling 100% of the time; this validates our approach of treating the features as variables (and is also what we would expect to find in the analysis of speech, as all of the features discussed here are variable). Secondly, it is clear that there is considerable variation in terms of how frequently each feature is spelled in Scouse CHLDL. Section 5 began to compare the extent to which the features are spelled, and from the discussion there it seems generally clear that localised features (which are not found in many other varieties) which involve either different numbers of contrasts, or phonetically divergent context-free realisations of a segment are most commonly spelled. This accounts for the cline of spellability NURSE/SQUARE > START > FOOT/STRUT. The lenition of /t, d, k/ is localised to Liverpool: *t*-spirantisation is found in some other varieties, such as Southern Irish English (Hickey 1984) and Middlesbrough English (Jones and Llamas 2008), but this is

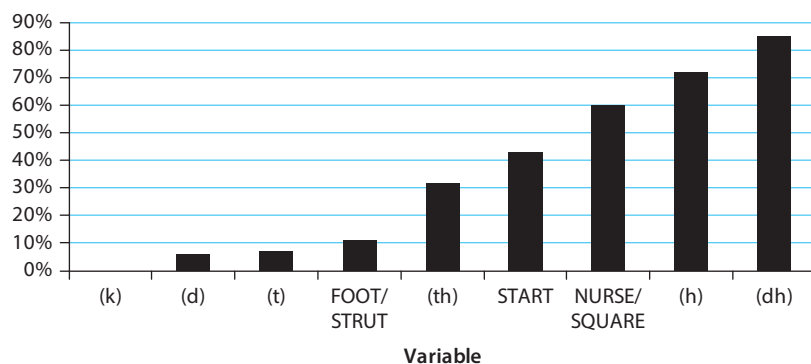


Figure 7. Relative differences in the non-standard spelling of each phonological variable

not allied to affrication or to similar realisations of /d/ and /k/, as in Liverpool. The 'localisedness' criterion therefore leads us to expect that Liverpool lenition should be spelled to a large extent in CHLDL; however, it is not. We argued that this is due to the fact that lenition is a 'late' phonological process, and it seems that this criterion trumps all others, rendering the feature non-salient, and therefore practically unspelled. This explains the cline NURSE/SQUARE > START > FOOT/STRUT > lenition (where 'lenition' groups together the spellings of (k), (d) and (t) from Figure 7). 'T-to-R' would appear above 'lenition' in the cline, as it occurs for practically all of the non-standard spellings of /t/, in line with the fact that it has characteristics of an 'early' phonological process.

H-dropping involves a difference in terms of phonological contrasts, like NURSE/SQUARE and FOOT/STRUT, but it is not localised to Liverpool, so we might expect it to pattern like FOOT/STRUT. It does not. H-dropping is one of the most frequently spelled dialect features in CHLDL. The frequency with which it is spelled is, we argued above, due to its status as the single best known shibboleth of non-standard English, and it may also be linked to Trudgill's claim (discussed in Sec. 2) that H-dropping has a high status variant (the *h*-ful form) which is reflected in standard orthography. This allows us to rationalise the cline H-dropping > NURSE/SQUARE > START > FOOT/STRUT > lenition, leaving only TH-stopping to be discussed.

Our consideration of TH-stopping in Section 5.4 noted that it is spelled in 76% of all possible cases overall, which makes it the most spelled of all the features considered here. However, Figure 7 shows that the results for (th) (the fortis segment, which can be /θ/) are very different from those for (dh) (the lenis segment, which can be /ð/). The figure of 32% for (th) shows that it is approximately as likely to be spelled as is START (at 43%), and this fits in with what we would expect from our consideration of phonological salience in Section 2. Like START, TH-stopping does not involve a difference in the number of contrasts between Scouse and other varieties, including RP — the contrast between, say, *three* [tʁi:] and *tree* [tri:] is present in Scouse, just as it is in Standard / reference English — it is simply realised in a different way. This context-free realisation of the 'TH' segments is, as for START, quite different from the realisations of those forms in RP (stops vs. fricatives), and is clearly a big enough difference to make the dialect feature noticeable, and hence a candidate for sociolinguistic salience. Given this, a degree of salience of the same order of magnitude as for START is expected. The fact that TH-stopping is a highly localised feature — slightly more so than START as it is not shared with other dialects in mainland Britain — means that we might expect it to be slightly more salient than START, but this does not seem to be the case from our raw numbers. It may be that other factors are at play, for example that TH-stopping is less common in speech for (th) than is the front realisation of START, and this would connect

to the claim, mentioned briefly in Section 2, that the frequency of occurrence of a form can affect its salience. It is certainly less likely to be spelled than NURSE/SQUARE, a localised feature which involves a difference of contrast.

This leaves us with a rationale for almost all of Figure 7's cline, accounting for the scale H-dropping > NURSE/SQUARE > START > (th) > FOOT/STRUT > lenition. It also leaves us with the surprising result for (dh), which has a non-standard spelling 85% of the time, being represented in the CHLDL texts more often than START, and even more often than NURSE/SQUARE, suggesting it might be more salient than any of the vocalic features. We believe that the explanation for this lies with the type of lexical items in which (dh) occurs. Practically all the occurrences of (dh) are word-initial, where it only occurs in function words (such as *the*, *that*, *then*). The asymmetry here is vast, as shown in Figure 4: 375 occurrences of (dh) in the CHLDL corpus are word-initial, whereas it only occurs eleven times word-medially, and it never occurs word-finally. This is a very different pattern of occurrence to the fortis congener (th), with 38 word-initial, 17 medial and 23 word-final occurrences. The number of occurrences of word-initial (dh) dwarfs almost all other features that we consider in detail — the only other with a similar number of occurrences is word-final (t), at 394 occurrences, with all others below 200 occurrences. Function words are extremely frequent in speech, so it is likely that this overwhelming frequency of initial stops for (dh) in speech has led to a high salience of this feature, quite possibly coupled with the fact that word-initial position is a prosodically prominent one (as we saw briefly in Section 2, prosodic prominence has also been argued to provide phonological salience).

The cline of occurrence of respelled forms in CHLDL shown in Figure 7 is thus comprehensible in the light of the expectations of phonological and other kinds of salience discussed in Section 2, as long as we add in the criterion of localisedness: initial (dh) > H-dropping > NURSE/SQUARE > START > (th) > FOOT/STRUT > lenition. CHLDL has shown itself to be a linguistically reliable and rational source of information for at least those aspects of the phonology of Liverpool English that we have considered here. Moreover, CHLDL spelling accurately represents some quite subtle phonological characteristics. We are thus able to show that it would be wrong to assume that linguistic features are never accurately or systematically represented in CHLDL.

At various points in the paper, we argued that if orthography is seen as a social practice which represents writers' meaningful decisions, then it follows that the performance of dialect in writing can provide a window through which we can identify the features in a variety that have local meaning. We are not the first to make this connection (Beal 2000, 2009; Johnstone 2009), but rarely has this line of enquiry been combined with a methodology that allows the spelling variants to be modelled as sociolinguistic variables. By applying quantitative tools to the

sociolinguistics of orthography, we have been able to consider the relative differences between respellings in the CHLDL data, as just discussed. By facilitating the discussion of the features that may be salient in a given variety, CHLDL becomes a useful linguistic resource. Recent work has gone further and argued that CHLDL-like material actually promotes the connection between linguistic features and local meaning in the first place. That is, CHLDL could become one of the ways in which ideas about language spread. To capture this observation, Johnstone (2010) invokes and develops Agha's (2003) notion of *enregisterment*. Enregisterment describes the processes by which relationships between linguistic forms and cultural values are stabilised across communities, and we believe that the features just identified as salient are likely to be those which have been enregistered for Liverpool English. It may well be that the texts that form our corpus have played a role in this enregisterment, although we do not have firm evidence of how widely are spread the dialect spellings that we have considered here. Many of the volumes that we have considered have been permanently in print since the 1960s and 1970s, however, and this shows that they are popular. It is thus likely that the consistent spelling of certain features, of the type that we have discovered, will contribute to the community's awareness of them.

Overall, the methodology adopted here for the investigation of CHLDL has proved itself to be valid, and our invocation of sociolinguistic, phonological and other criteria for salience which was closely woven into it, has proved fruitful. Our consideration of linguistic salience has surely not fully demystified the concept, but we believe that several of the criteria for the recognition of salience in phonological and/or dialect features which were discussed in Section 2 have stood up to some testing of their validity. If we are right in our argumentation, criteria such as phonetic distance, the distinction between contrast, early phonology and late phonology, the criterion of localisedness and frequency of occurrence were all necessary to understand why some features could be salient in Scouse.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we considered the fact that while non-linguists' opinions about varieties are often consistent, we know relatively little about which dialect features are noticed by speakers of non-standard dialects. We showed that we can approach an answer to this question by assuming that salient features can be manipulated in written dialect stylisation, and in particular we argued that if spelling is seen as a social practice which is the result of writers' meaningful decisions, then a hitherto under-explored genre, CHLDL, has the potential to shed light on those linguistic features that are socially meaningful ('salient') in a given variety.

We have argued that such material is worthy of detailed, quantitative investigation, and — while we recognise that this article is only a beginning in this regard — we have shown that coherent results can be obtained from such work. We believe that CHLDL can offer an intriguing dataset, which has emerged spontaneously (not via experimental elicitation) and which allows for an initial exploration of sociolinguistic salience. It is for these reasons, we conclude, that, when approached with the kind of methodology adopted here, CHLDL is an interesting and valuable linguistic resource.

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