

The Seventh Northern Englishes Workshop, Edinburgh, April 2016
Workshop on **Northern English Dialect Literature**

What does it *take* and *mean* for a phonological feature to be represented in dialect writing?

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The structure of the talk

1. Phonology and nonstandard spelling: what does it take for a feature to be represented?
2. Types of dialect writing
3. Dialect writing in Scouse
4. Which features are represented in Scouse dialect writing? What does that *mean*?

1. Phonology and nonstandard spelling: what does it take for a feature to be represented?

My interest in dialect writing (DW) is mainly in:

- the **ways** in which phonological dialect features are represented
- the **extent** to which phonological dialect features are represented

For a phonologist who's interested in nonstandard varieties of spoken English, there's lots to consider in the existence of nonstandard written English

- **which** features get represented?
- what are the precise **mechanics** of orthographic representation
- are features represented to the same **extent**?
 - and if not, why not?

This ties into broader concerns:

- what **are** 'the dialect features of a variety'?
- which dialect features are **salient** to speakers of a dialect?

All of this strikes me as surprisingly poorly understood

- at least, it is by me...

To state the obvious, DW involves the use of nonstandard spelling to represent phonological dialect features

- (as well as dialect morphology, syntax, lexis *etc*)

What *are* dialect features? They fundamentally seem to be:

- **differences** between the dialect and the **reference/standard dialect**
 - typically they are shared with some neighbouring dialects
 - only few are essentially **unique** to one dialect area

This flags up an important point...

- the existence of DW relies on writers' and readers' knowledge of several things:
 - knowledge of **the standard English spellings** of words, so that any divergence from this will be recognised and will mark out a form as 'dialect'
 - knowledge of **phonological differences** that exist between the reference variety and the dialect to be represented
 - knowledge of the **graphemes of English**, linked to the phonology of the **reference variety of English** – something RP-like
- all this is needed for phonological dialect features to be represented in DW

Hodson (2014) shows this on the basis of a sign from the Lake District:

- “the respelling is aimed at showing how Cumbrian English differs from RP”

TEK CARE
LAMBS
ONT ROAD

- *tek* has nonstandard spelling
- RP /teɪk/ ~ Cumbrian /tɛk/
- in RP-StEng phonological-graphemic correspondence:
 - <aCe> = /eɪ/
 - <eC#> = /ɛ/
- *ont* represents Definite Article Reduction – present in Cumbrian; absent in StEng
- *care, lambs, road* – the phonological differences between Cumbrian and RP are either **not perceived** or **not perceived as important enough** to be represented
 - NB: *lambs* retains the ‘silent ’ of standard English spelling

However, respellings in DW are not always intended to represent dialect features.

Eye-dialect spellings are also often found in DW

- eye-dialect uses respellings based on standard/general English pronunciations
 - *peepul* for *people*
 - *kow* for *cow*
 - *wuz* for *was*

The Cumbrian sign *could* have read:

TEK KARE
LAMZ
ONT RODE

Eye-dialect spellings often provide a phonologically ‘better’, more phonemic spelling

- they are often described negatively in studies of DW
- the claim is that they are intended to show speakers’ illiteracy or lack of education

As eye-dialect involves respellings of general English pronunciations, it is not much help for the study of dialect features

- but it need not contribute negatively to a DW text
- it can show a DW author’s phonological sophisticated awareness
- it can help to differentiate a text from Standard English
- this links to the **range of types of DW texts** and to **who DW texts are intended for**

In discussions of the orthographies devised for **Scots** it is common to distinguish between

- a ‘minimalist’ and a ‘maximalist’ approach (Bann & Corbett, 2015, 93)
 - should the author stay as close to StEng as possible, or emphasise the difference between the DW text (and the dialect represented?) and StEng/RefEng
- if DW texts are intended for **a wide readership**, it may make sense to adopt a minimalist approach
 - if DW texts are intended for **a readership of dialect speakers**, a more maximalist approach may be felt appropriate

This distinction of approach is fundamental to understanding DW

- more on this imminently...

One further point on **what its take for a feature to be represented**

- not all dialect features *could* in principle be spelled, no matter if they are easily noticed by DW authors
- suprasegmental features are not recorded in spelling
 - these can be highly characteristic of varieties
- Standard English spelling only offers a limited number of phon-to-graph correspondences
 - if a variety has phonological characteristics not in the standard, it may not be possible to represent them

DW authors can be inventive with StEng orthographic conventions, however:

- <'> typically indicates that something is absent in English orthography (as in contractions like *don't*, *I'm*, *she'd*)
 - this grapheme can be used to represent the absence of /h/, when a non-standard dialect is compared to RefEng, as in *'at* 'hat'
 - it can also be used to represent the glottal stop (on the assumption that the /t/ is 'missing'), as in *bu'ter* 'butter', *wa'er* 'water'

So, DW is basically limited to the phon-to-graph correspondences of StEng

- *but...* there are **lots** of English graphemes

English is a particularly good language for phonological DW

- there are lots of phonemic differences between dialects to respell
- the spelling system is ripe for respelling
- English has a ‘deep orthography’ – it is ‘irregular’ so there are many graphemes which can be reused in DW spelling
- there are many opportunities for eye-dialect or for the representation of subtle differences

For example, the Scouse GOOSE vowel is /ʊ:/

- English orthography offers a number of ways of spelling the GOOSE vowel
- <u...e, oo, eu, ew, ioux *etc*>
- a spelling *skewl* ‘school’ in Scouse DW draws attention to the vowel – which Scouse speakers (might) know is different from RP /u:/

2. Types of dialect writing

There is considerable variation in the types of DW that exist

- Shorrocks (1996) differentiates between
 - literary dialect and dialect literature

In literary dialect:

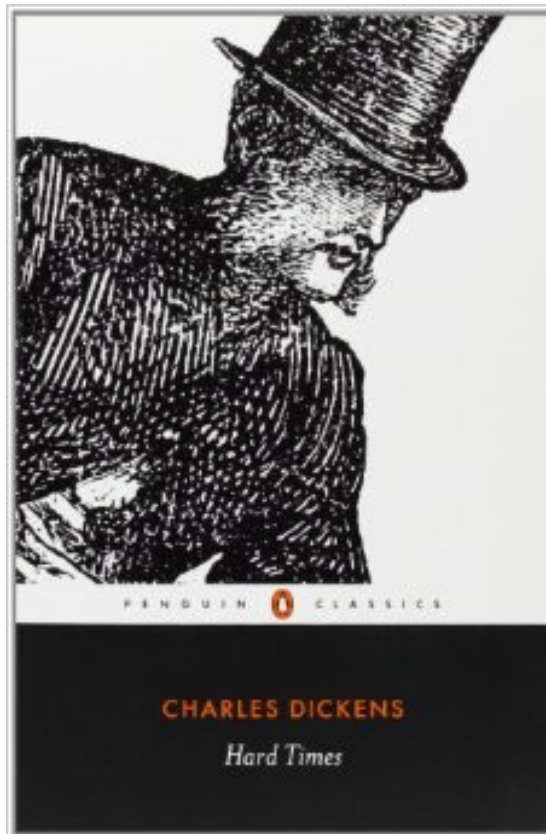
- non-standard spelling is used only in direct speech; the surrounding text is in standard spelling
- the volumes are intended for a wide audience and general readership – to be sold throughout the English-speaking world
- the point of the non-standard spelling may simply be to mark out a character as ‘speaking dialect’ – the details of the dialect represented may not be important

In dialect literature:

- non-standard spelling may be used throughout the text
- the works are intended for speakers of the dialect that is represented

This distinction works well for many texts

Literary dialect:



raising her hood a little, showed a quiet oval face, dark and rather delicate, irradiated by a pair of very gentle eyes, and further set off by the perfect order of her shining black hair. It was not a face in its first bloom ; she was a woman five and thirty years of age.

“ Ah, lad ! ’Tis thou ? ” When she had said this, with a smile which would have been quite expressed, though nothing of her had been seen but her pleasant eyes, she replaced her hood again, and they went on together.

“ I thought thou wast ahind me, Rachael ? ”

“ No.”

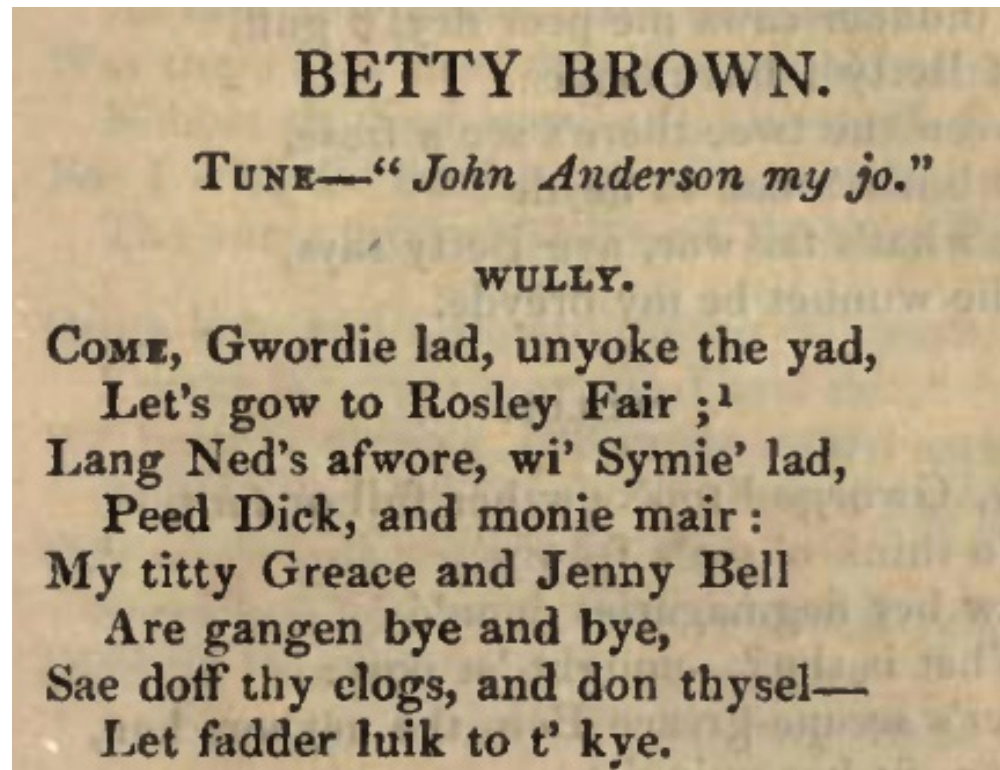
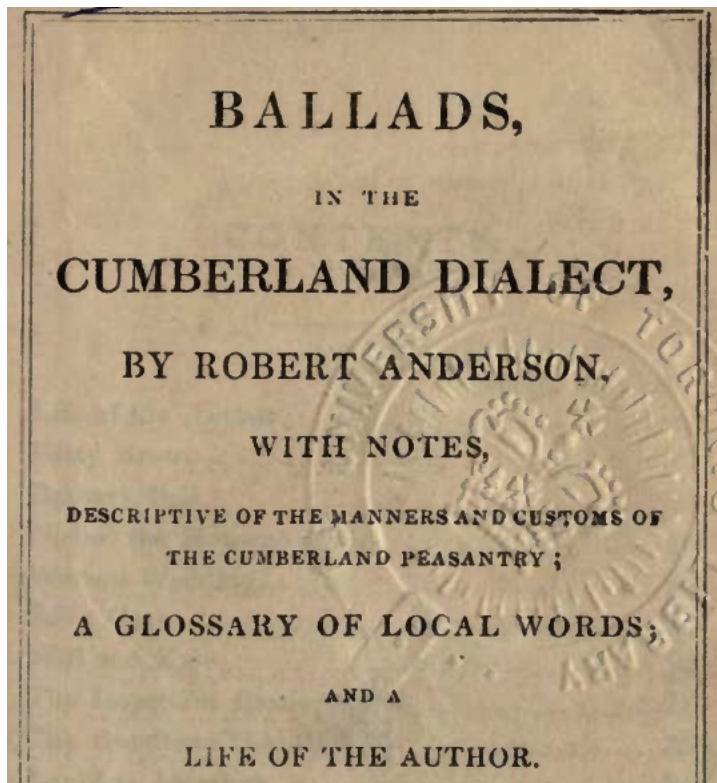
“ Early t’night, lass ? ”

“ ’Times I’m a little early, Stephen ; ’times a little late. I’m never to be counted on, going home.”

“ Nor going t’other way, neither, t’sems to me, Rachael ? ”

This distinction works well for many texts

Dialect literature:

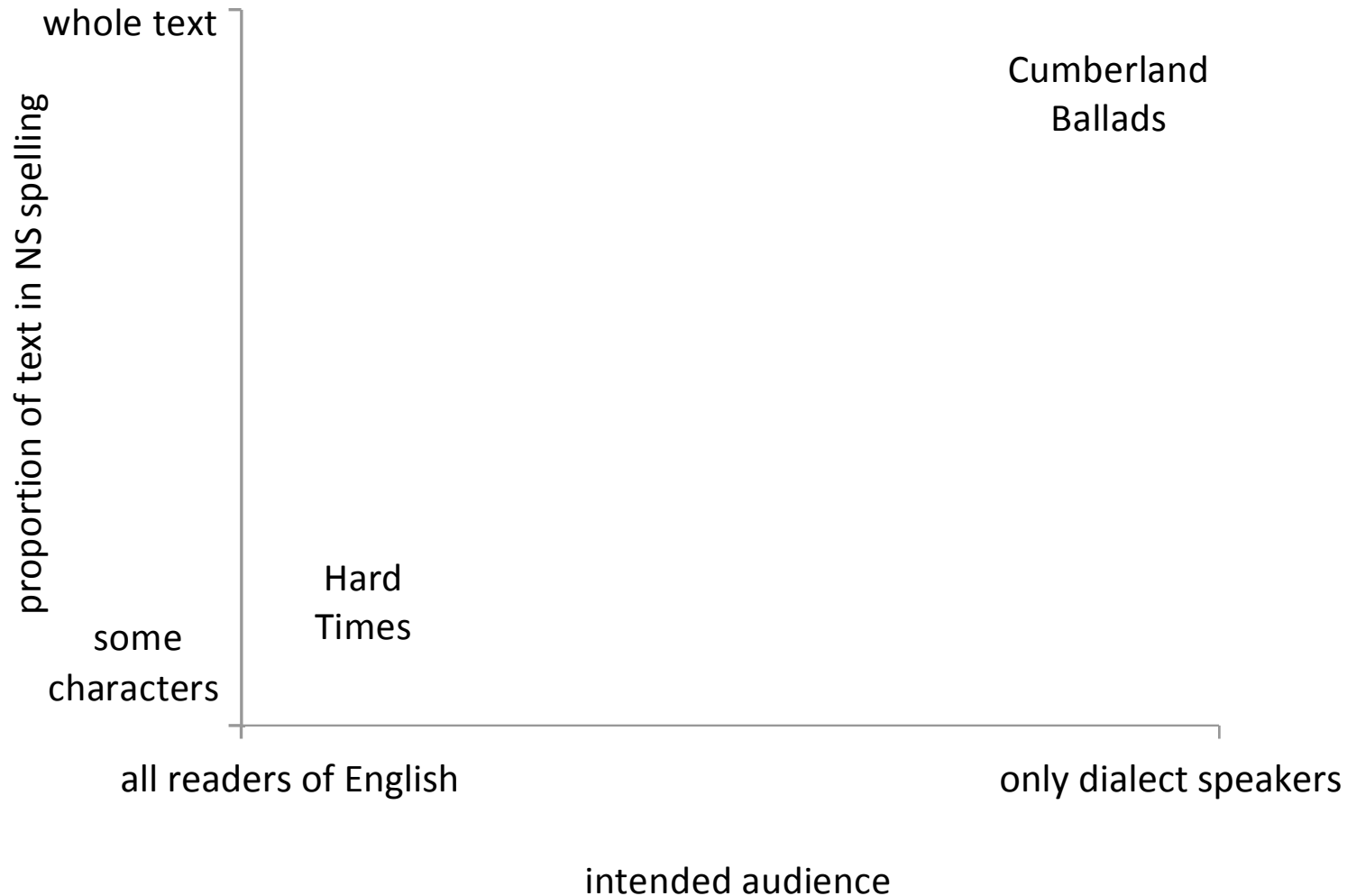


But...

- “...the boundary between dialect literature and literary dialect can be a rather permeable one” (Hodson, 2014)
- texts could be intended for both types of audience
- texts for a general readership might have more than just dialogue in NS spelling (*what do we say about Trainspotting?*)
- localised texts might only have dialect spelling in direct speech

It might be right to conceive of the distinctions in terms of two clines:

1. what is the intended audience?
 2. what proportion of the text is in nonstandard spelling?
- LD and DW are not completely distinct *categories*, but there *are* prototypes



There are several **genres** within the DW space that exists between these two poles

‘Generalised LD’

- *Trainspotting*

Within DL:

- personal texts (ego documents, unpublished manuscripts, webpages)
- ‘lay’ writing
- CHLDL

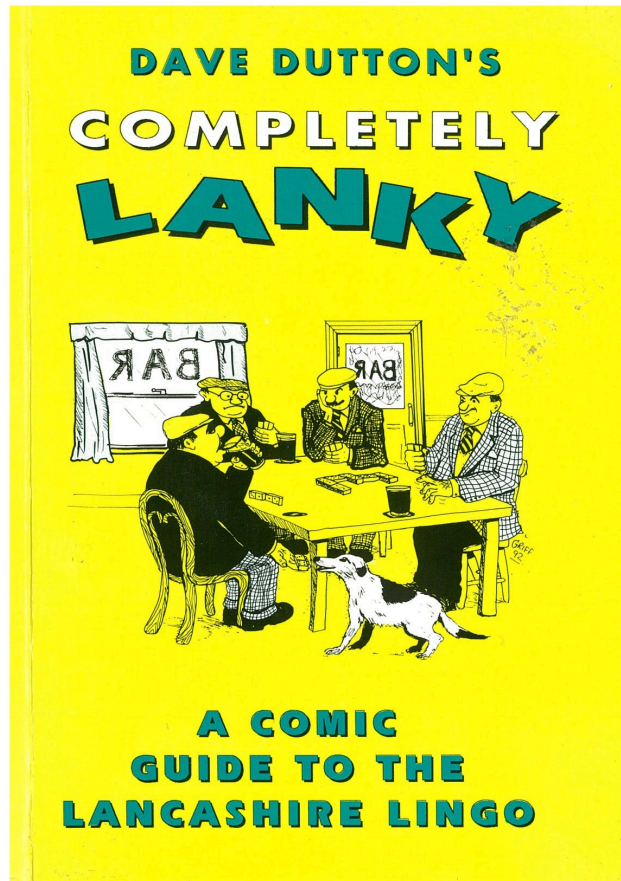
Contemporary Humorous Localised Dialect Literature

- 'CHLDL'
- written by, and is meant in large part for an audience of people who speak the variety in question
- it can feature lengthy passages in dialect spelling
 - however, such texts often directly **compare** dialect forms with (often) absurdly formal standard English forms
 - this is where part of the humour comes from...

CHLDL is normally easily recognised once you're looking for it, with several common characteristics:

- it is part of 'low/popular culture', resting on recent traditions
 - *Contemporary* = current, published continuously since the 1960s
 - *Humorous* = often 'vulgar', sometimes involving collections of jokes, often with cartoons
 - *Localised* = published by regional publishers, often only available in the dialect area
 - *Dialect Literature* = written with an audience of dialect speakers in mind

Volumes of CHLDL exist for many varieties of English



Lanky = Lancashire English

Th'art too slow ter catch a cowl. (cold).
(Do hurry up.)

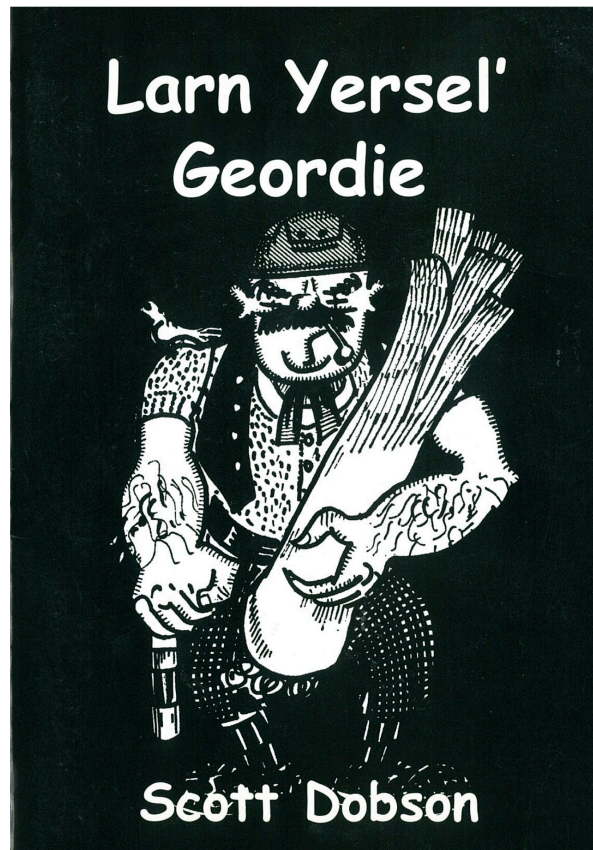
Th'art nowt burra slopstone blonde.
(I perceive that your hair is bleached. A Grade 1 put-down - the slopstone is an old-fashioned Lancashire stone sink, whence the insult intimates the colour of the insultee's hair was obtained.)

Thez a face lahk a line o' wet washin'.
(Stop sulking!)

This shows a characteristic of many CHLDL texts:

- the joke is that they pretend to be 'phrasebooks' or language-learning guides
- note that the Standard English translations can be overly formal = humour...

Volumes of CHLDL exist for many varieties of English



Geordie = English from North-East England

THE HOME

G. Wordaz on the buroo

E. Father is unemployed.

G. Agorrit on a storeclub

E. It was obtained on credit at the Co-operative Wholesale Society.

G. Eez away te the dole for tis munny.

E. Father is out on an errand.

G. Givower bubblint or aal dad yer jaa

E. Cease your grizzling, child, or I will punish you.

3. Dialect writing in Scouse

You all know 'Liverpool English', AKA 'Scouse'...

- spoken in and around Liverpool, and very closely associated with the city
- rated low in subjective 'aesthetic' rankings (Giles & Trudgill 1978, Montgomery 2006, Coupland & Bishop 2007)
- but has considerable covert prestige (Trudgill 1999, Watson 2006a, 2007)
- the dialect is in the linguistic North of England, but has a number of distinct phonological features



What kinds of dialect writing exists for Scouse?

Prototypical literary dialect

Kitty nodded earnestly and the movement caught the young lady's eye. She swung round, looking properly at Kitty for the first time.

'Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't see you there – are you being served or did I push in ahead of you?'

'S'orlright,' Kitty said. 'I ain't a customer, I's brung work in.'

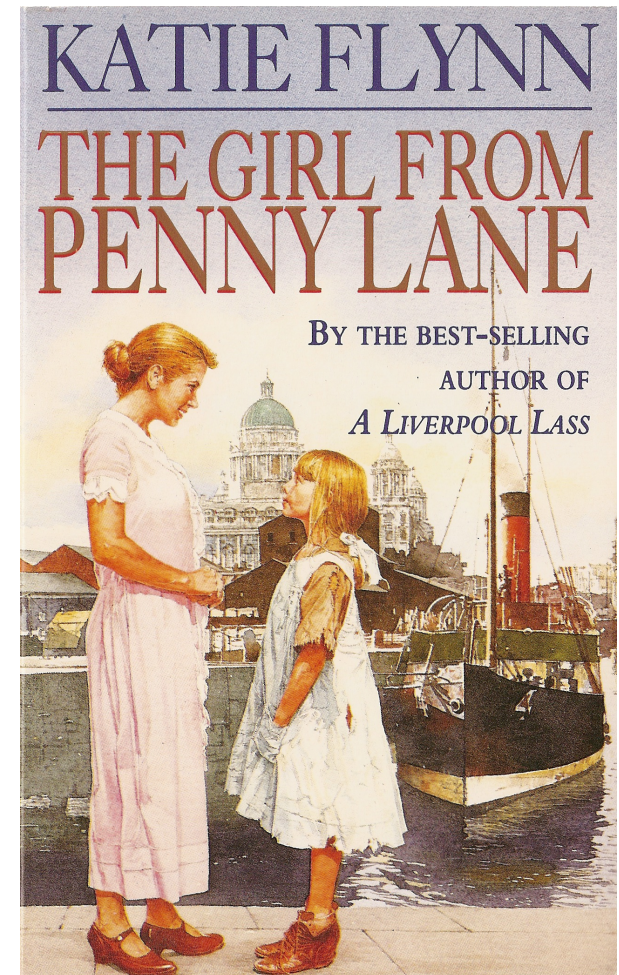
The young lady nodded.

'I see. Well, if the hat's ready I shan't be long, since Nellie – that's my sister – paid the first instalment, and there's only one shilling and sixpence owing, which I've got in my purse.'

'I'm fetchin' trimmings,' Kitty confided, delighted that this pretty, beautifully dressed young lady was disposed to chat. 'Me Mam makes 'em for Miss 'Ughes an' Miss Morton. They sends plain ribbons an' she 'broiders 'em, an' stitches lace an' makes button-'oles an' all sorts.'

'She must be very clever with her needle,' the young lady said. 'My sister can sew, but I'm not very good. Can you embroider?'


'Well, I can, me friend taught me, but I wouldn't tell me Mam,' Kitty confessed. 'She'd make me do it all, else. 'Sides, don't suppose I could do all them fancy stitches an' that.'




Not quite Dickens...

- in LD it doesn't really matter if it's authentic
- it just needs to be non-standard

Generalised literary dialect



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Stump

Niall Griffiths May 31, 2011
Random House

★★★★★ 6

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A newcomer has arrived in a small Welsh seaside town - a one-armed Liverpoolian. Seeking to rebuild his life, if not his body, he is attempting to lead a life here unlike any he's lived before: a normal one - shopping, gardening, signing on, visiting friends, all the usual diurnal activities. Over a hundred miles to the north, however, two men in shellsuits are leaving Liverpool, heading south in a rickety old car. They have been sent by their gang-boss to wreak terrible, violent revenge, but have only a rough idea of their quarry: a one-armed man, maybe living somewhere in west Wales, in a small town by the sea.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Niall Griffiths was born in Liverpool in 1966 and now lives in Wales. He has published six other novels:

Niall Griffiths *Stump*

—Fuckin useless mudderfucker *cunt* of a car ... fuckin Tommy givin us *this* pure piecer fuckin wank ...

Alastair the passenger does not look up from the *Reader's Digest Book of the Road* he is studying balanced on his trackie'd knees.

—Yeh want Runcorn.

—I know I want Runcorn, Ally. I *know* me way out of the fuckin city.

—Runcorn, an then we can gerron to the M56 til ... Hapsford or somewhere, wharrever the fuck it's called.

Personal dialect literature

A SCOUSE INTERPRETATION

OF

ALICE IN WONDERLAND

BY

MARVIN R. SUMNER

1990

* Twinkel, twinkel, littul bat!

'Ow I wunder wot yor at!"

"Yunnow de song doyeray?"

"I've herd sumtin like it," sed Alice.

"It goezon, yernow," de 'atter kontinyewed, "in diss way:--

* Up above de werld yew fly,

Like a tea-tray in de sky.

Twinkel, twinkel---"

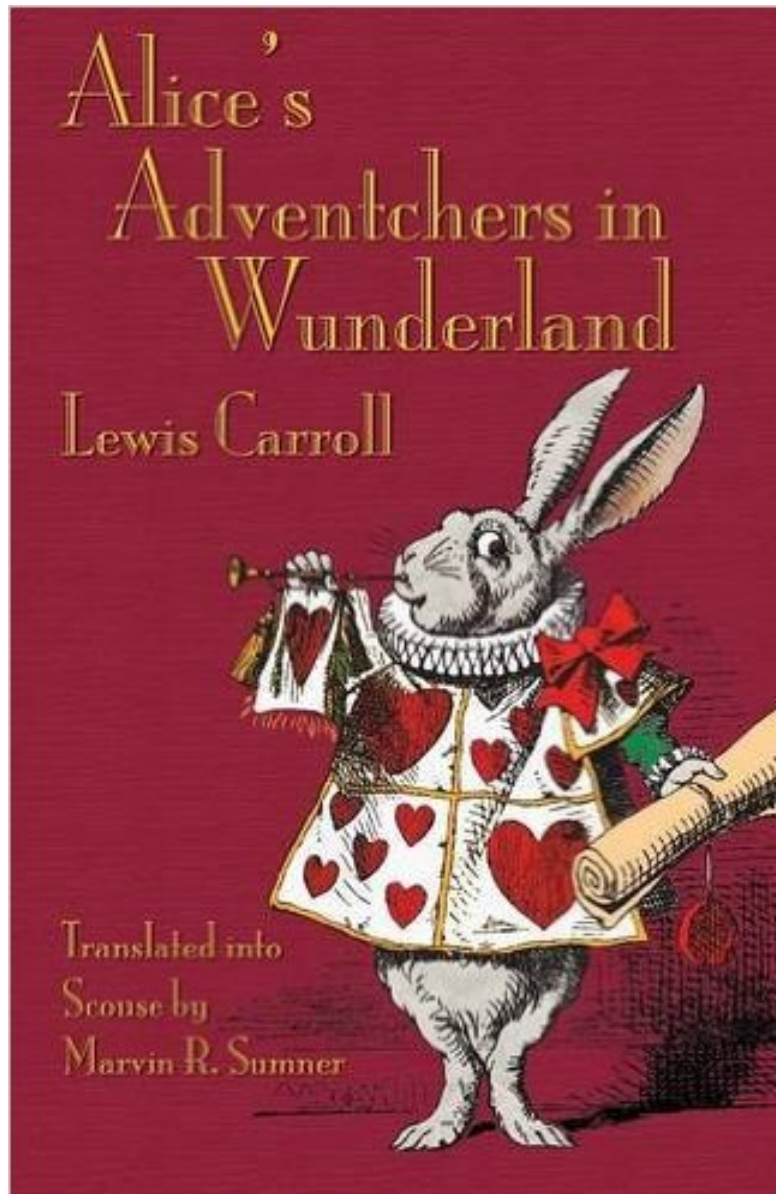
'Ere de Dormowse shuk itzself an began singin innitz sleep"*Twinkel, twinkel, twinkel, twinkel----" an wenn on so long dat dey 'ad to pinch it to make it stop.

"Well, I'd 'ardly finished de ferst verse," sed de 'atter, "wenn de Kween bawllled out, 'E'z murdrin de time! Off wid 'iz 'ead!" "

" 'Ow dredfully savidge!" eksclaimed Alice.

"An ever since dat," de 'atter wenn on inna mornful tone, " 'E woan do a ting I ask! It's orlwayz sixa klok now."

NB: this has recently be published, after having been murdered by an editor



*'Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!
Ow I wunder what you're at!'*

You know de song, do you?"

"I've eard sometin like it," said Alice.

"It goes on, you know," de Atter continued, "in dis way:—

*'Up above de world you fly,
Like a tea-tray in de sky.
Twinkle, twinkle—'*

Ere de Dormouse shook itself an began singin in its sleep
"*Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle, twinkle—*" an wenn on so long
dat dey ad to pinch it to make it stop.

"Well, I'd arldy finished de ferst verse," said de Atter,
"when de Queen bawled out, 'E's murdrin de time! Off wid iz
ead!'"

"Ow dreadfully savidge!" exclaimed Alice.

"An ever since dat," de Atter wenn on in a mournful tone,
"E wo'n do a ting I ask! It's allus six o'clock now."

The editor revised the text massively, to “remove all eye-dialect” and produce a ‘minimalist’ version of the text, contrasting with the ‘maximalist’ original.

"Yunnow de song doyeray?"

"I've herd sumtin like it," sed Alice.

"It goezon,yernow," de 'atter kontinyewed,"in diss way:--

You know de song, do you?"

"I've eard sometin like it," said Alice.

"It goes on, you know," de Atter continued, "in dis way:—

" 'Ow dredfully savidge!" eksclaimed Alice.

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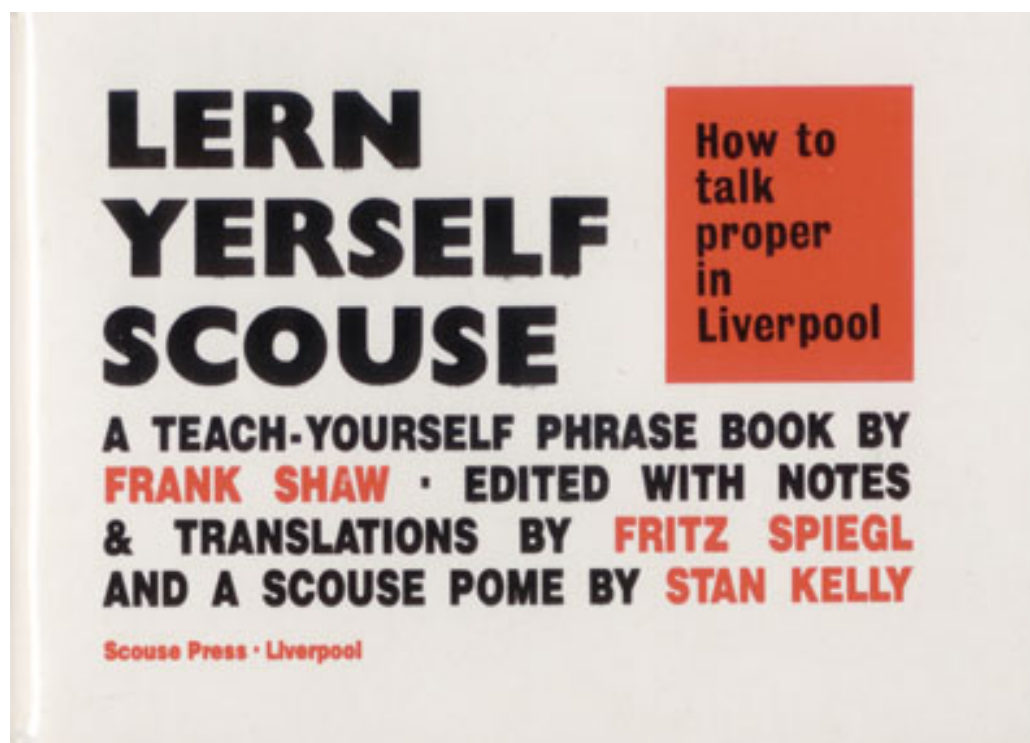
"Ow dreadfully savidge!" exclaimed Alice.

"An ever since dat," de Atter wenn on in a mournful tone,
"E wo'n do a ting I ask! It's allus six o'clock now."

CHLDL

The best known volumes of LivEng CHLDL are the *Lern Yerself Scouse* books

- Spiegl, who edited the series, claims they were the first in the modern wave of such texts
- the first was published in the 1960s (and is still in print)
- subsequent volumes have appeared at irregular intervals since: 5 volumes



Kelly, Shaw and Spiegl (1965)



Spiegl (ed.) (2000)

Yer cudden knock de skin off a rice puddn.
You are a weakling.

Lern Yerself Scouse (1966)

‘I WUZ JUS’ ‘AVIN’ A BERST BE’IND DE ‘EDGE’ Excuse
offered when found in anyone’s garden, even if there is no hedge.

Lern Yerself Scouse 4 (1989)

4. Which features are represented in Scouse dialect writing? What does that *mean*?

No DW is intended *for* linguists, but we can ask many questions of it:

- which features does are represented in DW?
 - why those features?
- does DW represent features which are characteristic/stereotypical of a variety?
 - does it represent their phonological patterning appropriately?
- does it represent different features to different extents?
 - if so, why?
- are there dialect features that are not represented at all?
 - might all this tell us something about these features' salience?

In general:

- DW can shed light on speakers' **knowledge** of dialect features and of the degree to which such features are **salient** with respect to each other

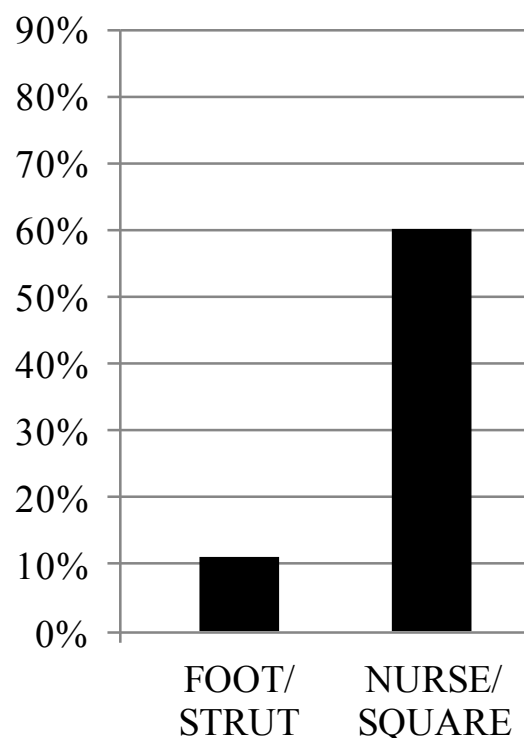
Such questions require a quantitative methodology

- Honeybone & Watson (2013) and Honeybone, Watson & van Eyndhoven (to appear) approached the spelling variants of Scouse CHLDL as analogous to the variants of sociolinguistic variables, in line with Labov's (1972) Principle of Accountability
- for a preselected set of phonological features, we counted whether all words which *could* be respelled to represent each feature *are* respelled, and how often the same feature is *not* respelled where it could be

We discovered substantial differences in the extent to which features are represented.

Differently represented differences involving **contrasts**

- Scouse lacks the NURSE/SQUARE and FOOT/STRUT contrasts that are found in RefEng
 - these are represented to very different degrees in Scouse CHDL:



We attribute this to a difference of **localisedness**

- NURSE/SQUARE is a dialect feature only in Liverpool and Lancashire
- FOOT/STRUT is a dialect feature ACROSS the North of England
- these differences of localisedness correlate with different degrees of salience

Doing different things to a /t/

- Scouse has two competing processes affecting /t/
- Liverpool Lenition involves the realisation of underlying stops as **affricates** or **fricatives**, and is very common in /t/
- T-to-R affects pre-vocalic /t/ (normally word-final) **in certain words**
 - an example of T-to-R from *Stump*:
—Runcorn, an then we can gerron to the M56 til ...

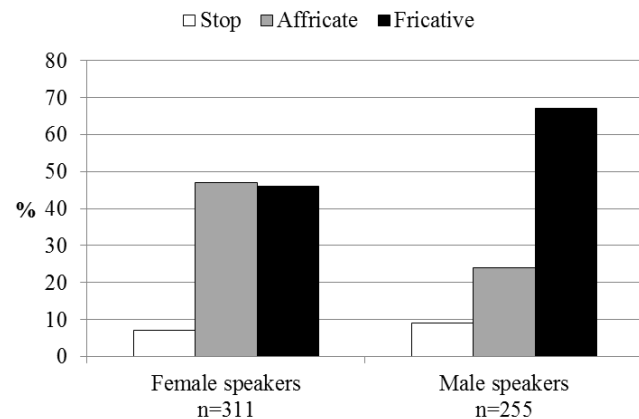


Figure 5. Realisation of utterance-final /t/ (in environment: V_##) in 16 adolescent speakers. Adapted from Watson (2007b). N values are token counts.

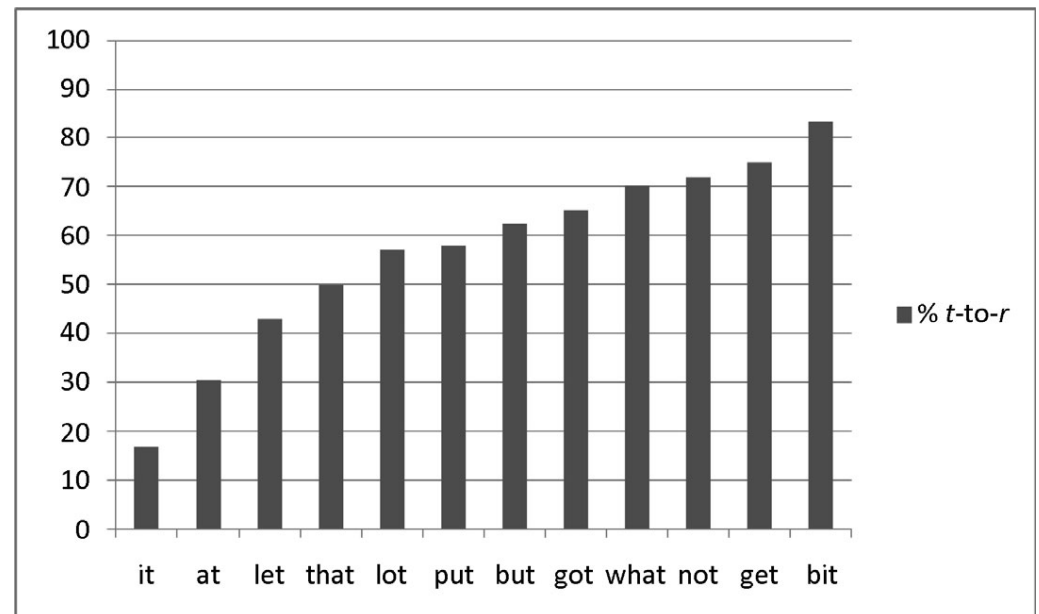


Figure 5. Frequency of occurrence of *t-to-r* for each lexical item in Liverpool archive data

T-lenition and T-to-R are represented to very different extents in Scouse CHLDL:

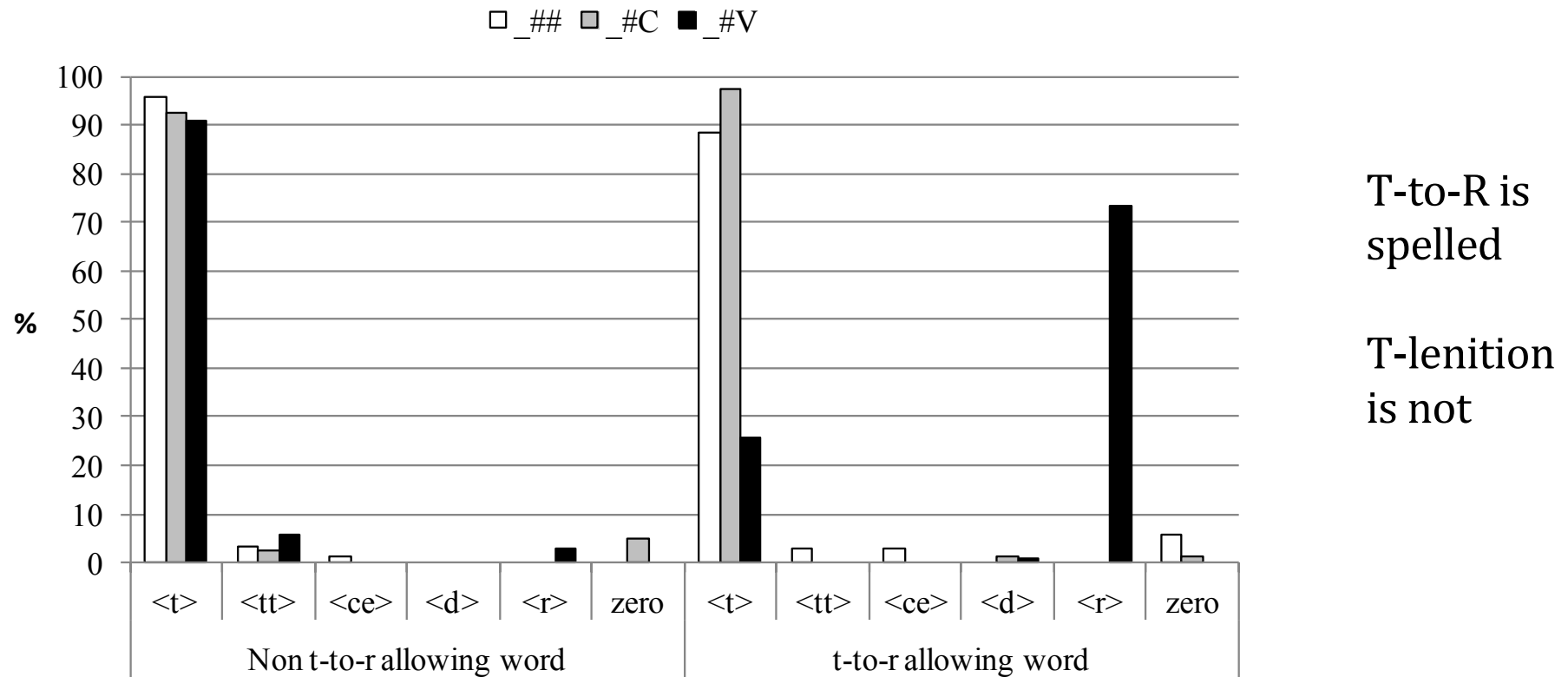


Figure 8. Spelling of /t/ in Liverpool CHLDL split by words which exhibit T-to-R in OLIVE's Archive subcorpus and words which do not, in three phonological environments: utterance final (_##), word-final preconsonantal (_#C) and word-final prevocalic (_#V)

We attribute this to a difference of **phonological salience**

- T-to-R is an ‘early’ phonological process: it involves segments which exist in the lexicon and it has lexical exceptions
- T-lenition is a ‘late’ phonological process: it creates segments which don’t exist in the lexicon [$\widehat{t}\theta$, θ], and it is exceptionless
 - both are ‘dialect features’ of Scouse, but only T-to-R is written to any great extent
 - T-to-R is more salient to speakers

But which features are represented in Scouse DW at all?

- to discover this, as a first step, I considered **1000 words** each from 3 texts:
 - *Stump*
 - the original, typescript *Alice*
 - *Lern Yerself Scouse* volume 1

I noted each nonstandard respelling and assigned it to a category

- the categories emerged from the texts, as needed
 - thus, the first words of *LYS* have three respellings:

Ullo dur

1 x H-dropping

1 x DH-stopping

1 x SQUARE/NURSE

Results: *Stump*

109 respellings in total = c. 10% of the text

	%
EYE DIALECT	2
<i>-in</i>	46
schwa = <i>-er</i>	13
H-dropping	6
<i>thee = the/they</i>	6
T-to-R	4
<i>an = and</i>	3
DH-stopping	3
SQUARE/NURSE	2
<i>me = my</i>	2
<i>ar = our</i>	2
<i>ahl = old</i>	2
<i>djer = did you</i>	1
<i>ad = I'd</i>	1
[other one-offs]	1

red = localised around Liverpool

blue = broadly northern

Results: original *Alice*

546 respellings in total = c. 55% of the text

	%
EYE DIALECT	46
DH-stopping	19
H-dropping	9
-in	4
an = and	4
SQUARE/NURSE	4
T-to-R	2
TH-stopping	2
STRUT	2
ter	2
C=CC	2
won/ce = one	1
yer = you	1
dinnt	1
[other one-offs]	1

red = localised around Liverpool

blue = broadly northern

Results: *Lern Yerself Scouse*: 292 respellings in total = c. 29% of the text

	%
EYE DIALECT	6
DH-stopping	29
H-dropping	15
SQUARE/NURSE	7
<i>yer</i>	7
<i>-in</i>	6
schwa = <i>-er</i>	6
<i>me = my</i>	5
T-to-R	3
<i>ew = ʌ:</i>	2
C=CC	2
<i>owl = old</i>	2
<i>a = of</i>	1
<i>an = and</i>	1
T's-	0.5
<i>yiz/yews</i>	0.5
<i>are = our</i>	0.5
TH-stopping	0.5
STRUT	0.5
<i>ewk = ook</i>	0.5
<i>wha</i>	0.5
[other one-offs]	3

red = localised around Liverpool

blue = broadly northern

The numbers do not represent the different extent to which features are represented

- they do not consider how frequently particular features *could* occur in text
- not how frequently the features are *not* spelled
- rather, they represent simply how commonly each feature is represented in a text

Commonly represented features:

- **DH-stopping** schwa = -er
- H-dropping *me = my*
- -in T-to-R
- yer an = and
- **SQUARE/NURSE**

Which Scouse features are *not* represented? *What is the list of Scouse dialect features?*

- BATH
- Velar-nasal-plus
- R-tapping
- final schwa fronting = eg, *mother* with [ɛ]
- ...

What does it *mean* for certain of these features to be represented and others not...?

[THE END]