

## **NEW-DIALECT FORMATION IN NINETEENTH CENTURY LIVERPOOL: A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCOUSE**

Patrick Honeybone, University of Edinburgh, [patrick.honeybone@ed.ac.uk](mailto:patrick.honeybone@ed.ac.uk)

This article appears in the popular/academic volume: Grant, A. & Grey, C. (eds) (2007) *The Mersey Sound: Liverpool's Language, People and Places*. Liverpool: Open House Press. 106-140.

Available electronically from: [www.englang.ed.ac.uk/people/patrick2.html](http://www.englang.ed.ac.uk/people/patrick2.html)

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

One thing that is commonly claimed about Liverpool English (or 'Scouse') is that it is not quite like its neighbours. While it certainly shares many characteristics with the varieties of English that are spoken nearby, there are also several salient linguistic features which are common in Liverpool English but which are not found in surrounding varieties (such as South Lancashire English, Manchester English and Cheshire English). Part of the point of this article is to focus on a few of the features of Liverpool English which set it apart from other Northern Englishes, with the aim of understanding why they exist in the form that they do. The explanation will be a historical one, couched in the framework of 'new-dialect formation'. This approach focuses on what happens when a new variety of a language comes into being, due to a special kind of dialect mixture that can occur when a number of already existing varieties come into close contact with each other.

As well as a focus on some of the 'special' features of Scouse, I also consider a few features of the variety which are not so unusual. Indeed, in order to properly understand the status of the 'special' features, it is crucial to also consider the context in which they exist. It can be dangerous to focus on individual linguistic features, isolated from the full system or set of features, because all the consonants and vowels of Liverpool English were affected by the same social history and population movements. It is just as interesting when we can see that the features that have crystallised to form the variety were not overtly affected by this history as it is when we see that they clearly were. Despite the fact that there is an undeniable Liverpool exceptionalism, as Belchem (2000a) illustrates, it would be wrong to think that Liverpool English is entirely unlike the other varieties that are found in the North West of England, just as it would be wrong to think that Liverpool is entirely unlike the other cities of the North.

We will see below that the important forces that determined the basic shape of current Liverpool English were largely those that were at work in Liverpool in the nineteenth century. This is when the available evidence indicates that the variety came into being, and it is when speakers of a number of dialects were mixing in the area. The approach taken here is to consider just four of the linguistic features of Liverpool English, each of which shows a different type of influence from the varieties of English whose speakers came into contact in Liverpool. They are representative of the ways in which the features of these different varieties won out to different degrees, in ways which are not always predictable. Some of them also show that Liverpool English is not just the product of what speakers of other varieties of English brought with them to Liverpool – like every form of every language, Liverpool English has developed independently, and some of its features have undergone endogenous, autonomous changes.

The features that I discuss here are all phonological. That is, they are features of the Liverpool *accent* and are not to do with vocabulary or grammar. It is sometimes

claimed (for example, in Belchem, 2000b) that Liverpool English is ‘only’ an accent and not a ‘dialect’, in part because most of the exceptional characteristics of Liverpool English are aspects of its phonology. There are problems with this claim, however. It relies on a convention that some linguists adopt to distinguish between these two terms. Hughes & Trudgill (1996, 3), for example, write that they “use DIALECT to refer to varieties distinguished from each other by differences of grammar and vocabulary”, while “ACCENT, on the other hand, will refer to varieties of pronunciation”. This allows us to say that people may speak the Standard English dialect with any accent, and that is a conceptually useful thing to be able to say. However, the grammar and vocabulary of Liverpool English are not always the same as Standard English, and, when they are, the grammatical and lexical forms that the Liverpool accent is typically associated with in speech belong just as much to Liverpool English as they do to Standard English.

Furthermore, there is another linguistic convention, in which ‘dialect’ is a superordinate term to ‘accent’. This is expressed by Trudgill (1999, 2) when he writes that “[w]hen we talk about dialect we are referring to something more than accent. We are referring not only to pronunciation but also to the words and grammar that people use.” This convention unambiguously allows us to talk about the process of ‘new-dialect formation’ for Liverpool English, and it is the convention adopted here. Liverpool English may not be a ‘traditional dialect’, as Wells (1982) describes the ancient very distinct non-standard morpho-syntax of Northumbrian English, Scots and West Country English (for example), but we can still call it a *dialect*.

In what follows, then, we consider the origins of four phonological features of Liverpool English. The features are: TH-stopping, non-rhoticity, the absence of contrast in the SQUARE and NURSE lexical sets and Liverpool lenition. What these are, exactly, will become clear in section 4, where I consider each of them in turn. This follows a brief consideration of what I mean by ‘Liverpool English’ and ‘linguistic features’ in section 2, and an introduction to ‘new-dialect formation’, in Liverpool and elsewhere, in section 3. As this piece is quite short, we can only scratch the surface of all the points that could be considered in connection with new-dialect formation in Liverpool. I hope that it succeeds in showing how the variety can be considered in this connection, however, and why it’s important to do so. It can only offer the briefest of brief histories of Scouse, ignoring most recent history. Nonetheless, the aspects of the history of Late Modern English in Liverpool discussed here, principally from the nineteenth century, allow us an insight into both what has gone on in Liverpool and into how new-dialect formation in general can proceed.

## **2. ‘LIVERPOOL ENGLISH’ AND ‘LINGUISTIC FEATURES’**

As this article appears in a volume which is dedicated to the description and discussion of Liverpool English, it is hardly necessary to spend much time here describing it. I mention only a few important points, and refer the reader to other sources of much more detailed information. First, though, I consider what linguists mean when they talk of ‘varieties’ (or ‘dialects’), and of their ‘linguistic features,’ in the first place.

I argued above that Liverpool English can be seen as a dialect of English, and in doing that, I also used the more neutral but largely equivalent term ‘variety’. Some linguists, however, would deny that there are such things as varieties of languages at all. On certain levels this is right – it’s not really possible to say quite where one dialect ends and another starts. They melt into each other geographically, and, in any

case, speakers vary in the way they speak, so someone living in the border area may use more Liverpoolian features one minute, and more Lancashire features the next. These border areas, or ‘transition zones’ throw up a number of complicated issues for dialectologists (see chapter eight of Chambers & Trudgill 1998 for some discussion of this), and it’s impossible to draw entirely satisfactory lines around a geographical area to say something like “this is where Liverpool English is spoken”. Often dialectologists rely on the isogloss of a particularly salient linguistic feature to mark a dialect boundary, where speakers on one side of the line tend to use one variant (such as using [x] in words like *back*, for example), and those on the other side use another (for example, using [k]). Perhaps ideally, a dialectologist would find a bundle of isoglosses, where several features of this kind diverge, but it’s quite rare to find isoglosses coinciding completely, so the whole notion that there really are dialects becomes problematic.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, in lay ideas and in the branch of linguistics which studies it, Perceptual Dialectology, it certainly makes sense to speak of discrete dialects. Work in Perceptual Dialectology such as Preston (1999, 2002), and, for the UK, Inoue (1996) and Montgomery (2006), has shown that speakers of a language are willing and able to volunteer opinions on the aesthetics of discrete varieties, and about precisely where particular dialects are spoken (for example, by drawing lines on maps). If we base ourselves on a mix of traditional and perceptual dialectology, it is entirely rational to speak of different dialects, such as Liverpool English, South Lancashire English, Manchester English and varieties of Irish and Scottish Englishes. Indeed, it will be crucial to do this when we consider contact between dialects in sections 3 and 4, below.

As well as using ‘dialect’ freely above, I talked about a dialect’s ‘linguistic features.’ What are these features? Work on dialect comparison naturally needs to focus on differences between varieties, and this is what tends to be described under the heading of “the features of a variety”. It is certainly possible to find phonological, morphological, lexical or syntactic phenomena which are unique to one dialect, in that they are only found in a very geographically restricted area, and when these are described, they certainly count as some of the features of a particular dialect, but most of the time when dialects are described, it is in terms of a comparison of differences between the variety and one of the reference varieties, such as Standard English, RP or General American – or rather in terms of a set of ways in which varieties can differ from the reference varieties. One such ‘possible difference’ is (non-)rhoticity, another is the BATH~TRAP split, both of which I mention further below. Others are the Northern Subject Rule, diphthong rotation, pronoun exchange, glottalling, flapping/tapping and consonant deletion (for an investigation of some of these features in the phonology of English, from a purely phonological perspective, see Carr & Honeybone, 2007).

In terms of the features which Wales (2006) argues are the most salient markers of the North/South divide in England, Liverpool English clearly patterns with the North, as it has a short /a/ in both BATH and TRAP, and typically has /ʊ/ (or at least certainly not /ʌ/) in both FOOT and STRUT. As we saw at the start of this piece, however, there is something special about Liverpool English, when compared to the other Northern

---

<sup>1</sup> Some linguists also maintain that the only coherently thing to study is the linguistic knowledge of an individual speaker. This approach is certainly the right one for some aspects of linguistic investigation, such as the phonological patterning of the realisation of segments, but it can’t work for any investigation that seeks to consider whole dialects, by very definition. The discussion in section 2 of Honeybone (2001) is also relevant here.

Englishes – indeed Hughes and Trudgill (1996,15) even go so far as to say that that it is “in a number of ways as linguistically southern as it is northern”. This is a complicated claim, though, and does not imply that Liverpool is entirely unlike its neighbours. It is nonetheless clear that Liverpool English is quite different from its neighbour varieties, which more-or-less maintain the Lancashire-Cheshire dialect continuum. Liverpool English stands outside of dialect continuum, as a relatively new variety, which has been decisively affected by linguistic contact.

Liverpool English is the form of speech that is characteristic of Liverpool, Birkenhead and adjacent areas of urban Merseyside. Since at least the 1960s (the OED’s first attestation is from 1945), it has been called ‘Scouse’ in popular parlance, and while it is currently consistently rated low in ‘aesthetic’ rankings (for example in Giles & Trudgill, 1978, and Coupland & Bishop, 2007), there is clearly covert prestige attached to the variety, as is currently spreading to be spoken in rural areas around Merseyside (Trudgill, 1999). Academic work on Liverpool English includes Knowles (1973), the starting point for any serious study of Liverpool English, and de Lyon (1981), Newbrook (1986, 1999), Sangster (2001), Honeybone (2001), Honeybone & Watson (2006) and Watson (2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, to appear). Important for the history of Liverpool English is Belchem (2000b), and it is to the role of the history of Liverpool and its people in the formation of Liverpool English that we now turn.

### **3. NEW-DIALECT FORMATION – IN LIVERPOOL AND ELSEWHERE**

Historical linguists have long focused on what happens when languages come in to contact, and on the linguistic effects that this can have. For example, the effect that Norman French or Viking Germanic had on varieties of early English when groups speaking those languages came to Britain has always been considered crucial in histories of English, and the mechanisms through which languages can affect each other in such cases of bilingualism have been well studied. Linguists have also always recognised that neighbouring varieties can affect each other, perhaps leading to speakers simply borrowing a feature from a neighbouring dialect. It was only in the 1980s and 1990s, however, that linguists started to really consider what happens when different dialects of one language come together in one place. This happens, of course, when the speakers of specific varieties move en masse, either to somewhere that already has a population speaking a different variety of the language, or, together with speakers of other varieties of the language to somewhere new, where no variety of the language is spoken.

These scenarios are those which give rise to new-dialect formation, and they have been influentially discussed in work such as Trudgill (1986), Britain & Trudgill (1999), Kerswill & Williams (2000, 2005), Trudgill (2004). In this previous work, the focus has been on what happened in New Zealand to produce New Zealand English when speakers of a number of varieties of English went to New Zealand in the nineteenth century, and on what happened in Milton Keynes when people from various parts of Britain came together to form a new town in the twentieth century. Trudgill and Kerswill argue for of a process of *koineisation*, where a new ‘compromise’ dialect, or *koine*, is created by speakers when different dialects come into contact, due to the levelling out of the variation in individual features among speakers in a number of stages, and the selection of particular variants to form a stable, focused new dialect by subsequent generations of children. Other relevant (and partially conflicting) work is Lass (1990) who places particular emphasis on a

‘swamping’ effect, where he argues one variety can overwhelm all others if the speakers are numerous enough, and Mufwene (for example, 1996), who argues for a ‘founder effect’, in which the variety of the first settlers in an area is argued to be privileged in terms of the features which will survive in the new variety.

There is a connection between what occurred in the development of Liverpool English and the situations that have been investigated under the headings of new-dialect formation and koineisation, largely for extraterritorial Englishes (ie, those spoken outside of Britain). In the formation of Liverpool English, speakers of several varieties of English came into contact with each other, and the history to be considered below is the history of these speakers. A study of population movements will be crucial, so population statistics (such as census returns) will be very important.

### 3.1 What is new-dialect formation?

Trudgill’s (1986, 2004) model of new-dialect formation is essentially a deterministic model, claiming to be able to predict which features will survive when dialects come into contact, as long as the proportions of the population are known, or at least it is unambiguously deterministic in ‘*tabula rasa* situations’ like New Zealand, where there was no-one who could think themselves to be the original speakers of a variety. This is not the case in places where large numbers of speakers move to a new part of Britain, where there already were people speaking an autochthonous, indigenous variety, even if in relatively small numbers (as in modern new towns, or, as we will see, cities like Liverpool). Nonetheless, the model offers a mechanism for interpreting new-dialect formation, and makes certain predictions about what should happen.

According to Trudgill, there are three main stages in the process. In stage I, adult speakers of established varieties come together, thanks to substantial population movements, in one place. These adults start to accommodate to each other linguistically, to rub off the most extreme differences between their varieties, or to lose features which clearly stand out as minority forms, or which might diminish intelligibility. However, the theory claims that these adults cannot truly form a new dialect themselves. This requires the creative acts of the children who came to the place of new-dialect formation very young, or who were born there. Stage II involves the first generation of new speakers in the area where dialects have come into contact. They have to come to terms with the various differing dialect forms that they hear and are themselves subject to considerable variation because they do not have clear linguistic role models in their peers. They pick up a number of features from their parents and from others around them, in line with the different proportions of the features in the dialects of the speakers who formed the new community, and start the process of koineisation. They can also create ‘interdialect’ features which do not exist in any of the dialects that contribute to the mixture. These speakers, who are not a homogenous group themselves, act as a filter for the linguistic features of the dialects of their parents’ generation to the children of the second generation. This second generation participates in stage III, creating a stabilised, focused koine or new-dialect. For Trudgill, the ‘majority’ variant of a feature always wins out where there is disagreement – not necessarily the features of the dialect with the most speakers. Finally, there can be a stage of ‘drift’, whereby, as Kerswill (2006) writes, “the new dialect and the source dialects undergo parallel changes, which are often taken further in the new dialect because there are fewer social constraints” in the in the newly settled place where the dialects in question came into contact.

Certain aspects of Trudgill's proposals are controversial – they allow no role for prestige in the selection of the features which survive in stages II and II, and they allow for blind determinism, at least in *tabula rasa* situations like New Zealand, which had only poor communications with Britain when New Zealand English was being formed. While this scenario cannot be entirely transplanted to account for what went on in Liverpool, there are many similarities. For our story here, a crucial facet of the theory is that it is predicated on the assumption that dialect contact inevitably results in dialect mixture – as we shall see, while specific dialects did play a big in the formation of Liverpool English, no one dialect imposed all its features on the newly emerging variety.

### **3.2. New-dialect formation in Liverpool**

As mentioned above, Liverpool English can be seen as a relatively new variety of English in a non-trivial way, arguably more so than the varieties spoken in many other northern British cities of equivalent size and similar historical development. This is largely due to the substantial contact which occurred during the development of the city between speakers of different dialects. Not dissimilar types of population mixture occurred in certain other UK urban centres at the same time that Liverpool English was emerging, however, (for example, in Glasgow and Middlesbrough) and we should not think of the development of Liverpool English as being unique in Britain.

Liverpool English is inextricably linked with the urban centre of Liverpool, and, unsurprisingly, therefore, the development of the dialect is inextricably linked with the development of the city. I consider this interrelationship in the next two subsections. I first describe the rise of Liverpool as a population centre (in section 3.2.1), and then move on (in section 3.2.2) to consider how this was relevant to the linguistic situation, by considering the number of speakers of different dialects who came to Liverpool and the (little) direct evidence that exists for the development of the dialect itself. The story of Liverpool English is certainly not one in which one single variety was transplanted to Liverpool, or where the 'founders' of Liverpool swamped all other varieties. It is a complex situation, and as we shall see in section 4, the linguistic effects were complex, too.

#### **3.2.1 The development of Liverpool**

The history of Liverpool has been written in many places, and what follows is a short summary, largely taken from McIntyre-Brown & Woodland (2001) and similar sources. Liverpool was granted letters patent in 1207, inviting settlers to what had been (and what remained for several centuries after this) a small and largely unimportant fishing village and port. In common with many northern English cities, Liverpool only grew in size to become an important urban centre in the past few centuries. It was granted city status in 1880, although it was already a massive urban centre by then. Its real population growth started in the 18th century and exploded in the 19th century, when Liverpool rose to prominence as England's second biggest city and as the single most important port of the British Empire. Some key dates, facts and factors in the rise of Liverpool as a port, and hence population centre, largely taken from McIntyre-Brown & Woodland (2001, 18-22) are: that Liverpool was made a free port in 1647; trade with America, which was to grow to vast importance starts in the 1660s; the world's first wet dock was built in Liverpool in 1715 (this was crucial in the establishment of the town as the key port in Britain); Liverpool became one of the

centres of the slave trade, which, along with other types of trade, brought great wealth to the town in the late eighteenth century; by 1850, the town's trade was double that of London and formed more than half of the entire trade in the UK.

The vast increase in trade meant that the docks became the major employer in Liverpool and vast numbers of people came from other parts of the country to work there as in-migrants. This was one of the factors which brought speakers of non-autochthonous varieties to the area. Other factors also famously caused further immigration to the area, however. There was a large forced migration from Ireland due to the mid-19th century famine there. Liverpool was the obvious, indeed often unavoidable place to go from Ireland as it was the main port of Britain on the West coast, facing Ireland; indeed, it was the main port of the British Empire, and therefore the obvious place to go both as a destination in its own right, or en route to other places (such as America). Due to this and other types of travel, a vast number of people passed through Liverpool, either as crew working on ships or as passengers bound for other destinations. Some of these people will also have stayed in the city. The phenomenal increase in Liverpool's population during the eighteenth and especially nineteenth century can be seen in the population statistics for the number of inhabitants in Liverpool in table 1.

Year	Population	
1561	690 [in 138 cottages]	source: McIntyre-Brown & Woodland (2001)
1663-1673	c.1,000	} source: estimates (from Lawton 1953, 120-122, through Knowles 1973, 17)
1708	6,435	
1773	34,407	
1790	53,853	
1801	77,653	} source: census returns (from Neal 1988, 2)
1811	94,376	
1821	118,972	
1831	165,175	
1841	286,656	
1851	375,955	
1861	443,938	
1871	493,405	
1881	552,508	
1891	517,980	
1901	684,958	
1911	746,421	

Table 1: population growth in Liverpool 1561 - 1911

The raw population figures in table 1, taken largely from texts on the social history of Liverpool give the basic context for the development of Liverpool English during this period. They are most reliable since the official government census began in 1801 – the earlier figures are estimates based on historical sources. It is clear that there is gradual growth during the 18th century, but that there is a massive and rapid increase in population during the 19th century, especially during the middle of the century, with increases of around 100,000 people in successive ten year periods. This remarkable rate of increase could not have been due to a simple increase in birth rate;

it was due to the in-migration of people into the area from elsewhere. The crucial questions for our purposes here are: where did these people come from, and, thus, what languages and varieties of English did they speak? Some population statistics that can help us to answer these questions are given in table 2. These figures are brought together from Munro & Sim (2001), Neal (1988) and Knowles (1973), and hence are not fully complete – the authors of these works were considering the role of national identities in the formation of Liverpool society and were not really interested in the formation of Liverpool English (apart from Knowles, who began serious consideration of the issue, but this was before work on new-dialect formation had really begun, and the discussion of the issues is not his main concern). The figures in table 2 give the place of birth of the inhabitants of Liverpool, generalised into those who came from Ireland, those who came from Wales and those who came from Scotland, as recorded in census returns in terms of a percentage of its total population. The figures start from the period in 1841, when the census began to record more precise details about the households that were described. This information becomes particularly reliable from 1851 onwards, when the place of birth was listed in census returns for each individual in a household.

Year	population	% Irish-born	% Welsh-born	% Scots-born	
1841	286,656	17.3			total in-migrants = 44.9%
1851	375,955	22.3	4.9	3.6	
1861	443,938	18.9	4.7	4.0	total in-migrants = 49%
1871	493,405	15.6	4.3	4.1	
1881	552,508	12.8	3.9	3.7	
1891	517,980	9.1	3.4	2.9	

Table 2: proportion of Liverpool population born outside England

The figures in table 2 show that a substantial proportion of the population of Liverpool throughout the nineteenth century must have moved to the city as adults, with their dialects already formed. The figures are quite imprecise – they do not give the exact places of birth, and we can only assume, without further work on the census returns, that the remaining percentages of the population came largely from parts of England, no doubt to a large extent from the North-West. Liverpool has long been home to groups who originated from outside of the British Isles, too, however, and while forming much smaller parts of the population until more recently, these people should not be left out of consideration – they doubtless contributed to the extreme amount of variation that would have been present in the forms of English spoken in nineteenth century Liverpool. For example, Liverpool has had a black community since the eighteenth century, which has increased notably since the nineteenth century, originally with roots in Africa and latterly with roots in the Caribbean (Ben-Tovim et al. 1986, Manley 1995), and has had a Chinese community since the nineteenth century (Wong 1989).

While not ideal, the figures above allow us to start to consider the situation as it must have been in nineteenth-century Liverpool from the perspective of new-dialect formation. Future, more detailed work should return to the census returns anew, to determine the place of birth (and thus the precise dialects) of those who formed Liverpool as a city, and hence formed Liverpool English, more exactly.

It is clear that substantial proportions of the population of Liverpool came to live and work there in the nineteenth century from Ireland, Wales and Scotland, as well as



from parts of England, and further afield and these people would have had dialects which were quite radically from each other in terms of a considerable number of features. The largest group shown in table 2 (which will have mixed with large groups from parts of England) were those who came from Ireland. This particular group came to Liverpool for a number of reasons, some briefly mentioned above. Regular shipping routes were opened between Ireland and Liverpool in the early 18th century, and the major importance of Liverpool as a centre for travel and trade meant that it was easy for those who wanted or were forced to leave Ireland to head for Liverpool to find work or to travel. The terrible Irish famine which started in 1845 and lasted for several years meant that many people were forced to flee their homes, and the obvious place to go, at least as an initial stop before travelling elsewhere, was Liverpool. The in-migration from Ireland was by no means all due to the famine, however, as shown by the already high proportion of Liverpool-Irish in 1841. There are good reasons to think that the period of time covered in table 2 is approximately the crucial period in which accommodation, levelling, koineisation and new-dialect formation occurred in Liverpool, and I turn to these reasons in the next section.

### **3.2.2 The development of Liverpool English**

Knowles (1973) briefly discusses the history and evolution of Liverpool English, making observations which have formed the basis of discussion for all of the (little) subsequent work in this area. Having conducted a long search for contemporary commentaries or direct evidence for the formation of a distinct and recognisable dialect in Liverpool, Knowles found only very little such evidence. He does, however, cunningly interpret some of the few sources that he finds to set the dates for the development of Liverpool English as between 1830 and 1889, based on direct comments from contemporary observers on the variety of English spoken in Liverpool, and on the *absence* of such comments.

What is at issue here is the emergences of an identifiably distinct Liverpool English – what most people, and present-day work in Perceptual Dialectology, would call ‘Scouse’ – which has the characteristics identified above: a variety which is closely associated with the urban area in and around Liverpool and which is clearly not simply part of the Lancashire-to-Cheshire traditional dialect continuum. In some real sense, before there was this new-dialect, although English was spoken in Liverpool, there was no perceptually real ‘Liverpool English.’

Knowles sets 1830 as being ‘pre-Liverpool English’ because a text published in that year on *The History of Everton* (Everton is a part of Liverpool) describes the speech of two characters from Everton, who have features in their speech which are identifiably Lancashire English features, and which are absent from modern Liverpool English, such as the use of *thou* as a second person pronoun. The records of these two characters date from in 1750, but, Knowles argues, because the (Liverpudlian) author in 1830 does *not* say that this kind of English is not representative of the city in 1830, we can conclude that it is likely that Liverpool English had not yet developed by 1830.

Knowles sets 1889 as the date after which an identifiably Liverpool English must exist because of comments that Ellis makes in his *Early English Pronunciation*: “The part of the nw horn of Cheshire which lies n of Bebington Higher and Lower (3 s Birkenhead), is affected by Liverpool and Birkenhead influences, that is, it has no dialect proper” (Ellis 1889, 408, cited in Knowles 1973, 18). This means, Knowles argues, that by the time that Ellis is writing an identifiably distinct Liverpool English

must exist. Ellis views it as “no dialect proper” precisely because it does not continue the traditional dialect continuum – it is, we may reasonably assume, in modern terminology, a new dialect which had been formed due to the dialect contact and mixture that occurred in Liverpool during just beforehand. As is clear from the figures in table 1 and 2, the period that Knowles sets out for the formation of Liverpool English (1830-1889) is precisely the period in which the population of Liverpool is exploding, and includes speakers of a range of very different dialects.

We should bear in mind that the comments which Knowles deals with do not mention any specific features of the dialect (such as those to be discussed in section 4), and the remarks can only be interpreted as indicative of whether there was (or was not) an identifiably ‘Liverpool English’. Knowles’ dates (1830 and 1889) are perhaps over-optimistically precise, but his basic contention that an identifiably ‘Liverpool English’ emerged during the 19th century fits in well with the predictions of new-dialect formation when put together with the population growth data in tables 1 and 2.

If we bring this all together, it gives us the following basic broad scenario for the development of the perceptually distinct Liverpool English that now exists, placing the development of the variety squarely within the Late Modern English period:

- Stage 1: broadly pre-19th century
- Stage 2: (especially mid) 19th century
- Stage 3: broadly post-19th century

During the long stage 1, there was no ‘distinct’ Liverpool English. English was certainly spoken in Liverpool but it would essentially have ‘simply’ been part of the Lancashire-Cheshire dialect continuum, and would likely have been essentially the same as (or, rather, part of) South Lancashire English.

It is at stage 2 that most attention needs be directed, as it is here that a recognisable ‘Liverpool English’ emerges. We can assume three sub-stages, based on Trudgill’s (2004) three stages of new-dialect formation:

- stage 2i: dialect mixture and accommodation among adult speakers
- stage 2ii: koineisation: levelling and the development of inter-dialect forms in the early generations of children of in-migrants
- stage 2iii: focusing of the dialect mixture the emergence of a stable koine

We can probably assume that stage 2iii occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century, and produced the basis of Liverpool English as we recognise it today, which is as homogenous and as stable as any other dialect (which is to say that it is not entirely homogenous and is subject to change).

Stage 3 is ongoing. Liverpool English has, naturally, been subject to further change since the nineteenth century, both due to later waves of contact with other in-migrants (Liverpool remained a destination for in-migrants from a wide and international range of areas until at least the 1930s) and thanks to ‘natural’ endogenously innovated change. We cannot assume that all of the current features of Liverpool English were present in the late nineteenth century, certainly not with the precise patterning that they have today. To a certain extent, however, I will need to do this in section 4, as clear records of the phonology of Liverpool English do not start until the mid-late twentieth century.

Given the large amount of in-migration from Ireland that is testified in table 2, it is sometimes proposed that the development of Liverpool English can be simply assumed to involve South Lancashire English and the varieties of languages that the Irish brought to Liverpool. Thus, for example, Knowles (1973, 69) writes that “[i]n general, Scouse conforms to the phonology of the North-West Midlands, but has phonetic realizations of Anglo-Irish origins”. Knowles (1977, cited in de Lyon 1981,

160) even goes so far as to declare “Scouse: a Lancashire dialect with an Irish accent”.

If we return to the figures in table 2, however, and take the scenario expected in new-dialect formation seriously, this cannot be the whole story. It is surely true that a substantial section of the population in Liverpool in the nineteenth century would have been born in north-west England and would have spoken Northern and Western Englishes, not simply because of the few families who remained in the area from stage 1, but also because, as Liverpool grew as an urban centre, offering opportunities for employment in many fields, there would have been substantial in-migration into the town from the surrounding area, as occurred during the growth of other northern cities. This would also likely have drawn in people from areas south and east of Liverpool, as well as from the north, and this would provide not a coherent, already existing Lancashire variety as one of the main inputs to the Liverpool dialect mixture, but rather a range of dialects which will have differed in a number of features.

Also, while it is true that a substantial section of the population had been born in Ireland, and that the Liverpool-Irish were often concentrated in certain areas of the city, they were only ever an absolute majority in few streets (see Pooley, 1977 and Neal, 1988), so we cannot assume that their speech would swamp the dialects of in-migrants from other areas. Furthermore, these people would have been speaking a range of dialects when they arrived, of both English and Irish Gaelic. The current considerable dialect diversity among the Hiberno-Englishes would already have existed in some form, with major differences between Southern Hiberno-English, on the one hand, and Northern Hiberno-English and Ulster Scots, on the other, already to some extent in existence (see, for example, Barry 1982). While a fair proportion of the in-migrants from Ireland would have been at least bilingual Irish Gaelic speakers, historians such as Belchem (2000a) claim that there was little Gaelic spoken on the streets of Liverpool, however. It seems that Irish Gaelic was not maintained in Liverpool and this means that, while it may be worth considering the potential for Irish to contribute exogenous factors in the formation of Liverpool English, Hiberno-English is likely the more probable place to look.<sup>2</sup>

A significant section of the population had been born in Wales – indeed Liverpool has been jokingly referred to at some points as the ‘capital of North Wales’ (Waller, 1981). The Liverpool-Welsh spoke both Welsh Englishes and Welsh, and they were often concentrated in certain areas of Liverpool, with Welsh-language churches and newspapers (Pooley, 1977, Waller, 1981, Jones, 1984, Belchem, 2000a). They were not so ghettoised as the Liverpool-Irish, but they were concentrated in certain areas of the city and were a highly organised community (Jones, 1984). Unlike the Liverpool-Irish, the Liverpool-Welsh maintained their language. Welsh was spoken by many

---

<sup>2</sup> The settlement of Irish in-migrants in Liverpool also needs to be seen in the context of Irish settlement patterns in other parts of Britain. The proportion of the population of other urban areas who had been born in Ireland was not unlike that in Liverpool. For example, in 1851, 18.1% of the population of Glasgow and 13.1% of the population of Manchester and Salford had been born in Ireland (Neal, 1988), and there was substantial in-migration into Newcastle upon Tyne and Middlesbrough. As Llamas (2000, 127) writes, “[s]uch was the extent of the migration that, as one in five adult males was Irish, Middlesbrough was second only to Liverpool in terms of the rise of its Irish population in the nineteenth century.” Despite not dissimilar levels of in-migration from Ireland into these areas, the linguistic effect has not been the same, and the linguistic features of Glasgow, Manchester and Middlesbrough Englishes are clearly different in many ways to those of Liverpool. This shows that while the role of Irish in-migration in the formation of Liverpool English was surely important, it was not overwhelming or all-determining, as it did not determine the destinies of these other varieties in the same way.

thousands in substantial communities (and indeed is still spoken in Welsh chapels in Liverpool today).

In-migration to Liverpool from Scotland was also notable, as is also shown in table 2, and the subsequent Liverpool-Scots community was not insignificant (it was the second largest in England, after Newcastle upon Tyne). In a similar way to the Liverpool-Welsh community, the Liverpool-Scots were not as ghettoised as the Liverpool-Irish (Pooley, 1977, Munro & Sim, 2000) and they were not so straightforwardly distinguished by religion (unlike the Irish and Welsh). Very little Scottish Gaelic was spoken in Liverpool (Belchem 2000a, Munro & Sim 2000) so this language is probably not a candidate for influence in the formation of Liverpool English. The input from the Liverpool-Scots would more likely be from their varieties of Scots and Scottish English.

To tie all this in with the predictions of the model of new-dialect formation, we cannot expect strict determinism in the formation of Liverpool English, as Trudgill claims for New Zealand, because there was not a purely *tabula rasa* situation in Liverpool – there were speakers of North-West English in the area before Liverpool’s population exploded due to in-migration, and there were northern and western dialects being spoken in the areas adjacent to Liverpool. However, the scenario that played out in Liverpool during the nineteenth century has much in common with the cases typically discussed under the heading of new-dialect formation. As we will see when we consider linguistic features in detail, there was not a clear ‘founder principle’ such that the features of Lancashire English were privileged in the focused koine, nor did the large amount of speakers of varieties of Hiberno-English swamp all other dialects – Liverpool English is certainly not a case of dialect transplantation. All the evidence points to the variety emerging from a dialect mixture, so in the consideration of certain key features of Liverpool English that is to come in the next section, we will need to consider the input into the mix from a range of dialects.

#### 4. THE FORMATION OF FOUR LIVERPOOL LINGUISTIC FEATURES

To see how the effects of the nineteenth-century dialect contact and mixture in Liverpool played out, we need to focus on specifics. In this section I consider four features of current Liverpool English in order to investigate how they came to be part of the variety. A short article like these needs to be selective, and while there are many other features which would be worthy of this kind of study, I can only focus here these four. All of these features are aspects of the segmental phonology of the dialect, and all have been relatively well described in previous work on present-day Liverpool English. It would be possible and worthwhile to consider the origins and patterning of aspects of the suprasegmental phonology of Liverpool English in this connection, too, such as voice quality, or intonation, which have both aroused considerable interest for the fact that they are not like those of surrounding varieties. It would also be possible to consider non-accent dialect features, such as the patterns of auxiliary-verb contraction (is it *I’ll not* or *I won’t*, for example), distinctive lexical items such as *made up* ‘pleased,’ and the prosodically conditioned morphological truncation process (which gives *ozzie* from *hospital*, *bezzie* from *best mate*, *lecky* from *electric* and *bevvy* from *beverage*), but we lack the space here.

For each of the four features to be considered here, I first briefly consider the patterning of the feature in current Liverpool English, and then go on to see how it can be made sense of in terms of the features of the dialects that were inputs in the formation of the variety. While there is naturally variation within Liverpool English

(this includes (i) regional variation, within the relatively small area where the variety is spoken, (ii) social variation, between what is sometimes called ‘Posh Scouse’ and ‘Scally Scouse,’ and (iii) standard intraspeaker variation), I focus here on the abstracted variety as a whole, and the description of the features given here describes variants which are available to speakers of Liverpool English and which are typical in the speech of those who have ‘strong accents’, exemplifying the ‘typical local form’ – a concept which is frequently assumed in work on nonreference accents (for example, in Newbrook, 1986, where it is also described as an ‘extreme’ variety). These are the ‘new NORMs’ of Honeybone (2001).

We run the risk here of incautiously projecting the present onto the past in that I must assume that the nineteenth-century inventory of features of a variety is essentially the same as the current inventory. I think this is justified in all cases considered here, from my reading of the historical dialectology of the varieties. It has to be said that there is little or certainly not enough work on the history of many of the varieties involved here, however. Hopefully this can be remedied in future (Watson, 2007b, shows how such work might be done for Liverpool English, working with material from old speakers recorded in the North West Sound Archive).

#### 4.1 TH stopping

I begin with a relatively straightforward case: the contrast which exists in most varieties of English between such words as (i) *tin* and *thin*, and (ii) *den* and *then*. These contrasts are represented in various ways in Liverpool English, and, in fact, are completely absent for some speakers, at least for certain words. These contrasts are typically realised in most varieties of English by contrasting alveolar stops with dental fricatives as in (1).

(1) [tɪn] *tin* : [θɪn] *thin*            [dɛn] *den* : [ðɛn] *then*

Liverpool English features realisations of the segments in the *thin* and *then* sets which may be stops (typically dental [t] and [d] or alveolar [t] and [d]). This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as TH stopping (for example, in Wells 1982), and it has been described for several varieties of English, but for very few dialects from Britain. It means that the contrast can be lost in Liverpool English, leading to neutralisations such as those in (2).

(2) [tɪn] *tin* : [tɪn] *thin*            [dɛn] *den* : [dɛn] *then*

While it is sociolinguistically recessive in some groups, TH stopping is a feature of contemporary Liverpool English (stop realisations are one of the variants available to LE speakers) and recent work (reported in Honeybone & Watson, 2004) has shown it to be remarkably robust in certain circumstances, and attested in a wide range of words, including low-frequency *plinth*, *birth* and high-frequency *this*.

Our question here is: how did TH stopping come into Liverpool English? There is no evidence that this is a recent development in the dialect, indeed, there is every reason to assume that it has been part of the variety since it was formed in the nineteenth century, because there was a very plausible donor dialect, or set of dialects, in the dialect mixture at that point. To work this out, we need to consider the dialects of the speakers who were in Liverpool during the nineteenth century. TH stopping is

not described for traditional dialects anywhere in the north of English, nor in Wales, or in Scotland, apart from in Shetland (see Millar, 2007) which is extremely unlikely to have had any substantial representation in the dialect mixture in nineteenth century Liverpool. Wells (1982, 329) describes some evidence for TH stopping in Cockney in previous centuries, but it is not clear how widespread it was (and it has left little trace now, indicating that it may not have been robust). Jones (2006), a compendious volume on the pronunciation of Late Modern English, has no mention of it for British varieties. While there may have been some minor input with TH stopping from some English or Scottish varieties, and from the speech of the inhabitants of Liverpool with non-European origins into the nineteenth century Liverpool dialect mix, the clearest candidate varieties for providing speakers with this feature are those from Southern Ireland.

TH stopping is common in present-day Southern varieties of Hiberno-English (from the Republic), as Wells (1982), Harris (1985), Hughes & Trudgill (1996) and Hickey (1999, 2004) report (it is not found in Northern Irish varieties). There is every reason to believe that this was the case in the nineteenth century forms of these varieties, too, because it is widely viewed (for example by Ó Baoill, 1997) as being due to contact with Gaelic and was hence likely transferred into Irish speakers' forms of English when they began to speak it, given that Irish Gaelic does and did not have dental fricatives (it does have velarised-dental stops, however, as well as alveolar stops, and it is assumed that speakers of Gaelic used these instead of dental fricatives when they had to learn English). For most southern Hiberno-Englishes, TH stopping involves maintaining the contrast, as the <th> fricatives of other varieties correspond to dental stops. Some varieties, such as Cork and Dublin (Wells, 1982, Hickey, 1999, 2004) have alveolar stops in <th> words, losing the contrast.

Importantly for our purposes, TH stopping is hardly reported in the other dialects which contributed to the Liverpool English koine, so it seems here that this is a clear case where a feature was taken up in stage 2ii and 2iii of the formation of Liverpool English from the dialects of the speakers of southern Hiberno-English. By itself, this seems to be a case which would speak in favour of the 'swamping' scenario, akin to what Lass (1990) describes for extraterritorial varieties, with a Southern Irish English feature winning out despite the fact that it would be in conflict with the equivalent feature in the speech of (almost all or maybe even absolutely all of) those from England, Wales, and Scotland, and despite the fact that the Liverpool-Irish were not clearly the majority of the population in the city at the point of koineisation, and would receive hardly any or no support in terms of this feature from any other dialect present in Liverpool at this time.

## **4.2 Non-rhoticity**

The second linguistic feature that I consider here seems to pattern quite differently, however. The distinction between rhotic and non-rhotic accents is one of the major divisions among varieties of English. It is one of the best known because it is one of the substantial differences between 'reference' accents from the UK and the USA. The difference is not a matter of one variety having a phoneme which another accent lacks – it has to do with where the phoneme [r] can occur in words (and it correlates with differences in the vowel systems, too, although I do not discuss those here). In non-rhotic varieties, such as the English reference accent RP, [r] can only ever occur when it is directly followed by a vowel (that is, when it is in a syllable onset). In rhotic accents, such as the US and Scottish reference accents General American and

Scottish Standard English, [r] can also occur when followed by a consonant, or by a pause (that is, when it is in a syllable coda). This means that the words in (3) will contain an [r] in both rhotic and non-rhotic accents, whereas the words in (4) will only contain an [r] in non-rhotic accents (assuming that they are utterance-final).

(3) *red, merry, Fred, terrific, Rhinoceros*

(4) *car, farm, fur, door, nurse, beer*

Liverpool English is resolutely non-rhotic. No trace of rhoticity has been reported for any speaker of the variety. If we compare this with the dialects which came into contact in nineteenth century Liverpool, it is immediately obvious that many of them *were* rhotic. Given that rhoticity is the older state and non-rhoticity is the innovation, it is reasonable to assume that those varieties which are still rhotic would have been rhotic in the nineteenth century (although not necessarily *vice versa*). All Hiberno-English varieties are rhotic, so all the Irish input into Liverpool's emerging koine would have pushed towards rhoticity being adopted in the variety. The Scottish input would have been exactly the same, all varieties being rhotic. The situation for the English and Welsh dialects is more complicated, and it is crucial here to recognise when rhoticity was lost in the various parts of England and Wales which have lost it. Notably, South Lancashire is one of the few places in England which are still at least variably rhotic, so the input from that area can be taken to have been rhotic, too. Jones (2006) and Trudgill (2004) summarise the sources that we have for nineteenth century varieties, noting that most sources concur in dating the very start of the loss of rhoticity to perhaps the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, probably in London, but that the main spread of full non-rhoticity is not well advanced until the early nineteenth century. During the middle of the nineteenth century, the crucial period here, Trudgill (2004) shows that we reliably know from the work of Ellis that much of the south-east of England, and a large swathe of the eastern lower North and East Midlands was non-rhotic. Jones (2006, 339) reports that the main authority on accents of English of the period, Ellis (1869, 603), using his own phonetic transcription which clearly shows non-rhoticity, indicates that he does not associate rhoticity with typically English varieties, writing that “[c]areful speakers say (faadhə, lAA'd, stAA'k, drAA'z) for *farther, lord, stork, drawers*, when they are thinking particularly of what they are saying, but (fardher, lord, stɔrk, drAAerz) is decidedly un-English, and has a Scotch or Irish twang with it.” We can take both of these observations as evidence that much, although clearly not all, of England was non-rhotic in the middle of the nineteenth century, and could have provided non-rhotic input into the Liverpool English koineising dialect mix.

There are two possibilities to explain the fact that Liverpool English is now non-rhotic. Either (i) it never became rhotic when it was being formed, or (ii) it did and has since become non-rhotic. Trudgill's principles on new-dialect formation would point towards (ii). The majority of speakers in Liverpool during the period of dialect mixture were rhotic – all the speakers from Ireland, Scotland and North-West England, at least – and this variant should therefore have been taken up into the koine. Any continuity with earlier forms of English spoken in the area would be in favour of rhoticity, too, given the general resilience of rhoticity in the North-West. On this assumption, the subsequent loss of rhoticity would be a case of 'drift', where the new-dialect has changed in the same way as other, older varieties in England.

And yet there is no evidence of any rhoticity in any record of Liverpool English, despite the fact that Liverpool is next to South Lancashire – one of the areas where rhoticity has still not been lost, which would discourage drift towards non-rhoticity, so (i) cannot be discounted. It could just be that the input from non-rhotic varieties of English English (perhaps from the eastern North and Midlands) won out in the mix of features when the koine was being focused. If so, this would be a problem for the predictions of the new-dialect formation model, and it is somewhat puzzling that twentieth century Liverpool English does not seem to have been rhotic. If early recordings of Liverpool English can be found, it would be important to assess them for rhoticity, to see if any rhoticity exists, as it was in early stages of New Zealand English (Trudgill, 2004). In any case, it is clearly notable that this is a situation where neither the Irish, nor the South Lancashire input to the koine has won out in terms of the form of the feature as it is found in contemporary Liverpool English, which is quite different to what we saw for TH stopping, which has remained in Liverpool English since the nineteenth century, despite being surrounded by non-TH stopping varieties.

### 4.3 The absence of contrast between SQUARE and NURSE

A contrast between vowels in the SQUARE and NURSE lexical sets is well established in most varieties of English (the lexical sets of Wells, 1982, are represented by a keyword in small capitals which stands for a large set of words which all have the same vowel). The realisations of these contrasts in varieties are given in (5), for RP, Scottish Standard English, and for ‘General Northern’, the commonest forms in Northern Englishes. The rhotic SSE has retained an /r/ in these words, and patterns quite differently to non-rhotic varieties in these regards, but clearly has a contrast.

(5)	SQUARE	NURSE.
RP	[ɛə]	[ɜ:]
SSE	[ɛr]	[ʌr]
GN	[ɛ:]	[ɜ:]

In Liverpool English there is typically no such contrast – the words in these lexical sets have the same phonological category as their vocalic nuclei. The precise realisation of the vowel in these words in LE can be quite varied, with central and front vowels occurring, but front vowels can be very robust, as in (6).

(6)	[skwɛ:] <i>square</i> : [nɛ:s] <i>nurse</i>	[fɛ:] <i>fare</i> : [fɛ:] <i>fur</i>
-----	---	--------------------------------------

When we consider the origins of this feature, we see that the picture is a little complicated. One thing is clear: there is a similar lack of contrast in South Lancashire English. This is still well attested (Barras, 2006) and is described in the *Survey of English Dialects* (Orton 1962, Orton, Sanderson & Widdowson 1978), the fieldwork for which was conducted in the 1940s and 50s. There is every indication that this is long-standard feature of South Lancashire English (indeed, Knowles, 1973, argues that it should be traced back to the sixteenth century), and according to the *SED*, is only found in South Lancashire. It is due to a merger between the vowels in the words



when the vowel in SQUARE words centralised. Importantly, the merger in Lancashire is to a central vowel, such as [əː ~ ɜː] (with residual rhoticity still an option).

The South Lancashire variants in the Liverpool koineisation mix are the most obvious explanation for the present-day lack of contrast in Liverpool English, although the most common Liverpool realisation as a front vowel is not explained. There are no reports of a SQUARE~NURSE merger in Welsh or Scottish forms of English, or elsewhere in England. There are, though, also reports of an absence of contrast in a number of varieties of Hiberno-English. Wells (1982, 444) writes that SQUARE and NURSE may merge in present-day Belfast, so that *fair, fir, fur* are all [fɛːɪ], with a front vowel, and Harris (1985, 48) reports that /e/ before /r/ is realised as [ɜː], with a central vowel, in much of Lagan Valley urban speech, giving [dɜːɪ] *dare*, and [stɜːɪ] *stair* and as a front [ɛː] in more conservative (typically rural) varieties, giving [dɛːɪ] *dare*, [stɛːɪ] *stair*. Also, Hickey (1999) claims that in ‘fashionable Dublin English’ *nurse* can be realised as [nɜːs] and *square* as [skwɜː], with central vowels. It is by no means clear that these patterns can be extrapolated to the varieties of Hiberno-English which were spoken in Liverpool at the time of koineisation. However, these forms do show that the pre-*r* vowels in these words are susceptible to considerable variation in Hiberno-English varieties, sometimes with front vowels and sometimes with central ones in ways which would have differed from those supplied by Welsh, Scottish and most English dialects during koineisation, and it is entirely possible that some such forms were brought to Liverpool from Ireland.

If this was the case, then it is likely that they contributed to the emergence of the lack of the NURSE~SQUARE contrast in Liverpool English because, while the contrast was missing in the speech of those from South Lancashire, who would have had a central vowel – probably a fully rhotic [ɜːɪ]<sup>3</sup> – in both lexical sets, the surface contrast was unclear in the speech of some Hiberno-English speakers, too: some could have [ɜː] in both lexical sets and some could have [ɛː] in both lexical sets. In the focusing of the Liverpool English koine, this would allow for a single phonological category which could be realised as [ɛː ~ ɜːɪ] to emerge. If this is right, then [ɛː] must have emerged as the realisation of choice in Liverpool English since koineisation (although [ɜːɪ] is still available as a variant, too). This would mean that varieties of Hiberno-English played a role in the adoption of this feature in the Liverpool English koine, but only in tandem with Lancashire English, where there was a complete lack of contrast, and which was the most important input. This was not a simple borrowing of the feature (the absence of contrast) from South Lancashire English, and it would be wrong to see Liverpool English as ‘carrying on’ the absence of contrast from South Lancashire English – nothing was simply carried on from South Lancashire English into Liverpool English because everything went through the mix of dialect contact and had to be pick out of that mix by a new generation of speakers who (subconsciously) formed Liverpool English. The absence of contrast in the input from South Lancashire English was bolstered by the confusion of forms supplied from Irish English dialects. I have consciously avoided calling the feature ‘the SQUARE~NURSE merger’ because there was no merger in the history of Liverpool English itself. The

---

<sup>3</sup> Given that these are stressed, long vowels, there is no real difference between the transcription [əː] and [ɜːɪ], and they can be seen as interchangeable.

merger occurred in South Lancashire English, and possibly certain Hiberno-Englishes, and they supplied the surface forms which led to the formation of a single phonological category in the new-dialect of Liverpool English at its birth.

Despite the likely bolstering of the South Lancashire forms by those from the Hiberno-English, it is not clear that the absence of a contrast would be the majority variant among the adult speakers from stage 2i who supplied the linguistic input for the children of stages 2ii and 2iii to select from, and yet it was the variant picked out to form the koine. The resulting absence of contrast in SQUARE and NURSE likely derives from the facts that the children could not accurately create two phonological categories in the face of such a range of surface forms, so a single category, with some freedom of phonetic realisation, from front to central, was the only possible result.

#### 4.4 Liverpool lenition

One of the clearest phonological characteristics of Modern Liverpool English is the way in which underlying plosives are realised. Liverpool lenition is a synchronic, variable process whereby underlying plosives are realised as affricates and fricatives in certain specific prosodic and melodic environments. It means that the plosives which are emboldened in the words in (7) might be pronounced as follows.

(7)	<b>crime</b>	[kxra:m]
	<b>e<b>x</b>pect</b>	[ɛxspɛxt]
	<b>d<b>e</b>e<b>p</b></b>	[d̥d̥i:ɸ]
	<b>t<b>i</b>m<b>e</b></b>	[t̥θa:m]
	<b>n<b>i</b>g<b>h</b>t</b>	[nai̯θ]
	<b>s<b>t</b>o<b>p</b></b>	[stɒɸ]
	<b>l<b>e</b>a<b>d</b></b>	[li:ð̥]

This phenomenon has been described in some detail in a number of studies, including Knowles (1973), Sangster (2001), Honeybone (2001), Watson (2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2007), and we do not need to consider its precise patterning (which is in any case rather complex) here.<sup>4</sup> We can just note that (i) the phonological processes involved are variable affrications and spirantisations ('fricativisations'), and can best be understood as involving stages of phonological lenition,<sup>5</sup> on a scale from plosive to affricate to fricative, and that (ii) fricatives are frequent in certain environments, including word-final and foot-medial positions, and affricates are also possible there but are frequent elsewhere, while (iii) in certain other phonological environments no

---

<sup>4</sup> The transcriptions [t̥θ], [d̥d̥] and [θ], [ð̥] represent alveolar slit affricates and fricatives respectively, similar to the [θ] found in Irish English (for the Irish English segment, see Hickey, 1984, 1999 and Pandeli, Eska, Ball & Rahilly, 1997). These are articulatorily and acoustically distinct from the grooved [ts] and [s]. It may be that both grooved and slit affricates and fricatives occur in Liverpool English; mostly, however, speakers seem to produce [t̥θ] and [θ].

<sup>5</sup> Quite what 'lenition' is, is a complicated question, but we do not need to answer it here – we just need a name for the phonological phenomenon and linguistic feature. Honeybone (to appear) traces meanings and usages of the term, and of the related terms 'weakening' and 'phonological strength' in some detail.

lenition seems to be possible – in other words, the processes are inhibited according to prosodic and melodic environment.

Liverpool English lenition is unique among varieties of English in its extent. While sporadic spirantisations and affrications are known in other varieties, no other English variety exhibits so much. While we cannot be completely confident that it was part of Liverpool English from moment it was formed, there is no reason to doubt that it was, and Watson (2007b) shows that it is well represented in the speech of speakers in their 50s and 60s found in the North West Sound Archive.

It seems clear that some part of Liverpool lenition is endogenously innovated – the precise patterning of the affrico-spirantisation was not taken wholesale as a feature from any of the dialects which contributed to the koine. However, there are related features in some of the input varieties which likely contributed to its development. One claim which is sometimes made is that the phenomenon could be linked to the morphological patterns of initial mutation (sometimes in part also called ‘lenitions’) found in Gaelic and Welsh. As we saw in section 3.2.2, Irish Gaelic and Welsh, and perhaps even a little Scottish Gaelic did come to Liverpool, but the arguments for their role in the formation of Liverpool lenition are not compelling.

Hickey (1996) offers the most considered account for the innovation of Liverpool lenition, based on the assumption that transfer from Irish Gaelic to Irish English brought about the Liverpool lenition pattern in Irish English, and that this was imported wholesale by Irish in-migrants to Liverpool. The transfer, according to Hickey was due to the ‘initial mutations’ of Irish Gaelic. However, the patterning of these mutations is very different to that now found in Liverpool. They are purely morphologically driven linguistic alternations which involve segmental alternations of ‘classical phonemes’ with surface contrasts, rather than the ‘allophones’ of Liverpool English. They affect only morpheme-initial segments, unlike the word medial and final effects which are more typically of Liverpool lenition, and they affect a large number of consonants, including glides and nasals – much more than just stops – and a large number of processes, including voicing and nasalisation – much more than just spirantisation (and they do not feature affrication). Celtic initial mutations and Liverpool lenition seem fundamentally different and it is not clear how the initial mutations could be transferred to give a Liverpool lenition pattern. Furthermore, there is no trace of most of the types of lenition now found in Liverpool in any variety of Hiberno-English. Hickey argues that this is unproblematic, and that the Hiberno-English varieties that remained in Ireland retreated to keep only moderate lenition, while the original situation was kept in Liverpool, it does not seem likely that *no* form of Irish English would keep the pattern if it had been so strong there.<sup>6</sup>

It seems more likely that the small amounts of plosive lenition that do exist in current forms of Hiberno-English provided some push towards spirantisation, along with the other minor affrications or spirantisations in the input dialects, and that these were developed, following an endogenous pathway of change, by those who formed Liverpool English.

There is a well-described and common process in southern varieties of Hiberno-English which is relevant here. It is the *t*-spirantisation described by Hickey (1984, 1996, 1999), and is also mentioned in Harris (1994) and Pandeli, Eska, Ball & Rahilly

---

<sup>6</sup> The case that the initial mutations of Welsh could have contributed is even less compelling. They are similarly morphologically driven and initial rather than medial and final, and while there is a ‘spirant’ mutation, the most common by far involves voicing.

(1997). This is a spirantisation process which affects /t/ in certain phonological environments to derive [θ], as shown in (8), adapted from Hickey (1984, 1996).

(8)	<i>top</i>	[tɒp]
	<i>pot</i>	[pɒθ]
	<i>Italy</i>	[ˈɪθəli]
	<i>Italian</i>	[ɪˈtæliən]
	<i>tight</i>	[taɪθ]
	<i>titanic</i>	[taɪˈtænik]

While this, too, is distinct from the affrico-spirantisation of Liverpool lenition, it shares certain key similarities, including a similar realisation of the fricative and a similar patterning in terms of where the fricatives occur in words: foot-medial and word-final. As it is now widespread in current southern Irish English, it is entirely plausible that the phenomenon was a feature of the Irish Englishes when their speakers came to Liverpool in the nineteenth century.

It is clear that Liverpool lenition was not brought fully formed as a phonological feature of any variety that came into the stage 2i contact mix in the nineteenth century. It seems likely that there was Southern Hiberno-English *t*-lenition, and there was probably also some cases of *t*-affrication, which is attested (especially in initial position) in several current varieties of English, such as London English (Wells, 1982), and may well be traceable back to their nineteenth century forms. Although all these affricated and spirantised variants would be minority forms, they did not become levelled out, perhaps surprisingly. They did not give the children of stages 2ii and 2iii a clear pattern to follow, but did give them an indication that spirantisation and affrication of at least certain stops was possible. The full patterning of Liverpool lenition was a creative act by the young generations of young Liverpoolians who were forming or focusing the koine – it was not taken ‘off the shelf’, as features such as TH stopping and non-rhoticity could be, because they were present fully-formed in the dialect mix, and it did not involve a levelling towards any extant variety. Rather, it was a novel, divergent development.

While the precise details of Liverpool lenition are quite remarkable, they are not unlike those of lenition processes found in other languages, such as Spanish spirantisation of voiced stops (see, for example, Harris-Northall, 1990, Penny, 1991), the Gorgia Toscana in Tuscan Italian (see, for example, Villafañá Dacher, 2006) and the High German Consonant Shift from the history of German (see, for example, Keller, 1978, Honeybone, 2003). The patterning in terms of how Liverpool English stops are affected and which positions this occurs in is similar to what would be expected from cases of lenition, which is a recognised ‘type’ of natural phonological process.

The most reasonable explanation for the origins of Liverpool lenition is that the input from the dialects in the nineteenth century mixture provided encouragement, or ‘contributory support’ for a natural process of lenition which was innovated by the children of stage 2iii, taking in all the plosives and spreading out to take up the full possible extent of a lenition process, as enabled by human phonology. Perhaps this counts as an ‘interdialect’ form in Trudgill’s framework, as it did not exist in any of the dialects that contribute to the mixture. The fact that there was no established variety in Liverpool at the time that this occurred, and that there was a large array of

varieties of English being spoken there, from all around the British Isles, and with speakers from the Caribbean, Africa and China may have helped in this, as there was no clear 'norm' or social constraints to hold back the development of the lenition, once it was innovated.

## 5. CONCLUSION

When it had been formed, the dialect of Liverpool English had something in common with neighbouring Northern Englishes, and something in common with Englishes from further afield, such as those from Ireland. It was not a direct continuation of any dialect that existed before, but had been created from a mixture of dialects. This process of new-dialect formation has been witnessed elsewhere in the English-speaking world, as mentioned above (and in other languages, too). It also occurred elsewhere in the north of England – recent work on Middlesbrough English (such as Fennell, Jones & Llamas, 2004) and Newcastle upon Tyne English (such as Allen, Beal, Corrigan & Maguire, 2004) suggests similar scenarios for the development of those varieties.

The four features that we have considered here bear witness to this history, but in different ways. We have seen that the mechanisms described in the model of new-dialect formation (discussed here in section 3) help make sense of what happened in Liverpool, but the predication that the majority variant of a feature will always win out have proven problematic (although we should see this in the context that these predictions are expected to apply purely deterministically only in strictly *tabula rasa* scenarios). The features considered here did not all pattern in the same way. TH stopping is due to the Hiberno-English input, almost as if it had swamped the other dialects. The fact that Liverpool English is non-rhotic seems to suggest exactly the opposite, however, and either the minority non-rhotic English varieties from south and east of Liverpool won out, or non-rhoticity was introduced by 'drift', or by the general spread of the change as it moved across England. The absence of a SQUARE~NURSE contrast was possibly predictable on a majority-wins basis, as both South Lancashire and some Hiberno-English varieties were unhelpful to the establishment of a contrast, although Welsh, Scottish and other English and Irish dialects would have presented data to the contrast. Finally, Liverpool lenition would not have been predicted to have the pattern that it has today, which is unique to Liverpool.

This article claims to offer a 'brief history of Scouse'. It is nothing like a full history of the variety, of course – there are many more linguistic features which deserve similar attention, and I have had little to say about the history of the dialect in the twentieth century. Liverpool English will, naturally, have changed since the focusing of stage 2iii, during the ongoing stage 3. Much of the material that would help to write this history has been lost, as it was never recorded, but it is possible that future work will write this history in some detail. I hope that this article might represent the start for work in this area. The population statistics used here have proven crucial, and it is clear that such data can contribute to our understanding of the historical development of dialects. Although the kind of social detail used in present-day sociolinguistics can never be recovered, the census returns and similar material could offer much more detail than we have considered here, and future research in this area is clearly called for.

Liverpool English is indeed not quite like its neighbours. But some of its linguistic features come from a mix which owes much to them, and to other dialects, such as the Hiberno-Englishes. It has also innovated new features or entirely redeveloped existing

ones to form new traits. Among the many cultural achievements of the people of Liverpool, the formation of a completely new dialect – although not a unique feat – must count as one of the greatest.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, W., J. Beal, K. Corrigan and W. Maguire (2004). 'Paddy' and 'Jock' meet 'Geordie': A prolegomenon to investigating the reflexes of nineteenth century linguistic contact in the North East. Paper presented at the Symposium on the Influence of the Languages of Ireland and Scotland on Linguistic Varieties in Northern England, University of Aberdeen. Downloadable from <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/langling/resources/sympprog.html>
- Barras, W. (2006). *The SQUARE-NURSE merger in Greater Manchester: the impact of social and spatial identity on phonological variation*. MSc dissertation, University of Edinburgh.
- Barry, M. (1982). English in Ireland. In Bailey, R. & M. Görlach (eds.) *English as a World Language*. University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor.
- Belchem, J. (2000a) *Merseypride : Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Belchem, J. (2000b) An accent exceedingly rare: Scouse and the inflection of class. In Belchem (2000a). 31-64.
- Ben-Tovim G., J. Gabriel, I. Law, & K. Stredder (1986). *The Local Politics of Race*. London: Macmillan.
- Britain, D. & P. Trudgill (1999). Migration, new-dialect formation and sociolinguistic refunctionalisation: reallocation as an outcome of dialect contact. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 97: 245-256.
- Carr, P. & P. Honeybone (2007). English phonology and linguistic theory: an introduction to issues, and to 'Issues in English Phonology'. *Language Sciences* 29: 117-153.
- Chambers, J. & P. Trudgill (1998). *Dialectology*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coupland, N. & H. Bishop (2007). Ideologised values for British accents. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 1: 74-93.
- de Lyon, H. (1981). *A Sociolinguistic Study of Aspects of the Liverpool Accent*. Unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Liverpool.
- Ellis, A. (1869). *Early English Pronunciation*. Part 1. London.
- Ellis, A. (1889). *Early English Pronunciation*. Part 5. London.
- Fennell, B., M. Jones & C. Llamas (2004). Middlesbrough. Paper presented at the Symposium on the Influence of the Languages of Ireland and Scotland on Linguistic Varieties in Northern England, University of Aberdeen. Downloadable from. Downloadable from <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/langling/resources/sympprog.html>
- Giles, H. & P. Trudgill (1978). Sociolinguistics and linguistic value judgements; correctness, adequacy and aesthetics. Reprinted in: Trudgill, P. (1983). *On Dialect: social and geographical perspectives*. Oxford: Blackwell. 201-225.
- Harris, J. (1985). *Phonological variation and change: studies in Hiberno-English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harris-Northall, R. (1990). *Weakening processes in the history of Spanish Consonants*. London: Routledge.
- Hickey, R. (1984). Coronal segments in Irish English. *Journal of Linguistics* 20: 233-250.
- Hickey, R. (1996). Lenition in Irish English. *Belfast Working Papers in Linguistics* 13: 173-193.

- Hickey, R. (1999). Dublin English: current changes and their motivation. In: Foulkes, P. & G. Docherty (eds.) *Urban voices: accent studies in the British Isles*. London: Arnold.
- Hickey, R. (2004). *A sound atlas of Irish English*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Honeybone, P. (2001). Lenition inhibition in Liverpool English. *English Language and Linguistics* 5: 213-249.
- Honeybone, P. (2003). Process inhibition in historical phonology. In Blake, B. & K. Burridge. *Historical Linguistics 2001*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 181-203.
- Honeybone, P. (to appear). Lenition, weakening and consonantal strength: tracing concepts through the history of phonology. To appear in Brandão de Carvalho, J., T. Scheer, & P. Ségéral, (eds.) *Lenition and Fortition*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Honeybone, P. & K. Watson (2004). The (continuing) development of Scouse: language meets history, society and culture. Paper presented at the Inaugural Conference of the Centre for Liverpool and Merseyside Studies, Liverpool John Moores University.
- Honeybone, P. & Watson, K. (2006). Phonemes, graphemes and phonics for Liverpool English. Education Committee of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain. Downloadable from <http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/ec/accents.htm>
- Hughes, A. & Trudgill, P. (1996). *English Accents and Dialects*. Third edition. London: Arnold.
- Inoue, F. (1999). Subjective Dialect Division in Great Britain. *American Speech* 71: 142-61.
- Jones, C. (2006). *English pronunciation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jones, R. (1984). The Liverpool Welsh. In: Rees, D. (ed) *The Liverpool Welsh and their Religion*. Liverpool: Modern Welsh Publications.
- Keller, R. (1978). *The German language*. London: Faber.
- Trudgill, P. (2004). *New-dialect formation: the inevitability of colonial Englishes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Kerswill, P. & A. Williams (2000). Creating a new town koine: children and language change in Milton Keynes. *Language in Society* 29: 65-115.
- Kerswill, P. & A. Williams (2005). New towns and koineisation: linguistic and social correlates. *Linguistics* 43: 1023-1048.
- Knowles, G. (1973). *Scouse: the urban Dialect of Liverpool*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Leeds.
- Knowles, G. (1977). Scouse: a Lancashire dialect with an Irish accent. *Regional Bulletin* 5. Lancaster University.
- Lass, R. (1990). Where do extraterritorial Englishes come from? Dialect input and recodification in transported Englishes. In Adamson, S. et al. (eds.) *Papers from the 5th International Conference on English Historical Linguistics*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 245-80.
- Lawton, R. (1953). Genesis of population. In Smith, W. (ed.) *A scientific survey of Merseyside*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Llamas, C. (2000). Middlesbrough English: convergent and divergent trends in a 'part of Britain with no identity'. *Leeds Working Papers in Linguistics And Phonetics* 8: 123-148. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/linguistics/research/WP2000/TOC.htm>.
- Manley, J. (ed.) (1995). *The black presence in the North West*. Salford: North West Labour History Group.
- McIntyre-Brown, A. & G. Woodland (2001). *Liverpool: the First 1,000 Years*. Liverpool: Garlic Press.



- Montgomery, C. (2006). Perceptions of dialects in the north of England. Paper presented at the Northern Englishes Workshop, Lancaster University.
- Mufwene, S. (1996). The founder principle in creole genesis. *Diachronica* 13: 83-134.
- Munro, A & D. Sim (2001) *The Merseyside Scots: a study of an expatriate community*. Birkenhead: Liver Press.
- Neal, F. (1988). *Sectarian violence: the Liverpool experience, 1819-1914, an aspect of Anglo-Irish History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Newbrook, M. (1986). *Sociolinguistic reflexes of dialect interference in West Wirral*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Newbrook, M. (1999). West Wirral: norms, self reports and usage. In: Foulkes, P. & G. Docherty (eds.) *Urban voices: accent studies in the British Isles*. London: Arnold.
- Ó Baoill, D. (1997). The emerging Irish phonological substratum in Irish English. In Kallen, J. (ed.) *Focus on Ireland*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Orton, H. (1962). *Survey of English Dialects: introduction*. Leeds: E. J. Arnold.
- Orton, H., S. Sanderson & J. Widdowson (1978). *The linguistic atlas of England*. London: Croom Helm.
- Pandeli, H., J. Eska, M. Ball, & J. Rahilly (1997). Problems of phonetic transcription: the case of the Hiberno-English slit-t. *Journal of the IPA* 27: 65-75.
- Penny, R. (1991). *A history of the Spanish language*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Pooley, C. (1977). The residential segregation of migrant communities in mid-Victorian Liverpool. *Transactions of the Institute Of British Geographers* 2: 64-382.
- Preston, D. (ed) (1999). *The handbook of Perceptual Dialectology*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Preston, D. (2002). Perceptual dialectology: aims, methods, findings. In: Berns, J. & J. van Marle (eds.) *Present-day Dialectology*. Berlin & New York: de Gruyter.
- Sangster, C. (2001). Lenition of alveolar stops in Liverpool English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 5: 401-412.
- Trudgill, P. (1986). *Dialects in contact*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Trudgill, P. (1999). *The dialects of England*. Second edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Trudgill, P. (2004). *New-dialect formation: the inevitability of colonial Englishes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Trudgill, P., E. Gordon, G. Lewis, & M. Maclagan (2000). Determinism in new-dialect formation and the genesis of New Zealand English. *Journal of Linguistics* 36: 299-318.
- Villafaña Dacher, C. (2006). Consonant weakening in Florentine Italian: an acoustic study of gradient and variable sound change. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Georgetown University.
- Wales, K. (2006). *Northern English: a social and cultural history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Waller, P. (1981). *Democracy and sectarianism: a political and social history of Liverpool 1868-1939*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Watson, K. (2002). The realisation of final /t/ in Liverpool English. *Durham Working Papers in Linguistics* 8: 195-205
- Watson, K. (2006a). Lenition and segmental interaction: evidence from Liverpool English (and Spanish). *Glossa* 1: 54-71.
- Watson, K. (2006b). Phonological resistance and innovation in the North-West of England. *English Today* 22/02: 55-61.

- Watson, K. (2007a). *The phonetics and phonology of plosive lenition in Liverpool English*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Edge Hill College of Higher Education/Lancaster University.
- Watson, K. (2007b). Levelling or not? Exploring phonological variation in Liverpool and its hinterland. Invited talk at the University of York. Downloadable from: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/staff/watsonkd/yorktalk.ppt>
- Watson, K. (to appear). Illustration of the IPA: Liverpool English. To appear in the *Journal of the International Phonetics Association*.
- Wells, J. (1982). *The accents of English*. Three volumes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Wong, M. (1989). *Chinese Liverpooldians*. Birkenhead: Liver Press.